

PETER HAGEN

The Landscape of Silence



"Come Go With Me" • 34"x 40" • Oil



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225 Canyon Road • Santa Fe, New Mexico • 505.988.1161 • info@mcclarryfineart.com



TIMELESS BEAUTY

By Vicki Stavig

“I find more beauty in the landscape than anywhere else. I love the overall beauty of it; there’s a mystery there. Everything in our lives today is about speed. Everyone is racing around, but landscape is peaceful, constant; it has a quietness, a timelessness, about it.”

That, says Peter Hagen, is why he paints landscapes. And he does so magnificently, capturing the colors, the light, the majesty of what Mother Nature has placed before us. While he paints those scenes with

enthusiasm and great skill, he also bemoans the fact that so many of us don’t take the time to look around us and appreciate the beauty of the land—and the sky, which also is a source of inspiration for Hagen.

“Watch a storm move in—and dark clouds, lighting dancing across the horizon, a walking rain shower over a mesa, booming thunder—it’s subtle inspiration,” he says. “Painting is a very solitary endeavor, and that is wonderful; it gives me time to think, to look. I am my own best

company. It seems the older I get the more I see—getting out and looking, looking, seeing. Sometimes it is just one small spark, an idea, a small picture that will grow in my head. Other times it will be one large landscape right in front of me.”

*Above
Cycle of Seasons, oil, 30" by 36"*

“I love the chamisa here in northern New Mexico, always visible but sometimes never seen: its presence, softness, its ever-changing color and shape throughout the year.”

Hagen has been drawing since he was a young boy and has been painting outdoors ever since his mother bought him a set of paints, when he was about 12. "I would go out in the backyard and paint—woodpiles and anything else out there," he says.

Hagen spent the first 12 years of his life in Flushing, New York, then moved with his family to Connecticut, where he went on to get involved in swimming, soccer, tennis, and sailing. While his mother spent her days raising her son and three daughters, Hagen's father supported the family by working as an account executive with an advertising firm in New York.

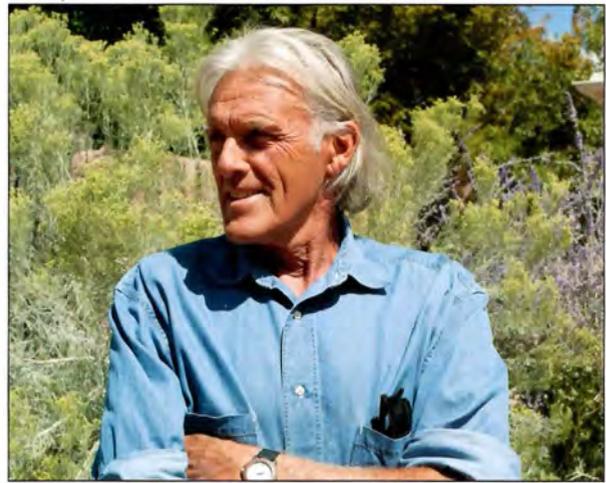
Following his graduation from high school, Hagen enrolled at the

Walking Across the Mesa, oil, 20" by 30"

"This is another one of the classic summer sights—a monsoon shower moving in, walking, dancing on the horizon, and letting go."

University of Arizona, crediting his curiosity about the West as the driving force for that venture. He lasted just one year, however, before realizing he missed his family and his life on the East Coast. He continued his studies, enrolling at the University of Bridgeport, which he says had a great art department, and taking drawing classes at the Silvermine Art Guild. "I was thinking I would go to New York and work in advertising and do some painting," he says. "But the big interest was abstract, and I wasn't too enthusiastic about that, so I put a hold on the artwork."

Just a few credits short of earning a degree in fine arts, Hagen dropped out of school and began to work in a restaurant, where he met a young woman named Lindsay, and the two quickly became an item. "We decided to take the winter off and go skiing in Colorado, and we never came back," he says. "I loved the mountains, the skiing, the beauty of the land and the wildness of it. I wasn't painting too much out there but, as time went on, I wanted to get back to what I really loved to do, so I started painting landscapes."





Hagen's day job—actually two jobs—centered around selling real estate and serving as a member of the ski patrol in Crested Butte. After 10 years—and the birth of his son Conor (now 30 and a film maker in Brooklyn, New York)—Hagen made a life-changing decision. “I decided that the winters were too long, and I wanted to do more painting,” he says. “I had made some road trips to

New Mexico and realized there was a lot of art and artists there so, in 1987, we moved to Taos.

“It was a small town with a great art history. It was a beautiful place to paint. In Taos, I really began to focus on painting every day. I had sold my house in Crested Butte and had enough money to get by. And I got to know some artists in Taos—Walt Gonske, Rod Goebel,

and Ray Vinella.”

Within just a year of the move, Hagen approached a gallery, which agreed to represent him and his work, and he was on the way to becoming a successful professional artist. “Sales were decent right away,” he says. “Within a year or two, they jumped up, and it's been good all along.”

Although Hagen is, for the most



“Some people are scared to death to be outside; I love it. I go out there where it’s all happening—the color, the light, the shadows, the warmth. I like to see it first hand.”

Sunset Ablaze, oil, 30" by 48"

“This is one of the classic New Mexican sunsets. It does not happen to this degree every evening but, when it does, it is quite a show; dazzling, constantly changing, with a vibrant array of colors.”

part, a self-taught artist, he did take two workshops led by Vinella, whom he credits with helping to set him on the right path. “Ray got me on the track I wanted to be on,” he says. “He helped me develop my palette, showed me what to look for, and gave me great direction.”

After 10 years in Taos, Hagen moved his family to Santa Fe, a larger city with more opportunities.

Today he and Lindsay have a home just a few miles from the center of town, where Hagen spends some of his leisure time growing vegetables and flowers, subjects he painted years ago, before focusing on what he describes as “the bigger landscape.”

Hagen paints every day, spending about half of his time out in the field and reveling in the opportunity

to be outside, enjoying—and appreciating—the natural wonders of the area. Most artists, he says, are initially intimidated by the thought of painting from life, but he had begun doing so on his own while in Colorado and, by the time he moved to New Mexico, he was comfortable with the process.

“I would just set up my small easel and start working,” he says. “Some



Flores de Manzano, oil, 30" by 60"

"This is one of the old orchards around Velarde, New Mexico. It was early spring along the Rio Grande. These orchards are small treasures. They were dripping in blossoms. I was lucky to get this one, as a frost moved in that night."



In the Shadows, oil, 24" by 48"

"I'm intrigued with the arroyos here in New Mexico; their stillness, timelessness. They can be calm one day and change rapidly with a monsoon rain raging with water. In this painting, the snow gave me these wonderful shadows and shapes."

people are scared to death to be outside; I love it. I go out there where it's all happening—the color, the light, the shadows, the warmth. I like to see it first hand. Sometimes I'll do small pieces that I can finish in one day, or I'll bring it back and work on it in the studio. I also take photos for additional information."

Although he loves painting outdoors, it is not without its challenges, Hagen says. The bugs, the wind, the rain, the snow all can be a little disconcerting, but those conditions aren't about to keep Hagen from packing up and heading out to discover new scenes to paint.

"I usually paint within an hour radius of my home," he says, adding that he also continues to take some road trips



Winter Blues, oil, 24" by 30"

"This is a late winter afternoon in one of the many arroyos in the Santa Fe area. I was taken with the blue shadows, mixed with the golden softness of the chamisa."

back to Colorado to paint the mountains and rivers there. "There is so much going on around here. I find new things, because the light is always changing, and there are changes with the seasons and the skies. It's all exciting. Years ago I painted in Spain and Portugal, and I've been to Mexico and Guatemala. They're wonderful, but I like to focus on what's going on here. My favorite time to paint is late afternoon, because there's a warmer light and bigger shadows, and there's more happening. I also paint at night."

Hagen enjoys the outdoors no

matter what he is doing—painting, fishing, or riding his bike. "I ride for one and a half hours every other morning," he says. "It's partly meditation time, and it keeps me in shape."

Asked about changes in his style, Hagen says, "After many years of painting, one does change. It's important to grow, to learn. You see differently. You explore with each painting; that's the enjoyment. That is life. I want to explore, try a few new things."

Hagen goes on to quote Andrew Wyeth, who said, "Nothing I've ever done has scratched the surface

of what I want to do." He likes the statement, although he admits it might be a little too strong for how he views his own work.

"I'm always pushing myself and asking myself, 'Where am I headed?' What I continue to try to do is simplify my work—the landscape, looking for shapes, patterns, color," "I try to find the abstract qualities, then try to combine that with realism. I try to capture the simplicity." ❧

Vicki Stavig is editor of Art of the West.