



Buffalo Shield, charcoal, 25 x 16.



Night Hawk, charcoal, 17 x 12.

JOHN COLEMAN

DECADES BEFORE he took the western art world by storm as a sculptor, John Coleman wielded charcoal. The Prescott, AZ, artist's foray into drawing began in high school and progressed to studies in life drawing at Chouinard Art Institute. Today Coleman, who also enjoys success as a painter, continues to revere the art form and often showcases his figurative drawings alongside his Native American-themed bronze sculptures and oils. Usually they complement those works and help cement a theme, he says, and sometimes good drawings inspire paintings, as *FIRST CHIEF* did.

In charcoal Coleman finds “a simple elegance” and a personality he likens to watercolors. “I let the material come out and do its thing,” he says. “The beauty of its translucency and the ghostly feeling of the paper coming through create a magical feeling.” Coleman develops multiple charcoal renditions of his models until one in particular “comes to life,” and he photographs his work to check for accuracy. But when his technique becomes too measured, he warns, replication can kill the life in a piece. “My interest is in moody atmosphere, light and shadow, hard edges and soft edges,” he says.

“The more vague or ‘lyrical’ a piece is, the more others can see their own story in it.”

Coleman's models wear items from his extensive collection of garments and artifacts, about half of which are antique and most of which reflect his focus on pre-Civil War, upper-Missouri Indian tribes. Any misstep in historical authenticity, he notes, risks waking viewers up from their dream. Find Coleman's work at Legacy Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ, Jackson, WY, and Bozeman, MT; InSight Gallery, Fredericksburg, TX; and Plainsmen Gallery, Dunedin, FL. —*Kim Agricola*