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Auburn graduate wins top prize at WEWA's Alabama Wildlife Fine Arts Competition

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (Jan. 5, 2024) – [Atlanta-based artist Jared Knox](#) fondly recalls his first trip to Alabama's Black Belt during a family hunting trip to Lowndes County when he was a teenager.

"I think about it (now), and it created this love for hunting and an admiration of all wildlife," he said.

Perhaps Knox channeled his personal Black Belt history while working on a "Bobcat and Bobwhite," a 36-by-24-inch acrylic painting on canvas that won Best of Show at the inaugural "Alabama Wildlife Fine Arts Competition" that was part of [the second annual Wetumpka Wildlife Arts Festival \(WEWA\)](#) in November 2023.

Knox, a 2021 graduate of Auburn University, created the artwork specifically for the competition in Wetumpka. He had been encouraged to enter by Cindy Harris, wife of [Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association \(ALBBAA\)](#) founder Thomas Harris, who had seen his work at a North Carolina gallery.

An avid hunter, Knox said he drew inspiration from his enjoyment of upland hunting and quail conservation while creating "Bobcat and Bobwhite." He also drew from his personal experience of seeing bobcats in the wild during deer hunting trips to north Georgia.

"There was one field that had a bobcat in it, and once or twice I got to see that bobcat hunt," Knox said. "It was at sunset. That image stuck with me. It was a big bobcat. I love that image, and I also love in general the story of different animals going out and catching their food."

That's precisely what "Bobcat and Bobwhite" showcases. "How cool would it be if I ever saw this, a bobcat holding a quail?" Knox added. "It looks like he's just recently gotten it. It's a fresh kill."

Knox grew up in Marietta, Ga., and studied mechanical engineering at Auburn. Art remained a hobby during his college years, he said, and he even did some commission work. Then, he was unexpectedly invited to show some of his artwork at a gallery in suburban Atlanta during his final semester at Auburn.

He said the encouragement from a gallery owner provided a “light bulb moment” and spurred him to make art, not engineering, into a full-time job. He set up his studio after graduation and has been a full-time artist ever since.

Being a part of the “Alabama Wildlife Fine Arts Competition” and winning Best of Show validated his decision.

“It was really cool to be a part of it, because some of the artists I look up to most were there, like Dirk Walker and Sue Key,” he said, mentioning two artists who also won merit prizes at the show. “I’ve been a fan of theirs forever. To be a part of it and win and talk with them, it was really great. It was awesome.”

ALBBAA helped promote the second annual [Wetumpka Wildlife Arts Festival](#), which was created through a partnership involving the [Kelly Fitzpatrick Memorial Gallery](#), known to locals as “The Kelly,” the City of Wetumpka and the Smoot Harris Family.

“The goal of the festival series is manifold and includes a desire to benefit the Wetumpka area by helping to increase tourism, impact economic development, expose The Kelly to a wider audience, and hopefully, create an ongoing event for this charming community as it continues to grow into a mecca for the arts,” said Thomas Harris, whose family has deep roots in the Wetumpka area.

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The Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association is committed to promoting and enhancing outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities in the Black Belt in a manner that provides economic and ecological benefits to the region and its citizens. For information, go to www.alabamablackbeltadventures.org.