

David N. Kitler





DAVID N-KITLER ©

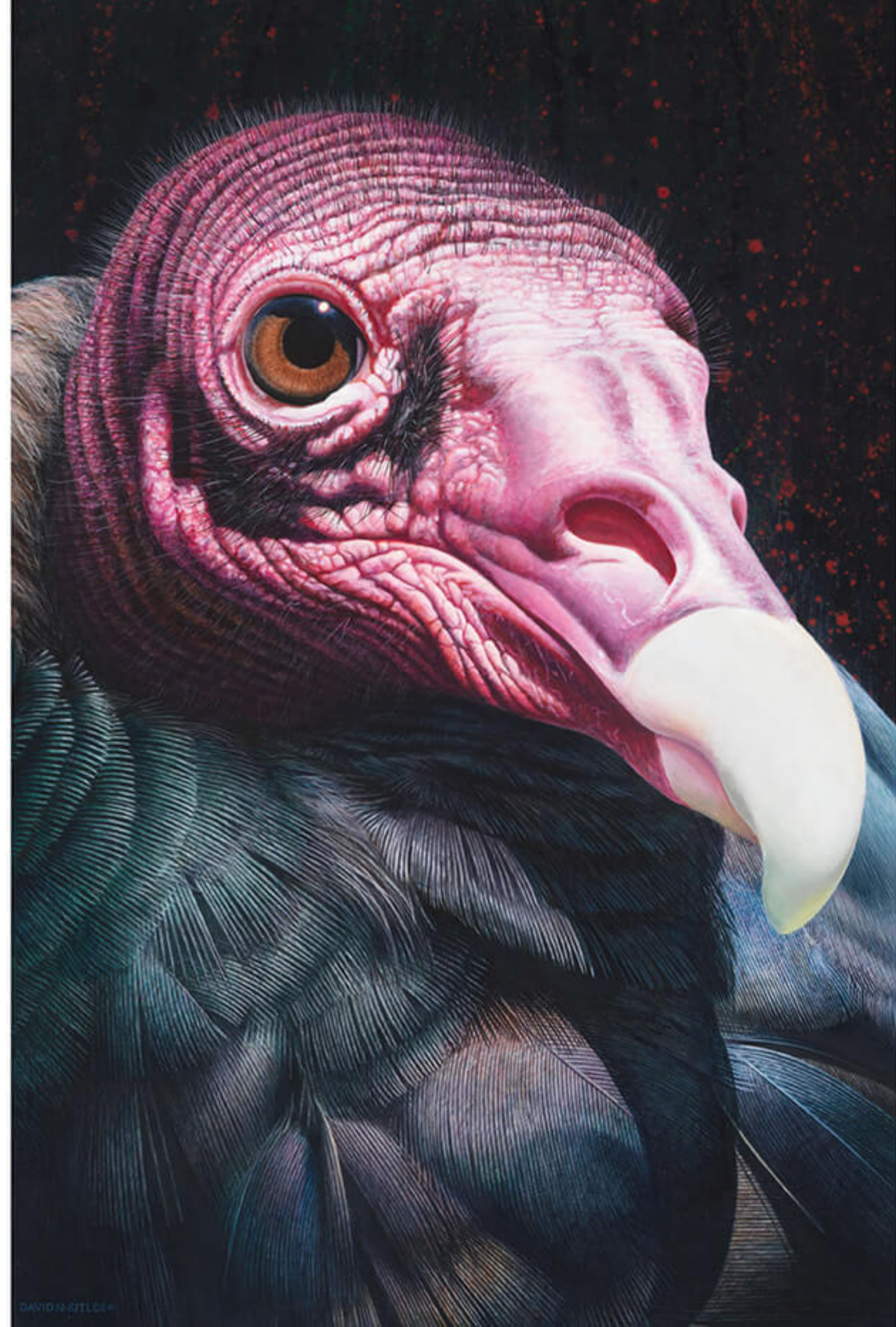
*Previous Page, Piece Keeper, acrylic on baltic birch, 33" x 24"  
This Page, above, Red-Lored Parrot, acrylic on baltic birch, 12" x 9"  
right, Larger than Life – Turkey Vulture, acrylic on baltic birch, 25.5" x 36"*

## The Invisible Clearly Seen

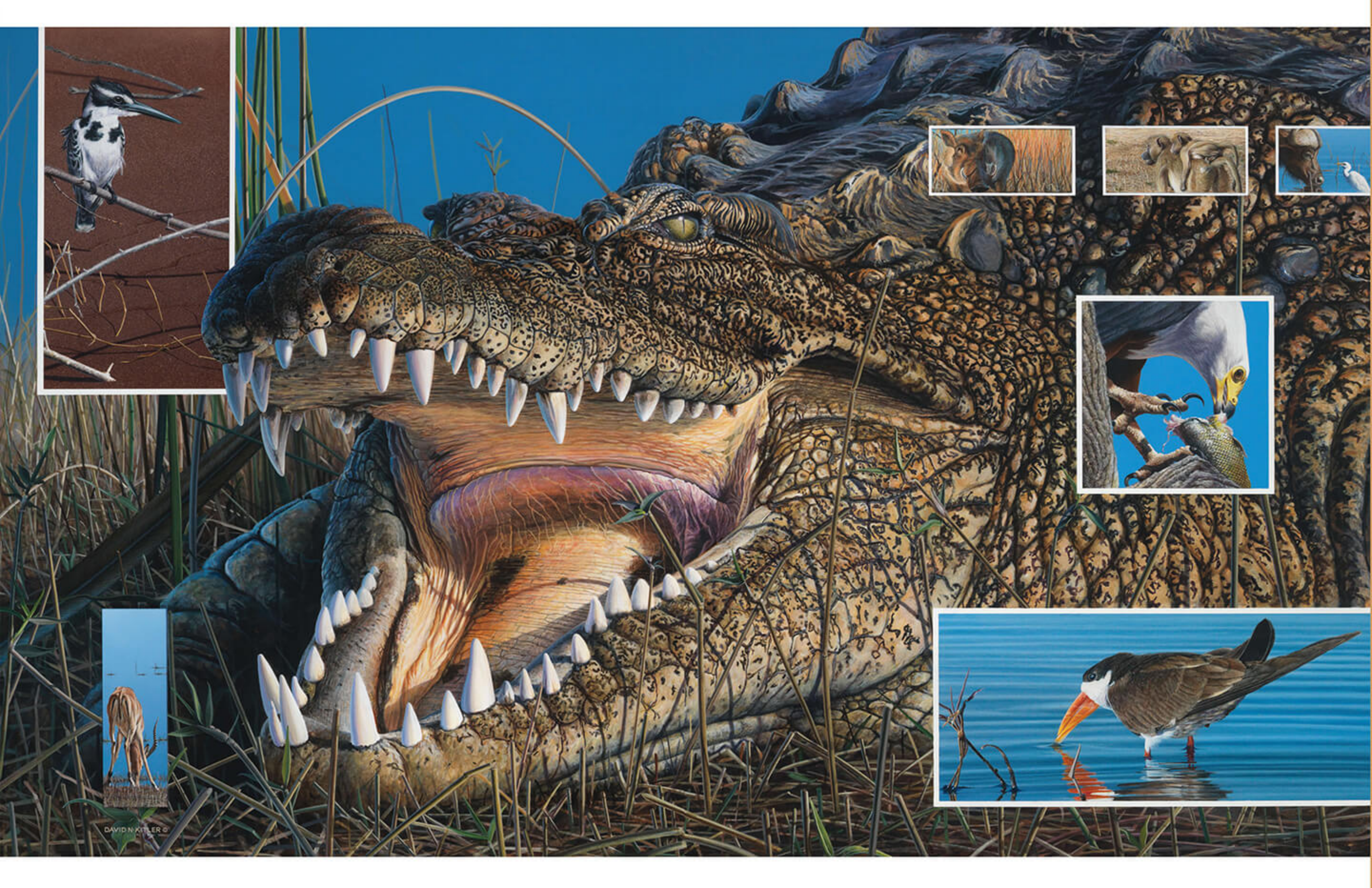
written by Ray Cronin

The natural world, for many, is a place to visit, a place outside of normal experience. For others, it's a workplace, a collection of resources. For some of us, fewer and fewer in our technological age, it is home.

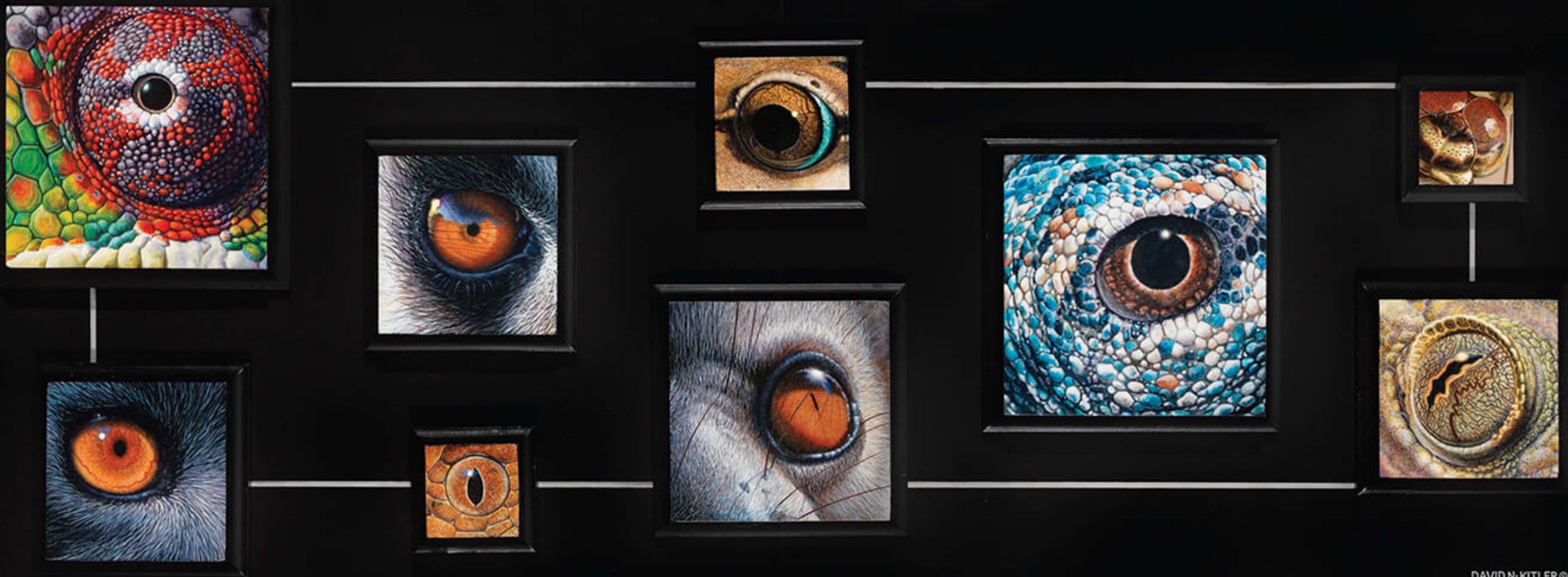
For artist David N. Kitler, nature is his inspiration, his subject, and a constant reminder of his faith. As he writes, "God is an amazing designer. The closer you look, the more there is to see..."



DAVID N-KITLER ©



DAVID N. KITLER ©



DAVID N-KITLER ©

Previous Page, *Along the Waterfront*, acrylic on baltic birch, 60" x 36"

This Page, above, *Jewels of Madagascar*, acrylic on baltic birch, 36" x 20.25"

The divide between nature and culture is as old as human society, one that many strive to overcome. Given the harsh realities of climate change, habitat destruction, water shortages and more, our relationship to the natural world has never been more fraught, and more in need of careful stewardship. "In nature, everything is dependent on something else for survival," Kitler writes. "As humans, we also depend on each other and, moreover, nature's survival depends on all of us working together."

Kitler, an acclaimed wildlife artist, takes the idea of stewardship seriously — in his art, and in his

philanthropic activities. An active conservationist, Kitler has, throughout his career, worked towards ensuring that the beauties of the natural world which inspire him will survive to support and inspire ensuing generations. His Christian faith plays a major role in all aspects of his life, and in how he views the natural world:

"Without a doubt the strongest influence in my life is the understanding that there is a God who created everything... There is a verse in the Bible that best explains it and I'll quote it here to limit confusion, it's found in the first chapter of the Book

of Romans (verse 20) and says, 'For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.'

#### A Long Path

For Kitler, as for Saint Paul, the beauty of nature reveals the handiwork and glory of God. Preserving that beauty has become Kitler's life's work and mission. His path towards art making is not one that he thinks of as "typical," marked as it was by extreme

obstacles that seemed to make the life of an artist impossible. Like many young people, he drew for fun and pleasure, and, indeed, was noted among his peers at school as someone who had talent:

"I can remember all the way back to my kindergarten (or maybe grade 1 class?) and hearing my teacher exclaim 'Look everyone, at the fire truck David painted — and there is even a dog!' It took a while for me to put two and two together, but one day it dawned on me that I was getting a lot of similar reactions to my drawings while none of my peers were," says David.



*Previous Page, White-Tailed Kite Montage,  
acrylic on baltic birch, 36" x 20.25"  
This Page, right, Pelican Up Close,  
acrylic on baltic birch, 10.25" x 10.25"*

Drawing is the foundation for so much in the arts, but initially Kitler's talent was a hobby, something that he used to indulge his passion for nature and animals. From an early age, the Toronto-born Kitler had decided that he wanted to be a veterinarian. His mother always encouraged him in his drawing however, telling him shortly before her death, "Don't let anyone ever tell you that you are not an artist." He was planning on university and eventually studies as a veterinarian, when tragedy struck his family. His mother was killed by his father, when David was seventeen, being the eldest he became the legal guardian for his four younger siblings. That was the end of his dreams of university and a career as a vet.

"After my mother's death I was accepted into Guelph University, but the lifelong dream of a being a vet was coming to a close, reality found me working in a factory making toothpaste." David shouldered his responsibilities, and for the next thirteen years he worked in that factory, five days a week, filling tubes with paste. The unremitting sameness of his day-to-day working life was assuaged by his life-long hobby" — drawing:

Just before his mother's death he had attended an exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum of wildlife art. "Animals in Art: An International Exhibition of Wildlife Art". This later proved to be a great inspiration to the young factory worker — providing a path





left, *Harpy Eagle Montage*, acrylic and graphite on baltic birch, 25" x 20"

to become the artist his mother already believed he was. The exhibition featured works by professionals, artists who were making a living in their field.

For a young person with no prior experience with the fine arts, and who had never thought that it might be a means of supporting himself, the experience was life-changing. "It featured paintings of animals done by 'old' people — people in their thirties and forties?" he remembers. "I still have the show calendar to this day."

"For thirteen years my only escape was travel and art, both were done to the extreme, and lived out with trips to places like Africa and India and years of waking up at 2:00am to paint and draw until dawn (before working an 8,10 or 12-hour shift!). It was during the factory years that I was asked to do more and more drawings, graphics and eventually, murals that a permanent escape route came into view."

#### **Becoming a Career Artist**

He began to draw and paint in earnest, garnering sales, small commissions, and eventually murals. When he was 25 he decided that he wanted to study art formally, to gain the professional credibility that, he believed, came with such training. He began studies at the Ontario College of Art, taking all of his classes as night while continuing to work in the factory by day. After five years of this demanding



DAVID N. KITLER

above, *Pink Sunset*, acrylic on baltic birch, 28" x 9.5"

schedule, Kitler graduated from OCA's Illustration program with Honours.

He has never looked back. Shaking the dust of the factory from his feet, Kitler set out to make a career as an artist. His difficult route has marked his approach, and, surprisingly, the toothpaste factory has been a major influence in his approach to art making:

"The important result of the route I travelled in becoming an artist is the effect it has had on the end product. Aside from the necessary time spent developing the skill, I never wanted the process or resulting artwork to in any way appear done by formula - I made toothpaste for years and knew every step in that process, if I hadn't gotten out I would

have gone crazy, I desperately wanted to shake the factory "mentality" from my life."

#### How to Say Something Unique

The old cliché that, "there is nothing new under the sun," doesn't hold much weight with David Kitler. He strives to make something unique in every work he creates. Never satisfied with simple technical verisimilitude, he wants his paintings to feel new, to convey something about the natural world to their viewers. As technically demanding as his process is, when asked what the hardest thing about his art is, he has a ready answer:

"That's easy — the idea. Coming up with a way to show or say something different with my art in a world

where "photocopying" seems to be the end game of many artists — even if a looser (impressionistic) style is used. Much of the wildlife art I see looks like the artist did little more than go to a zoo/animal sanctuary, take a photo and clone it. Trying to sell something different to a population that has feasted on "billions and billions" of Big Mac's means a lot of extra effort has to be undertaken to educate a public that almost fears trying anything different — pandas and tigers have made a lot of artists richer, but there are other creatures in the natural realm."

#### Showcasing the Real World

There are indeed many creatures and Kitler travels all over the world to find them. His process is based

in meticulous observation — of his subjects, the animals — but also of their habitat, their behaviour, and the other animals that make up the ecosystem he is portraying. He sketches and takes numerous photographs while travelling, and collects samples such as grasses, leaves, fallen feathers, fur or other items from the subject's environment that he can bring back to his studio near Calgary.

"I learn a lot from the close-up inspection of my subject, so a lot of samples of fur and feathers occupy my cupboards and shelves. I also hang a lot of enlargements of my photos, many of my favourite shots taken on trips around the world. They not only help me plan for the next way/subject to paint, they also remind me where I once was," says David.







Previous Page, left, Pika Study, acrylic on baltic birch, 15.75" x 29"  
 top right, Madagascar Creatures of the Night I, acrylic on baltic birch, 20" x 6"

Previous Page, bottom right, Madagascar Hang-out, acrylic and graphite on baltic birch, 36" x 24"  
 This Page, above, The Web of Life, acrylic on baltic birch, 30" x 19"

His painting technique is precise and painstaking, as one would expect from the finished works. He paints in acrylics, using layer after layer of transparent washes of cyan, magenta and yellow, over opaque's (white or white plus a colour), to create luminous surfaces that convey depth, and which

seem to capture the light. These jewel-like surfaces are almost impossible to photograph, he notes, "My biggest regret about the process is how little of the actual depth is relayed through the digital (or printed) media — the original is meant to be seen."

That may be, but nevertheless, as the images in this article convey, David Kitler has managed to make visible that exhortation from St. Paul that has been such an influence on him — in these works, indeed, the invisible can be clearly seen. And perhaps, once seen, it will be neither forgotten nor forsaken.

To see more of the amazing work of David N. Kitler please visit:

**David N. Kitler**  
[www.davidkitler.com](http://www.davidkitler.com)  
 403.938.2726