

ARTS

# 5 local artists are in governor's show

Work by Thal, Wipfler, Stratman, Monroe and Dowd to be shown at the state capitol.

By Gabe Allen

Fine art has been a coveted tradition in Wyoming since Thomas Moran and Henry W. Elliot tagged along on the Hayden Geological Survey of 1871. Much of the art produced in Wyoming has focused on the unique ecology, geology and wildlife found in the state, but many well-regarded artists subvert or divert from this trope as well, especially in recent years.

Perhaps nothing is a better example of both perennial themes and shifting tastes on a state level than the annual Governor's Capitol Art Exhibition in Cheyenne. Of the 63 artists selected for the 2020 exhibition, four hail from Teton County — Kathy Wipfler and Kay Stratman, both of Jackson; Laurie Thal, of Wilson; and Mona Monroe, of Alta — while a fifth, Jenny Dowd, is a well-known local artist who lives in Alpine.

According to Mark Brammer, the director of the Wyoming State Museum, the exhibition is focused on celebrating art and creativity in Wyoming in general, not any one genre or medium.

"One of the things that makes this exhibition so great is that it is open to all types of work," Brammer said.

The exhibition showcases sculpture, photography, painting, and, in Thal's case, glass blowing.

Thal, who has a glass-blowing studio attached to her home in Wilson, had two of her glass bowls selected for the exhibi-



Each work that is displayed during the exhibition — like "Lotus Bowl," a glass-blown sculpture by Wilson artist Laurie Thal — will be considered for several awards including the People's Choice Award, Governor's Choice Award and the Bobby Hathaway Juror's Choice Award. Recipients will be announced during a April 24 reception.

tion, Lotus Bowl and Winter's Bloom. Jacksonites may recognize the pieces from when they were on display at Thal Glass Studio for the 2019 Fall Arts Festival.

The bowls are actually the result of a collaboration between Thal and her husband, Dan Altwies. Thal created the shape and coloration of the bowls through glass blowing, a discipline that she has mastered over decades, while Altwies sandblasted etchings into the bowls. Altwies also sandblasted away glass from the edge of each bowl to create cutaway patterns that resemble flower petals.

"He's very precise and very immaculate in terms of his craftsmanship," Thal said.

Thal created Lotus Bowl with the intention to make something that evoked positive feelings from the observer through a color palette that was reminiscent of a sunset.

"It's the kind of piece that you look at and it makes you smile and feel good," Thal said.

She said that Lotus Bowl will complement her friend Kay Stratman's work, which has been accepted into the show as well.

"They have that same sense of calm and centering," Thal said.

Stratman used an even more esoteric method than Altwies' sandblasting to create her selected paintings: She paints on a Japanese shikishi board.

When Stratman first became interested in traditional East Asian painting, she was working a day job at a commercial art studio that was subcontracted by advertising agencies. She saw an exhibit on sumi-e, an ancient technique for black and white brush painting, and was immediately enamored. She spent years studying that type

of painting and selling artwork in the tradition as a professional artist, before developing her current style.

Stratman still uses many of the same tools, such as the shikishi board she paints on, which is a stiff board coated with a layer of gold or silver leaf and, on top, a thin sheet of rice paper. But the end results are more contemporary than traditional.

In "Winter Sun," Stratman's piece that was selected for the Governor's Capitol Exhibition, she scratched at the paint and rice paper in places to allow the metallic sheen to shine through. The end result is a numinous and foreboding creation that depicts a glimmer of light shining through billowing snow and clouds.

Although the composition seems brooding at first glance, a sense of calm is present.

"It's kind of the feeling you get on a 20-below day where the clouds are moving in and the sun is just trying to get through, but not quite," Stratman said.

The annual show, which traditionally was displayed in the Wyoming State Museum, has a new home this year in the Capitol Extension. All of the selected works in the show are for sale to the public and will hang from Feb. 20 to Aug. 13.

Each work has the chance to be selected for a Purchase Award, where the museum uses funds raised from the exhibition to purchase artwork for the capitol's permanent collection. A People's Choice Award, Governor's Choice Award and Bobby Hathaway Juror's Choice Award will also be given.

The reception for the exhibition will be from 5 to 8 p.m. April 24 in the Wyoming State Capitol Extension. ■

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