

**UPCOMING GROUP SHOW**

Up to 36 works on show  
Dec. 5, 2008-May 26, 2009

Museum of Northern Arizona  
3101 N. Fort Valley Road  
Flagstaff, AZ 86001  
(928) 774-5213

**SHOW LOCATION FLAGSTAFF, AZ**

## Painted journeys

By Mary Cassai

Three women caught up in the same passion sounds like something out of a D.H. Lawrence novel. But in this case, the three women are New York painters **Judy Abbott**, **Katharine McKenna** and **Eva van Rijn**, all masters at capturing the American West on canvas. Their efforts won them entry into the first Artist-In-Residence program at the Museum of Northern Arizona (MNA) in Flagstaff and a six-month exhibition

of their residency works called *Painted Journeys on the Colorado Plateau*.

"Landscape painting became a vehicle for the revelation and celebration of the Divine in nature. Painters of the period sought to illustrate that vision with rich color and breathtaking, atmospheric spaces for an eager and receptive audience," says MNA Curator of Fine Art Alan Petersen. "During the 1850s, many Eastern artists, including those associated with the Hudson River

School, began to look to the West in search of unpainted landscapes."

*Painted Journeys on the Colorado Plateau* opens at the MNA on Dec. 5 and runs through May 26, 2009. The exhibition of 36 landscapes (12 per artist) offers varied artistic interpretations of the Colorado Plateau—the massive physiographic area that subsumes parts of Colorado, New Mexico, and much of Utah and Arizona. The MNA will choose one painting per artist for its permanent collection.

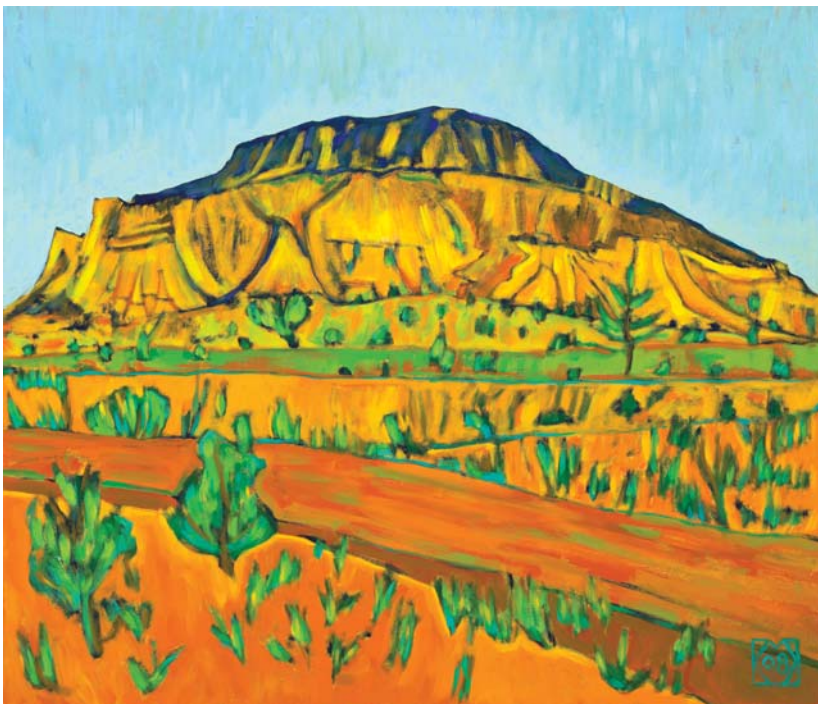


Judy Abbott, *On the Rez*, oil, 7 x 11"





**Eva van Rijn**, *Dinosaur Country I*, oil, 38 x 46"



**Katharine McKenna**, *Navajo Mountain Road, Utah*, oil, 24 x 28"

Petersen calls the residency a benefit not only to the artists, but to the museum as well.

"It's an historic move," says Petersen. "It moves the museum to the forefront of a great American tradition—the migration of New York artists to the West to do their life's work. Finally, we get the chance to see the Colorado Plateau with not one, but three new pair of eyes!"

The art of Abbott, McKenna and van Rijn convey a contemporary journey in the tradition of the earlier Hudson River Valley artists. Visitors will be struck by the contrasts in style and technique—Judy Abbott is a realist; Katharine McKenna, an expressionist; and Eva van Rijn a symbolist.



A colorist in the manner of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Fauves like Henri Matisse and André Derain, Katharine McKenna is an expressionist who paints what she sees with the mind's eye. In McKenna's piece *Navajo Mountain Road, Utah*, the color mix of the road diagonal, the brush, and the yellow field lead the eye to the mountain mass itself, a golden icon crowned in cobalt blue. It takes a close look to discover another treasure: images—wigwams, an abstract face, a figure on all fours—cut into the facets of the rock.

Native American heritage (Esopus tribe on her mother's side), and the memory of living nearly three years on the Navajo reservation, enrich Judy Abbott's perspective. To her, the land is mystical and sacred.

"Every time I go out there," she says, "I am in awe of the beauty of the place. I am unable to paint for days until I have first drunk in this beauty, until it has become part of me. Then I can begin my sketches."

Although Abbott is an all-terrain painter, two of her works in particular demonstrate skill with both open horizontals and thickly populated verticals. *Kelly Canyon* is a tour de force. Thick, wild and luxuriant, this is the canyon right after a wash has cannonaded through, etching new cracks in the mass of yellow rock. Rich brown sediment has settled into every crevice. Thick forest masses line both sides of the canyon, virtually obliterating the sky, but the sky answers the challenge in the blue pools on the canyon floor.

Eva van Rijn's love affair with nature began at age 3 in Den Hague, Holland, when her artist-mother brought a goat into the bedroom to introduce them to each other. "I'll never forget those eyes, that coat, that beard," she says. "From then on, I was hooked."

Van Rijn immigrated to America with her parents during World War II, settling in Woodstock, New York. In 1959 she discovered the American West on a painting trip to a Navajo reservation, and she has been going West every summer to paint since then.



**Eva van Rijn**, *Long Way Down*, oil, 24 x 24"



**Katharine McKenna**, *Yaqui Point, Grand Canyon, AZ*, oil, 24 x 28"





Judy Abbott, *Kelly Canyon*, oil, 15 x 8"



Van Rijn's depictions of the landscape are rich in subtle color and atmospheric depth. Her paintings glow with a tangible sense of light. In her piece titled *Long Way Down*, the viewer is completely involved, forced in a sense to stand where the artist stands—on the rim looking some 5,500 feet down to the floor of the canyon below, where the Colorado River becomes a narrow blue ribbon in the distance.

All three of these female artists bring gifts to Arizona: Abbott, her Native American heritage; McKenna, the only native Westerner (born in California and raised in Ward, Colorado), summers sifting for dinosaur fossils; and van Rijn, an ancestor, greatest of all Dutch artists, Rembrandt van Rijn. 🍷

*Mary Cassai is a freelance writer based in New York.*

For a direct link to the exhibiting gallery go to



[www.westernartcollector.com](http://www.westernartcollector.com)

New York artists Judy Abbott (from left), Katharine McKenna and Eva van Rijn will unveil their residency works in an exhibition called *Painted Journeys on the Colorado Plateau* at the Museum of Northern Arizona.