

Reviews by Stephen J. Bodio

Puget Sound Through an Artist's Eye

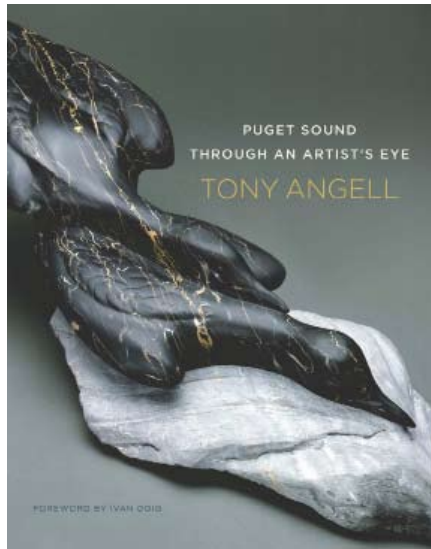
by Tony Angell

(University of Washington Press)

Sculptor Tony Angell's *Puget Sound Through an Artist's Eye* is like a four-decade diary by an artist-naturalist carved in stone. His characters are the myriad denizens of this rich ecosystem—petrels, plovers, cormorants, gulls, falcons, the occasional otter; perhaps above all the omnipresent raven, “under whose wisely wrought wings everything prospers,” as Ivan Doig writes.

If this were a “mere” coffee-table book showcasing Angell's birds, it would still be magnificent. But it is, first, a celebration of the Sound: “The natural diversity of Puget Sound as the artist's palette”; and second, an inquiry into the artist's craft: “Bringing experience and inspiration into artistic expressions.” There may be more visual artists who can write than writers who can paint or draw, but Angell is exceptional both as an observer of nature and at his own mind and hands' work.

He starts his journey in the high country and its valleys, with Steller's Jays and owls and forest hawks in winged stone. An eagle is rendered in black chlorite, as are many raptors, to bring out form without the distraction of color, but Snow Geese and ermine are done in appropriate white alabaster and creamy marble. As he reaches the estuary, falcons appear, one peregrine joined by a wave to a dense flock of plovers, an incredible tour de force in bronze. Cliffs and islands bring fish, loons, Bald Eagles, guillemots, and as he reaches open water, orcas, murrelets (who link back to the forests where they nest), and scoters. He explains their habits, their links, their changing fortunes. Incredibly, most



of these creatures, despite their different shapes and textures, are wrought from stone, though he adds sharp-edged ink drawings to show striking plumage or the structure of a feeding frenzy.

It is the second half of the book that fascinates me most, as he describes such disparate influences as Renaissance and Greek art to the poet Ted Roethke (“I was mightily impressed by his combination of physicality and sensitivity. Creativity and athleticism are not mutually exclusive.”) And stone sculpture must be the most physical of the visual arts. He cites Tunnicliffe, Rockwell Kent, and F. L. Jacques as influences on his drawing, and, like his friend Tom Quinn, the Samurai painter Musashi.

For sculpture, he was blessed by good public access to steatite, chlorite, and marble. Blank stone and Native artists pointed him toward his beloved ravens, almost his totemic bird. (“My many years in the company of ravens, however, have probably had the greatest influence on my work.”) However fine his ink-line birds, sculpture seems to say more to him. “‘Try to move or shape me,’ it seem to say. Some of my fascination comes from knowing something initially unyielding can be coaxed into revealing the forms, patterns, and colors within it.” He then proceeds to

show us, step by step, a white Gyrfalcon being “released” from the marble.

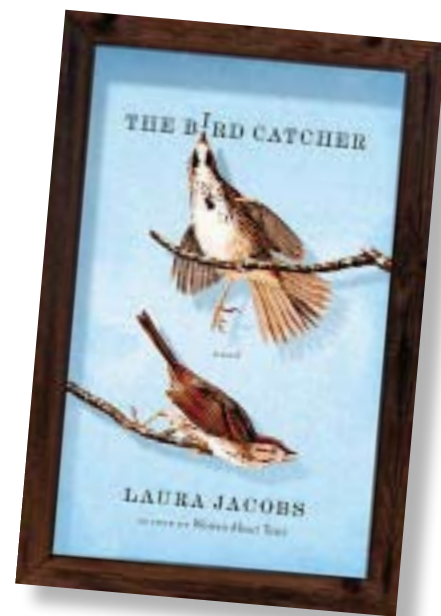
Watching, drawing, picking the medium all contribute to Angell's art. Could we be losing the opportunity to have more artists like him? As he says, “My time spent with my subjects has also involved direct handling of them. Given today's regulations on keeping wild animals it was fortunate for me that as a child there were few such restrictions.” It would be a shame if Angell's generation were, as the book title says, “the last children in the woods.” We cannot love what we do not know.

The Bird Catcher

by Laura Jacobs

(St. Martin's Press)

Regulations such as those mentioned above actually bear on the plot climax of *The Bird Catcher*, a novel about Manhattan, love, birds, and art by Laura Jacobs. Margret, a Manhattan “arts” woman, dresses windows at Saks and associates with the gallery scene at night. But she also shares her lifelong habit of birding with her husband, a professor at Columbia. Both author and character share a birder's (and an artist's) mind. Margret on field guides:



“Roger Tory Peterson's was the guide she grew up with, but the drawing was static. And though she loved the charming Golden Guide, its Blackburnian looked like a dutiful student. National Geo's male was brilliantly colored but forlorn. Kaufman, a new guide with photos, was invaluable for jizz, but it was Pough, a guide from the forties, which got the closest.”

She has the birder's eye: “When a flit or blur was different it was almost as if your body knew before your eyes knew before your body did.” And a naturalist's cool eye unlike her ultra-refined friends. “There was a bird on the second-story ledge that was probably a pigeon, but she always checked twice now, ever since she looked out her apartment window and saw a kestrel on a nearby air conditioner, eating a sparrow. It plucked the bird like a cook at the sink . . . when only the bottom half was left, a cup with two spindly legs, from the gruesome goblet the falcon pulled out the guts and swallowed them whole. And most people would have thought it was a pigeon.”

She is propelled from this idyllic life by a tragedy and begins to create a strange art form for herself: she collects dead songbirds, mostly warblers on migration, killed in collision with Manhattan high-rises, stuffing them and putting them into glass-fronted boxes, not unlike those of Joseph Cornell. “The black-throated blues. The box was filled with a bower of branches painted bone, ivory, and cream, while the back of the box and the inside rims had steep color, a midnight blue she'd leafed with silver stars. The two birds flitted within, Tamino and Pamina.”

When her best friend, an Alpha-female gallery owner, suggests a show, Margret becomes an overnight success—and a violator of Federal wildlife law. I won't tell you more about this tragicomic denouement, but Margret, and even her stuffed birds, come through well. Read this fine novel, even if books about Manhattan society aren't your “thing”; it is full of treasures.

EXPERIENCE AN ISLAND ON THE GEORGIA COAST WHERE ONLY THE SKY IS CROWDED.

From the moment you step ashore, you will sense the magic of this extraordinary natural sanctuary. Unspoiled. Undeveloped. Unchecked for killing.

Little St. Simons Island, Georgia is a private, luxury island along the migratory flyway. 16,000 acres of wilderness, seven miles of perfect beach. Guides, accommodations, seasonal cuisine. A place that welcomes hundreds of species, yet just 30 overnight guests at a time.

For special all-inclusive rates visit LittleSSI.com. Or call (866) 833-0718

LITTLE ST. SIMONS ISLAND

NJ Audubon
Three Events -- at
ADS