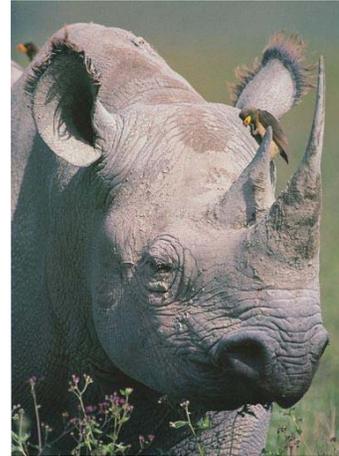




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Black Rhinoceros happily joins ambassadors in Our Shared Planet exhibit

I have long wanted to sculpt a rhino for the Our Shared Planet exhibit. If you were to search our current animal kingdom for a good representative of the prehistoric era, this is where the trail may lead you. Some rhino species have been on earth for over 50 million years, yet their fate now lies entirely in our hands. Due to the unfounded use of ground rhino horn in Asian medicinal practice, the illegal poaching of these magnificent beings has risen by 3000% since 2007, 668 last year. This makes the rhino one of the most endangered species on earth, and a perfect ambassador to raise awareness in the newly formed *Heads of State* section of the Our Shared Planet exhibit. Please follow along with the creation of this great creature, and join me in helping to raise awareness before it is too late!



Creative process of the Black Rhinoceros

As you can see in the picture above, the rhino is often accompanied by birds called oxpeckers. I have chosen to add these fun birds to the carving as a way to express the symbiosis between these two creatures while emphasizing the plight of the rhino, and the urgent need for its protection and preservation.



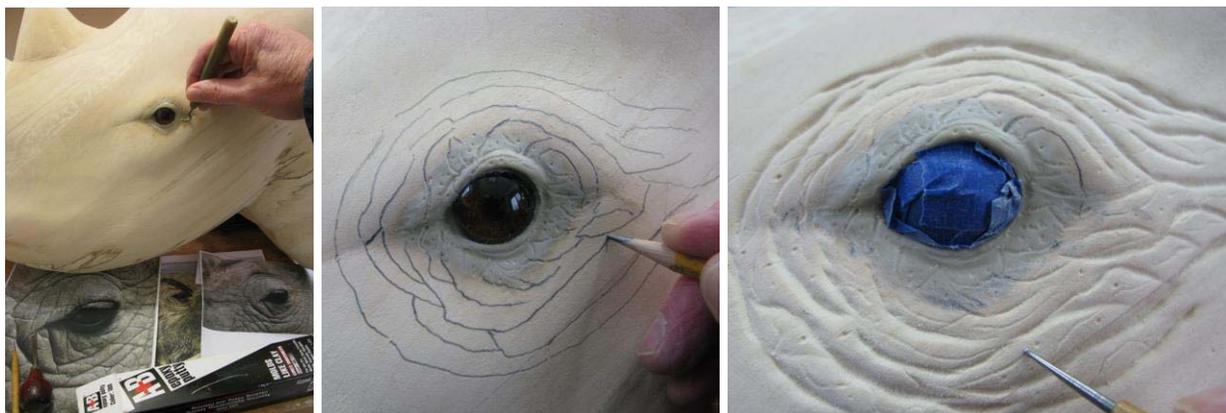
The full-size pattern that I have drawn is transferred onto the pieces selected for the two sides of the rhino's block. The center piece is laminated and cut out to form a hollow core in the middle of the rhino. This takes the strength out of the wood (causing splitting and twisting), makes the piece lighter, and gives the rhino a place to stick your arm in while working on it. I don't know how many of you have worked on a life-size rhino before, but it is no easy task. For some reason my sculptures keep getting larger. When someone recently asked me if there was an elephant in the future of the exhibit, I had to smile. Guess I'll need a bigger trailer. The last picture shows the block ready to begin the sculpting process and expose the rhino inside.



The first picture shows the hollow section in the block that will be capped with wood on completion of the piece. I then begin roughing out the rhino with an electric chainsaw and grinder. These, along with all the power tools used in my projects work great off the solar power that the panels on my trailer provide, and I never have to be plugged in anywhere!



Once inside the solar powered trailer I begin working on the smaller details such as the ears of the rhino. At this point I do a lot of my work using the rotary tools and the woodburning pens.



I then set the glass eyes with epoxy putty, draw in the wrinkles (which are many on a rhino), and sculpt them over his entire head. Did I say entire? The glass eyes are made at a small shop that specializes in any size, species, sex, or coloration of eyes for wildlife artists and taxidermists. The rhino seems to remain a little calmer if I cover his eyes for protection. It also keeps me from scratching the glass with my tools or sandpaper.



Final carving details and more wrinkles are added for the completion of the rhino. The piece is coated in shellac (center), followed by a couple layers of thinned down white gesso for primer before the painting process.



Many thin washes of acrylic paints are then added to get the proper shading, tint, and coloration. It is fun to see the creatures come to life at this point in the process. As I begin working on the birds for the piece, it almost feels as though there is a rhino looking over my shoulder. I guess there is!



The oxpeckers will be riding on the rhino, so blocks are cut and shaped in a position I have chosen to match the locations for the birds.



After working on something as large as a rhino, it is almost a relief to work on the oxpeckers. Though the birds are smaller, it is the detailing of their feathers that takes the most time. Here the woodburning pen is used to bring out that detail. The oxpeckers are now ready to paint and mount on their impressive ride.

All Aboard!



The Black Rhinoceros with accompanying Red and Yellow Billed Oxpeckers titled *All Aboard!*
H 29 x W 33 x D 15



About the Sculpture and the Rhino

The title of this piece is derived from the relationship between the rhino, a train in its own right, and his passengers, the oxpeckers. The Yellow Billed Oxpecker (front) seems to be hailing the familiar trainstation call of *All Aboard*, while the Red Billed Oxpecker takes its traveling seat on the rhino-train. The rhino and the oxpeckers strike up a mutualism or symbiosis often found in nature, where each benefits from the presence of the other. The oxpeckers diet consists mainly of ticks and insects that are found on the rhino's skin. You can see how each would gain in this respect. The rhino also benefits from the oxpeckers excellent vision, for though the rhino itself has superb hearing and smell, it has poor eyesight. The oxpeckers act as a sentinel on guard duty, warning the rhino with their call, or with their mass exodus, alerting the rhino of any possible approaching danger. The rhino must now choose to run or charge. Even though they are built like a tank, rhinos are very quick and agile, capable of running at over 35 mph. I hope he runs!

Fast Facts

Type: Mammal

Diet: Herbivore

Size: Height at shoulder 4.5 to 6 feet (1.4 to 1.8 m)

Weight: 1,760 to 3,080 lbs (800 to 1400 kg)

Horn size: Up to five feet

Protection status: Endangered (very)

Size relative to a 6-ft (2-m) man



You cannot help but be deeply touched by the struggles the rhino has faced. After years of rapid decline from senseless trophy hunting and poaching, the rhino was brought back from near extinction by protective measures. Its future was looking bright for the world until the recent explosion of poaching for the Asian markets. Ancient Chinese medicine claims of the value of ground rhino horn has since been invalidated numerous times. Yet in South Africa, rhinos are now being slaughtered at the rate of nearly two a day to fill the needless demand. Because the mighty rhino's horn is made of keratin, even if it worked, researchers say you would get a higher dose by chewing your own fingernails.

I am honored to recreate these magnificent beings and add them to the Our Shared Planet exhibit. It is unfortunate, but there is no shortage of animals that could use our help these days, so I have no problem choosing my next animal ambassador to sculpt for the exhibit. I could not do any of this without your help. Through the OSP exhibit and programs we help raise awareness of the importance of the natural world around us. Please share this with others and consider making a gift to Our Shared Planet to help make a difference on this planet we all share.

Simply go to:

www.oursharedplanet.org/donating.htm

Credit cards accepted or by check via our easy downloadable form.

Hope you choose to be a part of it all!

Thank you, Jim Ramsdell

Artist/Managing Director Our Shared Planet