



To the Net, approximately three feet long, edition of 25

Liz Lewis

Cast, Blast and Sculpt

By Carol Lueder

The thick envelope arrived with the hoped-for return address – the National Sporting Clays Association. She eagerly opened the package to learn that she was the first junior girl to become a member of the coveted All American Sporting Clays Team, something she repeated two more times. That event, along with a series of wins in the Midwest, launched the brief shooting career of Liz McNally Lewis, representing Beretta shotguns throughout the United

States and England. When Beretta required all contract shooters to be full-time, she was still in college and had to decline the offer. What started out as a family-and-friend weekly social event led to a shooting life that most only dream of.

She was gifted from the start – a youngster who excelled both academically and artistically. Lewis won scholastic art awards throughout grammar and high school. She was always doing little illustrations on notes and letters, drawing her dogs and attending craft workshops.

She started hunting with her parents at age 12. “It just feels real; it’s the closest connection to nature you can have,” Lewis says. “Wildlife has always been my passion.”

During a stop at an Orvis shop in Barrington, Illinois, she met a young man, Jimmy Lewis, who would later become her husband. They had much to share. She taught him to shoot and he taught her to fly cast. After their wedding at a Wisconsin hunting club, they settled in Bozeman, Montana where they obtained a fly-fishing outfitter’s license. Both took clients out fishing. It’s a grueling business. During fishing season you work 12-15 hours a day without a break for months. After eight years of successful outfitting, both wanted more to their lives. He went back to school and is now teaching high school English.

The camera became her next passion, and again she excelled. Her artistic ability was evident in capturing the essence and emotion of the outdoors, whether it was scenery or wildlife. Published in wildlife and outdoor





Boss Mare, recently introduced edition of 25. (12" x 12" x 8")

Morning Revelry, bobwhite quail introducing himself, edition of 25

First Light, sharptail grouse "booming" his morning greeting, edition of 25

(Right) *Scratch the Itch*, Lewis's newest solid cast, a 2" tall paperweight



magazines throughout the West, once again, Lewis was at the top of her game; then pregnancy halted a promising career with the camera. "I knew it would be pretty tough to take a baby on a mountain photo shoot. I'd always sketched and carved, but I never tried sculpting before. I was frustrated whenever I painted because I was dealing with only two dimensions when I knew there were really three."

Lewis ordered an armature and clay and started from scratch. She uses a slowcooker to soften the clay. After she smooths clay onto the armature, a bird or animal starts to emerge. Once she is satisfied with her clay model, it is turned into a bronze sculpture using the lost wax method. Limited only by her imagination, Lewis transforms that lump of clay into a kinetic sculpture – something with motion and emotion. Her sharp-tailed grouse is booming his greeting at *First Light* and crabby *Boss Mare* is about to step down a rocky trail. *Good Brakes* shows a pointer who just got his first whiff of a game bird and has come to a screeching halt.

Her husband told her about a guiding experience he had on the Big Hole River in Montana. A client's son hooked a large brown trout from a huge wooden McKenzie drift boat. The river was wild and full of boulders. Her husband realized that to save the fish, he had to jump in the





Good Brakes, a pointer on point: edition of 25

Three main steps of the lost wax casting process

- (Top) Original artist-created clay model of sculpture
- (Middle) Mother mold being removed from the sculpture in wax
- (Bottom) Final sculpture in bronze during patination, which chemically develops its coloration with various oxides



river, keep the boat from tipping and net the trout. Lewis rendered the scene in a three-foot long sculpture titled *To The Net*. All the dramatic action is reflected in the outfitter's and clients' faces and posture. When the clients saw the sculpture, they recognized themselves at once and purchased number one of the lot.

Lewis walked into Tierney Fine Art, a gallery in downtown Bozeman. The proprietor, Curtis Tierney, usually represents artists with established careers. "She walked in the front door, and I wasn't familiar with her work. She'd brought in a sharp-tailed grouse bronze. Right away, I

saw this raw talent and passion." Tierney purchased the bronze grouse outright – something unheard of in consignment galleries. "I wanted to offer support for a very deserving and fresh talent."

Peer recognition is the best recommendation an artist can have. Rod Zullo, a talented sculptor himself, says, "Liz is a perfect example of a person doing what she knows best, as opposed to the kind of artist who goes with the trends. She does what is best in her heart. She lives it and breathes it. She's qualified to create sporting art and she's truthful about it." Lewis' bronzes can be seen in galleries across America –



Liz Lewis and her research assistant, Scout, a Braque Francais pointer

Bozeman, New York City, Charleston, Denver and Dallas. www.lizlewismt.com.

Surrounded by dogs and her horse on five acres with a view of the mountains, Lewis spends her days riding, shooting, sculpting, and raising her six-year-old daughter who just caught her first trout on a dry fly. In her studio are works in process – a skulking fox, a tiny dog scratching his ear, a woodcock in full flight and others. But there is also an empty armature. I asked Lewis about it. “Oh, that’s going to be a great project,” Lewis said with a big smile. “My heroine is Annie Oakley and that’s going to be a bronze of her riding her horse flat-out with her split skirt and a lever-action rifle.”

Lewis is the modern-day embodiment of her heroine. She quotes Annie Oakley on her website, “Any woman who does not thoroughly enjoy tramping across the country on a clear frosty morning with a good gun and a pair of dogs does not know how to enjoy life.”

For additional information, visit

Carol Lueder worked in Chicago advertising agencies as a writer until she founded her own company, Fair Chase, which specializes in hunting, shooting, and equestrian books and sporting antiques and Liz Lewis bronzes. Lueder has been published in *Shooting Sportsman* as well as various Midwestern outdoor magazines.