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BOOTH
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21ST CENTURY REGIONALISTS: ART OF THE NEW WEST

SPECIAL
EXHIBITIONS
GALLERY

Through
April 13, 2008

by James Burns



© Louisa McElwain, *Distant Trumpeter*, oil on canvas, 2005, 48 x 48, Collection of the Artist

The Booth Museum's first invitational exhibition is now on display in the Special Exhibitions Gallery through April 13, 2008. Organized around a theme, this exhibition expands the definition of Western art and focuses a lens on today's West rather than the mythic West of popular imagination.

The exhibition highlights artists whose work has its roots in the regionalist traditions of the mid-twentieth century, but who create their own distinctive works in a modern style. Included are three sculptors, Rebecca Tobey, Mark Yale Harris, and Josh Tobey, and eleven painters, Trish Booth, Josh Elliott, Woody Gwyn, Elaine Holien, Tricia Higgins Hurt, Louisa McElwain, Howard Post, Ed Sandoval, Doug Smith, Gary Ernest Smith, and Jim Vogel.



© Mark Yale Harris, *Looking For Something Not Known*, Utah alabaster, 2003, 33 x 13 x 5, Collection of the Artist

Regionalism was an art movement popular from the 1920s - 1950s focusing on an artist's depiction of a specific geographical area. During the 1990s regionalism, experienced resurgence in the Western art world as some artists began to express a contemporary vision of the West as a region.

These artists take liberties with color, form, composition, texture, light, shape and perspective. They interpret their subjects based on personal experience and emotions, creating artwork that is more expressive than illustrative. Their work falls roughly into five styles of art: surrealistic, impressionistic, tonalist, expressionistic, and near abstract.

Booth, Gwyn, Vogel and Hurt have a distinctly surreal style; figures and forms almost melt in their work. Hurt, the great niece of Victor Higgins (a founding member of the exclusive Taos Society of Artists) emphasizes color over form in her stylized landscapes. She uses surreal colors to portray the moods of identifiable places, as in *Passing Storm*.

The work of Doug Smith, Elliott, Sandoval, and McElwain is more expressionistic. They focus more on conveying emotions than creating faithful renderings of their subject matter. McElwain uses a palette knife to create texture in her large landscapes, such as *Distant Trumpeter*.

Gary Ernest Smith also uses a palette knife to create his tonalist works inspired by nature. His wide-view landscapes, such as *View Towards Eagle Mountains*, depict rural America. Color and detail are important, recreating the feeling of looking at a particular landscape.



© Tricia Higgins Hurt, *Passing Storm*, oil on canvas, 2007, 30 x 30, Collection of the Artist

Similarly, color and light are integral in the impressionistic works of Post, whose life experiences provide the inspiration for his work. His trademark is an unusual birds-eye perspective that gives his subjects stronger patterns and shapes as in *Swingin Gates*. (Cover)



© Gary Ernest Smith, *View Towards Eagle Mountains*, oil on lichen, 2006, 40 x 60, Courtesy Overland Gallery of Fine Art

The most abstract works in the exhibition are those of Holien, and the three sculptors, Mark Yale Harris, Rebecca Tobey, and Josh Tobey. Harris comments on humanity in his works relating to man's relationship to nature. Figurative, but very stylized, *Looking for Something Not Known* is a commentary on finding one's purpose in life.

Through their artwork these fourteen artists convey their feelings and beliefs about the West and visualize their niche on earth. And, they raise questions about belonging, rootedness, and what it means to be a native of a place.