

Andrew Stock visits Ulusaba

An exhibition of paintings from a South African game reserve.

I was invited on a weeklong Virgin Unite Connection Trip to South Africa in October 2013 – a trip with a group of exceptional people that proved inspiring and life changing for a wildlife artist ever eager for a new challenge.

The fascination of three days of Johannesburg's extraordinary history and entrepreneurial businesses rapidly faded as the second half of the week was spent at Ulusaba private game reserve, Sir Richard Branson's spellbinding retreat in the Sabi Sands, neighbouring the Kruger National Park. Dawn and dusk game drives were food and drink for me, revelling in the rich diversity of mammals, exotic birds, insects and occasional snake. Meanwhile a Pride 'n Purpose* trip into a local disadvantaged neighbourhood and visiting the Bhubezi Community Healthcare Centre, (a project built primarily to look after people with Aids, HIV, malaria, TB and other serious diseases and illnesses), proved unbelievably emotive and culminated in a richly rewarding afternoon working with the Starkey hearing Foundation.

I was left stunned by my visit to Ulusaba; the variety and accessibility of the wildlife had been overwhelming and inevitably whetted my artistic appetite. Moreover, the Pride 'n Purpose project had moved me to such an extent that I felt that I too could help in some small way. I needed to return and paint the wildlife, then put on an exhibition that would, in turn, support P 'n P.

With Virgin Unite's support I travelled back to Ulusaba in March 2014. For two weeks I lived in the staff village and was up and out every morning and evening with the trackers and rangers, sketching and photographing the wildlife at every possible moment. It was an inspirational and exhausting time of gathering as much information as possible. Sketchbooks were filled with scribbles of the big five but so much more, especially the many, often overlooked birds.

Since my visit I worked on the Ulusaba paintings and drawings for the Ulusaba exhibition, 10% of sales from the exhibition were donated to the Pride 'n Purpose Project.

Exhibition details:

Private View 6 - 8pm Monday 8th -18th December
The Mall Galleries
The Mall
London SW1
10am - 5pm daily

*Working on a non-profit basis, Pride 'n Purpose is Ulusaba's charitable arm committed to helping disadvantaged communities living adjacent to the Sabi Sand Reserve. Pride 'n Purpose's main focus is on sustainable development initiatives and improving access to food, water and health services.