

The Salt Lake Tribune

‘Final Light’ exhibit illuminates iconic Utah artist Doug Snow

By glen warchol

The Salt Lake Tribune

Published: September 14, 2011 10:34AM

Updated: September 14, 2011 10:34AM

Most Utahns remember painter Doug Snow best for his epic clash with the Utah Supreme Court in 1998.

Snow’s run-in with the justices wasn’t legal in nature, and only indirectly related to the notion of freedom of artistic expression. Snow had created a 19-foot-high, 15-foot-wide painting for the new Scott M. Matheson Courts Building, into which the Utah Supreme Court was moving.

A selection committee had chosen Snow’s “Conflict and Resolution” painting to be hung behind the Supreme Court bench. The painting captures the aftermath of a powerful thunderstorm over Utah’s canyon country. Snow and a selection committee felt it was an apt metaphor for justice.

Despite Snow’s stature as one of the state’s most respected artists, some of the state justices took exception to his bold painting, arguing that their court “is not meant to be an art gallery.” But many art enthusiasts believe that Snow’s dramatic and towering depiction of nature and the land may have made the justices and their arguments over human disputes seem insignificant by comparison.

“It’s a powerful painting and the justices feared it was distracting to lawyers and people in court,” says Frank McEntire, curator of “Final Light.” “They wanted people focused on them as the symbol of justice. It became a battle of symbols.”

In the end, the justices spent \$26,000 to cover Snow’s \$70,000 work with a gray curtain. The painting is only revealed when the court isn’t in session.

A retrospective of Snow’s work, “Final Light,” which includes an early study for the Supreme Court work, is on display at the Salt Lake Art Center (through Oct. 22) and the Utah Museum of Fine Arts (through Jan. 8) at the UMFA.

Former Utah Supreme Court Chief Justice Michael Zimmerman, who was on the selection committee and loved Snow's painting, says the problem was mostly the scale of the painting, which has been renamed "Capitol Reef."

"It was an art-critic kind of thing," Zimmerman says. "The sheer size makes it striking. Nobody realized it was going to be that big. A portrait of Brigham Young that big would have been a problem."

Snow's electrifying abstract-expressionism colliding with Utah's red rock — the same artistic friction that meant curtains for "Conflict and Resolution" — is evident in many of the 36 paintings in the exhibition.

Snow's theater background comes through in the paintings, McEntire says. "His paintings show a bit of theatrical flair. They have a dramatic quality."

After Snow returned to his hometown of Salt Lake City from New York in the early 1960s, he embraced southern Utah. Eventually in 1990 he moved to Teasdale.

"He became enamored with the land," McEntire says. Snow's later works, in particular, bridge the gap between abstract expressionism and realistic landscapes by leaving a patch of sky, a few trees or a rock face recognizable — what McEntire calls a "fragment of the familiar."

"It's an abstract approach," McEntire says, "but in the end, it tells you it's a landscape."

Snow told McEntire he was content painting in southern Utah: "This place is it," the artist said. "I honestly think art in this country would be a more meaningful force if more artists took advantage of where they are planted."

Snow was painting on the morning before he died in a 2009 highway rollover near Sigurd. McEntire had had a long conversation with Snow a week before the accident and found the 82-year-old painter excited, as ever, about his work.

"He wanted to do another mural," McEntire says. "He was ready to rumble again."

As for the Supreme Court painting, McEntire hopes someday to see the curtain removed and the iconic painting embraced by another generation of justices, possibly more humble.

gwarchol@sltrib.com

—

Doug Snow's 'Final Light'

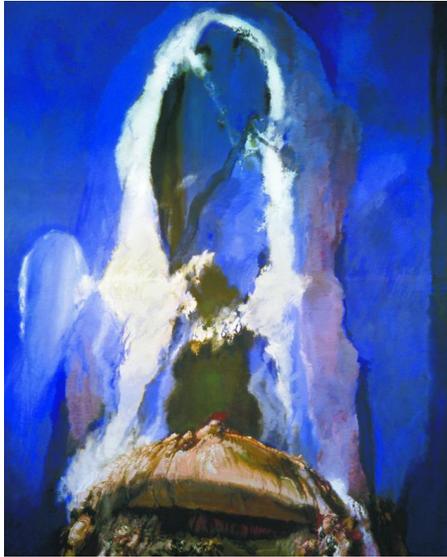
A retrospective of the paintings of V. Douglas Snow is jointly hanging at the Salt Lake Museum of Art and the Utah Museum of Fine Arts.

When • Through Oct. 22 at the Salt Lake Art Center and through Jan. 8 at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts.

Info • 801-328-4201 or www.SLArtCenter.org and 801-581-7332 or UMFA.utah.edu

Address • SLAC, 20 S. West Temple, Salt Lake City; and UMFA, 410 Campus Center Drive, University of Utah, Salt Lake City

Tickets • Salt Lake Art Center is free; \$7 admission at the UMFA; \$5, seniors and youth.



Capitol Reef (mural in the Scott M. Matteson Courthouse Supreme Court chamber), 1998



Study for courthouse mural used in Snow's 1% for art proposal for the State of Utah commission, 1997



Cove Desert Floor, 1989



Desert Landscape, 1959

Exhibition Spotlight: Springville

Drama of the Land: V. Douglas Snow in retrospect

by Shawn Rossiter

Doug Snow has been credited with bringing the New York School to Utah. While he was not the only artist to study the AbEx artists *in situ* and bring their techniques and outlook back with him, he was certainly one of the first; and, with the early recognition he garnered and the teaching position he held at the University of Utah, one of the most influential. Two years after his death, his long-time friend Frank McEntire has curated a retrospective exhibit of Snow's work, installed in two Salt Lake City locations. At the UMFA, the vibrant colors and dynamic compositions of Snow's canvases, dating from 1977 to 2004, hold their own in the expansive space of the museum's Great Hall. The Salt Lake Art Center's street level gallery provides a more intimate setting as well as a broader perspective: you are forced closer to the canvases so that they surround and overwhelm, while the chronology of the works begins with some of his early pieces from the 1950s and continues throughout his career, including the canvas left on his easel at the time of his death, now titled "Final Light: October '09, 2009."

What Snow learned in New York served him well for his long painting career, but it's evident from this retrospective that the most powerful and enduring influence on the artist was the landscape of the West. In Snow's early work, the mark-making techniques and compositional methods of the New York School -- and their antecedents in Europe -- are evident.^[1] These are the years when he discovered the expressive qualities of black, and when his hand learned a visual vocabulary that could be stretched and transformed to fit his needs. In these early works, a band of painterly activity strides across the center of the canvas,^[2] or comes rising up from the bottom to fill the painting. These spangled passages sit atop or are wedged in by more open bands of color. Sometimes the latter are previously applied grounds, but they are also frequently achieved by masking a heavily worked substrate (something he would have picked up looking at Pollock's "She Wolf" at the MOMA) so that his process may have been a form of automatic drawing in which "random" marks were eventually developed into masses and forms by a process of exclusion.^[3] In later paintings these loops and scrawls take on more concrete forms, becoming masses of paint that coalesce into the imagery of the western landscape: folds, cliffs, fins, monoliths, rock falls, hoodoos, and hogbacks.

Snow's work avoided the knitted picture plane that artists like de Kooning and Pollock inherited from the cubists. Form and ground remain separate in most of his work, and the horizon line, that most basic element of landscape painting, plays a dominant role: it can be an implied line, as in a magisterial block of forms that thrust themselves into the picture plane without entirely engulfing it; or a more explicit line, usually placed in dramatic positions -- high like a looming canyon wall, or very low, evoking a lone line of rocks beneath a desert sky.^[0]



[0](#) | [1](#) | [2](#) | [3](#) | [4](#) | [5](#) | [6](#)

As Snow's works progressed and took on more overt aspects of the landscape, the bands of color that were once abstract grounds now become masses of sky and cloud, full of atmospheric drama. These color fields wash across or come crashing down on the crusty, intricately worked surfaces evoking ridges and canyons. For an artist who lived in and painted from a desert landscape the prevalence of storms in Snow's work may appear incongruous, but it is precisely the desert dweller that pays the most attention to the weather. Moisture is desperately needed, but if it comes at the wrong time -- when you're hiking a slot canyon -- it can be disastrous. The full palette of the desert comes alive in the brief moments when a storm saturates the stone and fauna and a shift of clouds dramatically lights a hillside or mesa.

Snow's undergraduate studies at the University of Utah were in theater, and there is certainly something theatrical about his paintings.* His paintings can be violent and moody, majestic and thrilling; with their outrageous forms and stormy skies there is always something dramatic going on. For someone who's never been to the west, Snow's paintings may even seem like stage settings for imagined worlds -- akin to the fantasies of the Surrealists, or the jagged rock formations the artists of the Lowlands inserted into their narrative paintings. But to anyone who has spent time in Rabbit Valley or the Waterpocket Fold, or stared for hours, as Snow did, at formations like the Cockscomb,^[6] Snow's paintings are masterful evocations of a landscape that must be lived in to be believed.

Final Light: V. Douglas Snow In Retrospect is at the [Utah Museum of Fine Arts](#) and the [Salt Lake Art Center](#) through October 22.



Reprise, 1994



Untitled, 1956



Utah Landscape, 1955



Desert Landscape, 1959



Conflict and Resolution, 1997



Cove Desert Floor, 1989



Cockscomb, Near Teasdale 1985

Deseret News

Exhibit pays tribute to Doug Snow's work — 'He painted what he felt'

By Michael McKinlay

Published: Saturday, Sept. 10, 2011 3:00 p.m. MDT

Renowned Utah artist V. Douglas Snow loved living life to the fullest and expressing his inner vision through his artwork. Now the public has the chance to see through the eyes of Snow in the new exhibition, "Final Light: V. Douglas Snow in Retrospect."

From now until Jan. 8, 2012, Snow's work will be celebrated in a new exhibit at The Utah Museum of Fine Arts. The Salt Lake Art Center will house the other half of Snow's paintings until Oct. 22, 2011.

"I think my husband always painted what he felt, not what he saw," said Susan Snow, widow of Snow. "And when he had people in his studio look at his paintings, he wanted them to be moved by the paintings on an emotional level, not an intellectual level."

The exhibit features 35 public and private paintings that illustrate his early abstract expressionist-inspired period as well as his later works from the last three decades of his life.

"Doug Snow's legacy as a teacher and artist will live long into the future, and these joint exhibitions are a wonderful way to remember an artist loved by so many, said Gretchen Dietrich, executive director of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts. "We are also thrilled to introduce the work of such an important figure to a new generation of art lovers in our community."

Snow's paintings are found in various parts of Utah and the nation, including Springville Museum of Art, New York's Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Museum of Art at Brigham Young University and the Utah Museum of Fine Arts.

Snow also had three paintings that were purchased by a New York lawyer and were hung in one of the twin towers. His wife recalls three paintings that were lost on Sept. 11, two landscapes and an oversize flower painting.

"It wasn't until about a month or so after the bombing of the towers that we realized, 'Your paintings are gone,'" Susan Snow said.

However, some old acquaintances were able to surface for this exhibit.

"It makes me so happy because the exhibit is an opportunity for me and his other art friends to see old friends," Susan Snow said. "And not just people, but the paintings are old friends. I mean

so many of these paintings are scattered all over the place and when they go into private collections you often never see them again. So, it's nice to have them all gathered together."

Family, friends, neighbors, colleagues and art enthusiasts all gathered at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts and the Salt Lake Art Center on opening night to see Snow's collection from public and private galleries. The idea to showcase his masterpieces came about three days before his unexpected death from a car accident in October 2009.

"It was an obligation passed in my direction and I couldn't think of a better way to honor a friend and try to fulfill a last wish," said Frank McEntire, a colleague and close friend of Snow. McEntire, along with countless others, made the exhibition happen, through Snow's wish of a biography that showcased his work. "And organizing the book also organized the retrospective of the exhibition."

McEntire first met Snow through his work when he was an art critic for the Salt Lake Tribune, and from there, a friendship grew.

"I was the brother left behind and had to pick up the loose ends," McEntire said. The book, titled "Final Light: The Life and Art of V. Douglas Snow," produced by the University of Utah Press, is slated to be released next summer.

Doug Snow's life had always been devoted to art. After a childhood of drawing and formal lessons from LeConte Stewart, Snow began his formal art training in New York City at Columbia University in 1946. He later got a degree at the Cranbrook Academy of Arts in Bloomfield Hills, Mich. By age 30, Snow was featured in Life magazine, making him a nationally recognized artist. He later served as a professor and department chair at the University of Utah Department of Art. There, he and previous department chairman Alvin Gittins were able to expand the U's art program and develop a long-lasting friendship.

"What we think of today of the art department was really built on the backs of Alvin Gittins and Doug Snow," Susan Snow said. Douglas Snow and Gittins brought in modern and contemporary influences to the art department.

Although both had drastically different artistic strengths and geographic differences — Snow was a Westerner with an abstract expressionist style and Gittins was an Easterner with British roots and a forte for portraits — they were still able to connect artistically and poke fun at each other.

"One of the ways (Snow) used to tease Alvin Gittins was when he would pass by Alvin's studio and Alvin would be painting some important person's portrait and Doug would stick his head in and say, 'Hey Al, if you need help with the hands, just let me know,' " his wife recalled.

Both Susan Snow and McEntire want guests to see what Snow had envisioned his whole life. The exhibit is a precursor to his upcoming biography, and friends and family want the public to celebrate the artist's work and not just remember it.

"He enjoyed living," McEntire said. "The legacy of those who knew him was just to encourage others to live their life's dream as he was able to do. He tried to help people do that in many different ways."

For times and location of "Final Light: V. Douglas Snow in Retrospect," visit umfa.utah.edu or slartcenter.org.

Email: mmckinlay@desnews.com

© 2011 Deseret News Publishing Company | All rights reserved



Cockscomb II, 1987



Exhibition Opening Night at UMFA



Title Wall at SLAC



Doug Snow signature



Road to Teasdale, 1984



Untitled, 2004



Ghost Mountain, 2000

The Salt Lake Tribune

“Final Light” a must-see retrospective of Doug Snow’s art

By peg mcentee

Tribune Columnist

First published Sep 07 2011 05:24PM

Updated Sep 8, 2011 08:36AM

Taking in a Doug Snow painting involves weaving back and forth, side to side — all to absorb the singular beauty of landscape, sky and clouds.

Here in Salt Lake City, Snow is the subject of a retrospective honoring the life and work of the artist, teacher, playwright, opera lover, husband and father who died in 2009 at 82.

The exhibit, presented at the Salt Lake Art Center and the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, contains 34 of Snow’s works and runs through Jan. 8, 2012.

Many of the oils are of the Cockscomb, a soaring ridge near Teasdale, in southern Utah, where Snow built a studio, then a home many years ago.

Last month, I had the unexpected chance to see the ridge through the high, wide windows of Snow’s home, where his wife, Susan Snow, welcomed us with glasses of pure water from her well.

Walking outside, I studied the Cockscomb in the equally pure air of a Wayne County day. But when I saw his paintings this week, it became clear that Snow’s vision was far more complex than mine, as evidenced in the rich colors he saw in its crest of Navajo sandstone.

“Grab and investigate,” was his mantra, his old friend Frank McEntire says.

You see that in his early work as well as the later; in “Untitled,” a spire of red-orange bordered by dark borders top and bottom, painted sometime in the 1950s. And in his “Thorn Bush,” a dark, brooding, even slightly frightening piece created in 1960.



Photo of Snow's studio taken by Frank McEntire a few days after his death.
Unfinished "Final Light: October '09" on the wall.