

# One Fish, Two Fish...

*Artist Jeb Todd finds his inspiration in the waters of the world*



Artist portrait by Thomas Lee

**I**n A VERY SMALL STUDIO at the Emerson Cultural Center for the Arts, Jeb Todd paints portraits of fish. He paints the fish he remembers, and although they are not always anatomically correct, they are most certainly recognizable. Trout. Sunfish. Tuna. Bonefish. These are the fish of his past.

"When I was a kid, we'd go camping and fishing on the weekends," Todd says. "We'd put bits of bacon on our poles looking for sunfish, and those are the sunfish I paint."

But they are so much more than autobiographical shorthand. They are an exploration into the unknown.

"They are my interpretation of the fish's world," Todd says, turning back to his palette, a large, window-sized glass plate, placed on a set of flat metal drawers to stand hip high. Big palette knives of various sizes, large swaths of color with sloughed dried paint, push against the back of the glass. "My meditations on the

Todd stands in front of a permit fish he's working on. The background is thick and so textured that it almost lifts the image of the fish off the canvas. Parts of the blue, blue background seem to seep through the gray body of the permit fish, offering an image of movement as well as the fleeting

nature of life passing by each one of us, every day.

"I'm fascinated by the notion of taking a fish out of its aquatic world," Todd says, laying down his blue-covered brush and picking up a brush heavy with black oil paint. "It's like touching another reality, another dimension, more than the beauty of the fish."

A fishing guide for a long time, Todd always loved taking photographs of the fish his clients caught.

"Even the little ones," he says. "They were so beautiful."

Upon first glance, Todd's fish seem simple, but the more you look the more complicated they get. It's surprising and captivating. By creating an emotionally charged color-field painting as the base for his pieces, when he places the image of a fish on top of it, Todd's paintings become much more than they seem.

"I'm intrigued with how colors affect the eye," Todd says, he picks up a brush thick with gray paint and scrapes the excess off with a palette knife. "The 'backgrounds' are as important as the fish themselves."

In fact, they inform the fish experience. The intricate layers of subtle colors, hatched brushstrokes and the densely applied consistency of the surface catch the eye, grab you, and keep you interested in the figure at the forefront of the painting.

Art collector Beverly Gepfer owns several of Todd's pieces and thinks his work is brilliant.

"I think he has a distinctive niche and a unique style," Gepfer says. "Initially he started out painting only saltwater fish and then his wife encouraged him to do freshwater fish. I've purchased several of his trout pieces. He's an avid fly fisherman and a very, very good one and it shows in his work."

At her Montana ranch house, Gepfer has three or four of Todd's paintings.

"I just love his work," she says. "He's so talented. I wish he would paint more so I could buy them. I love his work so much I named one of my rooms at the ranch 'The Trout Room,' in honor of his paintings."

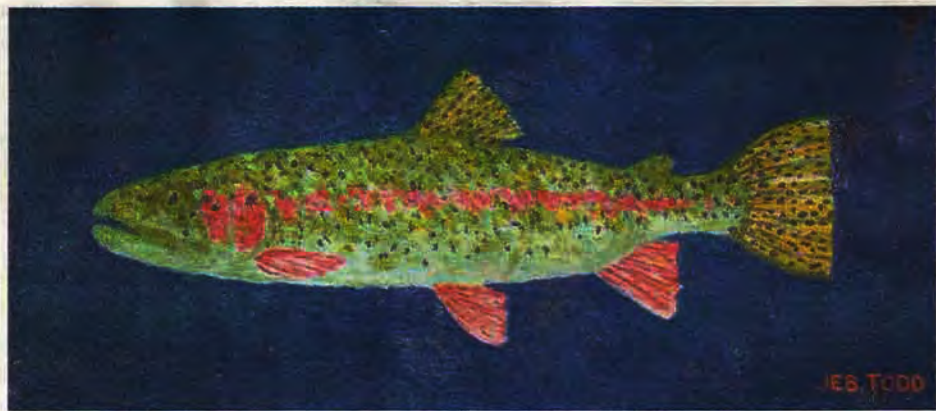
Growing up in a family of painters — Todd's aunt was a painter and his uncle still shows work in New York City — falling into the medium was like second nature. He can remember going out painting with them during the day and coming back to the studio in the evening.

"I see in front of me," he says. "I love the way the oil paint dries outside. And I can feel the mental image of the water and the fish."

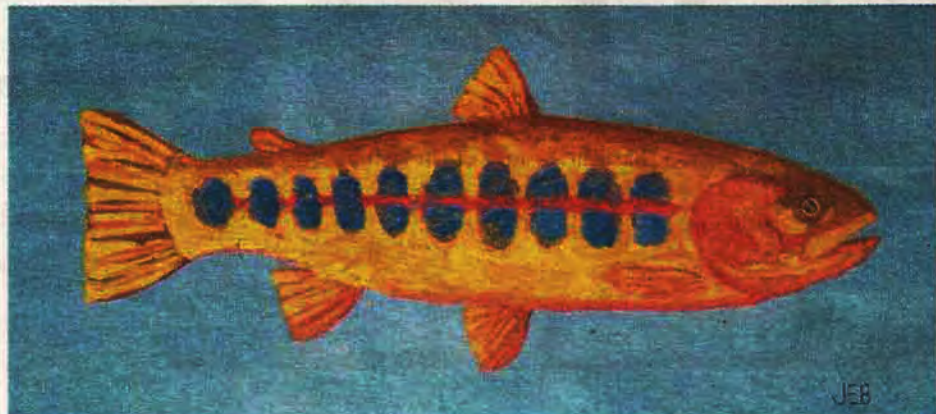
He recalls doing his first series in the Florida Keys, inspired by the ocean and unmitigated underwater life.

In the  
studio

BY MICHELE CORRIEL



Rainbow Trout 3



Golden Trout



Rainbow Trout



Bull Trout 2



Striped Bass



Sun Fish Green

"My uncle always told me to paint what you know," Todd says, coming back to the permit fish with a blue laden brush, working the darker hue into the edges of the focal image. "I know about fish."

And that's no lie.

Fellow painter and printmaker Scott Parker has known Todd for 25 years and can remember back in the mid-90s going on a fishing and painting trip in Florida.

"Jeb is the person who taught me how to fish, so whenever I look at a trout or any fish I remember him educating me on the species," Parker says. "He's a fishing fanatic and I love his closeness with the subject matter."

Parker has observed that many times when people are out fishing, they tend to take photographs of their catch, laying the fish on the bright green streamside.

"His paintings remind me of the brilliant green grass on the bank," Parker says. "He embellishes the color but he's got the fish right there, so you can really get his familiarity with and love of the subject."

As a painter, Parker is drawn to the bright plane, the background on which Todd paints his various species of fish.

"I love seeing the wonderfully vivid colors and, of course, the fish," Parker says. "I like the way Jeb lays down his paint with a fat stroke of a rich color, and when you put that in contrast to the dabs of the fish, it works well. The bright beautiful plane attracts the eye and then when I go further to see the species, it's a fun visual work. The fish is a static image but with all the detail of the brushstrokes on the fish, your eye is moving constantly, watching the pattern."

Having had the opportunity to watch Todd's progress, Parker sees the growth in Todd's work.

"He's gotten much more confident in his color choices," Parker says. "He's always been putting the bold colors in the background, but his palette has really developed. I'm excited to see where he goes from here, but I'm excited to see every painting he does." 📍

To see more of Jeb Todd's work go to [www.visionswestgallery.com](http://www.visionswestgallery.com).



VISIONS WEST GALLERIES

[www.visionswestgallery.com](http://www.visionswestgallery.com)

*Michele Corriel is a frequent contributor to At Home.*