



James Burkhart of Gainesville, who died in 2011, is well known as an artist who depicted scenes of Ozark life distilled through a keen native eye and rendered with a trained expert hand. His work reveals the hidden truths and beauties within ordinary things, from domestic animals and landmarks to old barns and buildings to gatherings of Ozarkian friends and families. The most familiar

settings for his works were found in and around Gainesville, West Plains and Springfield.

In 1967, he and his wife Donna bought 185 acres of land on Bryant Creek for \$75 an acre. The place had a ramshackle house and a river cabin, and the family spent every possible weekend there, floating the rivers and enjoying the land. They moved here permanently a year later and quickly settled into Ozarks life, becoming known to friends and neighbors simply as Jim and Donna.

Jim worked hard to support his family solely through his art. Donna Burkhart describes him as being "obsessed . . . driven to pain every day because he knew he had to support his family. Every single day he went to his studio at nine in the morning and painted until three in the afternoon."

He developed a heritage program in which he provided prints of local landmarks and other scenes to banks and insurance companies throughout Missouri, Kentucky, Arkansas and other states for use as customer premiums. The program included rodeo-inspired bronzes of a cowboy bull rider he created for State Farm Insurance.

He completed murals for companies on walls and ceiling of business buildings, always answering, "Sure!" whenever he was asked if he could do something-and then figuring out how to do it, Donna said. Today his work can be seen in homes and businesses throughout the Midwest.

His work's popularity came because it captured the hearts of those who saw it-and reflected the heart of the artist. He told an interviewer that the beauty of the Ozarks inspired him. "I'm closer to God here than anywhere else," he said.