

Sharing the planet—the work of Isabelle du Toit

By Rosemary Carstens



Born in France, moving to South Africa at age 10, back to France at 12, then back to South Africa once again at 16, where she completed a university education before moving to the United States, living first in Chicago and now in Texas, ISABELLE DU TOIT (Rouaud) knows a lot about changing environments. She's learned to look piercingly at the world around her, far

beyond the surface details of her subjects' surroundings, to the beating heart of their individuality.

Du Toit paints meticulous portraits of primarily birds and animals. She is an avid birdwatcher and has spent many hours in game parks observing nature, absorbing the interaction between man and his environment, and even countless more hours researching her subjects. Every feather, every nuance, color and texture matters and is an inseparable part of the whole. Although she began painting with acrylics, she now uses oils, preparing her canvases with repeated coats of white gesso, sanding between each application—much as Georgia O'Keefe did—to create a smooth, brilliant ground upon which to create her stunning pieces. The artist is deeply engaged with each of her paintings and it is hard to let them go when completed. Until recently she signed them "Rouaud," her grandmother's maiden name, in honor of her earliest role mode



It is by considered choice that Du Toit places her subjects against minimal manmade backgrounds rather than in their natural outdoor settings. This contrast of a living creature, portrayed with infinite detail, against a background of scarce distraction emphasizes its beauty and miraculous creation. For the artist, these are not merely reproductions of birds or animals; they deeply illustrate the plight of nature in the hands of an indifferent humanity. They give

the viewer pause for thought, a quiet, contemplative space for considering how empty the world would be without diversity of life.