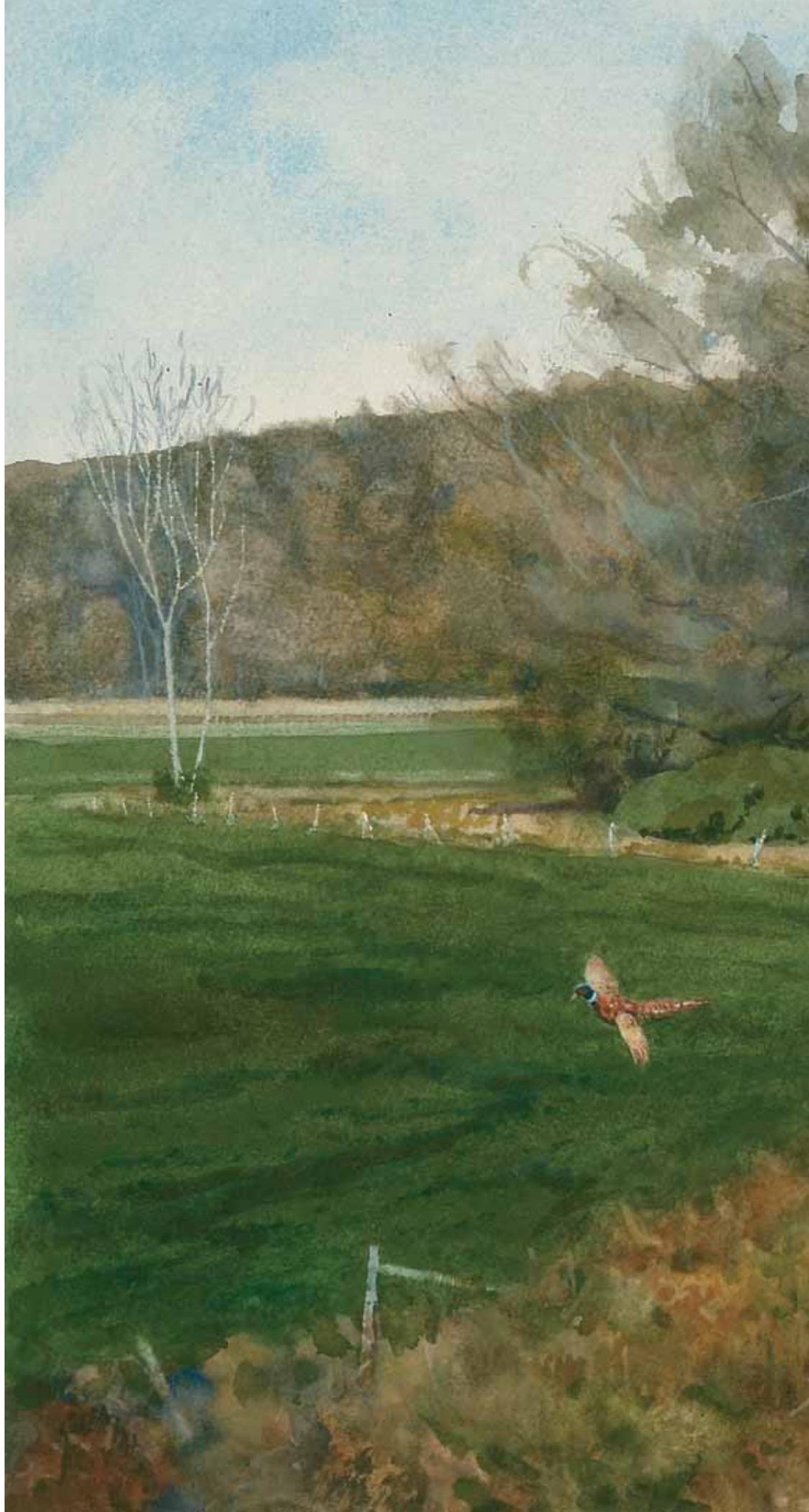


**I**n the world of sporting art, there are few who might be considered a master among their peers. Arthur Shilstone is one such individual. The story of his rise to international recognition over a six-decade span is as fascinating as the man himself.

Shilstone's beginnings resembled many of his generation, experiencing firsthand the hardships of the Depression and post-Depression era. Born in 1922 in a wealthy community in Essex County, New Jersey, Shilstone's early childhood was not unusual until his family, after the 1929 stock market crash, had to downsize and relocate to their summer home on Lake Mahopac, New York. Shilstone didn't mind. In fact, he enjoyed his early years bass fishing, duck hunting, and becoming a proficient sportsman. During this time he also took to drawing. Influenced by a high school art teacher who opened his eyes to the world of commercial illustration, Shilstone went on to enroll in Brooklyn's Pratt Institute in 1941.

When the United States entered World War II, Shilstone interrupted his education and enlisted. He was assigned to the Army's 603rd Engineer Camouflage Battalion, along with other creative types, such as fashion designer Bill Blass and abstract painter Ellsworth Kelly. The battalion specialized in deceiving the enemy through special effects such as deploying regiments of inflatable tanks, trucks and artillery. Throughout his tour, Shilstone captured everything around him on his sketch pad—his battalion members, the bombed-out villages, and the machinery of war. With India ink, a fountain pen and a dab of spit on his thumb, he could produce the soft washes that later found their way as signature elements in his sporting-art watercolors.





Arthur Shilstone



*Golden Afternoon* Watercolor, 18 X 24

After the war, Shilstone returned to his studies in illustration and commercial art, and graduated from Pratt on the G.I. Bill. At the time, young artists of his generation were being scooped up by the publishing giants and Madison Avenue agencies. During the glamorous era of prestigious mass-circulation magazines, Shilstone's work appeared in more than three dozen publications, from *Life*, *Smithsonian* and *National Geographic* to *Sports Illustrated*, *Gourmet* and *Field & Stream*; from book jackets and album covers for artists such as Billie Holiday to on-location assignments for clients like Brazil's Varig Airlines.

When he was discovered by *Life* magazine, he was assigned to cover several significant events, including the Sam Shepard murder trial, the funeral of Senator Joseph McCarthy, an investigation of the sinking of the *Andrea Doria* and the school

integration case argued before the Supreme Court. His 12 years as a freelance illustrator with *Life* resulted in countless evocative images that may have forever changed the way readers viewed the subjects.

Additional reportorial assignments included the Military Air Transport Service evacuation of wounded soldiers during the Korean War. He was selected by NASA to chronicle the Space Shuttle's maiden voyage, as well as a half-dozen subsequent launches and landings. (The original paintings hang in the NASA museum at Cape Canaveral.) Throughout his career, Shilstone witnessed many of his generation's greatest moments and recorded these events with his signature style of tightly composed illustrations blended with loose washes of color.

Shilstone and his wife, Beatrice, a fashion editor at *Women's Wear Daily*,

moved from the fast-paced city life to Connecticut, where he set up his studio in an old converted barn, complete with a massive wall of paned glass on the north face – perfect for the constant and unvarying north light illustrators seek – and several untamed acres around him. This setting, where grouse still strutted in the woods and good trout fishing in local streams was just down the road, helped set the stage for his sporting art.

Shilstone spent his off-time experimenting as a fine-art painter and entered his wet-on-wet watercolors in various competitions. In this technique, paints are applied to paper brushed wet with water in order to create diffuse, irregular areas of color. By the late 50s, he was an exhibiting member of the prestigious American Watercolor Society and Society of Illustrators.

As advances in photography began to influence the media's taste in major publications, illustration jobs were harder to come by. As luck would have it, a friend asked Shilstone to paint a sporting scene at his place along Montana's Yellowstone River. Soon after, a hunting trip he took on Maryland's Eastern Shore renewed Shilstone's passion for the outdoors, and thus launched his sporting art career in earnest. Shilstone was back in the setting he so loved while growing up and was now being paid to paint beautiful landscapes.

By the mid-1980s, Shilstone's inspiring watercolors of wingshooters and hunting dogs, of anglers surf-fishing for stripers along the New England coast, autumn salmon fishing in Canada, pulling brown trout from a Adirondack river with its many gorges or delicate brook trout from a small Connecticut stream, were selling at many prestigious galleries in the East. Shilstone's light-infused landscapes and sportsmen in pursuit opened a new revenue stream for the artist.

Like his most celebrated predecessor, Ogden Pleissner, to whom he has been most closely compared, Shilstone creates mood by blurring details in mists and skies. Tight details, such as fins and feathers, are not a priority in his work. He uses his brush to convey the story of men in pursuit of their game – capturing a body of water at a particular time of day, bathing them in the light of seasonally color-rich vegetation. His goal is to create a sense of place and a place of sense, in which sight, sound, look and the changing light and shadows are recognizable and convincing. Shilstone eternalizes his subjects in such a way that all sportsmen can place themselves in the image.

Shilstone is a transparent watercolorist, using a technique developed in late 18<sup>th</sup>- and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century England in which the white the viewer sees is the paper itself rather than watercolor. His use of the negative space of the unpainted areas,



*Canadas In Flight* Watercolor , 18 X 24

*The Blind On The Point* Watercolor, 18 X 25



Arthur Shilstone



*Arthur S. Shilstone*

***The Decisive Moment***  
Watercolor, 20 X 29



***Texas Gun Dogs***  
Watercolor, 17 X 22

sometimes prominent in the foreground or background, expresses swaths of snow, water and sky. This controlled negative space contrasts dramatically with densely pigmented areas and shadowed space. Shilstone's white paper also artfully expresses the splash of a fish breaking the surface and a gray winter's glow behind an obscured sun.

His strong, clean design, born of a

firm foundation in draftsmanship, figure drawing and masterfully crafted compositions, balances varying proportions of foreground to background, and of water, shoreline, and sky. Reflecting waters tie his fishing works together, forming spatial zones further established by a sharply focused foreground of river boulders or vegetation that gives way to hazy horizons in the distance. Water also serves to gather light and reflect it back up into the sky, making mist sunny, as in *Golden Afternoon*. Somewhere in the middle, as a focal point in the surrounding landscape, is the sportsman, highlighted with a hint of red in a shirt or cap, his size and clarity establishing the viewer's point of view and distance 'as seen in *Pool*

*Below The Falls.*

Shilstone designs a painting in many steps. He works directly from nature's never-ending source of inspiration. He relies on preliminary photos to create an initial framework and then contemplates how to approach his subject. He creates small studies to define perspective values, color and composition before creating a finished work. The final painting begins as a landscape to which he adds the details and figures to create the focal points and where he want to lead the viewer, carefully combining every skill set he has developed over the last 60 years, to create a sporting image as only he can.

The J. Russell Jinishian Gallery in

Fairfield, Connecticut is hosting the first major retrospective exhibition of Shilstone's lifework beginning on March 12, 2011. More than 100 of his paintings will be on exhibit, spanning his career from reportorial assignments to current sporting art.

Fred Polhemus is a sporting art expert and authority on Shilstone's work. An avid sportsman and fly-fishing fanatic, he currently serves on the board of the American Museum of Fly Fishing. He represents Shilstone and a select group of sporting artists through the J. Russell Jinishian Gallery in Fairfield, Connecticut.

*Pool Below the Falls Watercolor, 18 X 24*

