

SouthwestArt

Catching Up With Kenny Harris

By Bonnie Gangelhoff

Harris replied, "How exhausting it's been to have that uncertainty every day about how you are going to eat and where you are going to sleep. Then you have the pressure to create art and be amiable. It's absolutely insane. At least on "Survivor," the contestants are alone when they try to eat worms. They don't have to charm someone."

Lucky for Harris, he didn't have to pour any slimy creatures down his throat for breakfast. Trading his art for food landed him a luscious home-grown meal on a Mennonite farm in Ohio and a juicy steak dinner at St. Elmo's Steak House in Indianapolis, IN.

Harris slept in the homes of strangers and in the lobbies of bowling alleys. He painted a feed mill in Kidron, OH; a water tower in Windsor, MO; and a miniature Husky in Aspen, CO. As he spent more time on the road, he quickly learned he had to leave his big-city prices behind. People offered \$20 for sketches that would sell in his Los Angeles and New York galleries for \$1,500. His biggest sale came in the heartland when he sold an oil painting of a member of his film crew to a Kansas man for \$2,500.

It was also somewhere in Kansas where the peripatetic artist hit the wall, exhausted both physically and mentally. "But as soon as I reached the Rocky Mountains, I felt better," Harris relates. "I realized how much I am a person of the West." Renewed, he started to put his best marketing skills to work. The result: the three most amazing rides of his cross country adventure. In the trendy ski resort of Aspen, he tracked down a couple who owned a balloon-ride business and traded an oil sketch of their balloon for what he calls a "killer" ride in which he floated over mountains and watched deer and elk roam below. Harris also wrangled a rafting trip through a 29-mile stretch of rapids on the Colorado River and a ride in a Cessna plane down to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon.

The intrepid traveler began the last leg of his great race in Las Vegas, where he baked in 108 degree heat at sunset. But it was even "hotter" backstage at the Tropicana nightclub, where he sketched Folies Bergere showgirls in return for tickets to their Latin Mambo extravaganza. Somewhere outside Vegas, he hitched a ride from a young singer-songwriter who had partied all night and asked him to drive her back home to Los Angeles. She serenaded Harris while he pointed her car due west, driving straight to the Pacific Ocean and wrapping up the trip with a celebratory leap into the surf.

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But, you ask, did Harris win the Art Race? Sorry, we can't say until after the show airs, but we will keep you posted. Stay tuned.

He is represented by Terrence Rogers Fine Art, Santa Monica, CA; George Billis Gallery, New York, NY.

His next show is at George Billis Gallery, November 11-20

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