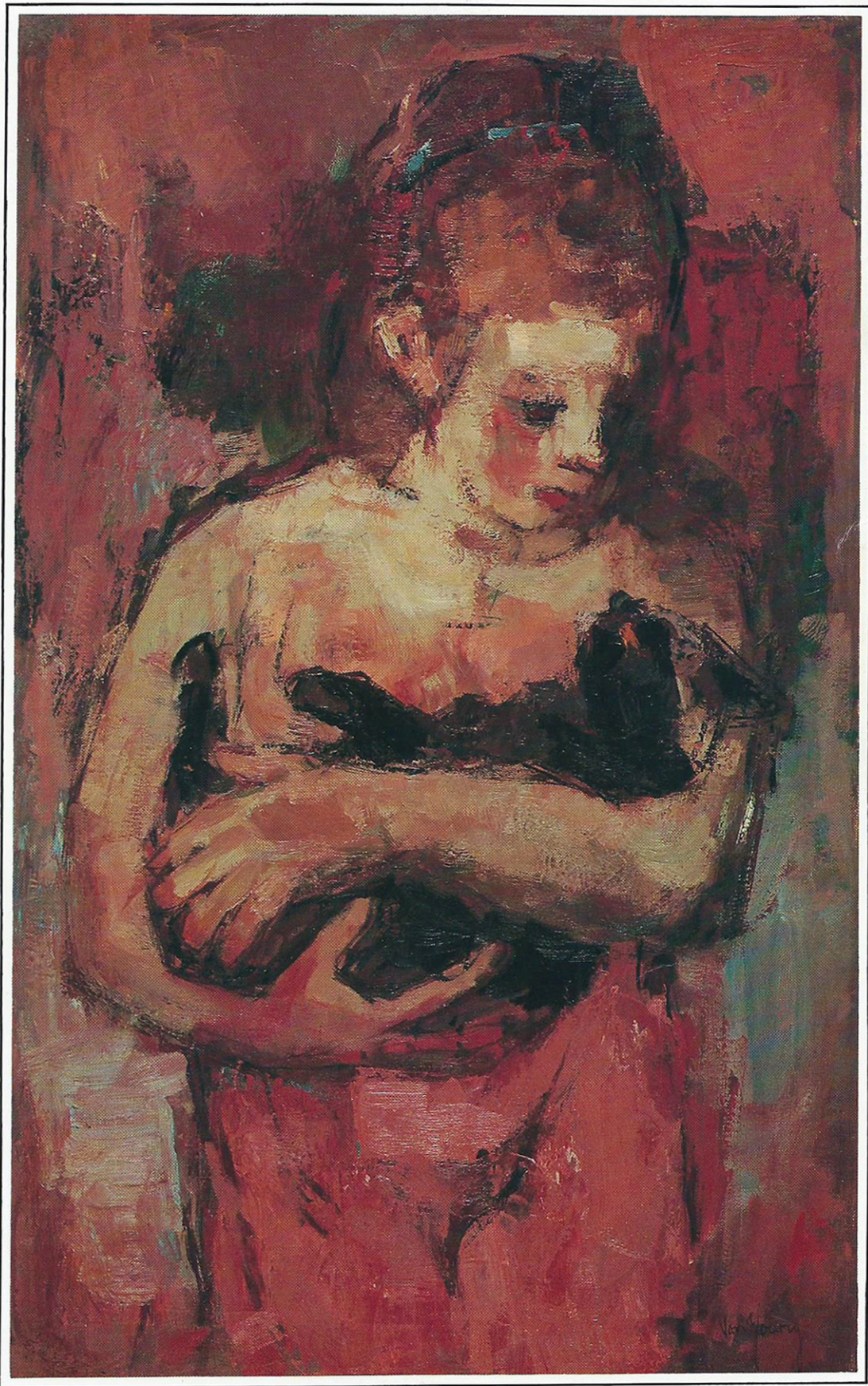


JULY 1977 \$2.50

# Southwest Art.®





David Garrison, BEAR HUNTER, 24 x 48. Photos courtesy of the artist.

# *Bringing A Mood Into Focus*

by Alex M. Joncas



David Garrison, CANYON DE CHELLY, 24 x 36.

*Alex M. Joncas received his B.A. from Northern Michigan University. He has taught English and Sociology in Michigan, Utah and Iowa. At present, he is employed by the National Science Foundation in Washington, D.C.*

Though he was born and raised in the Midwest and has his home in Burlington, Iowa, David Garrison still enjoys the beauty of the western atmosphere. From his Iowa home he travels to the Southwest several times a year. And once there he receives new inspiration for his conté crayon paintings of Indians, adobes, animals and other southwestern scenes and subjects.

Conte crayon, a medium largely ignored by artists, is the specialty of this successful painter who also works in other media. Garrison's conté crayon style is unique and easily recognizable. Through special care in applying the several layers of gesso (sometimes as many as fifteen) to the panel board, he achieves a characteristic freshness. Depending on the subject matter, the

*continued*



David Garrison, COWBOY, 20 x 24.

background and overall design is intensified with each application of the gesso-conté crayon mixture. Due to the resultant natural look and earthtones, the effect is complimentary to subjects pertaining to the Old West, wildlife, mother and child, and nearly any other topic.

"Conté crayon, as I use it, has a refreshing look to it and causes people to wonder how the aged quality was brought out," explained Garrison. Actually, conte crayon dates back to medieval times. The Old Masters used it for the quick sketching and planning stages of their master works. Yet there are no examples in our past of conté crayon used for and of itself. Garrison decided that it was time this was changed, and the success of his efforts is evident in his works.

"I've been asked why I work with western subjects considering I live in Iowa. Iowa is not without its Indian ancestry. Chief Black Hawk was one of the better known in my area. I enjoy reflecting back to our settlers and very first Americans in the history of our country, and the Old West offers the most versatile opportunity. I equally enjoy the wildlife because so much of the beauty lies in the anatomy. In my estimation, anatomy plays

just as important a part as good design.

"In many cases anatomy is where one separates the men from the boys in the fine arts. Outstanding artists of the past such as Michelangelo, Rodin, and John Singer Sargent realized the vital function anatomy plays. I came to understand that without it I would be only half the artist I hoped to be, no matter how many years I worked.

"In the years while the style I now have was developing, I was determined to bring my best potential into being and to perfect my own style. 'Have your own style and don't copy the success patterns of others' was my motto. Purposely, my style will continue to mature. I have no intention of becoming locked into my way of doing my pieces. I must progressively improve and expand my mode of working. An example of this progressive development is Michelangelo. The changes in this man's work are obvious right up to his last piece of sculpture.

"The importance of a unique style is a lesson I consider myself fortunate to have learned early in life. One of the great difficulties for young artists these days is to

*continued*



David Garrison, *SISTER'S CARE*, 27 X 20. In the collection of Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Nykiel, Chicago Heights, Illinois.



David Garrison, *SQUAW AND PAPOOSE*, 20 X 26.

decide between one's own impressions and those impressions of someone whom one admires very much. If he can become free from everyone else's influences, the young artist can work at his own time and at a more natural pace."

While seeking to achieve this goal of creating his own style, Garrison reflected on the challenges faced by the artists of the Middle Ages. "They had to start from scratch in creating a painting. Many had to make their own brushes and even their own paint before they could start a painting. Artists today need only go to the store to pick out their supplies from a variety of merchandise, brands, etc., available. So, to be limited to only one medium in this day and age is foolish."

Further explaining his philosophy, the southpaw painter said, "If I were to define my work in one word, it would be 'simplicity'. In trying to tell a story through art, the law to follow is 'simplify'. I believe in direct approach, eliminating all unnecessary detail and all unnecessary color---unnecessary color is just as much an artistic sin as overworking the area with detail."

It is Garrison's belief that during his four year stay

at the American Academy of Art in Chicago he received "excellent training by outstanding artists who were well-known in their fields." He studied oil painting with Joseph Bandenrouke, watercolor with Irving Shapiro, and anatomy with Bill Parks. In fact it was Parks who introduced Garrison to conte crayon. Garrison graduated from the academy in 1968.

For the artist, studio work is all-important. After collecting ideas in notebook, sketchbook and slides, he returns from his trip and starts sorting through and creating. "It is not uncommon for me to work ten to twelve hours at a stretch on several works at once. The idea behind this is not to mass-produce art, but to keep my mind from settling in a rut by doing only one thing at a time. Variety is the spice of life, and it is important to keep each piece original.

"I use abstract art in getting the basic design in my painting," explained Garrison. "In planning a painting I do sketches with light and dark patterns which generally show good basic design. This is usually called abstract art."

Where other artists use abstract as a finished piece



David Garrison, APPALOOSA COLT, 18 X 28.

of art, Garrison carries it one step further in making it realistic art.

"I do my work in rough draft at first, determining as I go what I want the detailed areas to be. Sometimes, when I find a subject a little more overpowering than usual, I work up small sketches to determine the center of interest."

Garrison says his goal is to create a mood rather than to paint a pretty picture. "I try to catch a moment in time--for instance, the beginning of the flight of a pheasant or the little duckling's first swim." The artist feels that composition and design are vital and that without these you would have nothing but a mess.

To identify his work as an original, Garrison not only signs his name, but he also places a thumbprint over his name. If this rather unique technique had been used by the Old Masters, perhaps the problem of forgeries would not now exist.

To paint outdoors on location is a satisfying experience for Garrison. The moods and colors are so unlike studio painting. However, the outdoors does have its hazards. For instance there was the time Garrison was painting a scene in a park. His deep concentration was destroyed as a large dog came up to him from behind. Too frightened to move, Garrison froze stiff, a move which proved to be disastrous for the dog mistook him for a fire hydrant.

The artist's ability to laugh, even when mistaken for a fire hydrant, reflects his daily positive attitude toward

life. In large measure this positive daily living can be credited to his Mormon upbringing and the family environment provided by his wife and two sons.

Garrison is an earnest conservationist. This, in part, explains his wildlife paintings. "Many beautiful species are endangered," he points out. "I enjoy painting wildlife and hope, by bringing out the beauty of birds and animals, to create an awareness that they are precious and not just something to hunt."

A number of galleries handle Garrison's work and can attest to the artist's versatility. Among these galleries are *Savage Galleries* in Santa Fe, New Mexico and Scottsdale, Arizona; *Hall's Gallery*, Lubbock, Texas; *Artists' Den*, Valparaiso, Indiana; *Lake View Art Center*, Peoria, Illinois; and *Images of the Old West*, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

David E. Garrison feels that self-discipline is an all important factor for attaining success at anything a person undertakes. Perhaps this is even more true for the artist, who encounters within himself a constant struggle is knowing that there is always something to learn. Age and experience are no exception to this rule. And for this 37-year old artist, to try to capture a mood and to bring it into focus for the untrained public eye is truly a challenge. Whether the work be a Madonna and child or a crusty old man from the 1800's, Garrison captures a spirit of tranquility and creates a mood of peace within. □