

Permanent Images

by Christopher Camuto

For six decades, Eldridge Hardie has been painting the scenes of American outdoor life. When we see one of Hardie's paintings, we recognize our own experiences made permanent on canvas. I've made and missed the grouse in *Crossing Shot Grouse*, over a setter like those on point amid that autumn color. I've waited out the drift of *Evening Hatch*, unsure, like the angler depicted there, whether light emanated from the river or the sky, hoping for a take before darkness set in. And so have you. "My ideas for pictures come directly from my experiences in the field. I can't recall any painting that hasn't originated from this source of inspiration." It matters, of course, that Hardie fished and hunted from West Texas near Paso del Norte in the valley of the Rio Grande as he made his way in life as an illustrator and artist who never strayed from his roots.

All this windup suggests that **THE SPORTING ART OF ELDRIDGE HARDIE: PAINTINGS OF UPLAND HUNTING, ANGLING, AND WATERFOWLING** (STACKPOLE BOOKS, HARDBOUND, LARGE FORMAT, 192 PAGES, \$75) is good company. Turn the pages on 150 watercolors and oils depicting upland hunting, angling, and waterfowling. Although the paintings are undated (which would have been helpful for understanding his evolution as a painter), you can enjoy a wide range of technique and expression, within Hardie's fundamental realism, that represent the harvest from 52 years of painting. Most appealing, and generous-spirited, are those scenes depicted from a point of view that makes the viewer the hunter or angler. The scatter of quail in *Point*

Blank or the flare of a grouse in *Held Tight* are near enough to the real thing to lead you right back to those iconic moments in your own memory. *Sifting in Pintails* and *November Mallards* will put you right where you want to be. If you want to stand on the bank of a river and think about things, try *Field Study Miramichi River at Two & a Half Mile Rapids*.

Hardie attends to nature in subtle detail, vividly captures the energy of game, and is clearly devoted to dogs—setters, pointers, Brits, Labs—each of which he depicts as an irreplaceable partner in the field. Although the scenes of Hardie's art are always familiar, there is nothing generic in what he does. And his hunters and anglers have a quiet, well-worn confidence about them. They and their gear look broken in to their recreation, their days afield a part of their lives. Included in this book are pages of field sketches and notes that provide insight into Hardie's admirable powers of observation and painstaking process.

Waterfowling has always gone its own way, quietly and out of the mainstream. Except regionally, duck and goose hunting don't have the public cachet of deer hunting and trout fishing. Perhaps it's just as well. The waterfowlers I've known were inclined to keeping odd hours and practicing dark arts. Except for their critical role in conserving wetlands in the 20th century, I think most waterfowlers are content to be a hunting subculture that enjoys being out of view. All the more reason to value the collection assembled by G. K.

*I was born to
paint, hunt, and fish.*

Eldridge Hardie,
The Sporting Art of Eldridge Hardie