

Something Goes Here

By Perry G. Baker

Glendale, Arizona

[Note: Perry Baker died on April 14, 2006, before completing this article.]

Hearing our editor's warm voice on the phone early one Saturday morning sent a chill down my spine. Had she finally gotten over that little unpleasantness from the LBHA Holiday Party? I mean, the lawyers had stopped calling me several weeks ago, and the collectors from the hospital seemed to have been thrown off my trail after I changed my phone number. I had thought I was finally in the clear, which was the only reason I answered that phone in the first place.

Well, obviously, she had not forgotten nor forgiven. What she said made the hairs on my neck, all three or four of them, stand up straight: My assignment was to attend an art show. An art show! In Scottsdale, no less. I pictured those scared troopers running down Last Stand Hill and jumping headlong into a dead-end pocket in Deep Ravine. I knew just how they felt. An art show. I had planned on lounging on my sofa, following Major League Baseball through three time zones on my cable TV, and quaffing a six pack of my favorite cold beverage. An art show! That was certainly the last time I would ever offer to start a Yule log at a party and, by the way, how was I to know that badger at the door was not her pet?

So, there I was, sleepwalking through rooms of pastel urchins with big eyes, imploring me to empty my wallet and give them a new home wall to decorate, and that's when I turned the corner and froze. Stopped dead in my tracks. Had to scoop my jaw up off the floor. I had wandered into a corner of the gallery labeled "Thunder on the Greasy Grass: A Series of Paintings Commemorating the Battle of The Little Bighorn on its 130th Anniversary," a series of magnificent paintings by the noted historical artist, Kenneth Ferguson.

Now, I should note here that my knowledge of art pretty much begins and ends with old *Far Side* cartoons stuck on the side of the fridge. I have no idea what all those fancy Italian phrases mean and normally, if given the choice between, oh, let's say, staring at a Picasso on my wall or that cute cat hanging by his paws to the tree branch, well, I'd go with the cat 100% of the time. So I hope you will forgive the fact that I can't really describe the classical genesis of the shape of Custer's nose or how the beadwork on Sitting Bull's shirt owes its color to some Renaissance school I've never heard of. But bear with me here because this stuff really is pretty cool. It's at least on a par with the best of Gary Larson, and that's saying a lot.

I looked around to make sure the wife had wandered off amongst the pastel urchins, and I carefully stepped inside the room. It was a display the likes of which I had not seen outside of the Custer Battlefield Museum in Garryowen, Montana. There was Custer, surrounded by portraits of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse and Moving Robe Woman and Brave Bear and more. I had to pinch myself to see if I had suffered some sort of stroke while cleaning out the infernal garage but, no, it was real. I was at the art show, and I was in heaven.

The first thing you see when you approach Ken's display area is the incredible image of George Armstrong Custer, dressed in his buckskins, arms folded across his chest, standing against a

backdrop of a tattered guidon, rendered in subdued tones of browns and red and blue and gold. It stops me dead in my tracks, and I have to stand there for several minutes just staring at the most evocative image I have ever seen. It is outstanding. Once I get over the initial awe of seeing this portrait of Custer, I focus in on those of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse on either side of him. The same earthy colors dominate all of Ken's paintings, and it is readily apparent that this guy knows his LBH lore. As I move in closer and begin to focus on the fine details, the pictographs in the background and the beadwork on their clothes, I notice a tall, bearded guy standing off to the right, watching me as I drool over these paintings. It's Ken.

I should interject here that the artist, Kenneth Ferguson, is one terrific battle buff. He has spent time sitting on the porch of the visitor center staring up at the monument, hearing the yips and shouts of the warriors and flinching at the reports of the guns. He can taste the dust and smoke and blood in the air and he knows, he really does know, what the faces of the troopers looked like as they fired their last shots from their Colts and realized that they were alone and exposed in the midst of that maelstrom. Ken knows what Crazy Horse must have looked like. He has an incredible empathy for Moving Robe Woman and Brave Bear. He has captured the essence of Sitting Bull like no one else ever has. And *Thunder on the Greasy Grass* is his homage to the battle on its 130th anniversary.

If you have made it far enough to read this report, you have already seen Ken's exceptional art. You know this just may be the most impressive display of Little Bighorn art ever produced. All of Ken's paintings reflect his distinctive approach to watercolor, pushing the boundaries of this medium and displaying his unique techniques. These paintings have a rich color and deep saturation seldom seen in this medium. And I know that because he told me so.

Ken, as it turns out, is a terrific guy to sit around and talk about the battle with. He can hold his own when discussing the fall of Calhoun Hill and is eager to show me his current work in progress, a sergeant, firing his last shot from a revolver, at the bottom of Deep Ravine. His paintings exhibit an intriguing mixture of romanticism and realism and make it clear that this artist has a deep and abiding interest in his subject matter.

Now, having given him that great buildup, I am really excited to tell you what he has offered to do for us: Kenneth Ferguson, great artist, true history buff, Little Bighorn Battle student, and all-around nice guy, has offered to make prints available for us, with all proceeds going to the Battlefield. That is just so cool that I even found myself forgetting my ball games. When we were talking about the availability of his work, and I was trying to remain nonchalant when I saw the price tags, he mentioned that he never produces prints because he prefers to spend his time working on new pieces.

However, as we discussed the various renovations that are taking place at the Battlefield and the expansion of the visitor center, he asked if there was some way he could help contribute to those efforts through his art. We talked about the various projects that could benefit and he quickly offered to donate a set of prints that would be offered exclusively through ***SOMETHING GOES HERE. And stuff will go here and so forth . . . and this darn article will finally end.***