

AMERICAN ARTIST

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**Landscape
Painting
In Oil**

**Courtroom
Drawing
In Pastel**

**Imaginary
Scenes In
Watercolor
And Oil**



COVER: *ALFORD LANDSCAPE* (DETAIL), BY MICHAEL FILMUS

watercolor

P A G E

Rediscovering the Prehistoric Past

by Terry Sullivan

At first glance, Atlanta artist Jennine Hough's acrylic and watercolor paintings look like intricate landscapes

and interiors that depict the everyday, ordinary world. But when the artist exhibits them with accompanying text, as she recently began doing, the paintings take on an added dimension. In her latest show, for example, Hough includes what appear to be feature articles from various fictitious national and international newspapers. Hanging next to the artwork, they establish a context and create a narrative for the pictures. The following excerpt is from one of those "articles," entitled "The Ultimate Picnic," which "appeared" in *The Denver Sun* and hangs next to the painting *Passage*

(not shown): "Thousands of Americans are ascending to Independence Pass, the Great Continental Divide, on Route 82 West between Leadville and Aspen, Colorado, to view, photograph, and film the spectacular, brightly colored, almost iridescent dinosaurs making their home at the base of the western pass.

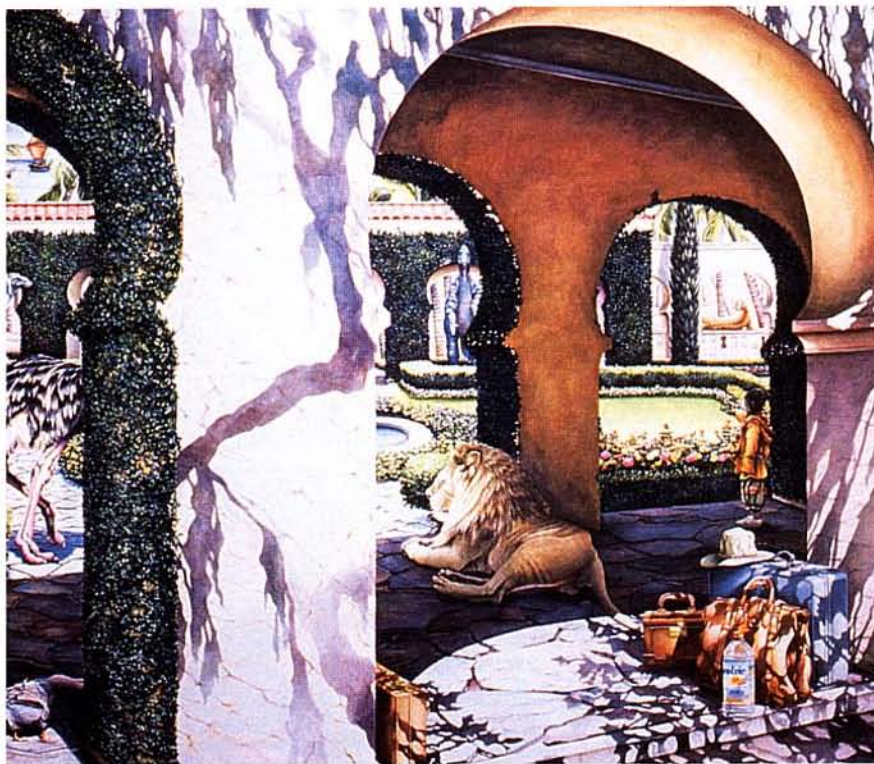
"The dinosaurs, numbering as few as ten and as many as fifty, are reported to be of the 'Stegosaurus' group of prehistoric dinosaurs. They measure 20 feet in length, are estimated to weigh 1.5 tons or more, and are 10 to 12 feet tall. Their backs are covered with two rows of upright, spade-shaped plates, and their tails have four sharp spikes. They move very slowly and are believed to be herbivores (plant-eating dinosaurs). Paleontologists have concluded that they are unable to climb and therefore are making their home in the valley."

It's clear that this article is really a piece of fiction. The dinosaurs, however—placed far back in *Passage's* pictorial space and almost hidden in the grand, sweeping terrain of the Colorado Rocky Mountain landscape—seem to become much more visible after you read the text. They are small, almost incidental, yet critical to both the composition's unity and the narrative's logic. By includ-

Opposite page, above: *Arcadia—Dawn*, 1992, watercolor, 38 x 51. Collection the artist.

Opposite page, below: *Lilliput*, 1993, watercolor, 38 x 51. Collection Steve Smith. Accompanying this work is a magazine "article" describing a search for a wolf in Yellowstone National Park that leads to the discovery of a dinosaur. "It was Chief Ranger Dan Frutchey, while scouting for wolves on Sunday, November 1, 1992, who sighted the first of another extinct population of creatures, a dinosaur, extinct for sixty-five million years," reads an excerpt from the text. In the article, the ranger says the scene made him feel like a Lilliputian.





ing these long-extinct behemoths in her landscapes and interiors, Hough achieves a fusion of carefully observed realism and prehistorically based fantasy. It's this element of surrealism that makes the paintings both humorous and intriguing.

Hough's series of dinosaur paintings, entitled "New Seens," was inspired in May 1991 after she visited an exhibit at Zoo Atlanta called "Age of the Living Dinosaurs," which included life-size re-creations of these animals in their natural habitat. "At the time," the artist says, "I had no knowledge of dinosaurs and had never been interested in them. I seemed driven by some unknown force to see this show." Hough left the exhibit knowing that her next serious group of paintings would somehow incorporate these antediluvian animals. She immediately called her gallery in Washington, DC, and told the director she needed until November 1993 to work on her new idea.

"I spent the summer of 1991 reading everything I could from the library, taking lots of notes, and borrowing books on paleontology and dinosaur 'stuff' from friends' children," Hough says. This dinosaur-related paraphernalia included clothes, gift-wrapping paper, note cards, high chairs, key rings, stuffed toys, cookies, candy, and soup.

The setting and content for the "New Seens" series soon came into focus for Hough. "After a trip to Aspen and the surrounding area," the artist says, "I realized that I wanted to combine the views of these Rocky Mountain vistas, my love of painting animals, the challenges of still life, and the patterns of sunshine, intimate interiors, and, of course, dinosaurs. The underlying thread of my exhibit would be based on 'sightings' of dinosaurs in the areas of the United States (i.e., Colorado) where they had become extinct sixty-five to one hundred million years ago." The first painting Hough created for this series was *New Seens*, which depicts an alert cat sitting on a chair looking out at the viewer and, seen through a window, a dinosaur drinking from a stream. Hough liked the way the title of this work suggested both an imaginary scene and the idea of a sighting. Consequently, she gave



Top: *Valentino*, 1993, watercolor, 52 x 60. Private collection. Hough wrote the wall text for this painting in the form of a fictitious television news special entitled *Valentino's Curtain Call* broadcast from the east coast of Madagascar. Part of the text reads, "The Malagasy ask to be thought of as 'something different.' They are getting their wish. They are now sharing their island, surrounded on the West Coast by the Mozambique Channel and on the East Coast by the Indian Ocean, with Iguanodons (dinosaurs). The Iguanodons have been appearing slowly for weeks...."

Above: *Herakles*, 1993, acrylic on linen, 32 x 32. Collection the artist.

Opposite page: *New Seens*, 1992, watercolor, 26 x 20. Collection the artist.

the whole group of paintings this title.

Hough's narrative for these paintings was inspired by various sources, both past and present: literature (*Liliput*), natural disasters such as the Midwestern flood of 1993 (*Noah's Ark*, not shown), the landscape of New Mexico (*Pele*, not shown), and the tradition of royal animal portraiture (*Herakles*). For all her works, Hough researched the setting and the types of dinosaurs she included in it. Both required specific and accurate information. "At times," the artist says, "the text and the paintings engaged in a dialogue, influencing each other; however, for the most part the paintings came first, from a personal feeling or response to matters of art, challenges to a point of view, a passionate feeling for a subject, or the maneuvering of a composition."

One compositional problem Hough had to grapple with in many of the works was what to do about the scale of the dinosaurs. "I paint realistically," she says, "and I realized that the dinosaurs were much more massive than all the other forms; they would have to appear in the background in order to work with everything else in the picture. Therefore, in the paintings—although not necessarily in the narratives—they appear incidental." Strategically placing the dinosaurs became a sort of game for the artist.

Each painting began with a few thumbnail sketches (about 5" x 7"). At this point, Hough determined where the horizon line would be and whether the composition would be vertical or horizontal. She created several subsequent drawings, working out scale, details, and proportion, then used graphite paper to transfer the final image onto linen canvas (when working in acrylic) or Arches 260-lb hot-pressed paper (when using watercolor). "I generally paint things in lightly," Hough says, "working from the background to the foreground in glazes, building up color." After she completes her acrylic works, Hough uses Conserv-Art Varnish (available in matte and gloss) by Winsor & Newton, which she feels gives her paintings the look of oil (she has a museum conservator apply this medium to her work with an air compressor, although it can also be brushed on).

And although her paintings might



have coincided with the Michael Crichton/Steven Spielberg *Jurassic Park* phenomenon, Hough's intentions run in a subtler direction. "As in the legacy of romanticism and history painting, I wanted not only to fascinate and inspire but to entertain and to inform. I attempted to create an event that never happened and combine it with a reality of long ago." ■

Jennine Hough's "New Seens" paintings were recently exhibited in Washington, DC; Ghost Ranch, New Mexico; Atlanta; and Drumheller, Alberta, Canada. She earned her M.F.A. degree at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Skowhegan, Maine.

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