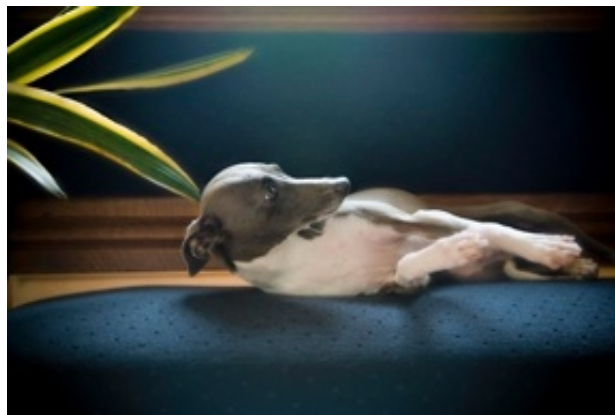


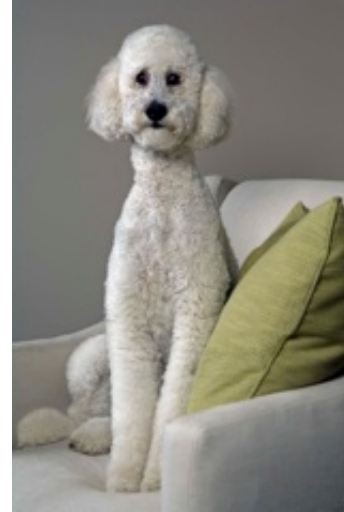
WORLD ARTS TODAY

HOME DANCE PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE TRAVEL





Portraits in Fur photos by Peter Nash. (www.peternashdogs.com)



His passion is pooches

Monday, January 17, 2011

Well-known celebrity photographer Peter Nash focuses his eye on man's best friend and elevates portraiture art to a new level.

By Karen McDonough

Peter Nash built his career photographing celebrities and country music icons carving out a solid reputation in the entertainment world. Now he's turned his lens and artist aesthetic towards lovable creatures of another sort, dogs.

As a portraiture artist, Nash shoots pets in their home environment, whether it's opulent estates or modest ranches, and through his stunning use of light, he's able to show their personalities within the detailed moment of a single shot. The results are quite extraordinary.

"I'm a huge fan of his," says Sara Stessel, gallery director of Stanford Fine Arts in Nashville. "I love how he's elevated the dog portrait to something magnificent, something majestic. That's what the English used to do when they had their dogs painted. The English were famous for this and there were portraiture painters who did just dogs. But no one has ever done this before."

Nash captures the animals' spirit by his straightforward use of lush lighting and sophisticated staging. He doesn't rely on gimmicks or treat his subjects merely as

cuddly tail-waggers. Instead, he approaches them as he would a celebrity or anyone else.

“With dogs, people want to see them for who they are,” says Nash, who lives in Nashville with his wife, Laura, and their kids, Ray, 17 and Lena, 15. “It’s portraiture and it’s theatrical and it harkens back to nineteenth and twentieth century painting in how the subjects are lit. My work is influenced by portraiture artists who rendered dogs. A lot of what I do looks like painting.”

His astute use of backdrop, setting and placement makes his work so interesting, Stessel says. “He’s able to find elements in the house or yard to fit the dog. You would never consider having your dog sit on your sofa with tapestry pillows behind him. He’s made them regal, even the most outdoorsy and manly dogs.”

Photographing pooches, on the surface, presents some obvious challenges. Nash, however, draws on his past dealing with superstars and uses the same techniques on his furry clients. “He’s got such a way with animals,” Stessel says, “he makes a connection. You don’t always get that with a photographer. Pets are tricky, they don’t always get along with everyone. But Peter understands them, it’s magical.”

With celebrities, Nash learned to instantly put them at ease with his affable personality and smart wit because, as he explains, “people in front of the camera freak. Every imperfection they have is being characterized by the camera.” He simply loves dogs and shows his affection to them before picking up his camera. “I have to make a celebrity instantly comfortable and it’s the same with dogs. They are like shooting a two-year-old. You have to hold their attention and get it done fast. You have to have the right lighting and know how to position them. After about an hour, they’re done.”

Stessel is a collector of his and commissioned the artist to shoot her own miniature Dachshund, Duke, as a gift for her husband. Stessel places Nash’s portraits alongside nineteenth and twentieth century English dog painting. “It’s art and people can appreciate the beauty of it and it’s elevated to a higher art form,” she says. “Then they realize they could have that something too just like taking a yearly portrait of their children. It’s a fabulous family gift you put on the wall with your family portraits.”

Nash’s work is featured in fine art galleries and private collections and can be seen on his online gallery www.peternashdogs.com.

From an early age Nash was drawn to photography and his creative talent was more than obvious by the time he was selected for admission to Los Angeles’s famed Art Center in the mid-1970s. “They didn’t take a lot of people,” Nash says, “only about 25 students a year. I was lucky to get in with a good portfolio. They taught me aesthetics and how to work using your own style and satisfy a paying client.”

He came of age during an especially fertile time in L.A.’s burgeoning art world which spawned the careers of legendary photographers like Herb Ritts and the Czech-born Antonin Kratochvil, who became a mentor to Nash.

Before Nash graduated, he found himself working as an assistant to Kratochvil and his wife, Laurie Kratochvil, who became *Rolling Stone* magazine’s director of photography and founding photo editor of *InStyle*. Antonin Kratochvil’s highly-respected work includes documentary reportage, fashion, music and celebrity profiles. Nash assisted the Kratochvils on photo shoots of all of it, from nude portraits to legendary

singers like Smokey Robinson and George Benson.

“My first impression of Peter was he had a wonderful portfolio and I loved his work,” Laurie Kratochvil recalls. “He really connected with the people on the other side of the camera. He had a respect for me and that was something that really stood out. I found him charming, smart and personable. I thought he was a fellow who was going to have a very successful career.”

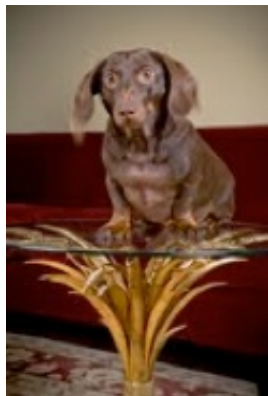
Out on his own, Nash pursued his passion of music photography working as a stringer for *Rolling Stone* magazine and many other major publications and music industry clients. By the early 1980s, he had made a name for himself on the West Coast.

A move to Nashville, the country music capital, in 1983 propelled his career to new heights. Over the years, he’s photographed a literal who’s who in country music -- from Johnny Cash to Faith Hill -- and Hollywood stars including Julia Roberts’ wedding to country music’s Lyle Lovett.

A few years ago, a woman called asking Nash to photograph her two dogs. Initially, he turned her down but later reconsidered. When he decided to call her, he realized he lost her phone number. A few weeks later, she called back asking if he changed his mind. After that first puppy photo shoot, the artist knew he found his calling. Today he jokes on his website about having “more PG-13 fun” working with dogs than stars.

Nash’s unexpected career shift unearthed a newfound passion and opened his eyes about the canine world. “People and their pets have a temporary, short-term relationship,” he says. “Having a creature like this forces us to connect with nature. Before this, I didn’t realize how connected people are to their dogs.”

From Kratochvil’s perspective, Nash’s smart career choices have brought him professional success and personal happiness. “[His dog pictures] are very painterly and they really have a sense of art history in them, that’s such a great part of it,” she says. “He’s probably getting such satisfaction out of it and giving a lot of joy to the [dog owners] and himself. That’s a huge accomplishment.”



Sara Stessel’s doxie,
Duke.



Peter Nash with the family whippet, Zeeka.
Photo by Lena Nash.

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