

Tales To Tell

Artist: Carel Brest van Kempen (1958-) Salt Lake City, Utah

Title: *Lizard Relay: Jaguarundi with Green Iguanas and Banded Basilisks* 1991

Media: acrylic

Size: 32" x 42"

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Carel Brest van Kempen was born in Murray, Utah, in 1958. He says he has been fascinated with drawing ever since he could hold a pencil; he always drew. Because he grew up in Emigration Canyon and exploring the wilds was what there was for children to do, his interest invariably has been in drawing nature.

Carel didn't grow up knowing much about art, but his parents owned three books about artists; Audubon, Rembrandt, and Salvador Dali. When he was in his teens and early 20s, he tried to be Salvador Dali, and Carel feels he still retains some of Dali's influence in his compositions.

Although Brest van Kempen is a wildlife artist, he's not the typical western wildlife artist: more than half his work is of tropical animals. He chose tropical wildlife because of his own interests, which have led him to spend large amounts of time in the tropics: Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Brazil, Cameroon, Guinea, Madagascar, Kenya, and the Solomon Islands, among others. Carel calls himself an amateur biologist and ecologist, both of which are important in his artwork. The fact that he studied biology, not art, may have influenced his art in ways that make it unique. Originally, van Kempen did his own work with ignorance of what else was being done in wildlife art, choosing what he knew and was interested in. Now that he has become a recognized part of the national and international wildlife artist scene, he makes conscious choices that allow him to continue to follow his own interests but that also maintain the niche he has found in the art world.

In high school, Carel took a drawing class, and he has since gotten pointers from other artists such as Benders and Lester. However, he is basically a self-taught artist whose drawing and painting skills come from years of dedicated practice, a biologist's attention to detail, and his own natural talents.

Being a successful artist didn't come easily though. Carel left college because he didn't know what he wanted to do, and from 1976-1989, he held various jobs such as being a fry cook and working in a tannery. Although interested in art, making a living at it didn't seem possible. He says in 1988, he finally started painting pieces he felt he could show someone besides his family and friends and that he could sell.

Having decided to commit himself to being an artist, Brest van Kempen sold his house and spent four years living in his van, doing nothing except painting. He says there is nothing like abject poverty to help a person focus; he didn't even have the distraction of eating because he had just enough food to keep himself from actually starving. During those grueling years Brest van Kempen figured out how to paint the way he wanted and now is very glad he did.

Carel decided to become a professional painter in 1989, and his art hasn't changed much since then. He acknowledges that his work has gotten more detailed, his technique has gotten better, and he's gone through a real learning process. He believes he is pretty good at what he's doing, so now he isn't concentrating so much on learning. According to Brest van Kempen, he gets bored easily if things are too easy, so he knows he will need to find other roadblocks, other challenges down the road. He expects in 15 years his art will be quite different just because he doesn't like doing the same thing over and over.

As a wildlife artist, Brest van Kempen tries to represent nature. As he puts it, "lots of stuff chasing other stuff." And although his work is evolving, Carel is sure it will always involve nature. His drawings and paintings are tightly rendered with themes that involve ecology and how animals relate to their environment; they're stories about how animals live.

His sense of fun comes through in his work "he himself has fun painting them" some paintings are whimsical and some darker. Often these paintings feature animals with their prey, one about to catch another or to escape—the moment just before the climax. Carel's experience in tropical areas has given him the background to create realistic settings for his dramas, including details of the animals' natural habitats and other animals that would be in the environment.

He's gratified when he sees someone whose eye is caught by a painting and goes closer and closer, to see the detail. If his paintings are interesting from a distance and also have qualities that draw people near to them, Carel feels the paintings are successful.

Lizard Relay shows banded basilisks and green iguanas, Carel doesn't think of it as a sophisticated piece, both kinds of lizards like to be near water. When danger, like the jaguarundi, threatens, the iguanas dive in the water and the basilisks run across it. Basilisks have long toes with rows of enlarged scales along the edge to give their feet a large surface area, and they run very quickly, never breaking the surface tension of the water, kind of skating across to safety. Both kinds of lizards are very common in Central America, near any river. Jaguarundi also like to hang around water, eating lizards, birds,

and other small animals. In this painting, the jaguarundi is spooking a bunch of lizards that are heading for safety.

Carel used to keep his own reptiles but had to get rid of them when he lived in his car, trying to make it as an artist. Although now a successful painter, he says he has only a brown linole that hatched from an egg in a bird's nest fern he recently bought. However, he uses his years of experience with reptiles and other wildlife to produce what Dr. Vern Swanson, Director of the Springville Museum says are the best, the most creative wildlife paintings around. Swanson says it is particularly Brest van Kempen's original use of color and his fine draughtmanship that sets his work apart from other wildlife artists.

Carel Brest van Kempen has become a successful professional artist. He sells mostly outside Utah through touring museum shows and through galleries all over the United States and in other countries. For the last three years, his work has been sold at auction through Christie's of London and is featured in galleries in North Carolina and Washington state. Some of his personal favorites are the Society of Animal Artists and other, similar touring shows.

He is accumulating an impressive array of awards and honors such as 1st place in the Doug Miller Art Show, two awards of Excellence from the Society of Animal Artists, the 1995 Best of Show from the Pacific Rim Wildlife show in Seattle and from the Southeastern Expo in Charleston, South Carolina, the two biggest wildlife art shows in the United States. In addition to his many awards, van Kempen was featured artist in the Pacific Rim Show and will be again this year. The Utah State Fair and the Days of 47 show both featured Carel's work, at the Director's request.

In addition to exhibiting, Brest van Kempen illustrates books and magazines and his paintings can be found on art print cards by Advanced Vivarium Systems, inc. This fall, the September 1997 issue of InformArt (a magazine of art prints) highlighted Carel and his artwork.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING (History, Aesthetics, Criticism)

What do you see in this artwork? (See BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION) What style of painting is this? (Wildlife, Realism) What is different about this painting than most wildlife art you have seen? What is similar? What medium has the artist used? How has that choice of media affected the artwork? How has the artist created tension in the artwork? Describe the artist's use of color.

What aesthetic approach to art has this artist chosen to use? (Realistic, art should look life-like and imitate or copy the real object)) In what specific ways is this artwork true to

the aims of realistic art? How has the artist created a realistic setting for the scene taking place? What other ways might the artist have chosen to represent this scene, and how would those changes have affected the artwork?

Is wildlife art valuable? Why or why not? What elements and principles of art has this artist used effectively? What ineffectively? Where should this painting be displayed? Why?

ACTIVITIES

Art

Objective: The students will demonstrate their understanding of SETTING by using a new technique to produce an artwork that establishes a sense of time and place.

Show the class the slide of *Lizard Relay* and discuss how the artist has created a sense of a specific time and place for viewers—the SETTING. Use ideas from QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING and from the BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION to help you direct the discussion. Also see Tales to Tell, the Crayola DREAM-MAKERS 1997 teachers' packet for more information on SETTING. The students may find a class-made list of ways to establish SETTING helpful. You may want to include paintings of interior scenes such as Lou Jene Carter's *Mostly Flowers* (A FEMININE PERSPECTIVE, May 1995 pkt), since they too establish a SETTING.

When you feel confident the class understands some ways they can establish a sense of time and place, teach them a new technique or the use of a new medium.

(If your students already have a broad repertoire of techniques or you do not wish to include new techniques in this activity, skip to the next section.)

Some techniques particularly suited to use in establishing SETTING are as follows:

1. Cutting shapes from construction paper, coloring them with chalk, crayon, paint, ink, or by using a combination of coloring methods, and then applying the shapes to a background by gluing on layers of shapes that overlap. The background can have been colored in some way before the shapes are glued on or can be a blank sheet of colored or white paper.
2. Simple stamps can be made from cut pieces of sponge, potato, foam, cardboard, a carved eraser, any textured surface that will take ink or paint, dried Model Magic, or any kind of printing block. The stamps can be used to provide visual texture in the background, to color shapes, to stamp on top of shapes, or to create layers of subtle color and shape. As an alternative to or a natural pairing with stamping, use rubbings of textured materials.

3. Collect (with the students' help) a large group of interesting papers or thin materials such as wallpaper samples, construction paper, cardboard, art paper, waxed paper, aluminum foil, gift wrap, tissue paper, cellophane, etc. Again, glue shapes cut from different papers to a backing (you may need to use poster board for the backing). The different papers may be used alone to create a sense of time and place or they may be combined with any method of coloring or texturing that works. For example, some papers have interesting textures by themselves and others do when they have been crumpled and then flattened out.

For more complex techniques, see the ART TECHNIQUE GUIDE VOLUME III, a Crayola Creative Resource, which came with the 1997 Crayola DREAM-MAKERS packets. This, and previous GUIDES, provide excellent instructions for techniques that can be used by children from kindergarten on up. They also contain examples that demonstrate that even five and six year olds can create attractive and complex artworks using these techniques.

4. Collect a selection of interesting fabrics for the students to use. As above, these fabrics can be used alone or colored before or after they're applied to the backing. Use poster board or another sturdy backing.

5. Help the students collect items that can be used to create a collage that will focus on conveying setting. These items may include natural items such as leaves, grass, flowers, small pieces of wood or small stones, or they can be man-made items such as magazine pictures, ads, fabric, food labels or containers—anything they can fasten on to a base.

6. Use collected or created items to produce a three-dimensional section or a three-dimensional artwork. (See activity using Crayola WET SET) In addition, this activity may be used as a link or introduction to earthworks or installation art. You may choose to have the whole class create an installation, and then have the class invite other classes to visit the installation. The students may want to record other classes' comments or reactions to the work or they may want to make a presentation to the visitors that introduces installation art. This particular activity works well for focusing on setting, but also is a natural for using SETTING, CHARACTERS, and EVENTS. (See other activities in this packet as well as the Crayola Teacher aids for other related ideas.)

7. Use techniques such as crayon resist, marker and paint, colored pencil and ink, watercolor pencils on moist paper, watercolor pencils dipped in white paint, Crayola OVERWRITERS, and others as described in the Crayola Guides. All these techniques yield richly textured and colored artworks that are excellent for establishing SETTING.

After you have taught the students how to use a new technique, have them think about a specific setting they want to create. To help stimulate ideas and to correlate the art activity with other areas of the curriculum, try one or more of the following ideas:

Music: play one or several different pieces of music and have the children imagine a setting for one of them. Then have them create an artwork of that setting in some media.

Language Arts: read the students poetry or descriptive prose and have the students visually describe the setting of one of the poems or prose pieces in an artwork. A few possibilities are "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening" and "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost, poems from the collections A Brighter Garden, by Emily Dickinson, The Kite That Braved Old Orchard Beach by X. J. Kennedy (he's also written other children's poetry books), and Ride a Purple Pelican by Jack Prelutsky. The initial description of the house in The Fall of the House of Usher, by Edgar Allen Poe, Hills Like White Elephants by Ernest Hemingway, That Time of Year by William Shakespeare (a sonnet).

A couple of favorite poems from Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama, by X. J. Kennedy are "A Mongoloid Child Handling Shells on the Beach" by Richard Snyder and "Root Cellar" by Theodore Roethke; they both establish setting marvelously. The anthology is published by Little, Brown and may be available in your high school or public library. A few minutes spent in the local library should provide you with many possible selections.

Science: Choose an aspect of your science curriculum that lends itself to being described visually. Research or accuracy or both can be part of the activity's objectives. Show the students the slide of *Lizard Relay* and of other artworks to demonstrate how scientifically accurate information can be used to establish SETTING. If you are interested in scientific accuracy, you may want to restrict the media.

The students may want to make a pencil drawing which they outline and fill in with some kind of coloring medium.

Science and Language Arts: As an introduction to, as part of, or as the culmination to a lesson on plants, insects, ecology, or habitat, have the students closely observe an appropriate area such as an ant hill, a flower, or a square yard of a field and list everything they see. In addition to the list, the students should write a paragraph that describes qualities of what they have observed. After the observations are finished, have the students share in small groups what they observed. Then have the students each create an artwork that demonstrates their observations.

This activity can focus on scientific accuracy or the students can concentrate on producing a visual portrait that communicates mood, time, place, and a reaction they had to the particular area they observed. Or the students can create the SETTING from an appropriate point of view such as how a flower or field might look from an insect's perspective.

Science: Have the students produce an artwork that is a visualization of a place most of them will never be, such as in space, down a volcano, at the bottom of an ocean, inside a thunderhead, etc.

Social Studies: Have students read about a place from your social studies curriculum and produce an artwork that describes that place in terms of SETTING. This can be an individual or a group project.

Geography/Geology: Use the creation of an artwork as a way to help students understand the geography or geology of a particular place or time. Or, have students demonstrate what they have learned by creating an appropriate artwork.

Art: Have the students concentrate on a single aspect of SETTING such as mood, time, or place, and use the chosen medium or a mix to create that aspect.

Drama: After discussing SETTING in art, ask the students to apply what they have learned to drama. You may want to include a section in the activity that looks at different kinds of settings for plays. You can read examples from plays. You can also talk about set design as a way of creating SETTING. Show the class examples of sets ranging from very realistic, to those employing special effects, to those that use minimalist or symbolic sets.

The activity can end there or you can have the students plan the set for a particular play or scene either as a class or in small groups. One interesting way to complete this assignment would be to give all the groups the same scene and have each design a set. The students would need to create a written and sketched version of the scene. Have the groups share their ideas for a set with the class and talk about why they made the particular choices they did.

Drama for Young Students: Gather a variety of possible props, objects, furniture, and moveable panels. Have the class or small groups plan the set for a short play they have written, a short scene, or a professionally written children's play. Or, give the class a brief outline of a scene and have them choose an arrangement for the set that will create an appropriate SETTING.

Drama for Advanced Students: Assign students to plan a certain kind of stage set and then share ideas. Out of the ideas, come up with a class plan and then perform the scene as a memorized and choreographed performance on the stage set. Or, perform a one-act play. Another idea to consider is how to create SETTING for readers theater productions.

Art

Objective: The students will demonstrate their understanding of how details can contribute to SETTING by discussing and by creating an artwork that contains details that help establish a sense of time and place.

This activity can be used after one of the activities outlined previously (it is a natural choice for a science activity that includes research and/or accuracy as one of the objectives.) If you haven't done an activity on SETTING, you will need to discuss what setting is either before you start the activity or as you go along.

Share some of the BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION with the students, including Brest van Kempen's comment that he enjoys watching people see his paintings and be interested in them from across the room and be drawn in close because their attention is caught and they want to see the details.

Show the class the slide of *Lizard Relay* and have the children identify details they can see. Then have the students create an artwork that will be interesting from a distance and also have details that will intrigue viewers into coming close to the artwork. Although Brest van Kempen's work is full of detail, the children's work could have just one or two sections with detail. Adapt any of the suggested activities previously outlined to focus on the inclusion of detail and how it helps create SETTING.

Have the students critique their finished pieces and then display the works in the school library or hallway where other students can see them. Have members of the class watch to see if they notice students from other classes being interested in looking closely at the artworks.

Other detailed artworks you can use are the two Jeanne Leighton-Lundberg Clarke paintings from previous packets (PORTRAITS IN PAINTING, April 1993, and A NATIONAL VIEW, Mar. 1995 pkts.) or her painting in the Elementary Art Core Poster Set. You may have other slides or reproductions of artworks that use detail as an integral part of SETTING.

Art

Objective: The students will understand the use of timing in depicting events and will create an artwork that demonstrates that understanding.

Show the class the slides of *Dawn Patrol*, *Ropin' Out the Best Ones*, *Deacon Jones' Experience*, and *Lizard Relay*. Have the students look at each artwork from the point of view of how the artist has depicted an EVENT. Ask the students questions as needed to spur thoughtful responses. For example: Which artwork is the most peaceful? Why? What elements and principles of art has the artist used to help create that feeling about the event depicted? Which artwork is the most exciting? Which artwork has the most tension? Why? How has the artist created that tension? The QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING and the BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION sections and the directions for each artwork's activities should give you helpful information for leading the discussion.

When the students have discussed an age-appropriate number and complexity of ways the artists have depicted events, assign them to create an artwork that focuses on an event.

Variations:

Carel Brest Van Kempen often creates tension in his artworks by picturing an event that is just beginning to happen. Look at samples of other ways timing is used to create

tension such as in photography (especially in sports or action shots), jokes, comedy, tragedy, horror movies, etc.

There are a million ways to explore this idea and to link it to other arts and art-related fields. A few ideas follow:

1. Give the students copies of different kinds of magazines and let them find photographs that demonstrate how timing is used to create interesting visual images that capture a particular moment. Ask the students to think about the moment just before and after the one depicted. How would those moments be different? How has the choice of timing created a specific mood or feeling?

2. After the discussion on events in art, move to how timing affects jokes. If possible, you could find examples of badly told jokes and well-told jokes. You may have teachers or friends who will come and demonstrate how critical timing is to humor. Many students of today will not be familiar with Charley Chaplin or other early film comedians. Show one or an assortment of clips or short videos and discuss and compare or just allow the students to enjoy the example(s).

3. After the discussion about timing in art, explore how timing is crucial in dance. You may want to include video clips of professional dancers or you may just want to have the class explore timing through their own movement. (Have students dance barefoot) Some ideas follow:

Ô Play several short selections of music that will encourage students to move at different speeds and in a variety of ways. Have a brief discussion of how the tempo and other qualities of the music made the students want to move in certain ways.

Ô Have students take turns being the 'movers' and the 'watchers.' Have the 'movers' walk at normal speed across the stage or one end of the gym or lunchroom. Then have them walk quickly, then very slowly, and then race walk. Now assign different children in the group to walk at different speeds. Then add running and stopping. Stop periodically and ask the students for their reactions to what they have watched.

After each child has had the chance to be both a mover and a watcher, divide the class in half. For young children you will need another adult or advanced student to help with this part of the activity. (If you have three who will come help so that each group has two helpers, that's even better.) You may have another teacher, an aid, a high school or college student, or a parent who has some dance experience or who is imaginative and can be the helper. Each adult will help (not do, but help) his or her group choreograph a short dance piece that is based solely on timing. If possible, perform the pieces on your school's stage.

The limits of the dance are that the only movements allowed are walking, (at any speed) running, and stopping. If you have a stage with space behind the back curtain, also restrict the students to moving only in one direction. When they have crossed the stage

they may go around behind the curtain and go across again. If you do not have access to such a stage, the students should be allowed to go across the stage or stage area and then turn around and go back. No music will accompany the dances, simply the sound of the students' feet.

Help the students choose an interesting mix of speeds and stops. They should keep in mind that their dance will be a kind of visual art and the viewers will want to see designs and relationships that are interesting. If the students are old enough, ask them to incorporate what they have learned about creating tension from discussing the artworks.

Limit the dances to five minutes or whatever seems appropriate. Do be aware that just like in painting, it's easy to go too far to make the dance too long.

After time to choreograph the dances, have each group take turns performing for the other. Then discuss the experience. How interesting were the dances? What made them, or specific parts interesting?

Extension: Incorporate what the students have learned about SETTING and CHARACTER into the dances. Divide the students into the same groups and have them add music, simple backdrops, lighting if available, and a few props to create a feeling of time and place SETTING and to add variations to the way the students walk, run, and stop, as well as simple costume items to convey CHARACTER. (For example, some students could walk normally and others might walk as if they were very old, or were very energetic, or very tired.) Warn the students that too many additions may produce chaos instead of an interesting dance and help them limit their choices to produce some specific effects.

Now have the students perform their dances and discuss their reactions and experiences.

Extension: Have the students add one art element or principle to their dances such as the use of line or of balance. Again, discuss what the students see happen and ask the students to relate the dance experiences to their knowledge of visual arts.

Drama

Objective: The students will explore their ability to take on characteristics of a role by discussing and exploring the movements of lizards and small wild cats.

Show the class the slide of *Lizard Relay* and ask the students to describe the ways they think the two different kinds of lizards pictured move. (See BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION) Ask the students how the jaguarundi would move. How would its movements be different from the lizards? Then allow the students to explore ways of moving that have qualities of the animals' actions. After exploring possible movements, divide the class into groups and have them act out the scene from the painting, giving each child a turn to be one of the lizards or the jaguarundi or let several children be jaguarundis at the same time.

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