

“These paintings are practical, utilitarian illustrator art. The original commission specified two things: a calendar that incorporated Julian or consecutive days and an image of an arctic animal. The size had to be amenable for use in the field and so a large postcard size with a calendar printed over the image fit these specifications. For the image of the animals to ‘read’ clearly, it was necessary to keep the composition simple and bold with minimal detail. This differs markedly from the acute attention to detail in conventional wildlife painting. I happened to be experimenting with airbrush as a potentially useful tool at the time and the polar bear was my first crude attempt at the technique; quite far removed from the gleaming chrome and flawless flesh stereotypically associated with airbrush painting. All of the subsequent paintings in the series have involved the use of airbrush to some degree where expedient. All were executed in water colours with the attendant strengths and limitations of that medium. I’ve always been fascinated with boundaries and edges where symbol becomes image and image becomes illusion. Consequently these pictures incorporate a playful manipulation of viewing distance, so that beyond a certain point the over printed calendar disappears and the animal remains. Likewise, the paintings, which were initially done entirely for reproduction on a reduced scale with no thought that they would be displayed in their own right, appear from a distance as almost photographic images but when viewed more closely are simple arrangements of areas of colour and texture.

Beyond their commercial and practical intent there is a deeper and more subtle element to these paintings. From the earliest of times, animals have been spirit messengers to mankind. Even today there is a magical healing power in seeing a wild creature in its natural setting. The sighting of a bighorn sheep or a black bear can cause a small traffic jam on a mountain highway as people stop for a glimpse. Safari tours do a roaring trade and wildlife shows are a popular staple on television. Being the creatures of imagination that we are this magic also works via a simple painted image, as indeed it did for our ancestors in their ancient painted caves.”

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