

Architect of the Savanna

Inspired by my observations in Africa that nothing lives in an environment without affecting it, this original color pencil drawing on lupa paper with abica vine explores the giraffe's important role in sharing and maintaining the plains of Africa. The giraffe's job as "gardener" is illustrated by the row of three acacia tortillas trees, - the giraffe's favorite food in the giraffe's spot which shaped like the map of Africa. To the left of it is a termite mound. Termites, in building their funnels, break up compacted volcanic soil so that trees can take root. To the right of the "Africa" spot is fire which, whether it is set by humans or lightning, fertilizes the soil and helps seeds to burst open and germinate. Below the "Africa" spot is an elephant who is pulling down a tree to eat the crown and the roots. In doing so, he is also thinning the forest and bringing otherwise inaccessible browse to smaller browsers.

In the background pattern, which was adapted from a border which I saw painted on an indebele hut in Zimbabwe, are other architects with whom the giraffes share the grasslands. Look for a secretary bird, who keeps the snake population in check, a wart hog, whose burrowing helps break up the soil, a feeding gerenuk who is another "landscape gardener," and a "dassie" rock hyrax, whose droppings feed the algae which break down the granite kopjes into soil.

Lastly, look for the three running baby giraffes, in the white between the spots. They are the giraffe's contribution to, and hope for the future.