



Livestock Photography to Bronzes

The Evolution of an Artist

Profile • KEN FREDERICKSON • Candace By

Ken Frederickson moved from British Columbia to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, as a teenager. His father was managing Mendel Holdings Western Livestock Intercontinental Packers Cow/Calf and Feedlot operations. He graduated from high school in Saskatoon. They had Walt Browarny out at the ranch to do some photography and Walt asked Ken if he would like to train under him. He made the commitment to start after graduation. That was in the late seventies and early eighties and it eventually evolved into his own livestock photography business called Reflections West Photography.

"I told my wife that it didn't matter where we lived because I was on the road all the time anyway. Our goal was to raise our kids on a ranch, and we were fortunate to find a place in the Wawota area. We moved out of Alberta to south-eastern Saskatchewan to raise our kids and build our ranch."

"I did photography for over 30 years. A lot of the contracts I had with exhibition associations were twenty plus years, like Lloydminster and Saskatoon. It got to be like a family reunion going to those shows. It was fun to work with the people and see the familiar faces from year to year. That was probably the hardest part of slowing down from the road work and taking pictures, I miss seeing the friends I made over the years."

"I always knew that I wanted to do three-dimensional art. I told my wife, Heather, back in the eighties that someday I was going to do bronzes, but not until I had time to focus on doing art. I think I can do it. When I was five years old, I used to sneak out of the house with my mother's sharpest pairing knife and hide behind the trees and whittle 3-dimensional faces out of sticks and stuff until I got caught with her sharpest knife. Now, I have retired from photography and am slowly becoming less involved with the ranch as our son is taking over, so I have time to dedicate to developing my skills."

"Bronzes have always interested me but it is a tough form to do because of the three dimensional aspect. It is a challenge but it is also very rewarding."

"I started by buying the wax, opening the package and just getting at it. I think that is the neatest thing because you find your own way. There was an art professor who stopped here as she was traveling through the area and she told me it was probably my advantage – being self-taught. I have no limitations because I wasn't taught to be like someone else out in the art world. I was my own person, one of one. It is a definite advantage."

"If you camp in Saskatchewan in September, you are probably only one of six people in a campground. We used to camp at that time of year as we were finished haying and it was quiet. I liked to sculpt in front of the camper. One day Heather, who was sitting beside me as I sculpted on the eagles, asked me where I was going to cast these. I really didn't know. A couple of the foundries in Canada I had spoken with wanted me to pour minimums of ten. So if they cost three or four thousand dollars a piece to cast,



Top of page: Bovine Series

Above: Ken at work on bighorn sheep



This progression of the water buffalo shows the oil-based clay and wax mediums combined in the sculpting process



Fancy Dancer



Pond Hockey is one of Ken's current projects



Air Ride

you have to put out \$30,000 for every piece of art you develop. It is too cost prohibitive to do it in Canada. I know there are lots of foundries in the U.S., but without going for a drive and checking them out, I don't know how you would know which one is the best one."

"Then out of the blue, this guy walked into our campsite and said, 'I thought I had better say hello to a fellow artist, especially a sculptor because there aren't many of us around. I love your eagles, I have been watching you work on them from across the campground.' When he said his name, Richard Loffler, I knew right away who he was."

"He asked me where I was casting



Leap of Faith

and I told him I wasn't yet. He said, Oh my God, you had better get going and you need to cast with us at this place in Montana. I will make the call and hook you up with the owner so you are set up to start casting."

"As soon as I walked in with the first piece I was going to cast, the Bear Soul, the owner said he had heard all about me. He said because I was from Canada and a ways away, they offered to keep my molds in a climate controlled building. They would look after the molds and if I only wanted to cast one and sell it, then reorder, that would be okay with them. They just wanted to help me get going. It was just a chance meeting that opened the doors for me."



Ovide Mercredi and Ken Frederickson



Bear Soul (front and back)

Southeast Asia are quite prominent. Several hand-knotted carpets from Iran, Kashmir, and Afghanistan as well as tribal rugs from Tibet are on display from time to time. A substantial Australian collection includes many paintings and carvings by Aboriginal artists. European artists are also represented. A large assortment of unique hand-crafted items, from around the globe, rounds out the collection.

“When Ovide left, he must have went straight to the conference office and looked up my wife’s contact information, because when she came back to the hotel that night, she had received a text from Ovide. “I know it is for you because it says, ‘You have an incredible gift for art that needs to be shared with the world.’ That led to the art retreat and one of the



Ken with the Eagles, part of the Shurniak Art Gallery permanent collection

Six months later another chance meeting played an important role in opening more doors in the art world. “I got the Bear Soul bronze back in March and in May, Heather had a convention in Quebec. She sits on the Community Futures Board of Directors and their Canadian convention was in the Quebec City region. I went with her to tour the Old City and I was attracted to one of the key-note speakers. It was Ovide Mercredi, who speaks all over the world on human rights issues. He spoke at one of their breakfasts, so I attended just to hear him. After he spoke, the convention participants left to go on their tour and I just stayed behind. Ovide came over and we started to chat over a coffee. I thought, who better to critique the Bear Soul bronze than him. I showed him some pictures and he gave me a personal invitation to attend the Assiniboia (Saskatchewan) Art Retreat, because a very good friend of his, Jan Layh from Manitoba, was helping Bill Shurniak coordinate the very first retreat. I had no idea what an art retreat even was.

Editor's Note: The Shurniak Art Gallery, in Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, houses the founder's (Bill Shurniak's) private collection of original paintings, sculptures, and artifacts from around the world. Opened in July 2005, the 8,000 square foot gallery contains seven gallery rooms, named after former and current villages in the area, that showcase the permanent collection. International art provides an interesting dimension to the permanent collection, acquired during a lifetime of travel and working abroad. Paintings, scrolls and furniture from China and

requirements was to have a piece of art on display at the Shurniak Art Gallery for a month. I only owned one bronze at the time, so I carried it into the gallery. Bill Shurniak exclaimed, 'Where have you been hiding your whole life.' I told him I hadn't been hiding, I had just been busy doing other things. He told me to get casting because he wanted to be the one to host my first gallery show. A year and a half later, it came to be."

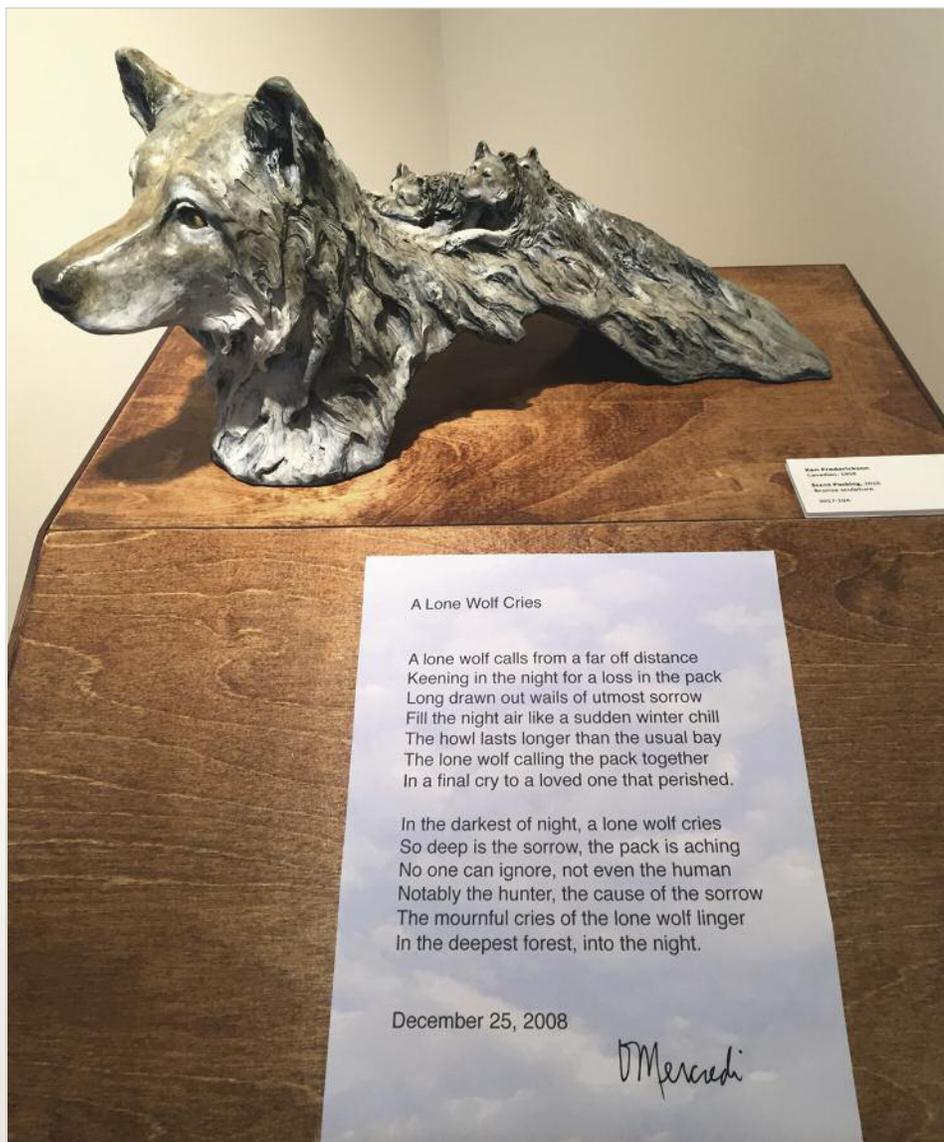
"The most exciting part about the first gallery show was the decision to merge Ovide's poetry with the bronzes and do it together. He wrote poetry for many of the bronzes and I created bronzes for some of his poetry. It was a neat collaboration and it was the largest gallery show they have held."

"Your progression as an artist gets

faster the more you do. How you perceive things and how you go about doing them, becomes easier. It has been an incredible ride the last three year, the art community has really opened to me. Jan Layh said there is over a two-year waiting list for people to be considered to have a show at the Shurniak Art Gallery, and I was moved to the front of the pack based on my first sculpture. It is absolutely unheard of. After the first art retreat I attended, I had an order for my first commissioned bronze. Now I have done a commission for the Livestock Marketers Association of Canada as an annual prize for the competition named The Calling. The Canadian Bar Association Saskatchewan Division uses a commissioned piece for its distinguished service award. I have done a few private pieces and won a

competition to have a Calgary Stampede prize for the next five years. It has been like strapping yourself to a rocket, it has been going so fast. I only look at a commission if it is something that interests me, if I have full license to do it the way I want to do it, and it has to be something I would be comfortable we could sell more, because it is so expensive to do only one. I have been fortunate enough to be able to sell at least one other bronze from each one I have cast."

"To do a gallery show, takes a lot of work and focus to put the pieces together. The most rewarding part is seeing people see the art. They don't have to buy it. If they get pleasure from a piece, I am pleased. There are five or six pieces that have been cast that people will actually shed a tear when they see them. It is a powerful



Lone Wolf Cries with Ovide Mercredi's poem at the combined gallery show



First Love



Male Angel

connection between a piece of art and a person if it emotes that kind of emotion. It is a beautiful and powerful thing to be able to pull something out of a person through the connection."

"A lady bought the Leap of Faith bronze three years after she saw it. It is one of the first sculptures I cast and is a big horn sheep just ready to lift off in a leap. The bronze was symbolic of my leap into the art world. You have to have the courage to make the first jump, but you don't really know where you are going to land. She has started to emerge as a painter and related to the piece. It is rewarding to sell a piece, it is like selling your first piece all over again. Lots of times they are niceties and not necessities in life, but if it can bring that much pleasure to someone, it is rewarding to me."

"I am pleased with the amount I am selling, but you end up rolling it back into another casting. This year the sales have been taking off and it is mostly collectors buying them. It has been amazing, I think I have sold 18 or 19 since May."

Prices are set according to size, for one thing. Bronze is a copper alloy and it trades on the open market like gold and silver, so casting cost is the determining factor. It costs a certain amount to mold it and an amount to cast it. The bigger the piece, the more the expense. The really complicated pieces have multiple molds, because things that stick out have to be mold separately and cast separately then attached. They can be quite labour intensive.

He has no agent but feels his experience in multiple businesses is all he needs to succeed. He trusts his instincts. There are other opportunities on the horizon, but he would like to see things grow at their own pace instead of being highly promoted. His focus is on the art, creating pieces he is proud to cast, the rest of the business will take care of itself. People are coming from across Canada and the U.S. to purchase



The teeth of the Grizzly show the detail of his work, while the cubs playing on the backside of the grizzly shows the contrast of the protective mother instinct and the playfulness of the cubs

his pieces. He believes if you do the best that you can do, that is all that is necessary. Heather takes care of a lot of the business details and has been completely supportive of Ken's artistic endeavours.

Ken follows his interests in subject matter for his sculptures. "Bill Shurniak commented that I have an ability to breath life into my pieces. The Pond Hockey piece I am working on is very different than the cow I just cast. It all comes from memory. I have always been a big history buff and a big part of the western art if preserving a piece of the past. A lot of the First Nations stuff was done for

the gallery show to fit with Ovide's poetry. The benefit was having Ovide to confer with because there has always been a big push that if you aren't First Nations, you shouldn't be doing First Nations art. Ovide put my mind at ease and assured me I should continue.

I want to explore more of the farming and ranching pieces for people on the prairies. There are also some more wildlife and birds I would like to sculpt.

I prefer to work from memory. If

there is something I question in my mind, I look it up, like the grizzly bear teeth. Once I get it figured out in my mind, I go to sculpt it from memory. I read a lot of anatomy books out of interest. It is important to know where the tendon insertions are to get a naturally appearing movement. I have the benefit of friends that are veterinarians who have shared their knowledge. I had a friend going through vet college and I used to spend Saturdays with him as he did horse dissection to get an idea of the inside out. You have to have a really good knowledge of what an animal has to offer in livestock photography and how to subtly tuck away the stuff that they shouldn't be showing. That necessary anatomy knowledge is available to me now to reach back and utilize in my sculpting. There are balance

points in structure that you need to recognize.

I work in wax and clay mediums. I started in wax because that is all I knew and I thought that was what I was supposed to do. When I took the Bear Soul bronze down to the foundry, they commented on my mastery of the old school technique. Not many people work in wax because it is harder. They suggested I try oil-based clay. I use both and I use combinations in most pieces. There are details that lend themselves more readily to wax. Once you get your old rubber molds made, you get your old

clay back. Since it never dries or hardens, I tend to make it into something else. The left over clay from the eagles is in the grizzly bear I am working on now.

In the summer, he works at a cabin in the Artist Colony at Kenosee Lake. He is one of three permanent artists there and there is one cabin reserved for artists to rotate through in two-week intervals. The Artist Colony is good for the park, but it is also good for the artists. "I will see about 3500 visitors at the cabin throughout the summer. They come from all over the world. It is great exposure and a great place to work in the summer months. It is also good for the public as they get something else to do while in the park." In the winter, he works out of a studio on the farm. "At the cabin, I have to work early in the morning before people start coming, you can get 135 people per day."

The bronze is one of the most expensive arts available because of the casting expense. The first year there was a lot of sticker shock with the people that came through. The second

year, we put a few of the prices up and we would get comments like, when I win the lottery...I love that but I can't afford it.... This year prices are on everything and people are buying it to collect it. The price doesn't seem to scare them, they want to own it because they love it. Most of the pieces will rarely go over 20 casts and the larger pieces only have 10. I prefer to have lower edition numbers where they are sold out and more valuable for people. If you have the confidence in a piece and love it that much, not flooding the market is the least I can do. He relies on his instincts to set the number he will cast for each piece.

The art is available for viewing at the farm studio in the winter. People will call and he will gladly show them around if he is available. His website (fredericksonbronzeart.com) and facebook pages (Ken Frederickson Bronze Art) are available at all times.

"Everyone always asks me why I waited so long to start this. Another artist put it really well when he said other artists spend their whole lifetime to evolve into who they were

meant to be. Or you can go out and live your life and start at a mature state when you can draw on life's experiences and have a really defined idea of who you are as a person, you are not trying to find yourself. It gives you memories over time that can help you pull emotion into your work. I don't think it is ever too late in life to try something. We all need things to keep us inspired and working towards something. This for me is the next thing. I have always been able to focus on something to build what I want. I focused on photography to build a business. I focused on building the ranch and raising a family. When it is time to start something else, you do your research and work to make it happen. You roll up your sleeves and focus to get it done. I think the largest part of my success is from my past – the knowledge of paying attention to detail from photography. It is necessary for this art form. Word of mouth has been huge in promoting my work. It is going to travel – good or bad, but fortunately it has all been good."

Plain Memory

