

Peter Nash

Dog Day Afternoons

by Robbie Moore

Will Rogers once said, "If you get to thinking you're a person of some influence, try ordering somebody else's dog around." So how does Peter Nash do it? Well, he treats *all* his subjects as celebrities. He says, "I approach a dog, in a sense, no different than if it was Dolly Parton." He shoots in color, he exclaims enthusiastically, "because they are in fur coats!" Beautiful browns and creams and oranges and blacks shot in blocks of shapes transferred to canvas make for stunning portraits. What makes his work different is that he identifies himself as a portrait artist as opposed to a photographer and likes his portraits to look like art on canvas, by using light in the same way classic artists did. And all the while he is charming your dog into posing like a professional. The

result is a very special photographic and classic dog portraiture. I had to see for myself how he weaves his magic spell over his canine subjects.

Zeeka and Ruby, the most wonderful whippets, met us at the door of the home in Brentwood the dogs share with Peter and Laura and their two teenage children. The playful energy of both dogs and owner were quite charming. Peter and these furry friends led us back to a bright workspace filled with some of his canvas canines. Ruby naturally posed on "her" couch just as if she were ready for her close-up. She had obviously done this before.

A graduate of the Pasadena Art and Design Center in California, Nash



PHOTO: MEGHAN AILEEN SCHIRMER



His list of clients includes most if not all of country music's royalty, from Dolly to Willie, from Johnny to Loretta, both Georges, and Chet too.



began his photography career doing editorials, a fun, fast-paced way to “get out the clanks” and hone his skill behind the camera. His natural love for music led him at the age of 21 to Atlantic Records in Miami where he worked in promotions, a very interesting job in the high times of the record industry. But his skill in photography and a keen ear for country music, acquired through many hours of listening to his brother’s Hank Williams records, led him on the road to Nashville in 1983.

His list of clients includes most if not all of country music’s royalty, from Dolly to Willie, from Johnny to Loretta, both Georges, and Chet too. No last names required. During those times there was no art direction position, so Peter learned to do it all. He became a favorite of many artists, a friend of Lyle Lovett, and was even the one to photograph the slightly surprising wedding of Lovett to Julia Roberts.

In the '90s there was a shift in fashion and country music. Peter, who at one time was only reluctantly hired because he was “too L.A.,” was now watching a migration of his work to the photographers and stylists of the coasts. The music was changing, but then so was Peter’s interest in it. As his passion for the genre shifted, he began to think about what his next adventure might be.

In 2000, his wife Laura gave him a beautiful gift for his birthday—a painting created in 1857 of a very noble greyhound lit in a way that remarkably resembled flash photography. Peter would look at the interesting painting quite often and say to himself, “I can do that.” Ironically, on the day he received a call from a woman inquiring if he did pet photography, he said, “No.” He hung up the phone, then thought to himself, “What am I doing? I love dogs!” He had no way of getting back to her, but, as fate would have it, she was persistent and called him back a month later. He took the job but charged her nothing.

As he shows us the portraits, he sadly tells us that quite a few of his subjects have passed on already. Because we know that a dog’s lifespan is shorter than ours, “A dog relationship is temporary . . . [but] it’s the closest thing to nature we have as city dwellers.” Peter feels honored to have been able to capture their spirits in unique portraits that will be family heirlooms. What I’ve found during this delightful afternoon with Peter Nash, and as I think Ruby and Zeeka would tell you too if they could, is that there is no one better for the job of making your dog feel and look like a celebrity. ✓

Peter Nash’s dog portraits are represented by Gallery202 in Franklin, Tennessee. www.peternashdogs.com

VISUAL ARTS | PHOTOGRAPHY | ANTIQUES | LITERATURE | THEATRE

Nashville Arts

February 2011

MAGAZINE



Enchanting Ningyo
The Dolls of Japan

Andrew Saftel
Face to Face

Jeff Jamison
In Reflection

Peter Nash
Dog Day Afternoons