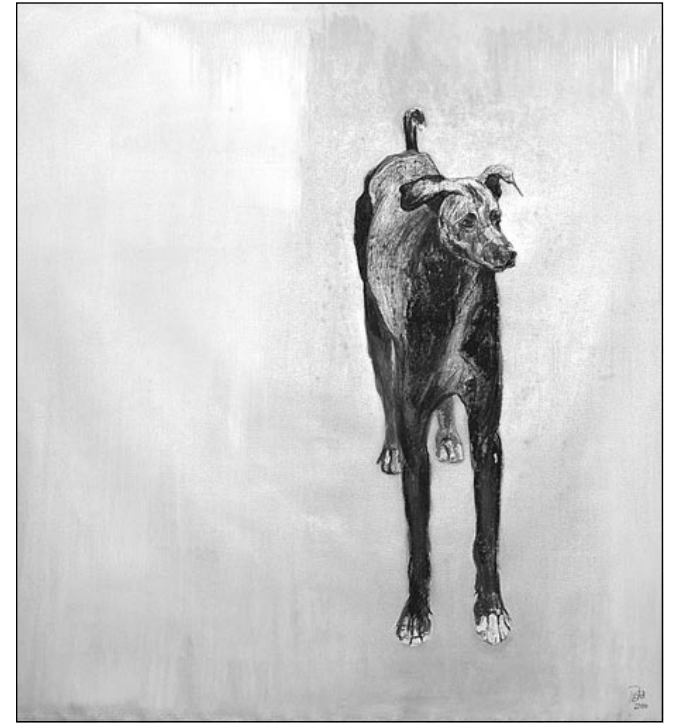
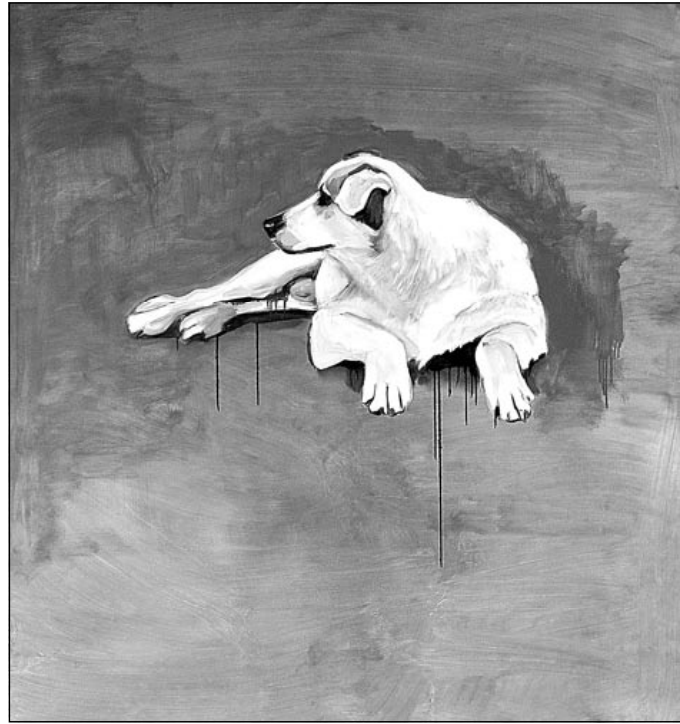


EMILY SWEET LANDEGENT | STAFF WRITER



# Artist paints for emotional response

## Her current series focuses on stray dogs seen in Nicaragua

Large-scale, expressive works, about an animal who often goes unnoticed.

"The Stray Dogs of Nicaragua" by Peta Kaplan-Sandzer hangs through Friday, Aug. 28 at Witter Gallery in Storm Lake.

The idea for the paintings began when Kaplan-Sandzer, originally from South Africa, first visited Nicaragua with her family. Charmed by the country, she and her family now live there full-time.

"For years I have combined my dual passion for travel and painting," Kaplan-Sandzer said.

In the past, this meant that after a trip to Morocco, she completed a series of paintings on architecture — and after Paris, a series of works on sculptures — and after India, a series on monkeys and goats.

"I always focus on a dominant set of visuals that, for me, are representative of my experience in the countries I visit," Kaplan-Sandzer

said.

And for Nicaragua, that dominant set of visuals was stray dogs.

"When I first visited Nicaragua, I was taken by the large number of homeless, yet often affectionate, stray dogs roaming the streets," Kaplan-Sandzer said.

"The challenge of daily survival seemed to echo the economic hardship of Nicaraguans who live on an average of \$2 per day. By sketching and photographing the dogs here [in Nicaragua], I found an expressive way for me personally to deal with the reality of their environment."

Working from sketches and photographs, Kaplan-Sandzer, uses charcoal and paint to sketch directly onto her 5-foot square unstretched canvases.

"These initial markings can remain and show through and are incorporated into the painting," Kaplan-Sandzer said. "This allows

the viewer to be engaged in the process."

Whether with thick, textured brushstrokes, or thin, dripping paint, each painting Kaplan-Sandzer crafts becomes a highly-personalized portrait of a dog, each with its own story of survival.

A self-described colorist — one who relishes pure, saturated color — Kaplan-Sandzer works quickly.

"I am impatient to get my vision onto canvas," she said. "I work until I feel satisfied with the end result, but primarily I am focused on the process."

Kaplan-Sandzer uses large canvases because her work is so physical, free and loose.

"My movements are large," she said. "I need surfaces which can accommodate [a] large expanse of color, as there is often an inherent tension between the background textures and colors and the treatment of the stray dogs them-

selves."

And such tension is intended to evoke a response.

"I want people to react emotionally," Kaplan-Sandzer said. "I am absolutely fine with people feeling sad when they see some of the dogs I have captured on canvas, as, to me as a painter, I then know I have been successful in my work — I have evoked an emotional response."

Kaplan-Sandzer also hopes her paintings raise awareness about the plight of animals abroad and near, as well as show that animals have the same capacity for emotion and feelings as humans do.

"I hope that in some way my paintings encourage humanity towards all animals," she said. "In most practical terms, I also hope through my work, and cooperation with humane societies, to motivate people to adopt dogs from local shelters." ♦

### At a Glance:

**WHAT:** The Stray Dogs of Nicaragua by Peta Kaplan-Sandzer

**WHERE:** The Witter Gallery, 609 Cayuga St., Storm Lake

**WHEN:** Through Friday, Aug. 28

**COST:** Free

**CONTACT:** (712) 732-3400

**ONLINE:** [www.thewittergallery.org](http://www.thewittergallery.org)

### Purchase:

To see more of Peta Kaplan-Sandzer's work, visit [www.petakaplan-sandzer.com](http://www.petakaplan-sandzer.com). For purchases, contact the artist at [petakaplan@hotmail.com](mailto:petakaplan@hotmail.com).