

Tim Cherry

Animals with Attitude

BY MYRNA ZANETELL

Missouri sculptor Tim Cherry's highly stylized bronzes are on the cutting edge of modern wildlife art. Innovative in both form and presentation, the artist's whimsical creations are truly "animals with an attitude"—their sleek, curvilinear forms and radiant patinas convey the essential charm of creatures, ranging from foxes, squirrels and deer to otters and fish, with a mesmerizing *joie de vivre* that is impossible to resist.

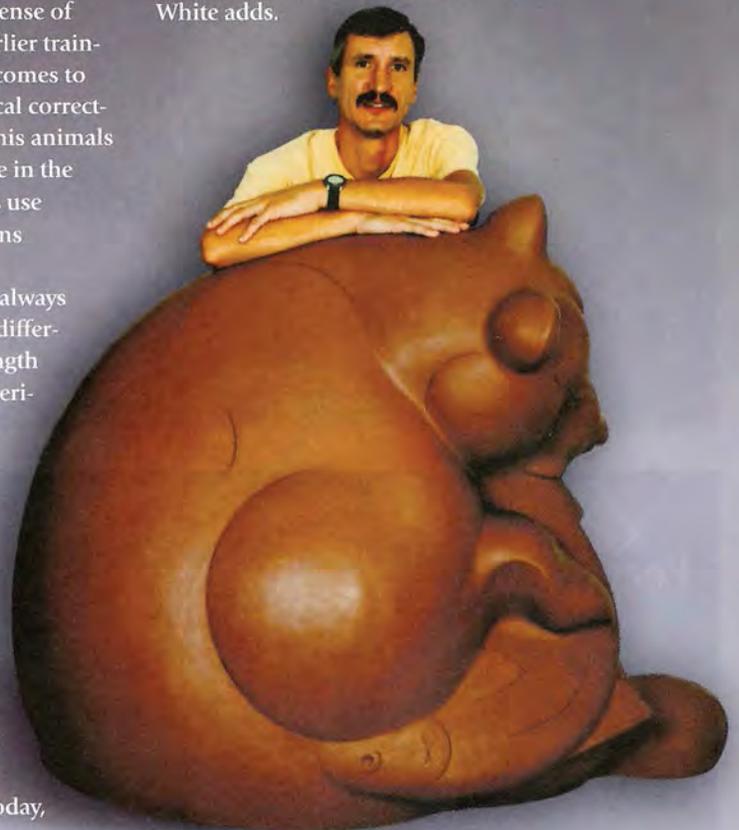
Mariam Alaskari, owner of the Meyer-Milagros Gallery in Jackson, Wyo., says that despite her area's penchant for realism, Cherry's unique approach to animal art makes him one of the gallery's best-selling artists. "Tim's work takes wildlife sculpture to the next level," she says. "While his images convey a wonderful sense of humor, he still draws upon his earlier training as a taxidermist when it comes to proportion and anatomical correctness." She notes that his animals are quite recognizable in the traditional sense, but his use of artistic license makes his interpretations compelling and unique.

Indeed, this Canadian transplant has always viewed the animal world from a slightly different perspective. "I think my greatest strength as an artist lies in not being afraid to experiment with different directions," Cherry says. "I want my audience to be excited about what I am doing and to look forward to new ideas."

Cherry's basic skills as a sculptor were honed as an apprentice in the Loveland, Colo., studios of Dan Ostermiller and Fritz White during the late 1980s. "Dan introduced me to the world of professional art, and Fritz was incredible as both a friend and a teacher. Even today,

I can't go into my studio without thinking, 'Now, what would Fritz tell me?'"

Referring to Cherry as 'one of his boys,' White says, "Timmy developed a different feeling about art than what was being done by everybody else. He was able to make this departure because he is so familiar with his subject. Spending so many years in the wild gave him the ability to see things that others might fail to notice." (Cherry was raised in British Columbia and worked as a hunting guide in northern Canada for many years before coming to Colorado). "A really good artist will catch those small movements and innuendoes specific to a certain animal, and then use these qualities to make his work come to life," White adds.



Tim Cherry with a clay version of one of his latest monumental-size sculptures, *Heads or Tails*.

High Jump
(bronze, 74 x 16" and 19 x 5")



(Above) *Snake in the Grass* (bronze, 40 x 12 x 77")
 (Top left) *Salmon Spiral* (bronze, 17 x 12")
 (Bottom left) *Bear Den* (bronze, 13 x 5")

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 — Tim Cherry

Cherry says that communing with animals in their natural environment has always been 'a must' for stimulating his creative juices. Every year in late summer, after completing a demanding schedule of gallery exhibitions and show appearances, he sets out to reconnect with nature. Week-long camping trips are a common escape, and more recently, he and fellow wildlife sculptors Darrell Davis and Martin Gates have met in Florida for what they call "reference and idea gathering trips." However, some of Cherry's most popular designs have also come from hours spent observing the squirrels, cats and other small animals that frequent the backyard of his Branson, Mo., home.

In fact, animals are so much a part of the Cherry household that last year's family Christmas card not only bore the signatures of Tim, his wife, Linda, and daughter, Amber, but it even included the paw prints of Lucy, the dog, and Noodle, the ferret. Describing this active bit of fur as a 'living slinky,' Cherry says, "Noodle twists in and out of small places just like she has no bones, hence the rather descriptive name." In fact, Cherry was so captivated with the ferret's clever antics that Noodle became the inspiration for a recent work entitled *Squirrel Knot*.



While his unique compositions reflect impressions gained by countless hours of being "up close and personal" with animals, their capricious qualities are certainly a byproduct of Cherry's own subtle sense of humor. For the artist, catchy titles, such as *Butterball*, for a deliciously rounded turkey, or *Happy Goat Lucky*, are inherent ingredients that complete the overall concept of each piece, and in some instances, actually inspire a new creation. No matter where the idea starts, having a strong design and interpreting the animal in his own way are the two most important factors in completing any new image. "Rather than experimenting with design concepts on paper, I use pliable clay as a tool to work out a variety of options. I begin with a quick thumbnail sketch. From there, I whack and hack, stretch and pull, working an idea to death. Fritz taught me not to quit until I had exhausted all the possibilities," Cherry says.

As a mature artist, now comfortable with his own style, Cherry continues to push the envelope by creating compositions that often include outside elements that complement his basic animal forms. For instance, *Snake in the Grass*, a sculpture that garnered him the Prix de West's coveted James Earle Fraser Sculpture Award in 2001, features a stealthy cat spread out along a slender stone table. By echoing the strong horizontal lines and the curves of



Rabbit Reach (bronze, 22 x 40")

the sculpture in this innovative base, Cherry was able to combine sculpture with furniture to create a complete presentation.

Bear Den and *High Jump* showcase two of Cherry's most recent style innovations: images based upon geometric shapes that repeat themselves throughout the composition, and which also incorporate elements of the animal's environment. In the first, a series of circles not only forms the bears' bodies and heads, but the rounded lines also expand to create the sensation of being inside a cave. In contrast, vertical and horizontal lines are emphasized in *High Jump*. As though poised on a river bank, a bear gazes at fish swimming in an imaginary stream far below. "I am having a lot of fun with these ideas," Cherry says. "I thought since I stylize my animals, I could go one step further and stylize their environment as well."

Cherry experienced another first last summer when he became the artist-in-residence at the Holland Hall private school in Tulsa, Okla. In all avenues related to Tim's art, the Cherrys are a family team. Although Tim was the official artist, Linda produced colorful graphics to illustrate his techniques, and Amber, a high school senior gifted in photography, enhanced the educational content with a PowerPoint presentation. "The three days we spent with the K-12 students was the most special and meaningful experience I've had as an artist," he says.

Casting monumental-size works is also becoming a more frequent activity

for the sculptor whose bronzes are generally tabletop size editions. He is currently working on a 7-foot-long enlargement of *Rabbit Reach*. This giant-sized bunny will find a home in a Cheyenne, Wyo., park, and it will also share space with *Heads or Tails*, another of Cherry's oversized bronzes, in the sculpture garden at the McLarry Fine Art Gallery in Santa Fe, N.M.

Avid collector Bill Witchger, chairman of Marian Inc. of Indianapolis, confirms

the growing feeling that large or small, Cherry's bronzes are at home in any setting.

Not only does Witchger's personal home collection contain a number of the artist's sculptures, but a monumental-size Cherry bear also welcomes visitors to Marian's corporate offices, and Witchger even commissioned the sculptor to create flat panel images for the elevator doors.

"Animals will always be the love of my life," Cherry says. "In all their forms, they bring a degree of happiness to our daily routine that is difficult to explain, and it is this serene, joyful quality that I want to share with others through my work." 

Myrna Zanetell is a free-lance writer living in El Paso, Texas.

Images courtesy of the artist.



Three Kind Mice (bronze, 56 x 12")