# Adam Smith

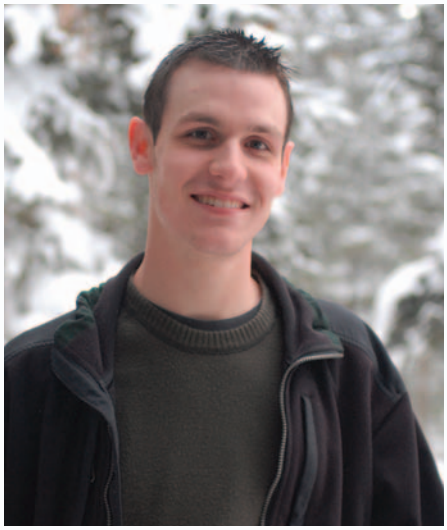
# An Exciting Chip Off the Old Block

*Eye of the Kingdom* (acrylic, 12 x 14")

**By Tony Varro**

It was a little over a year ago when young Adam Smith picked up a brush to devote some serious time to painting, and he is already "scarily good," according to one internationally respected wildlife artist—his father, Daniel Smith. Adds legendary gallery owner Ron Kobli of Decoys & Wildlife Gallery in Frenchtown, N.J., "I've sold everything Adam has sent me. I would like to get much more of his work. He's not as good as his father yet, and I wouldn't expect that, but with good instruction, it won't be long before he's giving his father some pretty stiff competition."

Young Adam is just 22 years old. A qualified automotive technician, he recently stepped back from the stresses of keeping up with ever-expanding automotive technology and switched to washing and detailing cars so that his mind is free to focus on painting. "This is so incredibly exciting," says Adam. "I need the job to pay my bills, but after work, as soon as I get back to my place, I'm free to paint all evening until midnight or later, and on all my days off. I know I have so much to learn, but with this job, I don't have to think too much about work, and that frees me to make more of a commitment to art."



Adam Smith

And his commitment is paying off. In January, he completed his first major show, at Safari Club International in

Reno, Nev. He brought five pieces—four of African animals and one of a golden eagle—and sold all five in the first two hours of the first day. "This is incredible. I'm ecstatic," Adam said from Reno. "And I have at least four commissions so far, mostly in sizes a little larger than I normally do, which is the direction I want to go." And, as for washing cars? "I will wait until I get home to decide, but I will probably still work on the cars part time. That seems to be the prudent thing to do."

## *Growing Up with Art*

Adam was born in Medina, just west of Minneapolis, in May 1984. The family moved to Bozeman when he was 9, and his life there has been surrounded by wildlife and by art. "My dad has been a full-time artist all of my life, and his easel has always been around, just a part of life for us. He was always drawing pictures for us kids (Adam has two sisters, one's an accountant, the other is in college), and I would do some drawing, but I never got into painting," he says. "My parents tell me that when I was 2, they would set me down on the porch with a brush and a bucket of soapy water and I would paint away with the bubbles—a 2-year-old can do a lot less damage with bubbles than with paint."

In Bozeman, Adam took some painting and drawing classes in grade and high school, but just like his father before him, he spent most of his time drawing and painting cars, not wildlife. "It would be fair to say that for a while, I was obsessed with cars," he says.

However, when he was 16, "I did an egret and some ducks, entering a hooded merganser in the state's junior duck stamp competition, and gained joint first place," he says. "The other winner was given best of show and went on to the national competition," while Adam went on to automotive school. He graduated from the Wyoming Technical Institute in Laramie as an auto technician with a minor in business, and went to work in the automotive maintenance department of a local dealership. "I quickly realized that this was not what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. My father had never tried to push me toward art, but as I watched him, I began to realize that his was an example worth following; he was doing something that for me would be a valid inspiration to follow."

*Livin' on the Edge* (acrylic, 10 x 15")

Shortly after Christmas in 2005, Adam picked up his paintbrushes again and, "Suddenly it was different. I was incredibly excited about painting. It was both challenging and fulfilling at the same time. I went on field trips with my dad to Alaska and to many parks, quickly realizing that I not only had a lot to learn about painting, but also about photography, and resource gathering, sorting and retrieving—all kinds of fascinating stuff," Adam says.

*Touch of Gold* (acrylic, 9 x 10")

On a recent trip to Moab, Utah, he learned the difference between painting from life and painting from photographs. "It was awesome to watch the power and grace of a moving mountain lion. The flowing and fluid motion of the animal injects a whole new dimension into the message of painting a lion," which he did as soon as he got home *(Livin' on the Edge)*, and it is one of his favorite paintings to date.

And that's why he is anxious to get to Africa. At present he is fascinated by African wildlife and now realizes that he needs to see the animals in their natural setting. "He is constantly raiding my African resource files," says Daniel, and if all goes well, they may be there in 2008.

At the moment, Adam sees himself as painting in much the same style as his father. "Dad is very picky, bordering on perfectionism, and I am the same. I strive to be the best I possibly can, but I still wonder sometimes,

why I can't get my water, for example, to look like his. But, then again, I realize he has been doing this for 30 years.

## *Own Style Will Come*

"I'm sure that sometime down the road, I will develop a style of my own; in fact, I can see differences right now. But for the present, it is enough to strive to be compared with him—that would be an enormous compliment. One of my dad's favorites is a zebra painting I did. To hear him compliment one of my works is amazing to me—coming from a great artist like him helps me push forward," says Adam.

*Midday Quencher* (acrylic, 7 x 14")

"I have thought of trying oils later, but for the moment I will stay with acrylics, like my dad. My parents are extremely supportive, and though Dad could be a little intimidating if I were around him all the time, he is a constant measuring stick for me. He offers criticism and help if I ask him for it, and I always know that he is being constructive and absolutely honest in what he says. He is not just patting me on the head and saying 'That's fine, son.' He takes my art very seriously, and to know that helps me enormously."

The Smith family home is on the outskirts of Bozeman where wildlife is part of the daily happening. "We recently had a mountain lion walk right by the house," says Adam, "but I wasn't there to see it. I love wildlife, and know that I will always paint it, but I would like to spend some time on landscapes, too. I have been able to hang out with some incredible artists throughout my youth—Simon Combes, Paco Young and many others who have been friends of the family—and it is incredible for me to look down the road and see that as a possible future. I'm sticking with small and portrait-sized pieces right now. I'd like to move up to larger ones as soon as I can, but not until I'm ready."

For daddy Daniel, Adam "is a constant source of amazement. He intuitively mixes perfect color and maintains proper values. I have no idea where that comes from—I haven't taught him. There are times when I can only shake my head when I look at his work." A cautious and experienced businessman who knows the ways of the art world, Daniel says that Adam will keep his car-washing job until he can cut it to part time, and when ready, move into the art world full time. For Kobli, that's exciting. "Adam has sent me at least four works so far and all have sold well. He is not prolific because, like his father, he is very detailed and each piece takes time, but I would like to get a lot more of his art. He's not his father, yet. But with good instruction, and he will get that from Daniel and others, it won't be too long before he is giving his father a real run for his money." WA

*Tony Varro is a free-lance writer living in Santa Fe, N.M.*

Images courtesy of the artist.

*Along the Chobe* (acrylic, 7 x 14")

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