

Spot the Five

An Original color pencil drawing on lupa paper with abica vines.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, the trophy hunters in Africa designated the five animals who were the most dangerous quarry, the animals which, if you didn't drop with the first shot, were likely to double back and get you, as the big five. They consisted of two predators, the lion and the stealthy leopard, two behemoths, the elephant and the rhino, and the powerful and tenacious Cape buffalo. These became the most sought after trophies. Today, most visitors to Africa are on photographic safaris and the big five are still the most prized sightings.

Since the elusive leopard is the most difficult of the group to find, I have made him the "canvas" on which to draw the others. This handsome male leopard is one which I saw along the Limpopo River at Mashatu, Botswana. On his front leg, two lionesses confront a cape buffalo. A buffalo also appears in spots below his ear, the rhino dwells on his nose, and two mated male lions on his neck. A matriarch and her elephant family traverse his shoulder. Lastly, a lone bull elephant is on his chest.

One of the themes which I like to celebrate in my drawings is my place in this tradition of animal image making which stretches back to the dawn of human history. For me, one of the glories of Southern Africa is the chance to see the paintings left by the late Stone Age people called the Khoi-San. They painted images of themselves and creatures which they lived among and depended upon, on the rock faces and cave of the Kalahari. I have put their versions of the big five in the background pattern.

Look for the leopard in the lower left hand corner. Below the big leopard's chest are two Cape buffalo. Pair of lions is located on the right margin, and a rhino, horn up, is above the lions. Across the top, find a female elephant and her baby.

Revel in the power and cunning of the magnificent big five!