



*Sunstruck*, acrylic on masonite, 17 x 21"

ART, ANIMALS AND AFRICA. JONI JOHNSON-Godsy has managed to blend her three greatest loves into a satisfying career as an artist. It didn't happen all at once, of course, but nearly 20 years after graduating from studying fine art at The Ohio State University, Godsy has forged a path that has led her to what most people never find—the unmitigated joy of getting up every day to immerse herself in what she loves the most, animals and art. In addition, she recently had the opportunity to pursue art and animals in Africa, a place she has been rabid to see since age 4.

#### First Things First

The question was never about where her career would go, but how she'd arrive at the destination. By admission, Godsy is a toe-dipper. To explain the analogy, she says she'll walk up to the pool, dip in a toe and if the water is fine, she'll step in up to her ankles, immersing herself incrementally.

BY MARY NELSON

Fresh out of art school, Godsy was recruited by Hallmark Cards Inc., Kansas City, Mo. It seemed a good fit. "My original interest in Hallmark Cards was based on the idea that animals are commonly used on its products," she says. "I could earn a steady salary with good benefits, while painting animals." Animals have always been her primary artistic pursuit, whether as an illustrator at Hallmark, a professional photographer for show dogs, or as an artist hoping to impart the soul of creatures to viewers.

When Godsy started working at Hallmark, all of the artists could paint. Today, with the advent of computer-generated art, things have changed. Painters have been taught to produce art digitally, and new-hires are computer whizzes, not painters. Godsy, resigned to the fact that the wheels of change were grinding, agreed to learn to create art on the computer, except she asked to be put at the bottom of the list. A wise move, apparently, because human-

produced art still seems to be more popular with consumers. Artists such as Godsy, among only a handful of painters who remain at Hallmark, have become golden in a situation where conventionally painted images are the better sellers.

Three years ago, however, Godsy decided it was time to get her ankles wet. She cut back to part-time at Hallmark, illustrating "cute Juves," cards geared toward young people. It was time to concentrate on wildlife art. She looks to the future with her customary reserve. "I'm fortunate to have my commercial art career at part-time status so that I can explore the other side of my artistic self," says Godsy. "Where it will take me, I don't know. But I will enjoy the journey." Most recently, the journey took her to Africa, where she fulfilled a dream from childhood, a time when she had felt an instinctual connection to the continent.

The African trip, a business partnership, was the beginning of what Godsy hopes will be more trips to the country. As a professional photographer, she was invited to take pictures of high-end safari camps by friends, who have a luxury travel review business. In exchange for the publicity the reviews would generate, Godsy stayed in Africa for free and went on two game drives a day. Her camera, it seems, never had a moment's rest during game drives, netting her hundreds of images to use as reference.

#### Pulling It Together

As a result of that trip, Godsy feels equipped to add African wildlife to her repertoire. "I usually paint only what I know, so I've really only done North American animals," she says. "Now that [I've been to Africa], I know what it smells like, feels like, tastes like. I can include that in my paintings, where it just simply wouldn't have been before."

As Godsy has begun painting more wildlife and fewer illustrations, she has sensed urgency in her art and artistic philos-

ophy. "My artistic philosophy comes from the reason I paint in the first place: I would like people to see the soul of the animal, to increase appreciation for the creatures that share our earth" she says. "When I think of the natural world and what we are doing to it, I want to help people, in some way, feel my passionate enthusiasm for preserving the wild animals and places." Her forays into animals' habitats generate more ideas, which she extends to viewers of her artwork through subtle, almost subliminal, ideas. "Rather than hit the viewer over the head with an obvious concept, I want the idea to come to them through the emotions they feel when they see the painting," she says. As she garners more intimate knowledge and passionate feelings, Godsy believes she will produce compelling images that will increase the appreciation for our feathered and furry friends. **WA**

Images courtesy of the artist.



Left to right: *Autumn Wader*, acrylic on masonite, 24 x 12 1/2"

*Grey Ghost of Madagascar*, acrylic on masonite, 25 1/2 x 8 1/2"