

THE TELLURIDE WATCH free

Serving the town of Telluride and Mountain Village, Colorado and the surrounding region

Volume 4, Number 3 • Friday, January 21 - January 28, 2000

ARTS AND LEISURE

Gallen and O'Gara Offer New Perspectives on the Western Landscape

By Elizabeth Covington

Bill Gallen and Gary O'Gara's oil paintings have a similar feel - a choice of earthy tones, a sensual feel for the landscape, a sensitivity to the quality of light depending on the time of day.

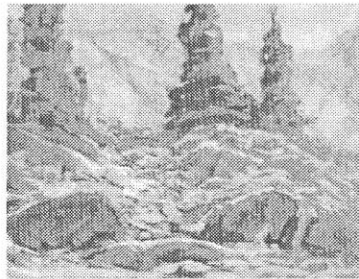
"Two to three landscape artists come into the gallery each week to show us their work," says Lissa Fesus, curator for the show. "We chose Gallen and O'Gara's work for their technique, their handling of materials, and especially the attention they give to light and perspective. Gallen's roads grab the viewer's eye and wander back into the painting.

"Both artists, create a mood and the viewer is able to re-visit a moment in Western landscape."

An exhibit of Gallen and O'Gara recent work opens Jan. 21 with a reception from 5:30-8 p.m. for the artists. The show will hang through the winter season.

Though the gallery has shown both painters work for nearly three years, it chose to highlight their work with a two-man show in order to bring the artists to the attention of gallery clientele.

Oil Paintings at Telluride Gallery of Fine Art



"Up onto the High Ridge"
14 x 18 Oil on Linen

ones." At the time Gallen and his now-Telluride-resident brother, Tom Gallen, had a thriving house painting business - "the big brushes" - in Milwaukee.

"I was looking for my muse", Bill Gallen says of the post-college days when he and his brother started the business, called Painting by the Gallen, a name under which Tom Gallen still works.

For ten years the Gallens ran the business, building it from a two-person show to a thriving business of twenty employees. When the brothers reached twenty employees, they considered doubling the size of the business and making more money.

"Then we had an existential moment," Bill Gallen says of the fleeting thought to go bigger. "And we decided not to push it further."

In fact, the two decided to scale things back - a critical decision that eventually allowed Bill Gallen the opportunity to pursue a budding interest in oil painting. At the time Gallen's marriage was in trouble and he was looking for "peace in life," he told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. His search for balance lead him to adult art classes offered by the Milwaukee Museum of Art, and

there he took drawing classes from an inspirational teacher.

"If you proved that you were not a psycho, they would let you into the museum to copy the work there," he says of first paintings. "I was able to copy several paintings in the art museum and I gave a lot of thought to painting."

Running with his newly discovered passion, Gallen rented a studio in downtown Milwaukee and set to work painting canvases. Within months he and other artists in the building held a show together; Milwaukee gallery owner Katie Gingrass noticed his work and invited him to exhibit in a 1997 three-person show in her gallery.

At the time Gallen's youngest brother was dying of leukemia, and caring for his ill brother gave him a deeper perspective on the leap of faith he was taking, moving from being house painter to being oil painter: "It is interesting, spending time with someone who is so sick. It was another existential moment when you see how tenuous our grip is on life on this planet. I decided it was really important to pursue my painting."



"Pacific Coast"
9 x 12 Oil on Linen

Gallen calls himself "plein air" painter, one who paints directly from nature. He and his mentor/teacher painter David Ballew take day trips around Santa Fe, finding a meadow a stream, mountain vista where they set up their easels and quickly recreate the scene in oil on canvas before the light changes.

sels and quickly recreate the scene in oil on canvas before the light changes.

"The light changes so quickly," he says of the desert light. "From 8 to 11 in the morning there is a completely different light."



"Sunny Slope in the High Country"
9 x 12 Oil on Linen

This means that Gallen has to work quickly, painting from thin to thick layers. "I try to get as fresh and spontaneous as possible," he says of the technique he uses called "alla prima" which means everything at once. "I have to do it quickly before the light changes. It is somewhat akin to playing the piano spontaneously."

With its quick and light brush strokes, Gallen's work has an almost watercolor feel to it and a viewer is drawn into the painting by the painter's fast, immediate brushwork.

"I paint at least a hundred paintings a year," he says, "but at least half of them are never seen in public."

Gallen sees himself pursuing his technique for many years to come.

"I feel far away from the point where I have exhausted what I can achieve with this technique," he says.

In addition to Telluride, Gallen shows his work in Charlotte, North Carolina, Laguna Beach, California, Madison, Wisconsin and in his hometown Santa Fe, New Mexico.



"Where the Light Comes In"
9 x 12 Oil on Linen

BIG BRUSHES FOR LITTLE ONES

Gallen has said that when he took up oil painting ten years ago he traded "big brushes for little