

Charcoal Chukkas

Olivia Eliot

Katie was commissioned in 2004 by The 2nd King Edward VII's Own Goorkhas (The Sirmoor Rifles) to produce a series of paintings to commemorate their Sirmoor Durbar - a reunion of over 2000 ex-British and Gurkha members of the regiment held in Pokhara, Nepal. After the reunion Jim Edwards invited some of the officers to continue their celebrations at Tiger Tops in Chitwan where he staged an elephant polo game for the occasion. "I continued to sketch and paint the group over this period", Katie explains, "and couldn't resist including a few sketched of the elephant polo games in the collection of work for the Durbar."

At the subsequent exhibition in London's Cork Street the elephant polo sketches all sold within the first half hour of the show. Jim was delighted with how popular the sketches had proved and asked Katie to return to Nepal to do some for him, but Katie's other commitments at the time made a swift return impossible. Katie last saw Jim just a few months before his death in March 2009. "When are you coming back to Nepal to paint my elephants for me?" he said", she explains. "So at his memorial I sat there and thought to myself, 'Why don't I do it now in memory of Jim? It was the least I could do for someone who had been a real support and inspiration to me. He was a true pioneer, an enthusiast, fantastically entertaining and fun and a wonderful force for good."

Katie mentioned the idea to Jim's sons and just a few months later found herself at the 2009 World Elephant Polo Championship in Bardia where she spent "a hugely enjoyable fortnight sketching players and elephants with the aim of creating a collection of high quality elephant polo prints."

As preparation for the project Katie's first port of call was the Natural History Museum's library where she spent weeks studying elephant anatomy. "Understanding anatomy is, I believe, essential when painting humans", she says. "It makes sense, therefore, that an understanding of how the elephant skeleton is designed and where the subcutaneous points are will help when depicting an elephant. From there you can start to get the relative proportions of the elephant in your mind: height from ground to sternum roughly equals one head length - things like that."

It was Katie's study of elephant anatomy that revealed a possible

explanation for their elegant movement: "My greatest discovery during my visits to the library was that I realised that elephants essentially stand on their tip toes all the time", she explains. "Their heels and wrists stay above ground level. I think that this could perhaps explain why, when they run they seem so much more elegant than their size and weight would suggest - they are literally dancing on tip toes!"

Like Jim, whose life her latest works now pay tribute to, Katie is passionate about nature conservation. "As a painter I am fascinated by how humans interact with the planet and the other species that share it. Being able to use my art to spread awareness and understanding is one of my goals and being able to raise money for the ITNC is a fantastic bonus. Elephant polo is unique because it is a rare opportunity to see Asian elephants working together for extended periods. In a game of elephant polo, the animals are all there before you on an open field. You can soon see their different characters, shapes, looks and watch how they interact with the players and the other elephants. They have really strong personalities and the younger ones especially have a great sense of fun and mischief. Elephant polo provides so much drama for the artist to feed on. The game is visually very powerful and has a stylish beauty all of its own."

Katie's chosen medium for the project was charcoal. "I specifically chose charcoal for the project for many reasons. First, I really wanted to get a sense of movement in the images. The elephants move much faster than I expected. They can't turn on a sixpence like a polo pony and they don't show the strain and exertion in their muscles as much because their skin is looser and more textured, but they can shift surprisingly fast for their weight and size. The mark making that you can achieve with charcoal helps to give that movement I think. Charcoal also feels less serious to me than oil. I intentionally wanted to keep a sense of fun in the drawings."

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To discover more about Katie's works, to register an interest or to request an invite to the upcoming exhibition visit www.quentinmills.com Prints will be available for purchase on line from 6th June 2010.



showcase

With charcoal and chalk on paper Katie Quentin Mills captures the thrill and power of elephant polo and the grace of the animals that make the sport possible. In an exclusive preview of a series created as a tribute to elephant polo's co-founder, AV Jim Edwards, that will raise money for Jim's memorial fund at the charity he founded, the International Trust for Nature Conservation, we reveal some of the works that will be unveiled at Katie's forthcoming exhibition in London this summer.

www.quentinmills.com



Charcoal and chalk on paper, 36cm x 51cm



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