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CARL RUNGIUS - Painter of the Western Wilderness



Theodore J. Holsten
EMERITUS MEMBER
Boone and Crockett Club

He never wrote a book, but reproductions of his illustrations and paintings have appeared in many of the most prominent sporting and natural history books for

more than a century. His father and grandfather were Lutheran ministers and they hoped he would follow in their footsteps, but he developed an early taste for the wilderness. Once exposed to the North American West, he never turned back, combining a love of hunting with his passion for art. A crack shot and skilled outdoorsman, he established himself as one of America's most famous and talented wildlife artists.

Carl Rungius was born in Germany in a small town near Berlin in 1869. He succeeded in convincing his family that a career in art was his ambition, and he was able to study at prominent art academies in Berlin. An invitation by his uncle in New York to visit and go on a moose hunt in Maine introduced him to North American wildlife. The hunt was unsuccessful, and he made a fateful decision to remain in New York for another attempt the following year. During that time he attended a sportsman's show;



became friendly with a rancher and guide from Wyoming; and was invited to make his first trip to the American West. Once exposed to the grandeur of the Rockies, he never turned back. Wyoming, Alberta, and New Brunswick became his favorite places to hunt and paint.

A rugged individualist, Rungius preferred to hunt alone, without a guide, and he often wandered into remote areas for weeks on end. This enabled him to combine hunting with an intimate knowledge of big game animals and the terrain in which they lived. Of all big game animals, he had a special passion for moose. He carefully sketched the animals he saw and those he shot. The unique feature of his painting is not only the accuracy of the animals he depicted, but also the animal's habitat, previously ignored by many other artists.

An early mentor and fellow B&C member was William Temple Hornaday who convinced Rungius to turn from illustrating publications to painting full time. Hornaday introduced him to many prominent sportsmen and helped further his career. Rungius accompanied Charles Sheldon and Wilfred Osgood, then of the Smithsonian Institution,

on the long trip to the Yukon that was the basis for Sheldon's first book "The Wilderness of the Upper Yukon."

Carl Rungius was elected to membership in the Boone and Crockett Club in 1927. Throughout his career he maintained a studio in New York City. He later divided his time there with a residence in Banff, Alberta, in full sight of his beloved Rockies. He died of a stroke at his easel in 1959. ■

The Principal Biographies of Carl Rungius

Carl Rungius – Fifty Years with Brush and Rifle by William J. Schaldach (1945)

Carl Rungius – Painter of The Western Wilderness by Jon Whyte and E.J. Hart (1985)



ABOVE: Carl Rungius in his studio, ca. 1920.

ABOVE CENTER: *In Search of Conquest*, by Carl Rungius.

RIGHT: Carl Rungius sketching Lake McArthur, Alberta.

