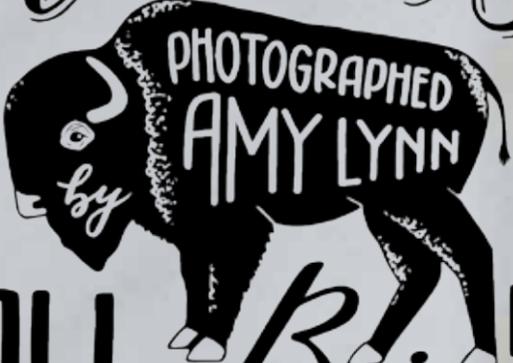




WRITTEN by ASHLEE PHILLIPS

Animal Instincts



ABSTRACT

TINA BEAU BISON MERL

travel explore ANTONY WILDEBEEST

LION AFRICA skull OSTRICH Walter ART

RACHEL

Brown

SURROUNDED BY wildlife

IMPALA

shark tooth

RHINO

tribal

INDIGO

Charlie

ALFREDO



TALL AND OUT OF PLACE, THE NEIGHBOR'S OSTRICH ALWAYS REMINDED RACHEL A LITTLE OF HERSELF.

The neighboring farms, housing a menagerie of goats, alpacas, and llamas, were a source of comfort; but that lone ostrich, standing strange and exotic against the Missouri farmland backdrop, and the kinship she felt with it, would go on to become Rachel's artistic muse.

Growing up, Rachel didn't think it possible to turn her passion of painting into a career. While her mother and grandmother pursued art as a hobby, she didn't have access to working artists to serve as mentors or provide community. As she put it, the people in her hometown "spent their money on groceries, not art."

Looking for any excuse to visit her creative paradise — California — Rachel embarked on a road trip along the coastline: San Francisco to San Diego. What was supposed to be a weeklong vacation turned into a month spent in Los Angeles. "In L.A., art is really valued, more so than where I grew up, or in the midwest as a whole — even with an art teacher mom. I don't think that people appreciate the value of it."

On her path to pursue art as a "legitimate occupation," Rachel began experimenting [continued on page 42]

with what would become her trademark technique: watercolor inks on canvas. She breathed life into her favorite subject — animals. She wanted people to identify with them, as she did with the ostrich.

I fell in love with one of her works, Leon the Llama. When I told Rachel, she laughed knowingly. She told me that the people who are attracted to her art are searching for lightness and whimsy. Maybe Leon spoke to my mischievousness or quirkiness. Pressing her further into the psychology of our tendency to relate to animals, Rachel explained, “We are hardwired to connect with them, in some way, to be our companions.”

Though she was painting and pursuing what she loved, success

SHE HAD GIVEN HERSELF A MARKER OF SUCCESS: WHEN A STRANGER BUYS A PIECE OF HER ART, THAT’S WHEN IT WOULD BE OFFICIAL

wasn’t immediate. Her first art fair ended up costing her \$2,000. “By all standards,” she admitted, “it was not a success.” It didn’t discourage her, though. On the contrary, she was exhilarated. Slowly, each show was better, and Rachel grew more confident.

She had given herself a marker of success: when a stranger buys a piece of her art, that’s when it would be official; that’s when she could consider herself a professional artist.

That first piece was a porcupine.

Rachel had listened to a talk by Elizabeth Gilbert on Schopenhauer’s intimacy and porcupines theory: when porcupines are cold, they cuddle together for warmth, but if they get too close, they gouge each other. The healthiest porcupines are the ones

who can find the balance between the closeness of the community without becoming co-dependent.

She painted the porcupine but left the inspiration a mystery. One day, a man found the porcupine piece online. He bought it on the spot. When he contacted Rachel to purchase the piece, he explained to her that he was going through a divorce and learning how to regain his life in a healthy way.

It was this moment when Rachel realized she had created something that resonated with a stranger. This was her validation.

In the years that followed, not only was Rachel able to call herself a professional artist, she also

found the place she belonged. After a kismet meeting of the minds during an art retreat

in California, she found the people whom she would later refer to as her tribe. “What drew me out here was the group of friends that I met, and that’s what has kept me here as long as I’ve been here.” She discussed how important it is to have a community, not only of cheerleaders — family and friends — but of her like-minded creatives, who would offer honest feedback. You need both, she told me, to be successful.

Finding her crew in Los Angeles allowed Rachel to grow as a painter. Rachel noticed her work had evolved, almost subconsciously. Where she once painted a solitary animal, she was now painting groups; she had finally found her fellow ostriches.

Rachel never wants to stop evolving artistically. For the upcoming

year, she has challenged herself to create a different themed collection for every month of 2017. When I asked her what she expects of the future, she laughed coolly and said, “I don’t even know where I want to go from here. I’m very open to it, and my next project is a wallpaper collection with a company. I don’t really know what to expect in the next 10 years, but I’m very open to it — whatever is to come.”

Find Rachel’s work online at rachelbrownart.com, or you can check out the coolest of Instagram feeds @rachelbrownart

