

Carol Hagan: Grateful Expressions

Nurturing the spirit of living under the Big Sky through bold colors



ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST

2005

OIL ON PANEL

18" x 24"

CAROL HAGAN LIVES NEAR THE Yellowstone River outside Billings, Montana. In a neighborhood that fades into the beige winter landscape, Hagan's bold colors explode onto canvas. A balance of contrasts surrounds her. Hagan's paintings shout vibrant colors while her spirit whispers a grateful humbleness. She takes time to study her subjects and create

her artwork, but efficiently attacks deadlines and projects.

At home, with her most valued assets surrounding her, she honors herself and her talents. Her husband, Pat, works closely with her, while her animals—Australian shepherd, Chewie, and her three cats—are always nearby. In the front room of her house "The Bugler," an elk exhaling winter



BATHING BEAUTY
2005
OIL ON LINEN
54" x 48"

breath, and "Owl Shaman," a barn owl swathed in a brilliant blanket, hang on the walls along with others.

"I become attached to my paintings," Hagan says, as her husband enters the room she adds, "It is difficult deciding which ones to let go of. They are all great."

Hagan began her fine art career by painting angels.

"I started with angels as a form of gratitude for finding this gift of painting. I am a spiritual person and I started painting to say 'thank you.'" One of Hagan's lithograph prints, "Guardian Angel," shows an angel with outspread wings. On the bottom of the print, the message summarizes her approach to life and painting: "May your days be graced



WARM SUMMER EVENING

2006

OIL ON PANEL

12" X 12"

with Love, your heart be filled with Joy, and your Life be blessed with Peace."

Hagan carries the beauty of a country-western singer with a mane of sandy blond hair and the calm, sky-blue eyes of the girl next door. In her soft-spoken manner, she tells the story of becoming a fine artist.

In college she studied accounting and found that it was

not a good fit. When motherhood beckoned with the birth of her son, Matt, she began a home-based business designing a line of children's clothing. As the business succeeded she spent more time away from home, defeating the original goal of spending more time with her child. She sold the business to a sportswear company and started graphic design work. Then the craft of fine artistry entered her life.



PRETTY GIRL
2005
OIL ON PANEL
24" x 36"

On a whim, one day Hagan went out and bought paints. Working with acrylics, she fell into painting by trial and error. The medium provided a refuge from her fast-paced work as a graphic artist.

Two years ago she started painting with oils after completing the first formal art classes she had ever taken. Hagan professes that her instructor Joe Abbrescia, who has been recognized as one of America's accomplished impressionist painters, "set me on a new course." Oils give her the ability to be more versatile and expressive with colors.

Hagan's first show—in 1988—was in Billings at Gainan's Flower and Garden Center's newly built atrium. Hagan exhibited a body of work for the show including a handful of paintings from her personal collection. Even that early show represented the subjects Hagan revels in painting. "I have a love of color and horses, of animals and Montana. As a little girl, I always wanted a horse."



BABY BARN SWALLOW
2005
OIL ON PANEL
6" x 6"

She claims her self-discipline came from competing in long distance running when she was growing up.

As Hagan discusses the challenges of owning horses, she flashes a knowing—almost mischievous—smile when she says that she can have the horses she wanted by painting them. “Besides horses, my favorite animals are bears. They have personality,” Hagan says, remembering two days in West Yellowstone, Mont., at The Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center where she took more than 2,000 digital photographs.

Hagan’s success comes from a good work ethic. She claims her self-discipline came from competing in long distance running when she was growing up. Every day for six hours she paints, with late afternoons spent doing business.

Prominent Plains artist Kevin Red Star has known Hagan for many years and has witnessed her evolution as a painter. “If you paint every day, you get better and better. Hagan’s art is innovative and exciting. I can see that her work is getting better. She is very, very good ... a fine colorist,” he says.

Hagan works in collaboration with her husband, Pat, who does the computer and printing work. For six years, he has perfected the technique of *giclée* printing, a method that is one

of the best reproduction techniques available in the fine art market. *Giclée* is a French word meaning “fine spray.” Hagan is proud of Pat’s talents and artists including Red Star, Charles Fritz, Nancy Cawdrey, and others trust Pat to accurately reproduce their works. With her own reproductions, she hand paints highlights with acrylic paints. “Each one has a piece of me. I am very particular about the reproduction of color. I want it to be as accurate as possible,” Hagan explains.

Originally Hagan worked in the breakfast nook of her home. Now, in her new sunlit studio next to the garage, natural light allows her to best see her colors. Here, Hagan paints while listening to music and recordings of nature sounds. She disconnects communication from the outside world, not allowing phone or fax to disrupt her creativity. Other incentives stimulate Hagan’s work too. Several thick bamboo sticks painted black, white and gold lean on the wall. A collection of smooth heart shaped rocks lie adjacent to a stack of photographs of her subjects.

The studio embodies her artistic path. On an easel, a

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Artist Carol Hagan

reproduction of her recent "Pretty Girl" displays more muted colors and her move towards realism. A year ago, Hagan started painting tipis because of their spiritual nature. On another wall hangs "Red Horse Lying Down," a piece that reflects the pri-

mary colors and less detailed images of her earliest work.

These days Hagan is busy. She is booked into 2007 with commissions and projects. Her work has been so well received that she is hesitant to take on more galleries wanting to represent her original paintings. She quietly boasts of having two oil canvases—"Bathing Beauty," of a bear and "Another One Bites the Dust," a bucking horse—selected for the C.M. Russell Auction of Original Western Art in Great Falls, Mont., where she will also have a showroom displaying her work.

Scott Cox, owner of Rimrock Art and Frame in Billings, says that Hagan's paintings are the main draw in his store. "Everyone loves her art. She has the ability to use color to create images."

At the Kampgrounds of America, Inc., headquarters in downtown Billings, Hagan contributes to a display entitled "The Art of Camping." Her favorite piece depicts a couple of tents and reminds her of a girlhood camping expedition when her parents allowed toasted marshmallows in the morning. The painting is appropriately named "Marshmallows for Breakfast." President and CEO, Jim Rogers believes their motto of camping and fun are synergistic to Hagan's paintings.

And for the rest of us, living here under the Big Sky and beyond, Carol Hagan's expression of herself in her paintings continues to color and nurture us all.

To VIEW SOME OF Carol Hagan's paintings, visit her website: www.carolhaganstudios.com **BSJ**

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