

Rikki Morley Saunders

Associate Profile

Rikki Morley Saunders
with Gift

What is it about animals that fascinates you so much?

Everything. The animals are my inspiration and my teachers. They confirm for me that life is amazing and being able to observe it is a blessing. I love to observe their habits, learn their language, study their forms and try to capture their grace and spirit in my mind, sketches, and later in clay or wax. I am always searching for a moment in time—always fleeting—that illuminates a creature's very essence. I am passionate about capturing that moment that sings to me, one which both exemplifies and conveys how special that animal is.

You have a menagerie of animals on your property.

We have horses, dogs, cats, a herd of deer, and a muster of peacocks. Gift, a white tail deer, was orphaned after a tornado came though the area and I raised him on a bottle. I learned so much everyday, over 17 years I spent with him. Our close intimate relationship granted me the ability to create *Gift in Velvet* and his female counterpart, *Spring Fling*. I truly miss him, what a gift he was. Our muster of peacocks are comical, elegant and beautiful. I had just started working on a life-size peacock, when my peacock model, Nureyev, had an encounter with a raccoon in a tree and ended up in a heap on the ground with a broken leg. It was amazing to have Nureyev in my studio for three months doing rehab. I would keep my studio door open and his sibling would come in to visit him. Being able to work from life in the studio was brilliant. After he was healed and released he took up chasing cars!!

You are an accomplished equestrian, having just missed out on the 1984 Olympic Equestrian team. Are there parallels you can draw between athletics and art?

One has to be focused, disciplined and present to reach that level of competition—not unlike what one needs to be an artist. In addition, it is an extraordinary joy to become one with your horse—as it is with one's art.

Tell us about your Conservation work and the organization S.A.V.E. you founded.

I was raised hunting and fishing and taught to protect and preserve our natural environs. When an unwarranted four-lane road expansion was proposed and I knew it would promote sprawl, loss of farmland, degradation of water and air quality. I got together with some of the most intelligent, passionate people and organizations in the region and started S.A.V.E. (Safety Agriculture Villages Environment.) We were, and are, tenacious and relentless in trying to save important natural resources for future generations.

Who are your favorite artists?

Anne Hyatt Huntington is certainly one of my favorites. I think *Diana* is one of the most beautiful sculptures, it is amazing from every angle, beautifully designed, elegant and powerful. Claudel, Rodin, Buggatti stand out as well, for their beauty, sensitivity, and movement. Architecture is one of my great loves and Edwin Lutyens was brilliant. Emile Galle and Louis Comfort Tiffany, helped me fall in love with the Art Nouveau movement and I started collecting it in my early 20s. It is all about nature.

How do you see your work developing over the next decade?

Life is a collection of stories, adventures, images, and feelings and during my lifetime I have collected some powerful and beautiful sculptures in my head from travels and experiences. These moments and the potential subjects for sculptures that might evolve from them are seared into my memory and will emerge one day in the future.



Spring Fling
Rikki Morley Saunders
Bronze - Life-size

What advice do you have for any sculptor beginning his or her career?

“Go for it! Work from life. Follow your heart, gut, and instincts. That’s what you’ve come here to do. Work hard for sure, but don’t forget the joy in observing, seeing and creating! Be willing to share your vision with the world. Think big.”



Bella
Rikki Morley Saunders
Bronze - Life-size