

Stephen Holland

There is an art to sports, one that most of us can only understand when we see Michael Jordan fly through the air toward the goal or witness a shot by Tiger Woods as it glides precisely to its resting place in the final hole. Beyond that, there is an intensity in sports that can never be captured with a mere photograph—in those frozen images, we miss the cheering of the frenzied crowds, the rush of expectancy as the ball rushes towards its target, and the calm of a master of the game.

It takes an artistic master to capture those moments, and artist Stephen Holland is one of those masters. In his hands, the greatest players of yesterday and today are caught with all the energy of seeing them in person, especially through Holland's use of painted words that recall the cheering crowds, the frenzied brushstrokes that capture the movement of his subjects, and the perfect expressions on the faces of each athlete.

It is somewhat fitting that Holland could never play sports himself. As a child, Holland was handicapped and needed a steel brace on his leg to get around, limiting his participation in sports to watching his friends and family play in his hometown of The Bronx in New York. Instead, Holland devoted his talents to art, drawing images of his friends while he learned about sports from his athletic brother.

Lacking the ability to hire professional models of any sort, Holland instead began to paint images of the athletes that he found in boxing magazines, giving them a much greater intensity than the photos were able to. Over the years, his talent evolved to the extent that he was able to attend New York's Art Students League, the School of Visual Arts, and the Pratt Institute.

Named by the American Sport Art Museum as Sports Artist of the Year in 1993, Holland has since emerged as one of the foremost sports artists of our generation following his art's first appearance on gallery walls. Early recognition of his work landed him with the distinction of being the official artist of the Los Angeles Kings. In addition, Holland was one of only 12 artists selected by the U.S. Olympic Committee to create artwork for the 100th anniversary of the Olympics.

Today, there is a waiting list of up to eight months for commissioned works, and many of these commissions come from the athletes themselves. Not surprisingly, Holland has become a personal friend of many of these athletes, including Muhammad Ali, whose wife chose one of Holland's images of Ali to be the main image used during his 50th birthday celebration. Like his subjects, Holland's artwork is big, often measuring around four by six feet to capture the power of the players.

Today, Holland lives in Santa Barbara, California with his wife J'Nelle, whom he credits for most of his success. His artwork, which is increasingly found in the collections of celebrities, athletes, and private collectors around the world, continues to evolve and grow more exciting with each new artwork.

Holland's story is as fascinating as that of any of his subjects, and Jack Gallery is proud to host him and his artwork in Las Vegas for the World Series of 2008.