

# Four Directions

December 4-April 10

THE STEAMBOAT Art Museum has established a strong reputation for presenting exhibitions on some of today's best western artists. This month a quartet of such respected painters comes together for a blockbuster show titled *Four Directions—Common Paths*. Ralph Oberg, Matt Smith, Skip Whitcomb, and Dan Young are linked not just by their depictions of the western landscape but by deep personal and professional friendships that have endured for more than three decades. "It's not only about their art," says Betse Grassby, the museum's executive director. "It's their story, their incredibly positive camaraderie and brotherly competition through which they've pushed each other to excellence."

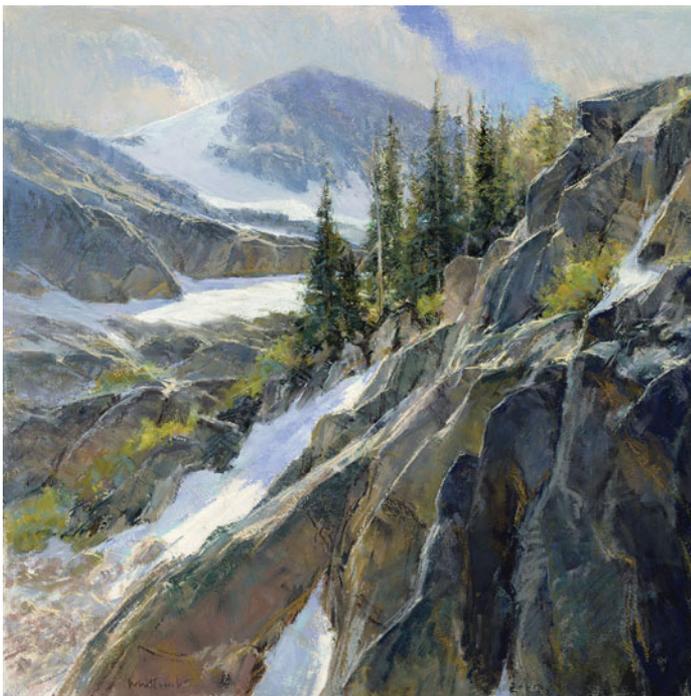
All four artists—Smith, who hails from Scottsdale, AZ, is the only one

who doesn't live in Colorado—plan to be on hand during the show's early days for a "soft" opening, due to precautions that currently limit museum attendance to 35 people at a time. Adds Grassby, "We're focusing on a big midwinter celebration and some member events," with specifics to be updated on the museum's website. All works can also be viewed online.

Whether experienced virtually or in person, the show represents what the artists themselves consider their best work. Each man has selected some 25 examples of both recent and older pieces, including plein-air studies and larger studio paintings.

About a quarter of them are available for purchase. Photos from the group's travels together round out the display.

Across the board, the paintings impress with their virtuosity. Consider Oberg's *HIGH IN THE BITTERROOTS*, which he considers "one of my favorite plein-air paintings ever." A scene of broad scope, considering its diminutive dimensions, it conveys remarkable detail through energetic paint application. Even more epic, his studio piece *NO MORE COWBOYS* captures arid Utah ranchlands. "It's techni-



▲ Skip Whitcomb, *Ascension*, pastel, 24 x 24.  
 ► Ralph Oberg, *No More Cowboys*, oil, 18 x 36.

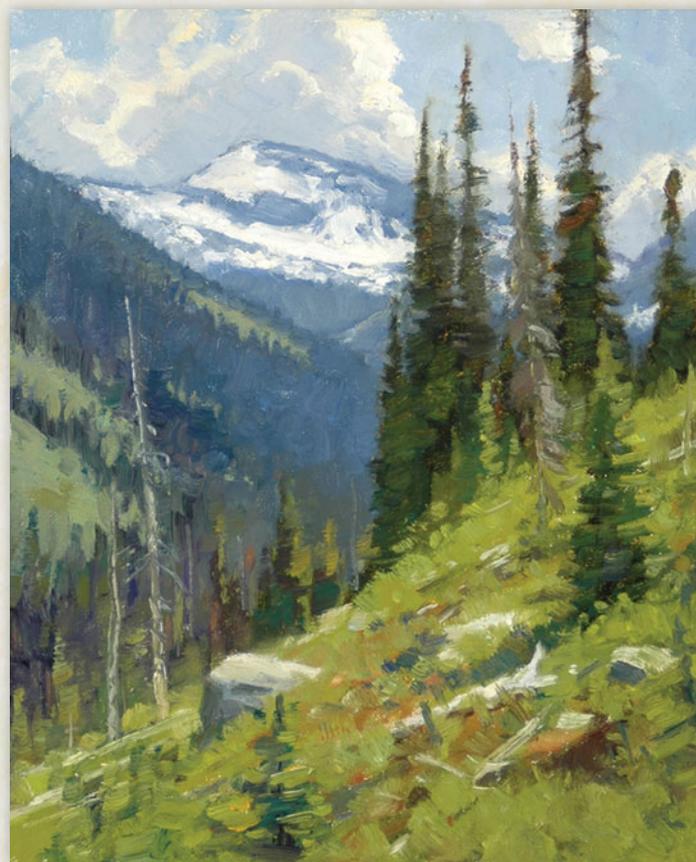


Dan Young, *Dance at Dusk*, oil, 12 x 16.





**Matt Smith, Monsoon Season, oil, 22 x 28.**



**▲ Ralph Oberg, High in the Bitterroots, oil, 12 x 10.**

**◀ Dan Young, Just Passing Through, oil, 28 x 48.**

cally one of my meatier, juicier works, painted with a lot of freedom and confidence,” Oberg notes.

Young points to *DANCE AT DUSK* as an example of his own plein-air approach. He painted it at the Silt River Preserve, located just six minutes from his home on Colorado’s Western Slope, and it portrays a thicket of cottonwoods and willows backlit by the setting sun. His larger studio work *JUST PASSING THROUGH*, evoking a peaceful dawn scene, maintains “the feel of my field-work,” Young says, in its spontaneous paint application.

Among Smith’s paintings, *ROCK PILE* exemplifies his skill at dramatically

deploying brush strokes to conjure nature’s power; it was an award winner at the 2018 Laguna Beach Plein Air Painting Invitational in Laguna Beach, CA. By contrast, *TONTO GIANTS*, a studio painting of saguaros in Arizona’s Tonto National Forest, seems almost photographic—a result, says Smith, of the fact that “if you get the color and value accurate, it’s amazing what the viewer can fill in.”

Whitcomb, too, displays such skill in his plein-air sketches and in larger studio works like *WINTER PASTURE*, an idyllic scene of the Steamboat area, and *SUMMER MOON—NEW FORK RIVER*, a nocturne in northwestern Wyo-

ming. He describes the relationship he and his pals share with succinct clarity: “We’re true kindred spirits, like brothers.” Adds Betse Grassby, summing up the show, “This exhibition demonstrates the wonderful synergistic impact of their 30-year relationships.”  
—Norman Kolpas

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