

*This watercolor was done by the noted German pigeon artist Charles Witzmann. The breed pictured is the Maltese. Owned by Lynn Watson.*

## Pigeon Art — and the Man Who Collects It

by Jan Parrott-Holden  
Vancouver, Washington

What could be harder to define than art? Art has been called “nature made by man.” It’s been termed “truth,” “beauty,” “the shadow of divine perfection.” Pretty heady ideas — all. And yet, if you live with art, if it is the passion of your existence, art can easily be defined as “life.”

Lots of people collect art. They like to keep beautiful things close at hand. They may specialize in still lifes, in portraits, land or seascapes. But few collect “pigeon art.” Lynn Watson does.

As far back as 1959, when Watson was just a school kid, he loved pigeons. Fact is, he was raising them at the age of five. But prior to that time he had never known there were books or paintings depicting the infinite variety of these birds. Then a friend showed him a marked catalogue from the Los Angeles Pigeon Club’s famous “Pageant of Pigeons” and a passion for pigeon art was born.

At the age of fifteen, Lynn became a member of the Los Angeles Pigeon Club and received the club’s bulletins, then being both expensively *and* expansively produced by Don Andrews, a man with considerable reputation as a pigeon lover, and a collector of outstanding pigeon art.

It was meeting Mr. Andrews and another pigeoneer of longstanding, Mr. George Neuerburg (one-time president of the LAPC) which opened young Watson’s eyes to the fascinating pleasure of collecting beautiful pigeon paintings.

That initial meeting with George Neuerburg taught Watson that this was a pigeon man whose reputation as a first-class pigeon breeder was only surpassed by his reputation as art

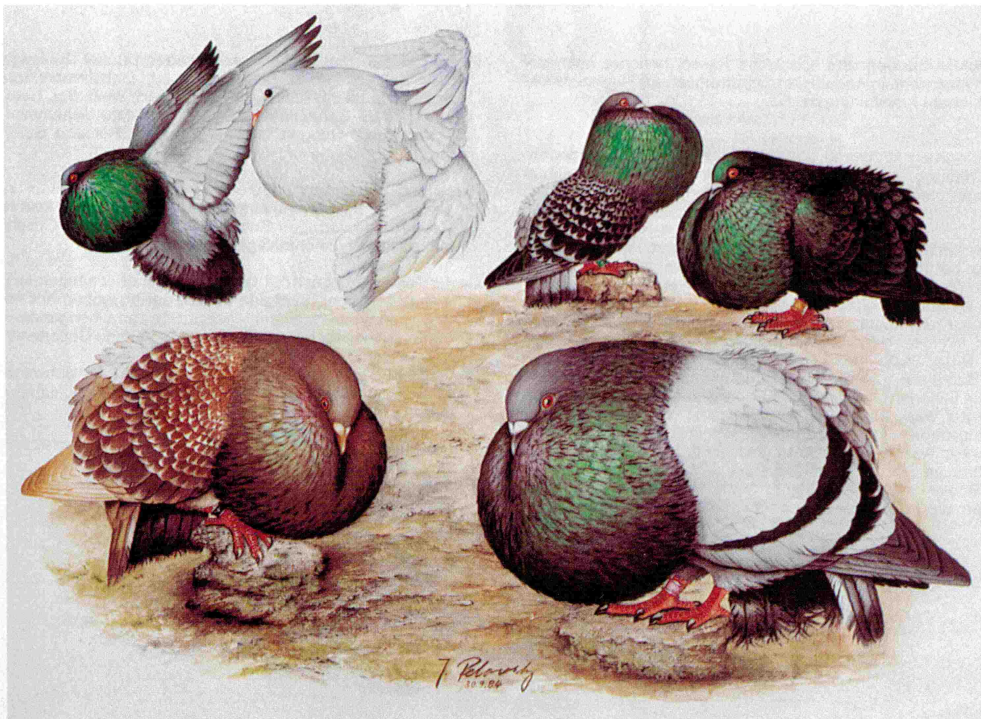


*Jacob Relovsky of West Germany. Considered by Lynn Watson to be one of the top living pigeon artists.*



## Dobeland

One of America's most famous paintings called *Dobeland*, painted in 1911 by M. Frank Cook. It took the artist nearly two years to complete the 132 birds in this painting. Now owned by Lynn Watson, it is the prized piece in his collection. This oil painting is 6 ft. by 8 ft., making it one of the largest paintings ever done.



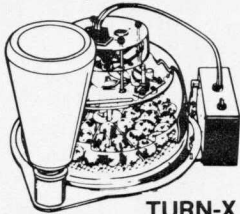
One of Lynn Watson's favorites, a group of Marchenero pouters. This watercolor is done by Jacob Relovsky of Germany and illustrates pigeons in life-like poses. Painted in 1984.

afficionado. Watson was determined to learn what a master could teach. Before long he was driving the 75 miles between San Clemente and Neuerburg's North Hollywood home with increasing regularity.

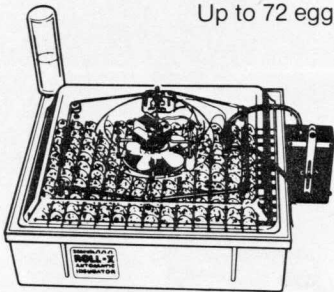
Watson describes his mentor as a brilliant hobbyist. A man whose bookshelves contained well over 1,000 volumes from the world over. Many rare, many richly illustrated. In his seventies, after suffering from a stroke, Neuerburg turned to Watson as more than an eager student. In exchange for taking over some of the old man's household duties, Watson received the tutelage necessary to discern quality pigeon art from what Neuerburg called "nickle and dime stuff." He developed a knowledge and appreciation for such things as pigeon post cards, statuary, and glossy magazines. As time went along, Watson was able to purchase some of Neuerburg's treasures and begin his own collection. Especially enthralled by the post cards, he managed to purchase Neuerburg's entire

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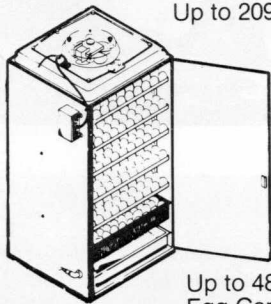
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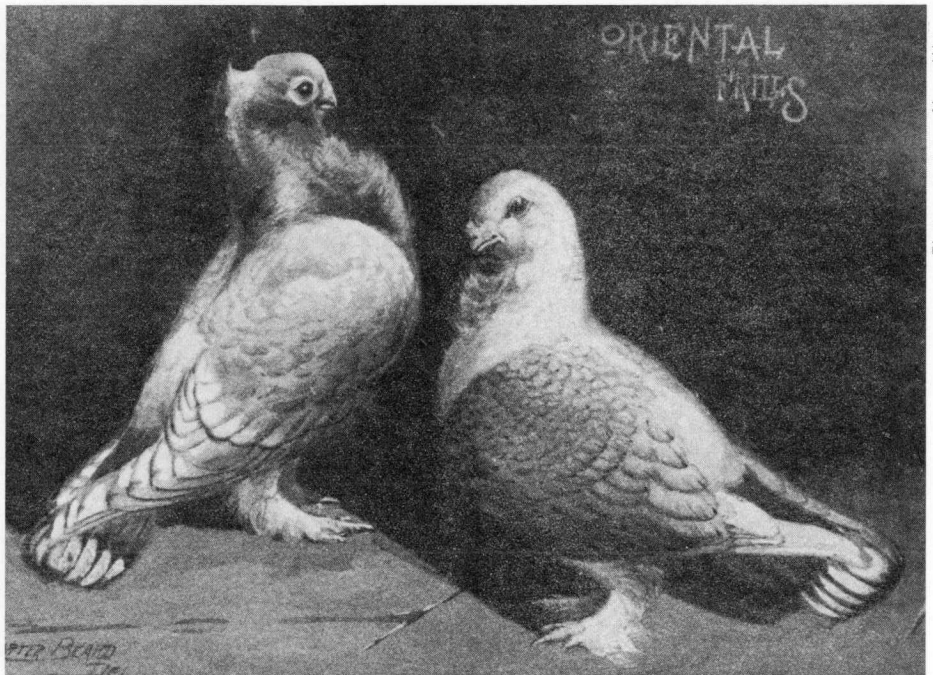
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Watercolor by the American artist Carter Beard. Painted in 1885, this study of oriental frills was based on actual champions from life. Owned by Lynn Watson.

Photos courtesy of Lynn Watson

miscellanea, adding to the number until he had in his possession over 600 cards from around the world.

Neuerburg took Watson to view Andrew's collection of pigeon art, a spectacular display housed in its very own shrine. Watson harkens back to the collection as something akin to a pigeon art museum, an inspiration to any collector.

Today Watson can boast a personal collection which exceeds that of Neuerburg or Andrews, at least when it comes down to category and number of artists. To attain this vast collection, Watson has travelled throughout Europe and has come to know many pigeon artists on a personal basis. He has shared his enthusiasm with other collectors, has erected



Lynn Watson of San Clemente, California in front of a few of his prize paintings. Paintings are on display annually at the Pageant of Pigeons held in Pomona, California.

displays of some of the finest paintings and prints, has studied the masters whose art comes close, indeed, to "the shadow of divine perfection!"

Watson feels it an awesome task to choose the world's most outstanding pigeon artist. Yet he believes M. Frank Cook the best American to portray pigeons as close to standard as possible. He claims several superior British artists including Ludlow, Simpson, and Chatterton. And there is no question in his mind that Jacob Relovsky of Germany is the best of today's active pigeon artists. Why? Because Relovsky's art is life like, to the most minute detail. The colors are true, the backgrounds realistic but not overpowering. Says Watson, "Relovsky's subjects seem to jump right off the paper at you." Do others agree? Well, the artist has a three year backlog of orders. So there must be something to Watson's claim. Certainly, Relovsky is no starving artist!

And what of Watson? Has he ever taken brush to hand? Well, yes *and* no. Though Watson took four years of art in school and has done some painting, he has never attempted to paint a pigeon. He does, however, share his priceless art collection with pigeon and cage bird people at every opportunity. Travelling to the national pigeon shows and to Los Angeles' own "Pageant," Watson sets up a display that can only be described as breathtaking. It brings pleasure to the hobbyist and a special kind of pride to the exhibitor.

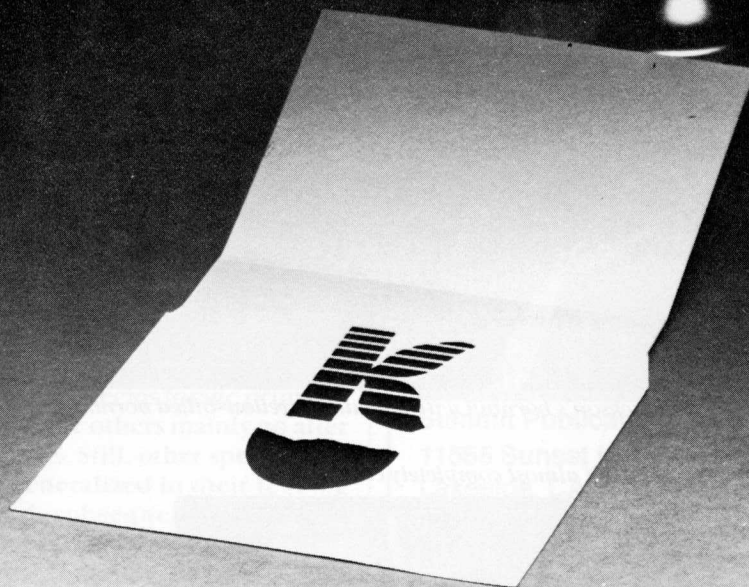
Does the collecting ever stop? It seems not. For Watson is always off to do business and share hospitality with fellow collectors.

When it comes to purchasing pigeon art, Watson suggests using much the same criteria as that used in selecting any quality art. Look for nice detail, truth in color and form, appropriate backgrounds and, most importantly, a life like quality.

To view Watson's fantastic collection of pigeon art is to be awakened to an incredibly new experience. Who would believe that the pigeon would ever have been so celebrated on canvas? And yet, why not? For Watson's collection epitomizes the definition that art is life. And to enjoy the beauty and diversity of such "life" is, in itself, a reward.

*Author's Note: If you are interested in learning more about the hobby of collecting pigeon art, contact Lynn Watson at 178 Aragon, San Clemente, California 92672. ●*

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