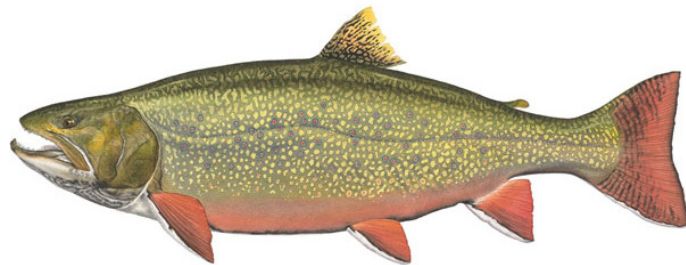


Scale models: Fish painter Flick Ford publishes new book

by Sharyn Flanagan December 6, 2013



Like a modern-day aquatic version of John James Audubon, Hudson Valley-based artist Flick Ford creates vividly accurate watercolors of fish that capture every subtlety and nuance of his subject matter, straddling that overlap among a scientist's appreciation for precise detail, a naturalist's passion for preservation of species and an artist's relish for aesthetic beauty.

Not that he ever set out to become "a fish artist, per se," Ford says, noting that initially he took up the practice of painting fish as an avid fisherman, simply as a way of keeping a record of his best catches. But along the way, painting accurately delineated fish turned out to be his *métier*; and with the publication of his third book, *Wild: 75 Freshwater Tropical Fish of the World*, Ford says that he hopes that the images and information contained within it will "strike a sympathetic chord" with people and raise awareness of the issues that surround the sustainability of fish in the wild, their tropical habitats and the important role that they play in rainforests.

Ford grew up in Larchmont as a third-generation fisherman and part of a family of artists: His father Flick, Sr. was a commercial artist, and brother Walton is a well-known naturalist painter. After a dozen or so years in New York City pursuing work in the audiovisual field and various things in commercial art, music and publishing, Ford came up to the Hudson Valley to live – first in Irvington, then Cold Spring and now a bit north of Hudson in Schodack Landing, where he has been since 2005.

He had studied watercolor and life drawing through classes over the years, but hadn't pursued painting seriously until after he left the City, Ford says, his first subjects birds of prey. But he was fishing again, too.

Ford began painting an image of every notable fish that he caught, taking care to get the proportions exactly right. The first step was to



Artist Flick Ford fishing

trace its outline on butcher paper or brown paper bags. "What I found out early on, trying to paint fish from photographs, was that even the best camera lenses distort the dimensions of the fish. You wind up getting an extra third or quarter of the body and a small head and small tail. If you really want to know what a fish looks like, just lay it on paper and do an accurate tracing."

The outline is just for dimensions, of course, and once that's done, Ford draws the fish freehand. He uses photographs for reference as he refines the work, although he says that one thing that helps him quite a bit is a near-photographic memory for color. Fish are notorious for their colors fading as soon as they're out of the water, he says; but if the reference photos don't show the colors or iridescence that he remembers seeing, he can still put them in from memory. He has saved all the tracings and drawings that he has made over the years, so that when another fisherman wants to commission him to paint his catch-of-a-lifetime, he can put it together from his earlier tracings of the same type of fish and the fisherman's photographs.

What he does isn't photorealism, Ford says, because that kind of painting captures the distortion caused by the camera lens. "What I do is more 'macro-detailing,' because I give you that kind of photorealistic detail, but I give it to you in the exact same proportions of the fish."

The next book that Ford publishes will be on reef fish, he says, with the current book being the first in a trilogy that will end with a book on fish of the ocean. "What we're trying to do is tell the story from rainforest to the reef to the ocean, because they all link together."

Fishing is the world's second-most-popular hobby, Ford says, next to photography; and yet, as we lose the rainforests each year, we're losing the species that live there, too. "The conservation has to start to save the hobby – or really, to save the fish that the hobby started from.

"What I'm basically doing is keeping a record, because the way we're going right now, there is no impetus to stop what's going on. We've decimated the North Atlantic to about 70 percent of its level of sustainable stock, and now we're doing the same thing in the South Atlantic Ocean, and on and on it goes. In about two generations it'll be 'Game over.' We try to tell the story so that people are aware of this."

Ford will do book-signings locally on the following days:

Saturday, December 7 from 2 to 4 p.m. at Catskill's "Day in December" at 390 Main Street. He'll bring original watercolor paintings from the current book, as well as prints and copies of his first two books, *Fish: 77 Great Fish of North America (2006)* and *Big: The 50 Greatest World-Record Catches (2008)*.

Monday, December 9 at 6:30 p.m. at Barnes & Noble at 1177 Ulster Avenue at Ulster Plaza in Kingston. For more information, call (845) 336-0590.

Saturday, December 14 at 1 p.m. at the Golden Notebook at 29 Tinker Street in Woodstock. For more information, call (845) 679-8000.

On Saturday, January 11, Oriole 9 restaurant at 17 Tinker Street in Woodstock will hold an opening reception from 5 to 7 p.m. for an exhibit of Ford's original art that will remain on the walls through February 4. For more information, call (845) 679-5763.

www.flickford.com, www.greenwichworkshop.com/ford/wildbook.asp.