

PET FRIENDLY
The Art of Stephen Huneck

LARGE FORMAT LABELS



Introduction



A self-taught woodcarver and printmaker, Stephen Huneck (1948–2010) developed a style distinctly his own. Over four decades working in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, Huneck moved fluidly among artistic media, experimenting in woodworking, painting, printmaking, children’s books, and more. Central to the artist’s practice

was his keen sense of humor, an interest in transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary, and, frequently, the inclusion of dogs. While canines and their adoring humans appear regularly throughout Huneck’s oeuvre, he also included a menagerie of other creatures in his art, including cats, birds, fish, and farm animals.

Utilizing simple forms, saturated colors, bold textures, and, at times, the written word, Huneck’s multimedia artwork reveals how animals humanize people. Huneck was inspired by the world around him, but he also worked “from within,” as he put it, drawing upon his strong bond with his dogs. *Pet Friendly: The Art of Stephen Huneck* explores the artist’s innate ability to capture this complex, centuries-long relationship.

Stephen Huneck Gallery Sign, ca. 2000

Carved and painted resin

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



As a largely self-taught artist, Huneck, was initially hesitant to create his work and share it broadly. “I was terrified of carving, but I really wanted these things,” he said. “Making them was the only way to have them.” Driven by both his own interests and encouraged by cel-

ebrated self-taught woodcarver Edgar Tolson (1904–1984), who appeared to Huneck in a dream in 1984, Huneck and his art quickly reached and connected with an enthusiastic audience.

In 1993, Huneck opened a gallery in Woodstock, Vermont, his first showroom dedicated to sharing his art outside of his private residence. A hand-carved and painted gallery sign like this one hung outside of the building, featuring a black Labrador retriever holding in its mouth a red banner with typography. Huneck educated himself in American folk art, and the genre was a constant source of inspiration for his multimedia artwork. This three-dimensional sign takes notes from 18th- and 19th-century trade signs used to advertise local goods and services, as well as ornamental woodcarvings for ships.

Dog Toys [Good Boy], 1997

Woodcut print

Collection of Shelburne Museum, Gift of the Friends
of Dog Mountain, 2022 3.6



Lap Dog, 2002

Woodcut print

Collection of Shelburne Museum, Gift of the Friends of Dog Mountain, 2022 3.14



Throughout Huneck's life, he experienced poignant visions that shaped his artistic career. In 1994, he suffered a debilitating fall that developed into acute respiratory distress syndrome and left him in a two-month long coma. During this time, Huneck had a dream about a sculpture so alive it was "pulsating with energy." This vision led him to embrace a new medium of woodcut printmaking.

His first prints were dynamic, bold, and colorful, just like his sculptures. He compiled this series into his first children's book, *My Dog's Brain*, which explores the simple yet infinite love dogs have for their humans and for life.

Both *Lap Dog* and *Dog Toys [Good Boy]* (on view nearby) were included in this publication. The artist's cherished black Labrador retriever, Sally, is featured in all of the book's illustrations, representing what Huneck saw as "a sort of canine Everyman," but in these two prints, yellow and chocolate Labradors have replaced Sally. By simply changing the dogs' colors during the printing process, Huneck was able to expand the series and represent a multitude of different Labradors.

“If You Love Your Dog, How Can You Hunt?”

Dog Trophy, ca. 1992

Carved and painted resin and antler

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain

Incorporating satire and experiences observed from life, and at times leaning into pure silliness, Huneck was intentional in making art that elicits joy. “If you’re a creator and you’re making art, it’s a way of speaking, it’s a nonverbal communication,” Huneck reflected. “But what you’ve got to do is to say what’s true, and it’s funny, because the truth is funny.”



Sitting Black Lab, mid 1990's
Carved and painted wood
Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Boston Doghouse Cabinet, mid 1990's
Carved and painted wood
Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Before Huneck became a prolific artist, he worked as an antiques dealer and furniture restorer, gaining a keen eye and understanding for New England furniture and its long-standing traditions. “I really learned a lot about what makes great furniture—not only about the various styles, but the construction technology as well,” he recalled. “In the Northeast, you find a lot pieces from the 1820s, ’30s, and ’40s made by eccentric people who created not only their own styles of furniture but did a lot of decorative painting and faux finishes.”

This humorous cabinet speaks to New England’s rich history with furniture-making and architecture. The structure features a three-dimensional head of a Boston terrier on the largest of the four drawers and is decorated with red wood clad siding, white decorative trim, and a traditional pediment, suggesting a sophisticated doghouse.

Windowpane with White Cat, mid 1990's
Carved and painted wood and resin
Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



In 1980, Huneck and his wife, Gwen, purchased an 18th-century Colonial residence just outside of St. Johnsbury, Vermont, down the road from what would become Dog Mountain. While they were intent on restoring and honoring the antique dwelling's architectural details, Huneck also zealously transformed the interior space into

an extraordinary total work of art. Almost every element in the house was custom carved and painted by Huneck and featured his familiar cast of characters, from a Dachshund stair railing to a glass coffee table supported by four carved black Labrador retrievers.

Dachshund Rug, ca. 2003

Hooked wool

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Lucky Dogs (Eye on the Pie), date unknown

Woodcut print

Collection of Shelburne Museum, Gift of the Friends
of Dog Mountain, 2022 3.19



Hanging Winged Cat, 1991

Carved and painted resin

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain

“I was discovered at a gallery on Madison Avenue at a time when cats were the big thing,” Huneck remembered of his major 1992 solo exhibition at the Alexander Gallery in New York City. “I was being really radical because I was doing dogs; as an artist, I wanted to do that.” Although the artist initially associated his art more closely with canines, several affectionate works of art featuring cats were part of that early exhibition.

This charming black-and-white cat seems elevated to a kind of divinity. Several similar animals appear within his oeuvre—some, like this one, with feathered gold wings identifying them as spiritual or divine archetypes. Huneck began experimenting with this imagery in 1986, when one of his sick dogs inexplicably recovered after he created a carving of the dog with wings.



Rainbow Trout Chair, 1995

Carved and painted wood

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Painted in one of Huneck's favorite colors, azure blue, the hand-carved and painted *Rainbow Trout Chair* is similar in design to a set the artist created for his own kitchen table.

The ladderback-style chair features four rainbow trout back slats arranged in different directions with a carved woven rush seat further emulating 19th century caned seated chairs. Huneck had a penchant for these colorful fish, once declaring that "rainbow trout are a carver's dream and one of God's most perfect creatures. The shape of their fins and the texture of their

scales [are] beautiful." He did not have to travel far for inspiration, as he stocked his nearby pond at Dog Mountain with trout.

Corner bent Dachshund, mid 1990's
Carved and painted resin
Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



“If You Love Your Dog, How Can You Hunt?”
Scottish Terrier Trophy, ca. 1992
Carved and painted resin and antler
Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Play, 2002

Woodcut print

Collection of Shelburne Museum, Gift of the Friends of Dog Mountain, 2022 3.22



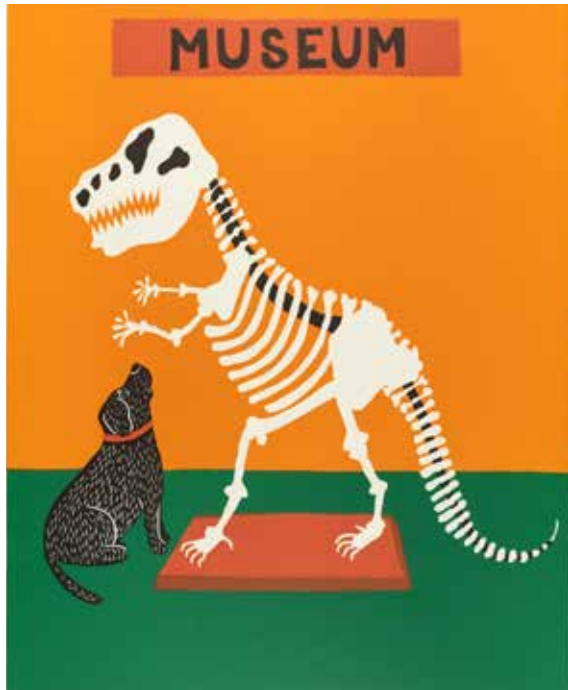
Huneck had an uncanny ability to breathe vitality into his art through his dynamic carving technique. “I use carving to create rhythm,” Huneck said. “Crosshatching does it on sculpture or a print. A pediment, a column, or an urn endows a building with energy. On furni-

ture, it’s the way the drawers are positioned or the knobs are placed, the way a finial is attached. Moldings direct the eye and complete a design. A trailing-vine border is a wonderful way to move energy around a piece. If the eye is moving, energy is traveling like an electrical charge. I’ve learned that you have to release that energy, or the piece is constipated.”

Paleontologist, 2007

Woodcut print

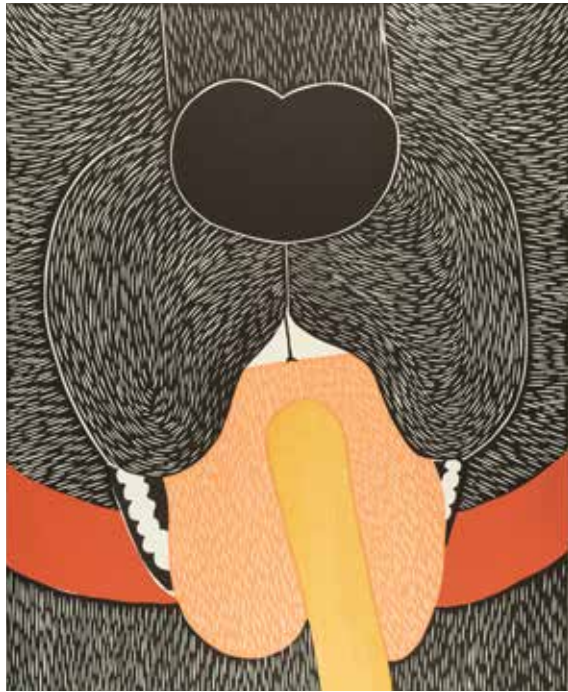
Collection of Shelburne Museum, Gift of the Friends
of Dog Mountain, 2022 3.37



Throat Exam, 2003

Woodcut print

Collection of Shelburne Museum, Gift of the Friends of Dog Mountain, 2022 3.27



“Texture is very important to me,” Huneck reflected. “I use it in all my carving, but it is a very difficult thing to do in print-making. I really needed all those years as a sculptor to master the medium.” When he was beginning to experiment with print-making, he approached the new medium as a carver. “It is much easier to carve with a v-chisel than to sculpt. You are not taking away a lot of wood. So, I sat

down and started doing these drawings. Ideas were popping into my head, ideas that were realized as prints. A whole new door had opened in my mind.”

Master of the Universe, 1998

Woodcut print

Collection of Shelburne Museum, Gift of the Friends
of Dog Mountain, 2022-3.20



Sitting Dalmatian, ca. 1997

Carved and painted wood

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Collections of small, sculpted dogs such as these were displayed on built-in shelving in the Hunecks' living room. Naturally painted and intricately carved with textural details, each of these emotive animals exemplify Huneck's dexterity and innate talent for wood-carving. Huneck achieved his distinct style by utilizing hand tools, preferring the control and charm of antique implements. He assembled a collection of more than 150 vintage tools including chisels, axes, and planes.

Basset Hound, 1994

Carved and painted resin

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Scottish Terrier, ca. 1997

Carved and painted wood

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Squirrel, ca. 1997

Carved and painted resin

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Pig, 2005

Carved and painted resin

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Sitting Spaniel, 1998

Carved and painted wood

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Corgi, ca. 1997

Carved and painted wood

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



West Highland White Terrier, 1994

Carved and painted wood

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Vermont Ski Patrol, 2004

Woodcut print

Collection of Shelburne Museum, Gift of the Friends of Dog Mountain, 2022-3.38



The Wagon, 2002

Woodcut print

Collection of Shelburne Museum, Gift of the Friends
of Dog Mountain, 2022 3.7



The Waiting Room, 2003

Woodcut print

Collection of Shelburne Museum, Gift of the Friends of Dog Mountain, 2022 3.8



Huneck's attention to composition, color, and texture is vital to his artistic practice; simple forms, bold colors, and a flatness of depth distinguish his work. Favoring emotive creativity over traditional or formal academic techniques, Huneck's work intentionally shares aes-

thetic similarities with American folk art. "I found my palette as an antiques picker," the artist affirmed, and indeed his work often features colors that are either chromatically intense or muted and more natural. Likewise, untrained artists often feature these distinct palettes by virtue of the fact that they are working with common household materials and paints available to them, such as Wilhelm Schimmel (American, 1817–1890), who brightly painted his whimsical woodcarvings with common house paints.

The Dog Show, 1988

Oil on canvas with carved wood frame

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Sociology scholar Michael Ramirez has observed that, historically, “owning pets signaled that individuals had the resources to tend to animals that had no economic function.” Today this remains largely true, apart from some celebrity pets who obtain lucrative social media followings or win

top prizes at competitions. Painted in a cacophony of bold colors, *The Dog Show* depicts a typical event where different dog breeds are exhibited and judged on either their breed standards or their agility. Huneck, who made both the painting on wood and its ornate carved frame, depicts three different dog breeds standing obediently at attention. Similarly posed are the three dog owners whose alert stance mimics the show dogs as the judge approaches.

In this scene, Huneck renders a field of grass by applying small vertical brushstrokes as individual blades. This technique is akin to pointillism, a painting technique developed in the late 19th century, in which small, individual dots of saturated color are closely applied to create larger forms through optical mixing of colors.

The Goose [Diptych], 2002

Woodcut print

Collection of Shelburne Museum, Gift of the Friends of Dog Mountain, 2022 3.24a&b

Huneck wrote more than a dozen children's books illustrated with his woodcut prints, which remain popular for readers of all ages today. Documenting the adventures of the artist's adored black Labrador retriever, Sally, and her friends, Huneck's prints capture the dogs' moxie and enjoyment of life's simplest pleasures. Defying the confines of the paper's edge, *The Goose* expands the scene of a wild goose chasing after Sally and her Golden retriever friend, Molly. The action-packed diptych, which Huneck included in the publication *Sally Goes to the Farm*, captures movement with various directional lines demarcating the animals' fast, forward action in contrast to the still, vertical blades of grass.



It Wouldn't Be Heaven Without Dogs, 2008

Woodcut print

Collection of Shelburne Museum, Gift of the Friends of Dog Mountain, 2022 3.16



In 1997, Huneck felt compelled to construct a small chapel on his studio and gallery property after, as he explained, “a wild idea just popped into my head.” Utilizing an existing outbuilding’s foundation, the artist built a small building in the style of a 19th-century New England village church,

complete with white clapboard siding and a steeple. Decorated with Huneck’s canine art, sculptures, and furniture—including stained-glass windows—this inclusive space is welcome to “all creeds, all breeds, no dogmas allowed.”

Visitors are encouraged to add handwritten letters and photographs of their deceased pets to the chapel’s interior walls, providing a place to mourn their loss while also celebrating the spiritual bond between humans and their pets. Today, the chapel is a pilgrimage site, attracting visitors from across the world to Dog Mountain.

Heaven illustrates Huneck’s belief in an afterlife enriched by reunions with beloved pets. This print was included in the artist’s popular 2002 book, *The Dog Chapel*, which recounts the artist’s miraculous recovery from a serious injury, which left him in a coma for several months, and a vision that inspired his first series of woodcut prints and, ultimately, the construction of the chapel.

Directed by Alex Shea and Patrick Kennedy
Dog Mountain: A Story of Love, Dogs, & Art,
October 2021

Video, 6:40 min.

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain, video
supported by the Vermont Community Founda-
tion's Northeast Kingdom Fund

Jack Russell with Collar, 1993

Bronze

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Jack Russell with Collar, 1993

Carved and painted resin

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Visually alike down to their matching chiseled pattern of short hair, these bronze and resin versions of a Jack Russell terrier appear to be cast from the same original carved-wood model. Bronze has a long cultural history as a valuable material for public sculpture, as it is highly versatile and can weather exposure to the elements well.

However, by using resin, a robust plastic material, Huneck was also

able to create sculptures that were similarly durable but lighter and less expensive.

Huneck was particularly fond of this energetic terrier breed, and he enjoyed carving their coarse hair and painting their spotted patterning. “Jack Russell terriers have amazing personalities, deep and powerful,” he said. “They are little dogs with giant brains.”

Yellow Lab Sculpture, 1998

Carved and painted resin

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Greetings, ca. 1994

Graphite on vellum

Collection of Shelburne Museum, Gift of the Friends of Dog Mountain, 2022 3.42



Hello Molly, Hello Sally, 2002

Woodcut print

Collection of Shelburne Museum, Gift of the Friends of Dog Mountain, 2022 3.17

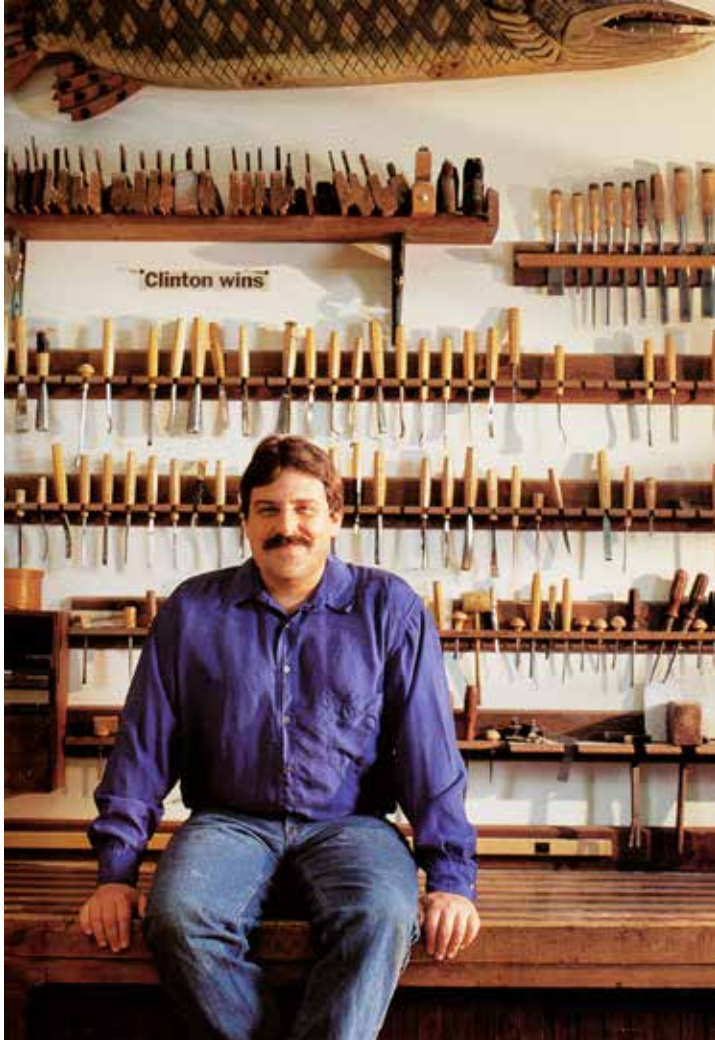


Huneck explained how he began his woodcut prints by first drawing “the design of the future print in crayon, [and] laying out the prospective shapes and colors.” *Greetings*, a pencil drawing on transparent vellum, is an example of this first, forgiving step, which allowed the artist

to make small changes. Once content with the composition, Huneck carved one block of wood for each color in its appropriate shape. After inking a block with its respective color, he would hand rub acid-free archival paper on top of the block, and then repeat this process for each color block.

Similar in design to its initial sketch, the woodcut print *Hello Molly, Hello Sally* demonstrates how the printmaking process enriches the final work. In the print, the grain of the wood, textured markings from the chisel, and saturated pools of inked color enhance the original design.

Unknown photographer
Stephen Huneck (American, 1948-2010),
date unknown
Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Tall Man with Treat and Dog, 1994

Carved and painted wood

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



In addition to pets and wildlife, Huneck also incorporated Catholic nuns, angels, bathing women, and rocket ships into his carvings, among other motifs. Huneck's disdain for the corporate world inspired the figure of a businessman wearing a suit and tie. Utilizing this symbol for capitalist greed, and sometimes superimposing his own portrait and attributes onto this figure, Huneck integrated these austere men into carvings that were darker in tone in his other series. In *Tall Man with Treat and Dog*, however, the businessman playfully provides a sense of scale from the Dachshund dog's point of view.

Black Snake, 1986

Carved and painted Basswood

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Outside

Irish Setter, 1990

Cast metal and paint

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



Dalmatian, 1990

Cast iron and paint

Courtesy of the Friends of Dog Mountain



