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Dale Weiler *Love Knot*: Mother and infant African elephant, 24x16x15 inches
Virginia steatite on steel, © Dale Weiler

The Awakening

Dale Weiler

My expedition to Tanzania in 2013 was the tipping point. Prior to this trip, my art seemed self-serving and narrow in focus. Very simply, my sculpting was a vehicle to offer my perspective on how I viewed my environment, while generating a revenue stream for my family. I hadn't really contemplated the broader perspective of how my art might serve a greater purpose resulting in a more extensive reach. I was reaping the rewards of my sculpting without giving something back in return.

This all changed when, in September of 2013, I joined eight other artists on a trip to observe and photograph wildlife in Tanzania. It was an opportunity to experience firsthand the impact unchecked poaching was having on the population of mammals and birds. As a child, I had been exposed to the natural world through the eyes of my father, a nationally acclaimed sporting art watercolorist and ardent sportsman. I grew up emerged in hunting, fishing and enjoying the outdoors. Over the years, however, I moved away from hunting animals to observing and sculpting them. The Tanzania trip opened up yet another revelation. I now realized I had to go one step further and help protect them.

Prior to this trip I had been frustrated by my inability to identify causes where I could actually make a difference. Each opportunity I considered was dismissed either by my skepticism of the

merits of the program or the actual difference I individually might be able to make. It was all too easy to fabricate excuses for not getting involved. The first step always seemed too large and overwhelming to initiate any action on my part. As it turns out, it really wasn't that big a deal. I just had to take the first step.

The last three years have opened an entirely new world to me. I am beginning to use my sculpting as a vehicle to bring public awareness to the plight of our wildlife and degradation of our environment. As it did for my father, art opened my eyes to the wonders of nature and my trip to Africa ultimately awakened my senses to the precarious position our planet now finds itself. Resources we have enjoyed might not be available to the next generation. In the last year, my wife Loti and I decided to start making a conscious effort to protect what we have inherited and become better stewards of all our natural resources.

To that end, Loti's and my first step in this new adventure has been to educate ourselves in what is occurring around us. While various events were capturing the headlines (global warming, disastrous oil spills and the slaughter of elephants and gorillas) there were so many other less publicized tragedies occurring, some of which were much closer to home than we had realized. By talking with friends who had already become involved, local environmental and conservation groups, wildlife organizations, browsing the internet and even contacting our state zoo, we are beginning to gain a grasp on what is occurring in our own backyard and around the world. Needless to say, we are overwhelmed by the number of causes we can support.

We quickly realized we needed a filter or screening process to help us decide on which areas we wanted to pursue. This has been both a challenging, but incredibly enlightening process and we have found it to be invaluable in helping us refine the myriad of issues needing attention.

Our first litmus test for supporting a specific cause is determining if the cause is something in which we are passionate. The second is determining the legitimacy of the organization. This can prove difficult, but we have found it is critical to determine how much of the funding actually goes to the cause rather than administrative and other ancillary purposes. Next we talk and meet with key individuals in the organization to get a feel for the passion they possess. Lastly, we determine if there's a good fit between what they need and what we have to offer.

On a local level Loti and I have supported land conservation groups, funded the creation and maintenance of three Monarch butterfly gardens, and contributed to local nature related arts groups and museums in our area. On a statewide level, we are in discussions with our state zoo in Asheboro, NC to map out possible areas of common interest. While zoos can be very

controversial, we found most are involved in far reaching environmental causes and diligently work to protect critically endangered species. We are especially impassioned with their efforts to protect the few elephants remaining in Vietnam and on a local level, tracking and monitoring hellbenders, a large salamander endemic to the Eastern US.

On a national level, Loti and I have been in discussions with various museums and other institutions to curate exhibitions encompassing environmental impact issues on wildlife. We are currently organizing an exhibition at the Roger Tory Peterson Institute in Jamestown, NY opening in April of 2017. By showcasing both my father's and my artwork, we hope to educate the public on how our love of nature influenced and guided our lives and art careers and how we can all make a difference in this world.

Loti's and my journey is just beginning (and here we are in our 60's), and it has already had a life changing effect on our perspective of our environment. We now see things through a different lens and have a much deeper appreciation for wildlife and our environment which we took for granted for so many years. A path is opening to incorporate my and my father's art into a vehicle to help give back some of the bounty and experiences that we have gained in our lifetime. It feels good to finally be able to pay it forward.



[Dale Weiler](#) has chosen a three dimensional medium, stone, to translate what he sees in nature. Working to protect our wildlife and environment, his sculptures reflect his evolving dedication to conservation and preservation programs. Traveling the world to both expand their awareness and inspire his artistic thirst, Dale and his wife Loti, continue their journey to honor and protect our

world. Dale is a Signature Member of [The Society of Animal Artists](#).

This post is part of the [MAHB's Arts Community space](#) –an open space for MAHB members to share, discuss, and connect with artwork processes and products pushing for change. Please visit the [MAHB Arts Community](#) to share and reflect on how art can promote critical changes in behavior and systems and [contact Erika](#) with any questions or suggestions you have regarding the new space.

MAHB Blog: <http://mahb.stanford.edu/creative-expressions/awakening/>