

SPORTING SHOT



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Sporting Artist: LIZ LEWIS

'Situational art' from a life outdoors

JOHN D. TAYLOR



On the eve of another Montana winter—elk season was all but over, the daily high temperature scorched up to 6 degrees and a half-foot of new snow had whitewashed the pre-Thanksgiving landscape—Liz Lewis's Bozeman home was busy and warm.

Despite nursing a cold, Lewis was preparing for her last elk hunt of the season in addition to fielding my questions, running herd on her family and tending to her [Braque Français](#). So while the topic of conversation was work-related, Lewis may just as well have been thinking about the crack of a rifle shot and



"Good Brakes"



the joy of blood-tracking an elk in the snow. This no doubt quickened the artist's pace, for such things are her passion, her training and her life's work.

Liz Lewis is a unique lady.

She grew up in a family of northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin hunters, shooters, anglers and outdoors folk. Her late father, Richard McNally, and her stepmother, Carol Lueder (yes, the same Carol Lueder who sells outdoor books and artwork through her business

[Fair Chase](#)) were particularly fond of these pursuits. As a child, Lewis's interests naturally leaned toward the outdoors. Throughout high school and into college, she shot well enough to be a sponsored member of Beretta

USA's sporting clays team. She ran the sporting clays circuit, going to school three days a week, shooting four and touring the country for her sport. She was also an avid angler. Thanks to these influences, an outdoor-

oriented career seemed natural, and Lewis became interested in getting a wildlife biology degree.

Then one serendipitous day in a sporting-goods store, she ran into Jimmy Lewis, a fly-fisherman from



Three steps in the lost-wax process for casting the sculpture "Good Brakes" in bronze (from left): the original work in clay; a wax casting in its mold; and the finished product in bronze—one of 25 in a limited edition—getting the final touches of a rich patina finish in the studio.



"First Light"



Annapolis, Maryland. The two hit it off famously. Shortly thereafter Liz accompanied Jimmy to Bozeman, where she went on to earn a degree in fish & wildlife biology from Montana State University. The pair went on to become well known in Montana's fishing and

guiding circles. Jimmy became an outfitter after years of guiding, while Liz joined the business as a guide.

For several years this kept Liz busy, yet all of the outdoor activity didn't satisfy her creative streak. "I always had a need to create and express myself," she said.

So began her foray into wildlife art—at first photography and painting. "After a while I got frustrated with two-dimensional art," Lewis said. "And the photography seemed like there was too much

detail. I also did some woodcarving. I just didn't have the patience for it. I was afraid to make a mistake, because I couldn't put wood back if I took too much off."

Then about six years ago, at the suggestion of friend and fellow Bozeman artist Rod Zullo, Lewis tried sculpting clay. "Working in three dimensions, I managed to pull this off," she said. "It gave me the spark that made me want to do more."

Today self-taught Lewis is an up-and-coming sculptor of bronzes whose passion for sport and experiences afield get poured into her work. "To the Net," for

"Morning Revelry"



example, unfolds a dynamic scene from her fishing-guide life: two drift-boat anglers with a nice trout on. The guide—out of the boat, waist-deep in the creek, and trying to steady the boat and net the fish—leads them into a moment they'll always remember.



Another example is “First Light,” which skillfully portrays a displaying male sharptail while catching the spring mating fervor. “Good Brakes” is a portrait of a taut-muscled pointer, the dog suspended in that magic moment before the flush.

Lewis describes these pieces as “situational art”—different places, scenes and moments that she wanted to share. Things that she has witnessed living the outdoor life.

“Everything has a tale to tell,” Lewis said, “and that’s what I try to share with people. There’s a place for the perfect elk, standing broadside . . . but it’s not always clean and perfect. Hunting and fishing are blood sports, and they are messy. They’re not in a box; they’re not neat and tidy things.

“I want to make my work as accurate as I can—to keep the science in my creativity. Yet I also want it to be loose and

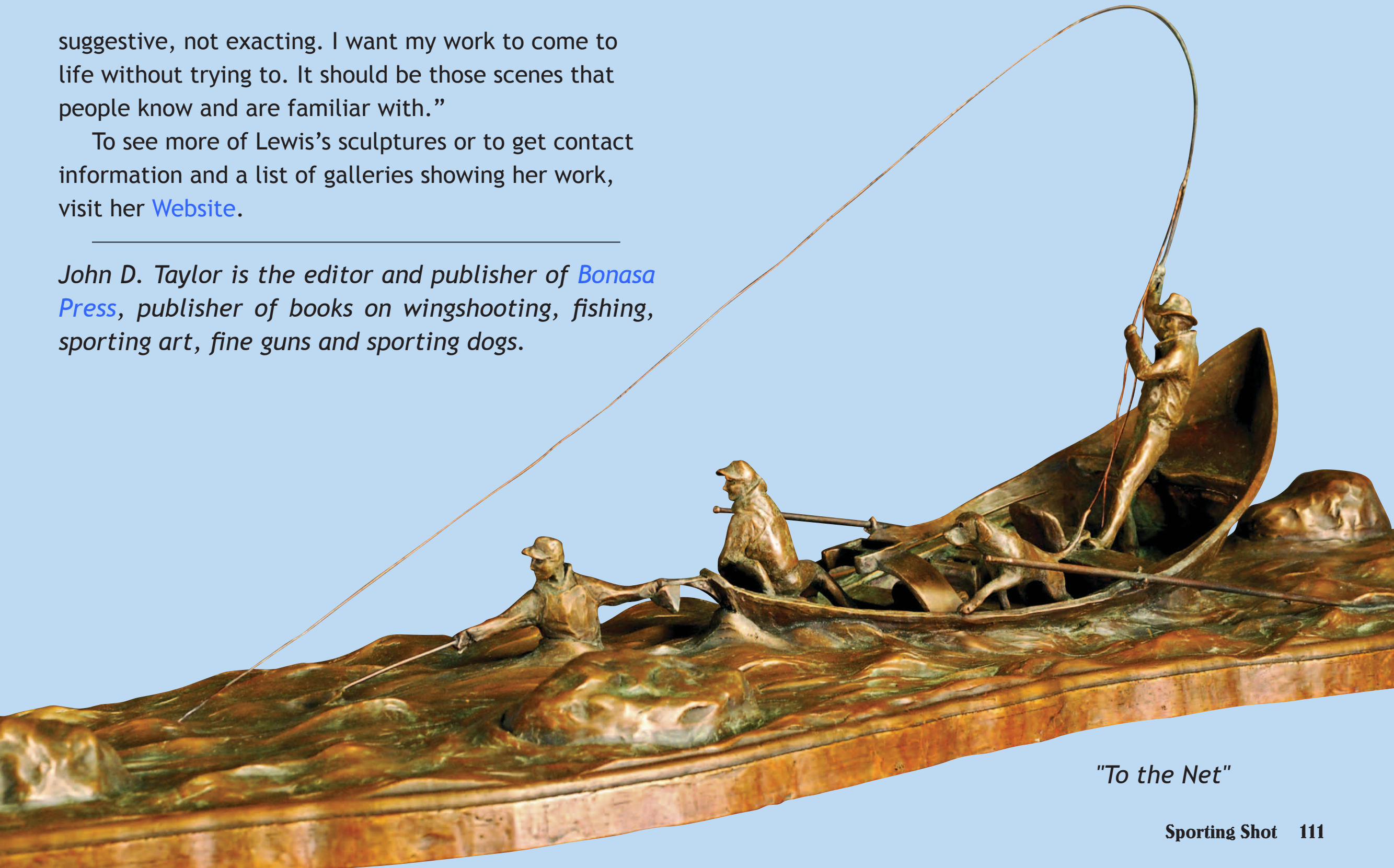


The high-relief “Tailfeathers” makes a lasting memory of a day’s bag. Liz Lewis in her studio, above, applying finish to one of the bronzes.

suggestive, not exacting. I want my work to come to life without trying to. It should be those scenes that people know and are familiar with.”

To see more of Lewis’s sculptures or to get contact information and a list of galleries showing her work, visit her [Website](#).

John D. Taylor is the editor and publisher of [Bonasa Press](#), publisher of books on wingshooting, fishing, sporting art, fine guns and sporting dogs.



"To the Net"