

Higher Ground, oil, 12" by 9"

"Mountain goats are definitely one of my favorite animals. They live in amazing environments, and it can be extremely difficult to view them up close, especially during late fall and early winter when their fluffy white coats are in prime condition. I have put in a lot of miles hiking in the high country in frigid temperatures to try to spend time observing them, and I frequently come up short. When I do find them, they almost always end up in a painting."

KELLY DANGERFIELD

Firsthand Experiences

By Brandon Rosas

K. DANGERFIELD



Morning Reflections, oil, 18" by 22"

"I photographed this pair of trumpeter swans on a small pond in Wyoming and was drawn to their overlapping shapes, the contrast of warm and cool colors, and the reflections in the water."

Kelly Dangerfield was 13 years old when he asked his grandmother to give him his first oil painting lesson. While some grandmothers' houses are filled with the scent of cookies and pictures of cats, his grandmother Arlene's house was filled with artwork. A hobby painter, she always had her easel set up and landscape paintings on display when her grandson visited. Dangerfield was intrigued.

"She bought me a little tabletop easel and told me to look through these old magazines for a picture I thought was cool," Dangerfield says, adding that he chose a photo of a high mountain lake. "She showed

me how to sketch it out on a canvas and let me do my thing. The experience was fun. It was rough, but it had an impact."

Born in 1980 in Salt Lake City, Utah, Dangerfield's upbringing featured equal exposure to art and to the outdoors. Although his parents divorced when he was a toddler, both sides of his family were outdoorsy and took frequent hunting and fishing trips to the mountains an hour outside Salt Lake City. "I have a lot of early memories of camping trips with the family and being out in nature, and those things sunk in," he says. "That was key for where I am now."

After that first painting lesson with his grandmother, Dangerfield continued to explore art. As a teen-





Lounging Around, oil, 14" by 20"

"I often paint animals that are moving or interacting, but occasionally I also like to show them in the more passive moments that make up a majority of their day. This bobcat is relaxing on a rock and is not concerned with much else going on."

ager, he was quiet, introverted, and serious—perfectly calibrated to concentrate on art. He produced pictures in everything from charcoal to oils, often working from *National Geographic* and *Field & Stream* photographs of animals he had seen during his own outdoor adventures.

Dangerfield credits his high school art teacher, Bill Laursen, with helping him to see himself as an artist. "He gave me the confidence that I was doing great things, had a lot of talent, and could do this for a living if I wanted," he says.

Laursen encouraged Dangerfield to go on to art school, but relatives warned him that a career in art might not support a family, so he enrolled at Utah State University in Logan and settled on a major in economics and finance. Although he left

behind one love—art—he soon met another—Angie. Dangerfield graduated in 2003, and the couple married shortly after.

The newlyweds moved to Salt Lake City, where Dangerfield joined a respected financial advising firm. He dedicated himself to his work, but felt unfulfilled. "I got wrapped up in chasing money and the dream of a successful career," he says. "I didn't have the maturity to understand that finding something you are passionate about and driven to do every day is extremely important to being happy."

Angie, who was an administrator at the University of Utah, felt the same way, so in 2006, they quit their jobs and moved to Bozeman, Montana. They had visited family in Montana several times and loved its out-

door lifestyle but were not aware of the thriving art market in Bozeman, which would become important to them later on.

Dangerfield took on financial consulting gigs to supplement his income while he explored other career paths. He also began to visit area galleries. "I would go in and see art that I loved and related to, a lot of wildlife and landscape art," he says. "Seeing art being sold and local artists making a living really opened my eyes quickly that I could do this."

Angie agreed. "She could see this was something I loved and recognized that I had the talent to make it happen," Dangerfield says. Within a year, the couple decided that they would start a family and that Dangerfield would start painting. He set up a studio in their home and found



Red & Gold, oil, 16" by 30"

"This particular red fox was in a hurry, as they usually are, and I thought it would be a great pose to use for a horizontal format. An autumn aspen grove felt like a perfect setting, and I was pleased with the color harmonies created by the red fox in the golden grass."



Autumn Mist, oil, 26" by 48"

"I'm fascinated by moose and am lucky to live fairly close to Grand Teton National Park, where I spend a lot of time studying them each fall. Early one October morning, I found a small group of moose browsing along the banks of a river. Immediately after sunrise, this bull and cow decided to cross the river to bed down for the day. With the sunlight striking the face and antlers of the bull, the cool mist rising off the river, and vibrant autumn colors in the background, everything seemed to come together for a perfect scene."

a mentor in renowned wildlife artist, Daniel Smith, who invited him to his

studio in Bozeman and critiqued his work.

Smith also introduced Dangerfield to Kyle Sims, a young artist



River Crossing, oil, 9" by 13"

"I've been fortunate to spend a lot of time researching bison in Yellowstone, and it's always a great experience when a herd decides to cross the Yellowstone River. On this occasion, this mature bull was doing his best to keep his head above water—not something you see every day! I thought it would make a unique subject."



Valley Morning, oil, 22" by 30"

"I think pronghorn antelopes are really interesting animals. Their markings stand out among other wildlife in the region, and they are really fun to paint, especially in dramatic light. With this piece, I wanted to show a group of several animals interacting, but I also wanted to emphasize the feeling of the golden light spilling into the valley."

who was already at the top of the wildlife art game. "They were genuinely helpful and willing to push me in the right direction," Dangerfield says. "I'm very appreciative of their willingness to open their studios to a

young artist."

After just six months at the easel, the budding artist began to market his work. "Looking back, that was probably not the best approach," he says, but it did get him

into a local gallery by the time his son, Finn, was born. (A second son, Cormac, was born four years later.)

Dangerfield began to capture in oils the nature scenes he witnessed as he explored the area. An avid fly-fisherman, his subjects include trout and large mammals, as well as landscapes painted both en plein air and in the studio.

Sales of his work progressed slowly at first. Dangerfield put his paintings in any show or gallery that would accept them and focused on improving the quality of his work, which allowed him to gradually increase his prices. During those early days, he also took on commissions that included pet portraits and landscapes.

"These days," Dangerfield says, "I'm far more selective about the commissioned work I take on but I'm still open to discussing customer projects if the subject matter interests me."

Despite potential distractions, Dangerfield continues to work from his home studio. "I had to learn to be flexible and work around my children's schedules," he says. "I had to be really self-motivated and, in the early years, I did a lot of painting on the weekends and in the evenings."

Spending time with family has proved to be one of the blessings of a career in art. Angie accompanies him to art events and assists with everything from communicating with clients to naming paintings. "She's my biggest fan and is always there to encourage me," Dangerfield says. "There is no way I could have made it this far without her support."

Dangerfield takes the whole family on several trips each year to areas with accessible wildlife, such as Yellowstone and Glacier national parks. "Every painting I do is based on firsthand experience," he says. Anything he has seen with his own eyes is fair game to paint, and while his experiences have so far been limited to North America, he hopes to some day travel to New Zealand, Patagonia, and to the Arctic to study polar bears.

He doesn't just paint wildlife, however; he is committed to doing



Early Morning Shadows, oil, 24" by 36"

"This piece was inspired by an experience early one morning in Yellowstone National Park. As the sun rose, the light illuminated this majestic bull elk as he worked hard to keep his harem of cows in a tight group. The rest of the herd remained in the cool shadows, and I thought the contrast of shapes in the light and shadow would make an interesting painting."

what he can to protect the natural world. He has witnessed firsthand the destructive effects of explosive population growth on the Rocky Mountain ecosystem and donates artwork to raise funds for conservation organizations. "I hope my work will highlight the natural beauty of these areas and serve as a reminder of the amazing wildlife that we share the land with," Dangerfield says. "I hope viewers of my art will be inspired to not only get out and enjoy nature themselves, but to also work to protect it."


He is pleased with the progression of his art career and, in 2015, discontinued his consulting work and began to focus on painting. The same year, he got into his first major exhibit, the Out West Art Show

in Great Falls, Montana. Two years later, after moving to Pocatello, Idaho, Astoria Fine Art in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, agreed to represent him and his work.

"I've been specializing in wildlife art for 15 years, and Kelly is one of the best young talents I've discovered," says Astoria owner Greg Fulton. "In terms of quality for the price, he is one of the best buys in the wildlife art world. I see his career going nowhere but up." Astoria featured him in a two-man show with Mark McKenna in 2019, and the following year his work was included in Small Works, Great Wonders at the National Cowboy Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, where he sold both paintings he exhibited.

Dangerfield hopes he has

shown his children the importance of nature and of pursuing a life they love. "They see me working all the time," he says. "They watch my process—how long it takes and how much work I invest in every painting—and they get to see the final outcome when I deliver it to a show or gallery and it finds a home."

Both of his sons have shown a talent for art. Dangerfield doesn't push them, but is keen to see where they go with it. "Neither of them has taken up an oil painting brush yet," he says, "but when they ask for the lesson, I'll be there." 

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