



While a talented artist, Andrew Knudson, Towner, is an avid hunter and angler.

INSPIRED by Nature

Story and Photos by Luann Dart

With detailed brush strokes, artist Andrew Knudson transforms paint into feathers and fur.

He colors the canvas with the feathers of a pheasant flushed from the brush. He splashes the painting with the down of a duck. Or the friendly face of a faithful hunting dog. His passion for wildlife and the outdoors is portrayed in every creation.

And often the canvas itself is inspired by nature. He paints on wild turkey tail feathers, cottonwood leaves, buffalo skulls, deer hides and antlers. "I'll paint on anything," Knudson said with a smile and a shrug. "I like to work with things that I'm interested in – the wildlife. I've always been in the outdoors."

A Minot native, Knudson's early inspiration sprang from the shores of Lake Audubon, where he spent summers with his parents, Bob and Connie Knudson, and two younger brothers, Casey and Peter, casting a fishing line or exploring the shores in solitude.

A self-described introverted artist, Knudson revels in North Dakota's solitude while hunting or hiking. And that quiet assurance appears in his art. "I try to paint regional animals that I've encountered in the wild," he said. "Once you've been an outdoorsman for quite awhile, you know if the deer's antlers don't look quite right or if proportionately the animal doesn't look right . . . you get that eye."

Knudson often carries his camera during hunts or hikes, aiming the lens to help him capture those details in his art. But as he concentrates on composing his work, the outdoors often beckons. "There are always antlers to be looked for, horses to be ridden or a canoe to be paddled," he said with a smile. "I'd love to go spearfishing any day."

With that passion for outdoor pursuits already in place, Knudson followed his artistic instincts throughout high school and into college, earning an art degree from North Dakota State University in 1993. Two years later, his path led him to Towner, where he works from his Plains Perspective Studio and Gallery, a name which reflects the region's influence on his art.

"It's a great place to live," he explained simply.

Inside the cozy studio tucked behind his house, sunlight streams across his workspace onto the walls of art. Most notable are the intricate scenes Knudson paints onto wild turkey feathers, which he collects himself or from other hunters. Knudson sprays the feathers with a fixative to enhance the painting

surface, and then uses a soft bristle brush and oil paints to create a white-tailed buck gracefully stretching toward a mouthful of autumn leaves, or a buffalo grazing on the plains. He often embellishes a painting with tiny animal tracks across the matting.

Even in college, Knudson was using natural materials in his art, sculpting buffalo using sticks and other natural materials. When he began incorporating feathers into the sculptures, he was inspired to paint on them. Knudson's feather paintings are popular as fund-raising pieces for several wildlife organizations, including the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Delta Waterfowl, Pheasants Forever and Pheasants for the Future.

A Pride of Dakota member, Knudson has also created artwork for Ducks Unlimited in several states, including North Dakota for the past nine years.

From the tiny, involved paintings on feathers, Knudson relishes another challenge – painting murals on 77-foot walls. He's completed wall murals in Towner, Mandan, Bowbells and Parshall, splashing western and outdoor scenes across the communities.

"It's a really nice departure from all this tiny artwork. It's fun to be challenged once in awhile," he said. "I like to be really hands-on. It's so much easier for me on the really large pieces like a mural because it's really an aggressive hands-on approach. I paint extremely fast compared to most people."

As a champion bareback bronc rider, Knudson also creates western art depicting the modern cowboy in the vivid colors he relishes. His "Little Britches, Big Dreams" print commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Champions Ride at the Home on the Range near Sentinel Butte.

Knudson points to another commissioned painting as his most challenging – a 4-by 5-foot painting of a Mandan village during the time of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

"That, by far, was the most challenging in terms of historical accuracy," Knudson said of the painting, which is now displayed at the North Dakota Heritage Center.

Knudson also paints massive acrylic canvases, often as commissioned artwork. Resting on an easel in his studio is just one example, a canvas for a big game hunter, depicting 11 different African hunts in one collage that Knudson continues to tweak.

Artist Andrew Knudson employs pieces of nature – turkey feathers and bone in these instances – to authentically depict the wild side of North Dakota.



Plains Perspective Studio and Gallery is located on the worldwide web at www.plainsperspective.com.

“They’re never done until they’re out the door,” he said with a laugh. “It’s the creative process for me, not so much the finished product.”

Knudson’s main outdoor passion today is bowhunting because it’s challenging and puts the hunter in close proximity to the animals. “I’ve had some really neat outdoor experiences. You go out and have 10 poor fishing days in a row and then you have one good day and that’s got you coming back for more, and it’s the same way with hunting. It’s that one good day that keeps you coming back.”

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