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WILDLIFE PAINTER BRINGS PASSION FOR LIFE AND ANIMALS TO THE SAWDUST ART FESTIVAL

Wildlife painter, Chris Hoy, has been selected as the 2008 Guest Artist for the Sawdust Art Festival's Summer Show in Laguna Beach.

Laguna Beach, CA – Renowned wildlife artist Chris Hoy has traveled great distances to get close to animals in their natural habitat, the core of inspiration and passion for his life's work: his paintings. But his most life changing journey was not about travel at all. It was a near death experience that changed the texture of his life, and ultimately made him a better artist.

In 1995 while hanging a piece of art, Hoy slipped and fell through a glass table, slitting his right wrist to the bone, which is also his painting hand. In 20 minutes he lost half his blood and risked losing his hand and life, too. Prompt medical attention saved his life and hand but doctors indicated he would likely not regain use of his hand and not be able to draw or paint again.

But Hoy, a natural born optimist and a former wrestling champ in his youth, mustered the strength and desire he needed to defy the odds.

"Not only did I begin to paint again, but I painted better than ever before. I became a better artist and a better person. Sure my first drawings were not that great, but I didn't let that stop me. I just kept at it, and soon I was way beyond where I was before the accident," Hoy said, "and I matured. I learned so much from that experience I vowed to never stop learning," he finished.

(Continued)

Page 2/Sawdust Guest Artist, Chris Hoy

Now 13 years later he has accomplished more than anyone expected, and as the guest artist for the upcoming Sawdust Art Festival in Laguna Beach, which runs June 27 through August 31, the public will have the opportunity to see the results of his personal journey as well as his world travels.

Hoy, raised in Orange County and now residing in Palm Springs, said his love for animals began at an early age when he developed a kinship with the family dog. And although he liked to draw, he never thought he would have an art career until he went on a backpacking trip with his buddies to Oregon in 1978.

“We went to a zoo in Oregon and I was able to hold a baby lion. Something happened. I just knew I had found my passion. There was some sort of spiritual connection. That’s really when the bug bit me,” Hoy said.

After returning from his backpacking experience he started doing pencil drawings of animals, particularly wildlife, and decided to submit his art for the Festival of Arts in Laguna Beach. He was accepted in 1979 and began a 20 year career with the festival where he ventured into colorful acrylic paintings.

“Acrylics was a phenomenal experience, and when I started to bring animals to the show to paint their portraits, it began another successful phase of my art experience,” he concluded.

But his foremost passion continued to be his constant search for wildlife in their habitat. It is in these moments when he captures the animals in his paintings.

(Continued)

Page 3/Sawdust Guest Artist, Chris Hoy

Hoy's travels have taken him to seven continents, where he found artistic inspiration in the animals he encountered, and he captured their nuances, unique personalities and expressions on canvas.

In New Guinea he was captivated by the tropical birds and mammals in the deep rain forest. In Kenya and Tanzania, he focused on the plains of the Serengeti and Masai Mara to search for the "Big Five:" elephants, rhinos, lions, leopards and cape buffalo. While there he also attempted to climb the 19,340 foot Mount Kilimanjaro.

In Asia he began people-watching and sightseeing in cities where he mixed elephant rides through hardwood forests with seeking out leopards, tigers, birds and rhinos to paint. While there he also visited the Himalayas and climbed to a 22,000 foot base camp at Mount Everest.

Hoy's most memorable experience in Asia was during a recent visit to China where he was handed a baby panda. "It's hard to describe that experience," Hoy said. "There's just nothing like holding such a rare species. There's a warmth about them that is so touching. It was just beautiful," he finished.

A later trip to Alaska brought the Humpback whales to his canvas. As did a trip to the Dominican Republic where he went diving for them. "There is nothing quite so humbling as being in the water with one of these gentle giants," Hoy said. "We saw several mothers with calves, which were 13 feet long and

(Continued)

Page 4/Sawdust Guest Artist, Chris Hoy

weighed over two tones at birth. That's huge when viewed from the surface, but overwhelming when you are eye to eye with them," he finished.

In Australia, he discovered the Outback, a 50,000 year old civilization offering the giant monoliths of Uluru (Ayer's Rock) and Kata Tjuta (the Olgas), he also discovered some of the most unusual animals on the planet: duckbilled platypuses, emus, koalas and kangaroos. "These animals just make me laugh," Hoy said. "They're just so goofy they're fun to be with," he ended.

Antarctica was the most impressive destination for Hoy. There he experienced nature in its most isolated and inspiring forms. "White, blue, gray and brown are the primary colors of Antarctica's backdrop," Hoy said, "leaving the other colors, found on the red beak of a seabird or the yellow orange hued feathers of a Macaroni penguin to stand out," he added.

Over the years, Hoy's work has received much acclaim and he has been commissioned to do a variety of projects. He was honored by the late former President Richard M. Nixon as the winner of a national art contest, and he was chosen as the only artist to design Yosemite National Park's t-shirts.

His artwork is also available in finer galleries nationwide, also hanging in the San Bernardino Art Museum and the San Diego Wild Animal Park, as well as in corporate and private collections throughout the world.

Hoy, who has a line of bedding featuring wildlife scenes sold in various retail outlets, also had a stint on television's Shopping Channel where his paintings

(Continued)

Page 5/Sawdust Guest Artist, Chris Hoy

were sold on live television. He has created work for a variety of celebrities including the late Mrs. Walt Disney, Cheryl Ladd and Jane Goodall, but the real celebrities in his life are the animals he encounters and paints.

He admitted he will never stop searching for those elusive animals adding as a child his grandfather labeled him the, "Huckleberry Kid." "I used to wonder why," Hoy said, "So I think that has sort of stayed with me. I just love that about life. It's a constant learning experience," Hoy concluded.

2008 marks Hoy's debut exhibition at the Sawdust Art Festival. He will have more than 100 original paintings on display, including his acrylics and pencil drawings.

"I am thrilled to be a part of the Sawdust Art Festival. It's a fun atmosphere and it mixes well with my personality," Hoy added.

After his Sawdust exhibition this summer, Hoy plans a trip back to Africa where he, "wants to mingle with mountain gorillas." Until then you can see Hoy "mingling" at the Sawdust Art Festival where he will be daily during the two-month show, painting pet portraits and discussing his work with festival-goers.

July 23 and **August 13** will be **Animal Days** when Hoy will bring live animals for the public to see from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on the Sawdust Main Deck. He plans to bring in baby animals including a lion, an Artic fox and a kangaroo.

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Page 6/Sawdust Guest Artist, Chris Hoy

The 42nd Annual Sawdust Art Festival invites visitors to our “Summer of Enchantment.” This year’s show features 202 Laguna Beach artists, 19 of which are first-time exhibitors like Hoy. Art workshops for children and adults are offered daily, along with artist demonstrations, casual outdoor dining and the Sawdust Saloon. The Sawdust Art Festival...creatively fun!

Festival hours are 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily (except July 4 closing at 6 p.m.) Adult Admission \$7 Seniors \$6 age 65 and up; Children \$3 age 6-12 years and Free for children under 5 years of age. Summer Season Passes are only \$20 and Annual Passes are \$25 (includes unlimited Summer and Winter admission).

The Sawdust Art Festival is located at 935 Laguna Canyon Road in Laguna Beach. Free city trolleys will bring visitors to the festival and to town. For additional information call 949-494-3030 or visit www.SawdustArtFestival.org.

The Sawdust Art Festival is a non-profit organization dedicated to educating the public and promoting the art created in Laguna Beach.

The Sawdust Art Festival thanks our 2008 sponsors *Czechvar, Kendall-Jackson* and our Official 2008 Media Sponsor, *The Los Angeles Times*.

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