

Biography: Robin Hill

Robin Hill is one of the world's most distinguished bird painters and artists. His career has spanned five decades and 3 continents, producing some of the most compelling natural history artwork ever seen. Not only a master artist, Robin has produced many books, written by himself, has contributed to numerous magazines. He was also a pioneer of Australian television nature documentaries and had a close bond with the early conservation movement back in the 1960's.

After many years with his focus primarily being watercolor bird paintings, Robin has now broadened his palette and turned his brush to portraiture in oils, both human and canine. He also paints splendid landscapes, wildlife and still-life works.

Robin Hill was born in Brisbane, Australia in 1932. A year later his family moved to England, where they lived for seventeen years. It was here, during a boyhood of escaping from restrictive schools to the out-of-doors, that he developed a passion for the natural world and the keen powers of observation so beautifully reflected in his detailed paintings of birds and other wildlife.

Hill's formal training in art began early at the Wimbledon School of Art and continued at the National Gallery of Art School and the Royal Melbourne College. Chafing at the academic regimen, Robin Hill "went bush" for three years - a period of rich experiences in the Australian wilderness so different from the domesticated park lands of England. To support himself during this unstructured immersion in nature and painting, he worked intermittently as a sheep shearer, cowboy, and blacksmith. Eventually, Hill returned to finish his degree in art and design and began his career as an "all round" painter and graphic artist, including a position with ABC -- the nascent television station of Australian Broadcasting Commission.

Whether in the bush observing wildlife or in an academic setting, Robin Hill was always developing his art, evolving the talent and techniques that enabled him to pursue his avocation of bird painting. This passion soon overwhelmed other interests, and Hill elected to concentrate exclusively on painting and writing about natural history.

His first exhibition of bird paintings, hosted by the Australian Galleries in Melbourne, was a critical and commercial success, followed by exhibitions in Sydney, Johannesburg, London, New York and other cities in Australia and the United States. After publishing his first book BUSHLAND AND SEASHORE which won a design award, Hill returned to England for two years and exhibited regularly at the Tryon Gallery in London.

Upon his return to Australia, Robin Hill wrote and illustrated BUSH QUEST published by Landsdowne Press. This book provided the seminal idea for a nature television series starring Robin Hill produced by ABC. This very popular show BUSH QUEST WITH ROBIN HILL was the first nature documentary series produced by ABC and spawned the series WILD AUSTRALIA.

During this period Robin Hill was commissioned by Thomas Nelson, Ltd. to write and paint the illustrations for a comprehensive volume on AUSTRALIAN BIRDS. The lavishly produced book was a landmark in Australian ornithology and publishing, selling 30,000 copies in the first few weeks.

Hill biography (continued)

Robin Hill relocated to the United States in 1971, establishing studios in Virginia and Washington, D.C. Following successful exhibitions in Middleburg, Virginia and New York, there was a solo exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. and also an exhibition cosponsored by the World Wildlife Fund and the Australian Embassy.

In the 1980s the fine restaurant group Clyde's commissioned Robin Hill to paint a series of eighteen large-scale watercolors of birds, including triptychs measuring as large as nine by five feet. The beautiful composition and exquisite detail of these works led to numerous commissions for similar large scale paintings.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Robin Hill executed an ongoing commission to paint complete sets of American birds -- The Endangered Species; The Ducks, Geese and Swans; The Upland Game Birds; The Birds of Prey; and The Marsh Birds. This series of more than 200 paintings is part of the permanent collection of The Morris Museum in Augusta, Georgia which opened in 1992.

The series of THE UPLAND GAME BIRDS was exhibited around the United States as part of the Smithsonian Institution's travelling exhibitions in the 1980s. THE LOST AND VANISHING series (click title for more information & images), portraying extinct and endangered birds of North America, was also a travelling exhibition in support of the World Wild-Life Fund.

The Ducks, Geese and Swans series was published as THE WATERFOWL OF NORTH AMERICA - a beautifully designed, large format book with illustrations reproduced with unusual faithfulness to the stunning originals in color and detail. With a foreword by the Duke of Edinburgh published by Morris Communications Corporation in 1987, which captures North America's 51 species of waterfowl in 53 color plates reproducing Hill's watercolor paintings.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Hill expanded his repertoire to include paintings of dogs, farm animals, other wildlife, still-life, industrial sites, pre-Columbian ruins and other subjects. In addition to his well known watercolor /gouache paintings, he has painting in oils, particularly for portraits and for some wildlife paintings.

In addition to his books, Robin Hill's writings on nature and travel have appeared in various newspapers and magazines. He had a regular, illustrated column in the Melbourne Age newspaper for many years, and was a regular contributor to Cruising World magazine, for which he wrote about wildlife as well as his sailing experiences.