



Small Town, Big Art

Our tiny Wyoming valley is a presence in the art world.

BY JOOHEE MUROMCEW

THREE YEARS AFTER dropping out of Yale's School of Art in 1879, illustrator Frederic Remington first traveled to the American West, visiting what was then called the Montana Territory. Enthralled by the rough beauty of ranch and mountain life, he returned to the West twenty-one times over his lifetime—inspiration for an esteemed body of work that included magazine illustrations, fiction writing, oil paintings, and bronze sculptures. An original casting of his iconic *Broncho Buster* sculpture sits in the

Since its inception in 2006, the Jackson Hole Art Auction has surpassed its previous year's sales almost annually. Art buyers and collectors from around the world come to the auction (or bid over the phone or via proxy) for a variety of pieces by big-name artists.

KATHRYN MAPES TURNER

Oval Office, a gift to President Lyndon Johnson. At the 2011 Jackson Hole Art Auction, Remington had a hero's return to the West when his classic oil painting, *He Lay Where He Had Been Jerked, Still As a Log*, sold for \$1.583 million in front of an audience of four hundred people, the breathtaking highlight of a record-setting auction year.

SANTA FE, NEW Mexico, and Scottsdale, Arizona, have long enjoyed reputations as major visual arts destinations in the American West. Downtown Santa Fe has more than two hundred galleries within a two-square-mile radius. Scottsdale counts over one hundred within its town limits. Increasingly, Jackson Hole is gaining a reputation as an art buyers' destination. Our twenty-six downtown art galleries may not hold a candle to the number in Santa Fe or Scottsdale, but when you consider Jackson Hole's population—about 21,000—we have more galleries per capita than either.

"The art scene is not necessarily new here," says Joan Griffith, executive director of Trailside Galleries, the valley's first gallery and now with locations in Jackson and Scottsdale. "Artists have been coming to the area since the turn of the century, and soon after, the art buyers, too."

It was fifty-some years ago that Trailside Galleries opened. It was an opening locals thought crazy. Dick Flood Sr. tried to hide what he was doing for as long as possible. He instructed the man painting "Trailside Galleries" on the front of the space, which was on the Town Square, to do it in a way people today would associate with *The Wheel of Fortune* game show. "The painter skipped a letter or two here and there to hide what was going in," said Daro Flood, one of Dick Flood's sons and himself an artist, in an interview several years ago.

Eventually, the lettering was completed, there was no doubt what was going on, and it was time for Jackson's first Western art gallery to open. It was 1963. "People really thought dad was crazy for opening a shop that was devoted entirely to Western art," Flood said.



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PRICE CHAMBERS

MANY GIVE CREDIT to the Fall Arts Festival, the National Museum of Wildlife Art (NMWA), and, more recently, the Jackson Hole Art Auction for helping the valley's art scene grow and gain in credibility. Tayloe Piggott, owner of Tayloe Piggott Gallery, expresses deep gratitude to the NMWA, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2012, as the cornerstone institution that steadies the vagaries of the commercial art market. She

"The [Jackson Hole Art] auction has benefited everybody. It's a friendly gallery culture here, with lots of different styles."

– Joan Griffith, executive director Trailside Galleries

sends visiting artists and clients to the museum to educate them about the region's artistic heritage. "Many artists who are a part of art history are in their collections, and the museum's focus on their genre is important. It is really good art."

This year is the 30th Fall Arts Festival (September 3-13). Like so many successful events in Jackson Hole, it is a community collaboration. Launched by the Chamber of Commerce, today it draws on the efforts

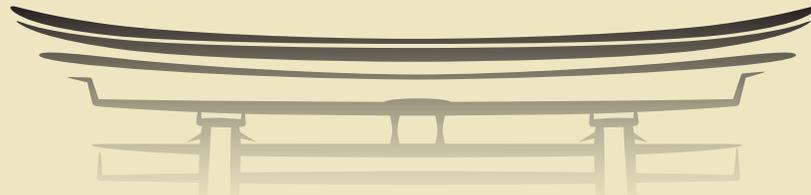
The National Museum of Wildlife Art holds the world's largest public collection of work by Carl Rungius, a renowned wildlife painter.

and energy of art galleries, the NMWA, the lodging and restaurant industries, and nonprofit groups.

The 8th annual Jackson Hole Art Auction (September 13 this year) is a partnership of Trailside Galleries and Santa Fe's Gerald Peters Gallery. Its significance as a destination art auction has grown with every year's record-breaking sales figures. "We've brought droves of art collectors to the area," Griffith says. "The auction has benefited ev-

erybody. It's a friendly gallery culture here, with lots of different styles."

ALONG WITH THESE events and the NMWA, the valley's gallery scene has expanded. The events certainly draw art collectors to the area, but buyers also include an increasing number of vacation homeowners. In 2013, *Barron's* magazine ranked Jackson Hole as its top location to buy a second home, citing what all



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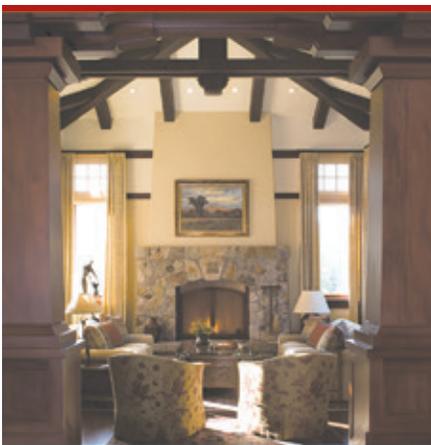
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COURTESY PHOTO

Interior designer Rush Jenkins of WRJ Design used this installation of butterflies by New York artist Paul Villinski as part of the design scheme in a Jackson Hole home.

year-round residents hope does not become too obvious—spectacular outdoor living, great schools, infrastructure, and arts in a tax-friendly state.

While Trailside Galleries, along with most every other gallery that opened and operated up until the mid-1990s, focused on Western and wildlife art, helping our art market expand and remain relevant to the larger art world is its responsiveness to clients. Over the past fifteen or so years, as more people have relocated to the valley from centers of global commerce

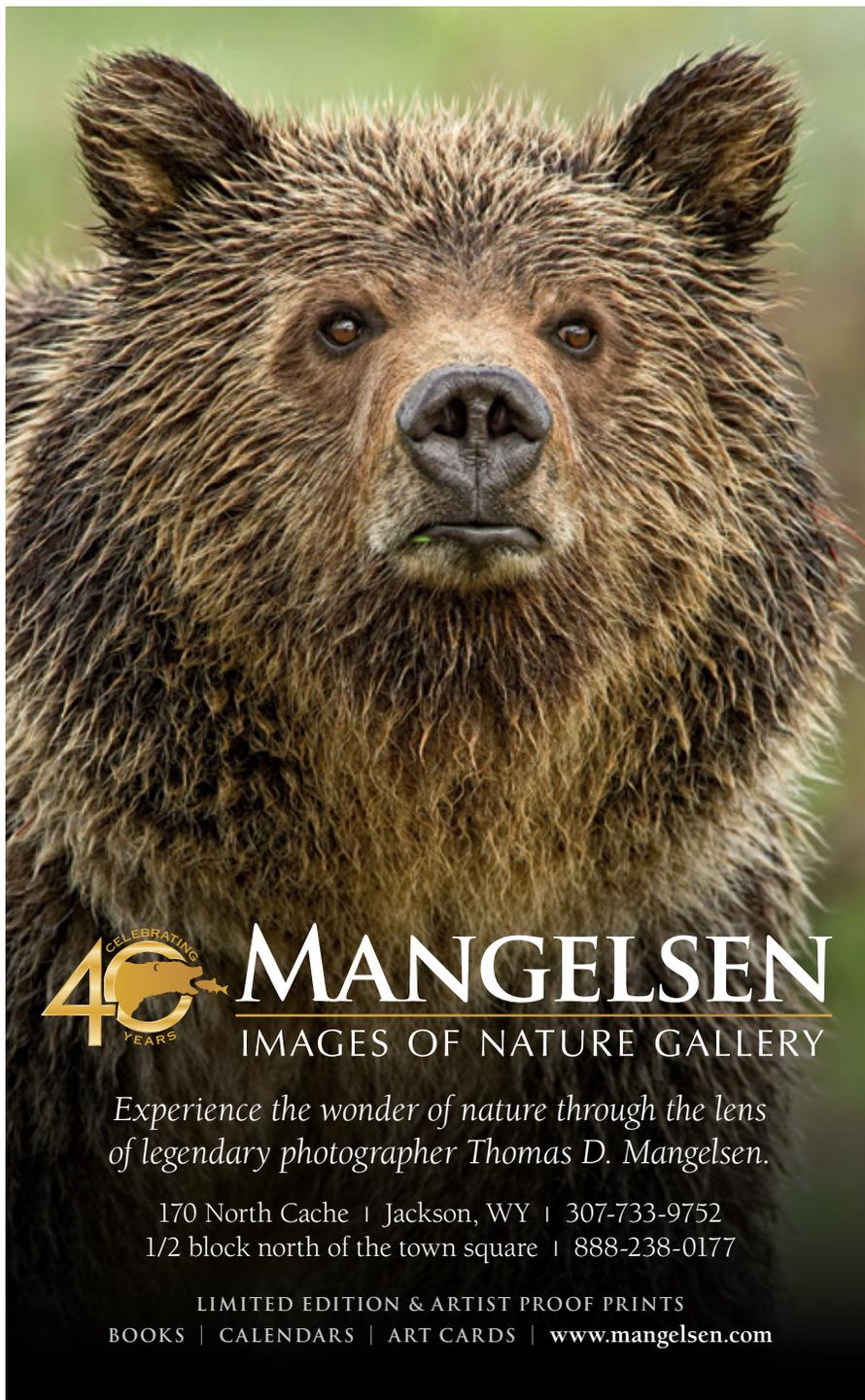
and culture, valley design—and naturally, the art that goes with it—has experienced an aesthetic shift. Modern design has made inroads in Jackson Hole. Piggott counts architects Peggy Gilday, John Carney, and Stephen Dynia as strong proponents of this sensibility, along with their clients who want “Western” art, but are redefining it for themselves.

Interior designer Rush Jenkins, principal at Jackson-based WRJ Design, was formerly curator of design for Sotheby’s New York. Artwork is a critical piece of his design process, and he works on many different levels with clients in regard to art acquisition and installation. He points to Tayloe Piggott, Heather James Gallery, and Altamira Fine Art as

bringing more contemporary names to Jackson, whether they are considered Western or not. “I want the art to speak to this region,” Jenkins says, “but there are multiple ways that is manifested.” Recent works he has selected for valley homes include an installation by New York artist Paul Villinski—a flight of painted aluminum butterflies ascending a bedroom wall—and a signed silk-screen print (*Tour de Force*), by artist Charles Pachter, of a contemplative moose standing boldly at the edge of a diving platform. “These are not necessarily regional artists, but their work feels like a reflection of the place. That’s what makes art global.”

Shari Brownfield, director of both Heather James Galleries—one here in Jackson and the original in Palm Desert, California—agrees that the advent of contemporary mountain home design, a departure from the classic log cabin look, heralded a new chapter for the valley’s art scene. In her twelve years here, Brownfield has worked as both a gallery director and a private art consultant. She says the past four or five years have brought a particularly rapid and pointed evolution of the art market as well as the average art buyer. Heather James Gallery offers an amazingly broad scope of art, in terms of both genre and media. The gallery hangs work from Impressionist paintings to contemporary steel sculptures. But, like Jenkins seeks to do, the gallery showcases art that speaks to this region. The work of California-based painter Penelope Gottlieb—on exhibit all summer long and at a solo show during the Fall Arts Festival—at first glance echoes classic Audubon prints. Look a little deeper at Gottlieb’s color-rich botanical paintings, though, and a subversive study of invasive species is revealed. Yoshio Ikezaki’s works—sumi ink rendered on handcrafted paper—has feathery, abstracted peaks and valleys that speak to landscapes, whether here or in the artist’s native Japan.

“We have a beautifully educated community that really stands behind all the arts—theater, dance, visual arts, everything,” Piggott says. “Artists I represent want that intimate connection with their collectors. Many people come here with certain dreams of the Western experience, but they’re very experienced collectors, having collected in many genres of art. It’s very refreshing.” ■



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