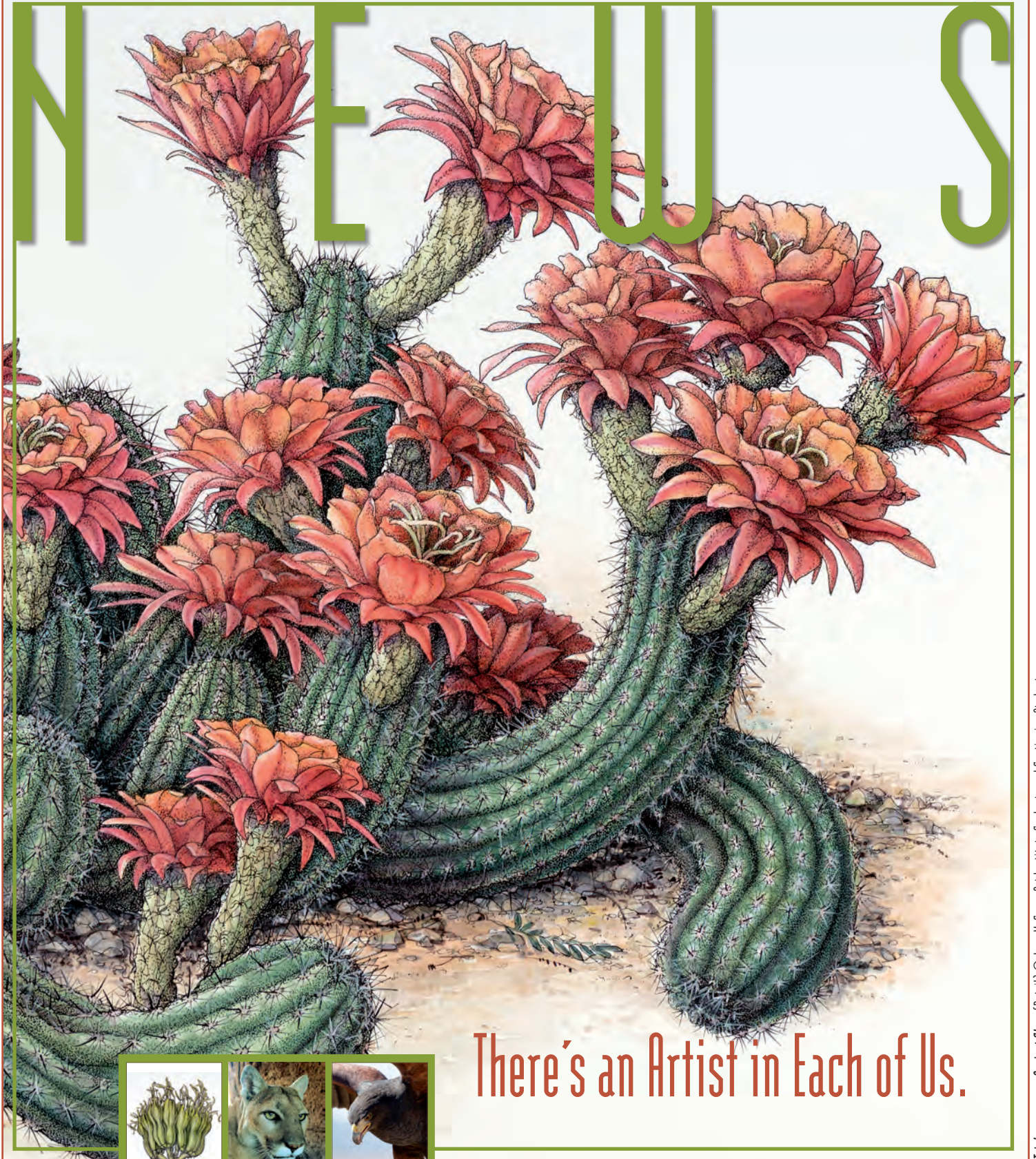
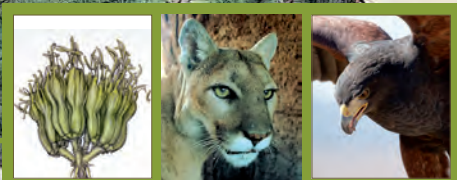


# ARIZONA-SONORA DESERT MUSEUM

A NEWSLETTER FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARIZONA-SONORA DESERT MUSEUM • VOLUME 12 ISSUE 4 • OCTOBER-NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2011



There's an Artist in Each of Us.



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# Art Institute continues

By Susan T. Fisher, Director, ASDM Art Institute

## He comes into the room,

relaxed, confident, and ready to pose. He has modeled before, and 15 artists staring at him do not ruffle his feathers one bit. He is after all, a professional. He is *Tyto alba*, a barn owl. He sits calmly on the leather glove of the Desert Museum docent. The class is *Animals in Art: Raptors of Arizona*.

In the Art Institute's live subject classes, instructors and staff are eager to share their knowledge of the barn owl, as well as a large number of other animals, and to discuss their significance in the desert ecosystem. Art students learn anatomy, behavior patterns, and habitat adaptations while experiencing a real-life encounter they might never enjoy in the wild. "The live animals make the classes meaningful. It's just a thrill to have this much time with them," enthuses a recent student. Some students have become Museum docents or volunteers as a result of their Art Institute classroom encounters.

The Desert Museum is known for realistic exhibits, representing the flora and fauna of the Sonoran Desert, and it seems only natural to include an art focus. In fact, it could be said that the Art Institute is the artistic voice of the Desert Museum. It offers art and photography classes, it presents art exhibits and oversees the Museum's art collections including the Vanishing Circles collection which premiered last spring in the Ironwood Gallery. Its varied coursework is attracting a growing number of students.

## OUR STUDENTS REPRESENT ALL AGES AND INTERESTS

Snowbirds, locals, and out-of-town visitors all have discovered our unique program where live animals are used as

models, a hallmark of the program. Art Institute classes provide solid professional instruction in drawing and painting on the lush grounds of the Desert Museum. Anyone 13 and over is welcome to join in; no experience is necessary.

The courses and workshops appeal to a variety of interests, for example, stay-at-home parents (now that the kids are in school) eager to return to drawing or painting. In a single classroom setting it is common to have a diverse group of recent retirees, professional artists, and teenagers who all enthusiastically harness their artistic energies.

Some of our participants have specific interests related to birds, reptiles, mammals, or landscapes. Attendees may choose to focus on a specific medium such as watercolor, oil, acrylics, graphite, or colored pencil. Whatever their interests, bonds of friendship are formed through the shared experience of learning to draw, sketch, and paint in a group.

## WE'VE COME A LONG WAY IN 10 YEARS

The Art Institute joined the Desert Museum family in 2001. The program was initially organized around a series of classes designed for intermediate to advanced artists. Museum archivist, Peggy Larson, recalls staff uncertainty about the introduction of an art program in a museum setting. Larson says, "At first we weren't sure how much art would contribute to the Museum's overall purpose of education and conservation, but we were overlooking our own necessity for art and illustration. For example, interpretive signs, maps, Getgo Guides, and books all require an artist to express with pictures what is

not as easily accomplished with words. Pictures fill the blanks in communication when words cannot."

"We've long exhibited plants and animals in excellent, naturalistic exhibits, written about them, talked about them, filmed them, and demonstrated their behavior and biology," Larson says. "Through the fine art works collected and/or exhibited at the Museum, and through Art Institute classes, the Museum staff, students, and visitors gain a valuable perspective of the plants, animals, and landscape. We see these things through the eyes of artists who, through their art, display their personal and emotional insights. Art stretches our minds, our connections, and our empathy for the desert and the living things within it."



Raptor Free Flight meow. © ASDM Art Institute, Susan Fisher

Classes are not always in classrooms. There's a broad spectrum of painting and sketching opportunities on the Museum grounds.

# to reinforce the Museum's mission



Baldwin Education Building. © 2011 Rhonda Spencer

## ART INSTITUTE ATTRACTS NOTED ARTISTS AS INSTRUCTORS

Students come from across town and across the nation to learn from their favorite artists. And art instructors tell us they love teaching here because they appreciate the surroundings and the staff support for their classes.

Janie Gildow is a professional artist who has a national reputation as a colored pencil artist, and she has the student following to prove it.

Nicholas Wilson is a well-known wildlife artist with a strong commitment to the Desert Museum. A former Museum employee, Wilson created the mountain lion on the Museum logo, as well as many other paintings in the Museum collection.

Rick Wheeler, popular scratchboard artist and Art Institute instructor says, "I often come to the Museum to sketch on my own."

An impressive list of wildlife painters, plein air painters, scientific illustrators, and watercolorists who teach here are delighted to add the renowned Desert Museum to their resumes.

## WE WELCOME SPECIAL PROJECTS

The Art Institute offers students the satisfaction and pride of working on long-term efforts. The scientifically precise art of botanical illustration is the focus of one such class that has students drawing illustrations for a book about the legumes of Arizona. This ongoing class continues under the tutelage of longtime docent and well-known botanical illustrator, Margaret Pope. Her students have been working closely with Matt Johnson, a professional illustrator and botanist who hopes to see the book published. Johnson coordinates efforts to this end with the University of Arizona and Boyce

The Baldwin Education Building is home to the Art Institute and features office space, numerous multi-purpose classrooms, and exhibit space. Additionally, the Museum's art collection is stored in an area built expressly for its safekeeping, with a receiving area for visiting exhibits. In late 2012 a dedicated art classroom/studio for Art Institute classes and a new location for the Desert Museum library will open on the lower level of the building.



Pin location sketch. © Nicholas Wilson



Thompson Arboretum. Projects similar to this one attract professional artists into the classroom, and student participants reap the benefits. While photography has many advantages in capturing natural subjects, illustrators can create on a single page all parts of the plant in a scale that suits the botanist's needs. The plants can be shown in summer foliage, blooms, and fruit, all in one illustration, impossible in a single photograph.

Joan McGann, program graduate, has completed illustrations of desert grasses in minute and exacting detail, and she has contributed paintings to the Vanishing Circles collection. "This is where art and science meet," McGann explains. "It is the combination of scientific accuracy produced with artistic flair that is rewarding for me." McGann's work has been recognized by the American Society of Botanical Artists, has been shown in the New York Horticultural Society Exhibit, and is currently being shown in "Losing Paradise?" an exhibit on display at Kew Gardens in London.

### ART INSTITUTE PHOTOGRAPHY CLASSES ARE A HUGE SUCCESS

Instructor, docent, and professional photographer, Jay Pierstorff, has created several photography classes for the Art Institute. His Behind-

the-Scenes Photography sessions have grown to twice as many offerings this year as last. Shawnee Riplog-Peterson, Curator of Mammology and Ornithology, works with Jay to offer opportunities that make getting those close-up shots of intricately defined feathers easy. An added bonus is that this class opens areas of the Museum that are not normally accessible to visitors.

Photographers are quick to sign up for Dr. John Schaefer's course. He teaches at the Art Institute twice a year, and his workshops are always full, with a waiting list. The former president of the University of Arizona was a student of photography pioneer, Ansel Adams. Dr Schaefer also helped found the Center for Creative Photography at the U of A. His well-known, close-up photographs of desert plant life can be seen on the pages of Arizona Highways and featured in many places throughout Arizona.

### ART INSTITUTE CONTINUES TO INSPIRE

Students at the Art Institute learn about the desert with skilled art instructors, docents, and staff. They observe, draw, paint, photograph, and learn about the Sonoran Desert in meaningful ways that far surpass a casual stroll past exhibits.

Do students consider their personal conservation efforts a direct result of their art studies? We know one person who does. An ardent pursuit of botanical illustration inspired one woman to build a diverse and encompassing program devoted to "the creative interpretations of the desert ecosystem and the living plants and animals that inhabit it." "Conservation through Art Education" became her mission and her motto. She is Priscilla V. Baldwin, founder of the Art Institute.

Art Institute class offerings can be found in our on-line catalog at: [www.desertmuseum.org/arts](http://www.desertmuseum.org/arts). \*

Everything that hops, hisses, growls, or chirps has artistic value at the Art Institute.