



Capitol art exhibition displays variety of paintings, drawings

by **Jennifer Rife** | FEBRUARY 7, 2017

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Walking into the Wyoming State Museum’s brightly lit multi-purpose room, its walls painted a shade of blue, one is hit with a barrage of colors in rectangular frames. The 17th Annual Governor’s Capitol Art Exhibition, on exhibit through March 4, has taken over the space.

Hung in an adapted salon style — hung closely together, but not floor-to-ceiling as is typical in a salon hanging — the show is a survey of 70 pieces created by artists from around Wyoming. The variety of sizes, styles, mediums and colors stimulates the senses. Variety *is* the name of the game in this exhibit and there is something for everyone to ponder, like, and dislike.

Dominated by representational paintings, there are the requisite images of bison, grand landscapes, horses, wildlife, and other western imagery.

Abstract pieces, including a compelling bold canvas by Alissa Davies of Jackson, are interspersed among the recognizable subjects, as are a few with challenging subject matter. Without artists' statements as access points into the artwork, these are primed to be misunderstood or ignored for lack of understanding. This is unfortunate for both viewers and the artists.

As one would expect with an exhibit of this size and scope, there are many outstanding pieces. Landscapes by Terry Kreuzer of Cheyenne and Virginia Moore, another Jackson artist, draw the viewer into the places they depict. Images of horses by Lynn Newman of Cheyenne, Lucas Anderson of Laramie and John Giarrizzo of Cody demonstrate how one subject can be presented so differently.

Only three 3-dimensional pieces are included in the show, one of which is a carved and glazed clay vessel by Joy Jones of Riverton.

Photography also has a small presence in the show, and includes representational images of Wyoming landscapes, a rodeo scene and a Native American dancer in traditional attire. While it is not unexpected to see a photograph of an elk, seeing an elk carcass in an exquisite black and white photo, by Chuck Kimmerle of Casper, is surprising.



One art quilt by Gillette's Joan Sowada is overshadowed by the group of paintings it hangs with, and many small pieces get lost among the larger pieces surrounding them.

The purpose of the exhibit, which is important in understanding its context, is to expand the Governor's Capitol Art Collection. From a press release:

"Established in 2000 under an initiative by Governor Jim Geringer, and organized under the auspices of the Wyoming State Museum and the Wyoming Arts Council, the Governor's Capitol Art Exhibition celebrates the work of Wyoming artists.

"The State's five elected officials and representatives from other state agencies participating in the program select Purchase Award winners. Works receiving Purchase Awards join the Wyoming State Museum's prestigious Capitol Art collection."

The exhibit space has limitations for housing the expanding collection, as does the Museum. Those considerations mean works that exceed specified extra-large dimensions, video, and installations are not accepted for entry. Artists whose work involves these mediums are not included, eliminating a swath of artists living and working in the state.

To view the exhibit as representative of Wyoming artists is not an accurate assumption, and keeping the context of the show in mind is imperative in this regard.

Accepted pieces are chosen from artist submissions by a judge from outside of Wyoming. This year, painter and muralist Archie Rand of Brooklyn, New York, served as juror. A curatorial statement is not included with the exhibit, nor is there one on the exhibit's website. Such a statement, along with artists' statements, would enhance not only the exhibit, but the website. It would offer insight into the exhibit and the work, enriching the experience for all.

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For exhibit-goers who enjoy variety and a chance to see a multitude of artistic endeavors, this is an excellent show. Those who prefer art exhibits that are hung with more breathing room for each piece and statements to guide attendees into the artist's viewpoint will find this show frustrating. Either way, the exhibit is worth seeing, if only to take in the amount and variety of art created in a sparsely populated state.

A reception for the Governor's Capitol Art Exhibition is open to the public Thursday, Feb. 9 from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Several awards will be made at the reception.

Artist Jennifer Rife holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art History from the University of Kansas. By day she works at the Laramie County Library in Cheyenne coordinating and curating exhibits. Her website is www.artinthemiddleofnowhere.com.

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