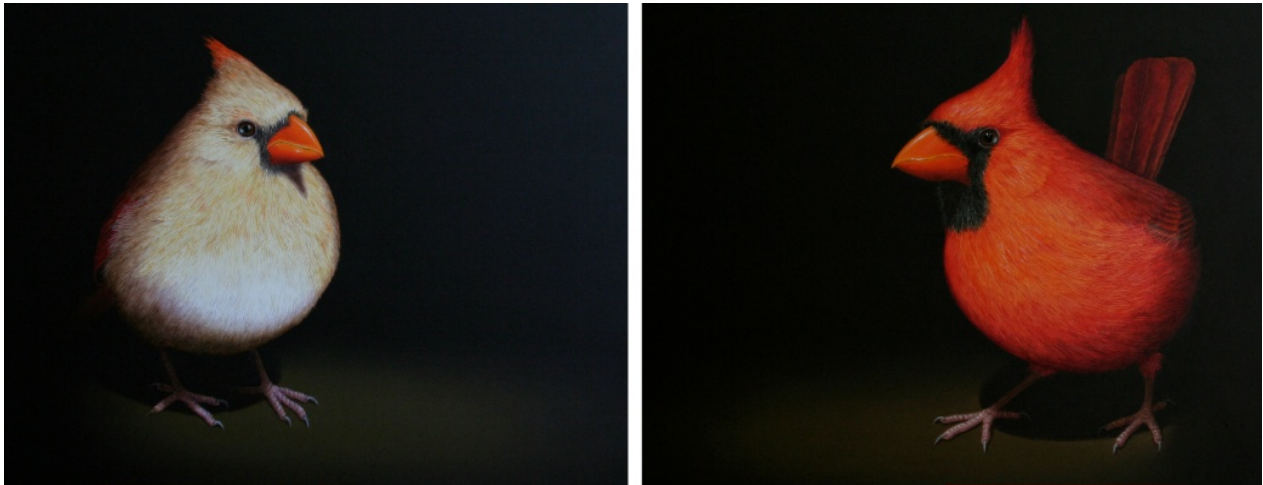


Patterns of Flight



When Isabelle du Toit emigrated from South Africa to the United States, she was not allowed to work, so she did something that she loved doing for years—she painted. And the first thing that she noticed about America is what she wanted to capture on canvas and that is the rich and exotic supply of both birds and mammals specific to the various regions of the country.

“To me, what as amazing about America is how much wildlife there is,” says du Toit. “When we first came here, we wanted to find out what the country looks like so we started camping, canoeing and sailing, and started looking at animals. It was a foreign country so it was so exotic to me.”

Part of the reason for this interest is that the first bird du Toit saw on one of these trips was a cardinal. Seeing such vibrant and colorful birds that she wasn’t familiar with really opened her eyes to how different North American wildlife is from Europe and South Africa.

“I was blown away,” says du Toit. “I didn’t know there were such birds. So, seeing a bright red cardinal in a tree was so incredible for me and really triggered it all. Even though South Africa sounds exotic, for me, arriving here and seeing this was exotic.” Du Toit ended up living in what she thought was suburban Dallas. But, it too ended up being a great place to observe unique and unusual forms of wildlife.

“It was so in-your-face here in Dallas and I loved it.” Says du Toit. “I saw possums, raccoons and squirrels right in the middle of Dallas. In South Africa we got birds, but not much else. I’ve always had a love for animals and birds, even as a child my parents use to take us to state parks to see animals. So this has always been with me.”

Part of what du Toit is trying to accomplish with these paintings is to inform people of the plight of many of the species she paints. She feels that most of them are threatened in one way or another and their habitats are being destroyed daily. That affected her so significantly she made it her mission to focus on birds and animals that she finds in this predicament.

“I did a frog and then started doing more and more,” says du Toit. “But, part of the work is researching about the birds or animals. I’m not just using their beauty for no good reason but I know about the animals I paint, find out about them, and there is a huge amount of love involved in the critters I paint.”

Besides being attracted to their colors, shapes and patterns of movement, du Toit is also attracted to the human characteristics that the birds sometimes exhibit. This also informs the way she designs the background for each image and why she places them in such stark compositions.

“I think we have a disconnect with nature,” says du Toit, “and a disconnect with each other. I think our disconnect with nature is something that needs to be thought about at least. My animals are isolated often to get a sense of displacement or loneliness. I place them within dark backgrounds and structures to show this. There is a human side of it as well and that comes from my feelings and ideas about moving around so much.”

Du Toit also feels that the animals have a sense of calm or peace to them and wants collectors to be able to find some sort of solitude or serenity by living with them. “My paintings are a one-on-one,” says du Toit. “You are standing in front of it, with the animal or the bird, and looking at the details in the work makes one feel like they have the real thing at home. They are so alive in my head that I want people to think they are taking them home as pets.”