

*All paintings are shown
at their actual size,
displayed with pennies
for good measure!*



Macy (watercolor, 1¼" diameter pin)
by Rachelle Siegrist



*The Sinks—Great Smoky
Mountains National Park*
(watercolor, 3½ x 2½")
by Wes Siegrist



Beggars Can't Be Choosers (watercolor, 3½ x 2½")
by Wes Siegrist

**Wes & Rachelle
Siegrist**
**Life Under the
Magnifying
Glass**



Western Cadillac (watercolor, 2 x 3")
by Rachelle Siegrist

BY PATRICIA MORRIS BUCKLEY

When Wes and Rachelle Siegrist attend wildlife art shows, the best sales tool for their miniature watercolors is often a simple magnifying glass. Unfortunately, the same tool is also their worst enemy because it can distress their fellow painters.

"Customers take our magnifying glasses over to look at the works of other artists, who sometimes get upset," Wes says, because they're not happy about viewers seeing every brushstroke. "Our work is painted to hold up under magnification. It still has to look good



Wes and Rachelle Siegrist, who work side by side creating miniature watercolors, take frequent breaks to walk in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which is next door to their Tennessee home.

three feet away, one inch away and through a magnifying glass. We call it the 'Wow!' factor, and that's best seen under the magnifying glass. We typically don't make a sale until they pick up the glass."

There's a flip side to this story. When the married couple enters juried wildlife art shows, slides of their work are projected on a wall during the selection process. "When our work is blown up to 600 times its original size, our signatures look as if they were painted with a house brush," he admits.

The Siegrists have painted watercolor miniatures for 10 years and in that time they've garnered quite a few loyal collectors, including a handful who own more than 25 of their petite paintings. They show in both miniature and wildlife art shows, and between them, their resumes are crammed with awards. For instance, Rachelle won Best of Show at the 33rd annual International Miniature Art Show in Largo, Fla., while Wes won the Award of Excellence at the 24th annual



Just South of Dubois (watercolor, 2 x 4") by Wes Siegrist



Those Adoring Eyes (watercolor, 2 x 3") by Rachelle Siegrist



works they complete each year mostly feature wildlife, but a small number are portraits and landscapes.

After 17 years of marriage, they're usually the only ones who can tell their works apart since they use the same pigments, surfaces and brushes. For viewers to tell who painted which piece, well, it often takes grabbing hold of that handy magnifying glass to read the signature.



Another Day at the Spa (watercolor, 2 x 4") by Wes Siegrist



juried show of the New Mexico Miniatures Art Show in Roswell, N.M. Several of their works are in the permanent collection at the Natural World Museum in San Francisco, Calif.

All these accolades would never have happened if they hadn't, quite by accident, received an application for a miniature art show. "There were so many rules and guidelines that I tossed it aside at first," recalls Wes, 42. "Then one day, Rachelle was off shopping, and I decided to try one really small painting with their rules. And I fell in love. There's a real challenge to doing it."

When Rachelle, 37, returned home that day, her competitive spirit kicked in and she also tried painting a miniature, soon becoming enamored, as well. Today, miniatures make up 99 percent of their work. The 100 to 125



The Mountaineer (watercolor, 3 x 2") by Rachelle Siegrist

Before They Met

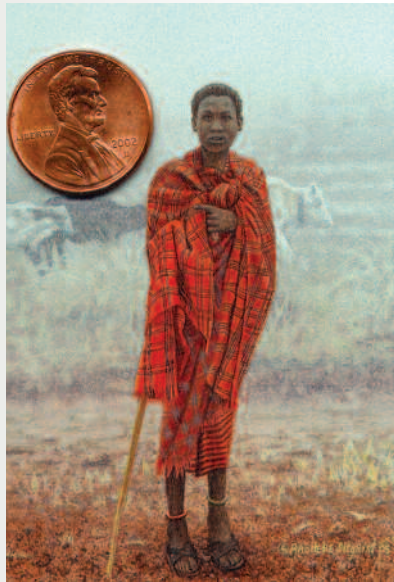
Growing up in the small country town of Elizabeth, Ind., Wes was the only artist in a family that loved the outdoors, although his grandparents encouraged his artistic bent with

modeling clay and coloring books. At Evangel College (now a university) in Springfield, Mo., he majored in commercial art while selling paintings to friends. One college summer, he entered a show in Indiana with only a few pieces in his portfolio, and as result, had to produce 65 paintings in two weeks. "I remember Ray Day, the best-known artist in the area, telling me, 'If you can paint 65 painting in two weeks, you're going somewhere,'" he says.

That somewhere turned out to be South Florida, where he lived with his grandmother in a marina-side trailer so he only had to peek out the window to see wildlife, especially seafaring birds. He held a number of jobs, including working at an advertising agency, in a funeral home and as an art teacher. It's while teaching that he met the then 19-year-old Rachelle.

Rachelle grew up in Okeechobee, Fla., also a small country town, "where there

were more cows than people," she recalls, "so all my best friends were cows. I was always outside and surrounded by animals." In high school, she got into modeling, and decided to major in fashion design in college. Then her brother had a kidney transplant and she opted to stay home to help him. Her mother heard of an art class and introduced her to the instructor, who just happened to be Wes.



Masai Herdsman (watercolor, 3 x 2")
by Rachelle Siegrist

"The classes were an hour's drive away" at the Highlands Museum of the Arts in Sebring, Fla., "so we would talk the whole way," Rachelle says. "Sometimes we would go have lunch in the state park near the museum and we got to know each other pretty well." Or, as Wes puts it, "I told her I'd teach her to paint if she married me."

Teaming Up Personally and Artistically

The pair wed in 1990, and despite an enthusiastic reception at wildlife art shows and the support of their families, especially Wes' grandmother, whom he says is still their No. 1 fan, they struggled to make ends meet. "Traveling to shows from South Florida was cost prohibitive," he says. That's when the miniature show application changed the scale of their work and the scope of their audience. For several years, they were among the few wildlife artists who painted miniatures.

"In the beginning, we'd stick out like sore thumbs at wildlife art shows," says Wes. "Then we started to encourage other artists to give it a try. In a sense, we created a lot of our own competition. But miniatures are so addictive."

Most of their photo-realistic paintings measure less than 8 inches square, with some as miniscule as 1 3/4 x 1 3/4". In each one, the details, from fur to feather, are as meticulous as a larger work, perhaps even more so as an animal head can be the size of an eraser on a pencil. Favorite subjects include birds, reptiles, butterflies and mammals. If there is any real signature to their style, it's in the humor, such as animals showing the joy of being brushed, and in their color choices.

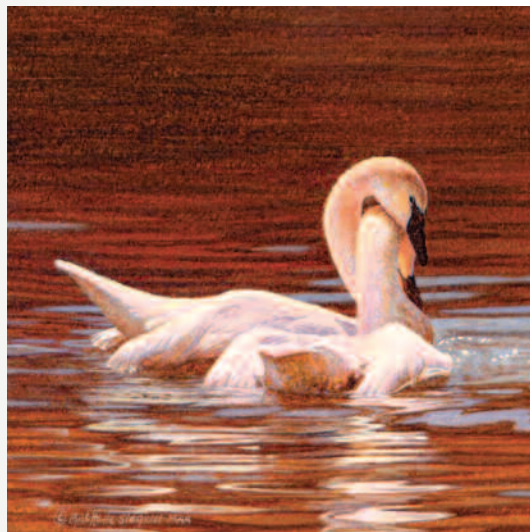
"We've recently taken black out of our palette. We use purple or dark blue for shadows," explains Rachelle. "We're going for a glowing look." They always give each other feedback. "When we're done, we let the other look at it to see what we can do to make it better," says Wes.

Neither uses a magnifying glass to paint, so their noses may be inches from their work, and they have no trouble painting a foot apart from each other. But there is one rule—don't shake the table. And when it comes time to choose who gets to paint which reference photo, "that's when we arm wrestle," he says, "although I always lose."


Not all their time is spent in the studio. They moved to Townsend, Tenn., in 2001, and their home is adjacent to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, where they walk or bike almost daily and find plenty of wildlife for inspiration. Their need for leisure time is sometimes a point of contention. "I always want to go play," says Rachelle. "Wes has to tell me to work." "I'm more business-minded," he replies.



Roan Mountain Beauty (watercolor, 3 x 3") by Wes Siegrist



Romantic Overtures (watercolor, 2 3/4 x 2 3/4")
by Rachelle Siegrist

As for the future, the couple sees themselves continuing to transcribe the wildlife they love into miniature form. "Another nice thing about miniatures is that they are so collectible," Wes explains. "People don't buy them to match a sofa. Plus, it would take eons to fill a wall with our paintings." 

**Both artists are represented
by Row House Gallery,
Old Milford, Ohio.**

Images courtesy of the artists.

**AS
SEEN
IN** **WILDLIFE ART**
M A G A Z I N E

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