

# Georjean B. Hertzwig

A newcomer to the pastel medium makes her mark with a striking animal portrait.

By Christine Proskow

Georjean B. Hertzwig was struck with a certain insight as a child: She would become a full-time artist, though not until later in life. Hertzwig says she's now poised to do just that. Though she took up painting only three years ago, her receipt of the Art Spirit Foundation/Dianne B. Bernhard Gold Medal Award for Excellence in this year's Pastel 100 has given the artist a huge boost and the impetus to realize her childhood prediction. Remarkably, her prizewinning painting, *Ken's Bucky*, is also her first pastel. Is it beginner's luck? "That portrait was really my education in pastel," the artist

says. "I tore it apart and did it over again until I got what I wanted."

## Seize the Moment

Hertzwig may be new to painting, but she's no stranger to artistic expression. For more than 20 years, she's received recognition as a largely self-taught sculptor of farm and show animals—a pursuit that she's integrated, as time allowed, into her active life as a dog breeder, and trainer and judge of dogs and show horses. Her realistic and arresting sculptures cast in bronze tell of her passion for both art and animals, as

well as her comprehensive knowledge of animal anatomy. "I've been breeding dogs since 1968, and I know animal anatomy from the bone," says the artist. Now she's taken her in-depth understanding of the Australian shepherd (the breed portrayed in *Ken's Bucky*) and poignantly translated its unique characteristics into pastel.

Although Hertzwig is able to pull subjects from her immediate surroundings—she lives on a beautiful 12-acre farm in New York State that's also home to dogs, horses, sheep and other farm animals—*Ken's Bucky* emerged as a commissioned piece. Before this portrait, Hertzwig had merely dabbled with pastel, laying it over ink and watercolor, and she'd only recently begun to paint in oil. She viewed the commission as an opportunity to plunge into learning



## About the Artist

Georjean B. Hertzwig, of Pawling, N.Y., has created realistic sculptures of farm and show animals in bronze for the past 25 years. In 2005, eager to introduce color into her repertoire, she began working in pastel and oil. For the past three years, Hertzwig has studied painting with oil painter and illustrator, Robert Abbett. Her first temptation to try pastel came about while she was perusing materials in an art store.



**Ken's Bucky (18x26)**

about the medium. “I knew I was in for a challenge,” she says, “but I also just enjoy experimenting, like a scientist does. And I was fascinated by pastel. The beauty of art is that you really can’t destroy it. You can learn by your mistakes, so in effect there truly aren’t any mistakes.”

It isn’t just the dog’s vigilant pose that draws us into this portrait, but his direct gaze which creates a convincing, if not familiar-feeling connection. For Hertzwig, it’s about capturing that moment. “There’s a fleeting moment, I would say an attitude, where something about that animal is revealed,” she says. “Bucky

is closely watching his owner Ken and waiting to be given a command. That’s characteristic of the breed. Australian shepherds are very attentive and highly devoted to their owners.”

By juxtaposing horizontal and vertical lines and shapes, playing warm tones against cool tones and by incorporating such enlivening details as the fine wisps of the dog’s fur, Hertzwig conveys a subtle sense of movement within an otherwise simple composition. “I like the idea that something simple can be quite powerful,” she says. “I seek to touch the soul of nature, which I feel is borne of a kinesthetic quality. I find things that emphasize a visual quality, without also possessing a kinesthetic or animating component, lack feeling.”

### Learn by Painting

All totaled, it took Hertzwig one year to finish Bucky’s portrait. That time, however, was also given to learning about paper and brands of pastel. She carefully studied the pastel techniques demonstrated in a Daniel Greene book, and she read issues of *The Pastel Journal*. “I used *The Pastel Journal* a lot, trying to figure out how other artists did what they did. Luckily, the person who commissioned the portrait was very patient,” she says. Perhaps even more significantly, Hertzwig restarted the painting twice—the final piece is her third try. With each new beginning, she refined her painting technique and with each foray, she experimented with a different kind of surface until she at last found the one that worked for her.

Since Hertzwig painted with many layers of pastel, that meant finding a surface that could hold onto the pigment. Her first two selections included a lightly toothed paper and a sanded paper. More than halfway into the painting on her first surface, she realized that the paper had reached its limit. In an attempt to save the piece, Hertzwig coated the surface with fixative and marble dust, to no avail. Even though the sanded paper offered a better tooth and weight, Hertzwig wasn’t happy with the its texture. In the end, Gatorboard met all of her needs. “I like that it’s sturdy, and it can easily hold many pastel layers,” she says. Gatorboard’s more velvety texture also appealed to her. Of course, by her third go-around, Hertzwig was ready to bring it all together. “I’d practiced so much, and I was still interested in the piece, so it flowed,” she says.

Hertzwig worked from a main reference photo of the dog, supplemented with a number of close-up photos. After she sketched her composition onto her



**For Free** (bronze, 12x26)



**Bluie** (bronze, life-size)



**Ponies (ink, watercolor and pastel, 8x10)**

surface, she began to build with color, starting with the dog and then going to the background and steps. To render the dog's form and the coloring of the fur as accurately as possible, she used her own Australian shepherds as live models. "I'd shine a light on my dog to see how the light reflected in the white and merle [or gray] areas of the fur," she says. "The gray on a merle dog is very difficult to paint because it still has a brownish-gray undercoat. I'd try to find the warm tones and the cool tones in the fur."

### Color Appeal

Hertzwig took up painting with the hope that it could fill a void that sculpture could not. "It's difficult to get metal to feel warm and alive. What attracts me to painting is the color—it adds another dimension to help capture that feeling of life," she says. In all, Hertzwig estimates that she used more than 50 pastels to paint *Ken's Bucky* (she chose from Unison, Senelier, Schmincke and Nupastels). Even a dark section, such as the bottom steps, is laden with color—in this case, deep maroons, blues and greens. Not surprisingly, pastel's lush colors are what drew her to the medium. "Pastel is luminous. I like the way the colors vibrate when they're placed next to each other. They'll even appear to change subtly, depending upon the quality or direction of the light that hits it," she says.

She favors, too, the hands-on aspect. "I relate pastel to sculpture in the way that you build up the form from the inside out," she says.

A significant influence on Hertzwig's artistic development has been the input of oil painter and illustrator Robert Abbett, whose illustrations in *Field and Stream* magazine inspired Hertzwig as a kid. "I'd borrow my father's magazine and copy Bob's pictures," she says. Three years ago, when Hertzwig serendipitously moved into the area where Abbett lives, she got up the courage to introduce herself and ask about taking private painting lessons from him. Abbett agreed.

"As an artist, it's so valuable to have a mentor that inspires and encourages you," Hertzwig says. Among the things Abbett has taught her are to map out her values first and to carefully mind color relationships. Not everything, however, has been about painting technique. "He taught me how to file my paintings and he suggested that I write a story about each piece," she says. "Bob gives me guidelines and makes suggestions and then encourages me to do what I want. Most importantly, he's given me such a permission to be an artist."

If Hertzwig's prizewinning accomplishment is any indication, she's taken Abbett's invitation to heart. 

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