

August 25, 2016



**Kelly Dodge** *Mischief Maker*, Galapagos Sea Lion and Espanola Mockingbird, 13.5x20.5 inches, Pastel on Museum paper © Kelly Dodge

## **Galapagos, Forty Days and Forty Nights –An Artist’s Sojourn** Kelly Dodge

Seemingly oblivious to my presence, a rather large female sea lion lifted her head momentarily to eye me before returning to her midday slumbers. She scratched occasionally while her pup trundled curiously behind a colourful marine iguana whose swishing tail proved too tempting to resist. The large female was soon disturbed by mockingbirds that seemed most interested in picking flies from her nose. As I sketched her, a pair of mockingbirds decided I too was worthy of investigation. They circled me for several minutes...as though insisting to be included in my sketch.

In the fall of 2009 I was blessed to be named the recipient of the 10th fellowship of the [Artists For Conservation Flag Expedition Program](#). This unique program makes possible the artistic field study of unique, threatened habitats and rare or endangered species in remote regions of the world. The Artists for Conservation Foundation made possible my expedition, [“Galapagos, Forty Days and Forty Nights –An Artist’s Sojourn”](#).

The Galapagos Islands are isolated from other land masses, straddling the equator with the nearest land, mainland Ecuador, 960 km to the east. They are made up of 13 large islands, 6 smaller islands and over 40 islets in the most active oceanic volcanic region in the world. The

islands are home to high numbers of endemic species. During my expedition I observed critically endangered waved albatrosses, dueling marine iguanas, curious penguins, flightless cormorants and other fascinating creatures, including the famous Galapagos giant tortoises. Munching contentedly on foliage, tortoises sometimes lumbered towards me to sniff my bare legs; marine iguanas walked over my toes; and comical birds, aptly named blue-footed boobies, crudely scratched their nests in the trails making it necessary to maneuver around them.



**Kelly Dodge** *Particularly Poignant*, Yellow Warbler and Galapagos Giant Tortoise Pooh, 12x23 inches, Pastel on Museum Paper © Kelly Dodge

In my quest to artistically capture the essence of Galapagos and the spirit of its creatures, I was struck by the fact that only 5% of residents ever get to experience what I did. During my 40-day expedition, I visited 11 of the 13 larger islands and although the population on one of the islands now exceeds 20,000 people, many residents know only the villages and immediate areas in which they live. Sadly, they have not experienced the pristine national park areas. The inhabited islands are undergoing severe ecological change and the primary terrestrial threats are introduced species (especially goats, cats, pigs and invasive plants) and habitat destruction. Due to the islands remoteness and relatively recent discovery, the endemic species thrived with little predation resulting in the unique lack of fear I had the pleasure of observing. It is this isolation that makes native plants and animals so vulnerable to new arrivals. Their future depends entirely on their continued existence on the islands.

This beautiful corner of Creation also finds itself corrupted by many of the outside world's social problems such as AIDS, drugs, unemployment, alcoholism, teen pregnancies and child pornography. Surging tourism has risen from 17,000 visitors in 1980 to almost 170,000 in 2009. Residents need water, food and building materials. Although these are problems common

throughout the world, they are magnified by the fragile ecosystem of Galapagos. Changes intended to make man more comfortable, often have the opposite effect on the natural world. The challenge is how and where to make necessary changes to meet the needs of the population while enhancing sustainability.

Having gathered abundant reference material, I returned home to begin my studio journey. My paintings are my interpretation of the beauty and wonder of Galapagos, through which I hope to inspire personal preservation and conservation attitudes. No species exists on its own –we all exist as members of intimately related communities. The Galapagos is one such community, sharing a distinct environment in a socially symbiotic relationship with mankind.

As I recall those first moments in Galapagos, watching silently as the mother sea lion napped while her curious pup ‘stalked’ the iguana and the mockingbirds ‘stalked’ me, I cannot help being moved by that single, beautiful example of Creation. We are but tenants here, called as custodians on behalf of future generations and all species, to tend the garden of Creation.

The good news is that 95% of Galapagos native species remain intact today. Galapagos is still an ecological wonder that has the potential to set an example for sustainable growth. If governments, conservation groups, developers and individuals can work together in an effort to achieve a balance between the needs of humans and the natural world in Galapagos, it can be done elsewhere.

I have had the privilege of meeting firsthand the creatures who become the subjects of my artwork. My desire is to share this experience with others who may never be able to encounter firsthand a wild creature in their natural environment. As stewards of Creation, we must remember our place in the natural world. My art is a celebration of the privileged place I hold in partnership with my fellow creatures and my Creator. A genuine appreciation of our place in the natural order is where true change begins — a truth driven home by my visit to the extraordinary islands of Galapagos.

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[Canadian artist Kelly Dodge's](#) first exhibition marked the beginning of a fast rising career that has garnered both national and international recognition. She is a signature member of the Artists for Conservation (AFC), the Pastel Society of America, and the [Society of Animal Artists](#),



N.Y. In 2004 she was deemed an 'Artist of Note' by Wildlife Art magazine. In 2009 she received the prestigious AFC Flag Expedition Fellowship enabling her to travel to the Galapagos Islands for the purposes of artistic field research. She has been awarded the AFC Medal of Excellence twice. This award is given annually in recognition of extraordinary artwork.

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