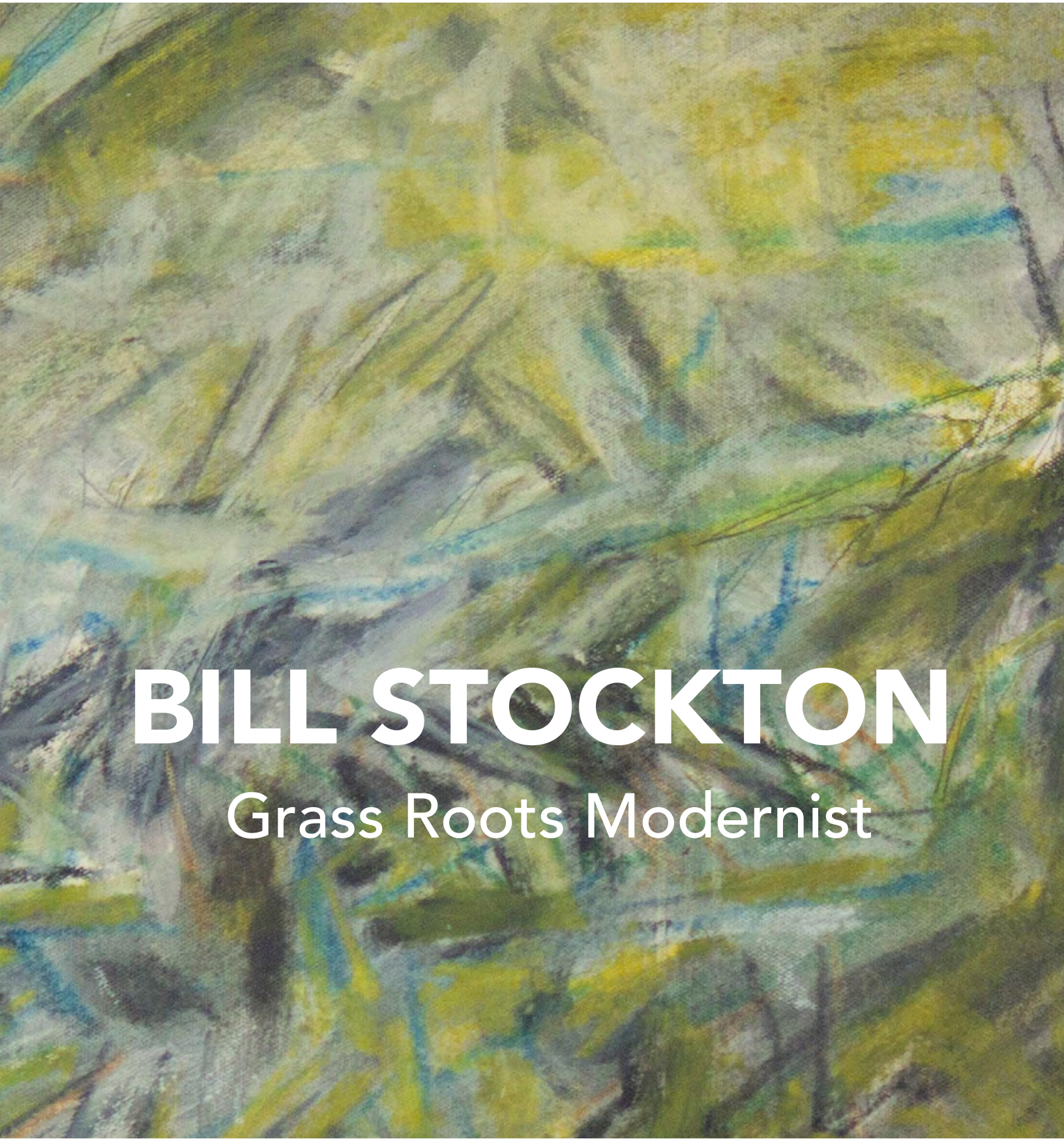

BILL STOCKTON

Grass Roots Modernist

yam yellowstoneartmuseum

BILL STOCKTON
Grass Roots Modernist

Yellowstone Art Museum
Billings, Montana

This publication was produced in conjunction with the exhibition *Bill Stockton: Grass Roots Modernist* organized by the Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, Montana and on view from November 7, 2019, through January 5, 2019.

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Fir Branch, 1992. Livestock marker and graphite on canvas board; 27 x 38 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.114).

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White Landscape, 1990; Livestock marker and graphite on canvas; 18.875 x 24.875 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.104).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Bryan W. Knicely

Growing up on a farm, I saw firsthand how those who work the land excel in their creative processes. Usually those innovative skills are used to fix something, tinker, or problem solve. Occasionally, as with Bill Stockton, we are fortunate to see those skills combined with art training and used to make innovative art outside of a traditional studio setting. Stockton retained his core identity as an artist after he returned to the ranching life. He created a unique body of work by using the untraditional tools and resources of agriculture in his art.

We are thrilled to present the first major exhibition of Bill Stockton's work at the Yellowstone Art Museum since 1993. The show is drawn from the 93 drawings and paintings in our permanent collection and works from the collections of many individuals and institutions. Works on loan include eight of Bill's sculptures, exhibited together for the first time, and a number of exceptional paintings from throughout his career. We are honored by the generosity and trust of these lenders.

For the financial support of this publication, the exhibition, and related programming, we acknowledge with heartfelt thanks Title Sponsors: Theodore Waddell & Lynn Campion; Lead Sponsors: John W. & Carol L.H. Green, Deborah Anspach & Dr. John Hanson, Charles M. Bair Family Trust, and Anonymous; Supporting Sponsors: Donna M. Forbes, Gareld & Barbara Krieg, Gordon McConnell & Betty Loos, Jon Lodge & Jane Deschner; and Opening Reception Sponsors: Ted & Bess Lovec, Sharon L. & Garde Peterson.

Our curator, Susan Barnett, reached out to a few people who were close to Bill Stockton, requesting brief reminiscences for the catalogue. Instead of a few paragraphs, we received significant essays from Gordon McConnell and Gilles Stockton, as well as thoughtful personal memoirs from Patrick Zentz, Theodore Waddell, and Sara Mast. In addition, Gilles loaned more than a dozen works, shared images and knowledge, and graciously hosted our curatorial team at the Stockton Ranch.

None of our exhibitions would be possible without our exceptional staff, dedicated volunteers and docents, and passionate board and committee members, all of whom have poured their enthusiasm and skills into this project. Special recognition goes out to the stellar designer Michael Jorgensen, who generously donated his time and talent to design this catalog. The YAM's curatorial team—Susan Barnett, Amanda Daniel, Lisa Ranallo, Chaz Riewaldt, Karen Ferguson, and Morgan Syring—worked extensively on the research, curation, conservation, preparation, and mounting of this significant selection of Stockton's work.

> "I was influenced by the patterns I walked and the tangle of the brush coulees."

The YAM remains eternally grateful to the extraordinary philanthropist, Miriam Sample, who made it possible for the YAM to collect some of the best work of Montana's Modern Masters. Sample purchased more than 200 works of art for the Museum under the guidance of (then executive director) Donna Forbes and her curatorial team. Not only did her generosity preserve some of the state's cultural treasures, it also provided financial security and recognition for many of the state's artists.

The view from the Stockton ranch: Chinese Mountain, 2019; Photograph by Susan Barnett.

GROUNDED IN MODERNISM

Susan Barnett

"I hate statements about art, since most artists write about art as badly as all critics."

Bill Stockton was many things: artist, sheep rancher, soldier, sign painter, performer, storyteller, husband, father, grandfather, and dyed-in-the-wool Modernist. This catalog, published on the occasion of Yellowstone Art Museum's 2019 exhibition, assembles a portrait of a remarkable individual from the perspectives of six writers. While the exhibition presents the most extensive gathering of Stockton's work to date, the publication creates a lasting record of the life and work of this influential Montana Modernist.

Gilles Stockton, Bill Stockton's son, recalls his father as he knew him in childhood and through the ensuing decades. The colors of his writing shift with his perspective across time. Scholar Michele Corriel positions Stockton in the small vanguard of Modernists who influenced Montana's cultural development, linking the events of his life to specific works of art. Gordon McConnell writes about Bill through his perspective as both an art historian and YAM's former assistant director. His reminiscences include traveling to Grass Range to choose paintings and drawings for the Museum's collection. Artists Ted Waddell, Sara Mast, and Patrick Zentz paint a picture of Bill Stockton as a mentor and friend whose example helped them thrive as place-based artists in a rural state.

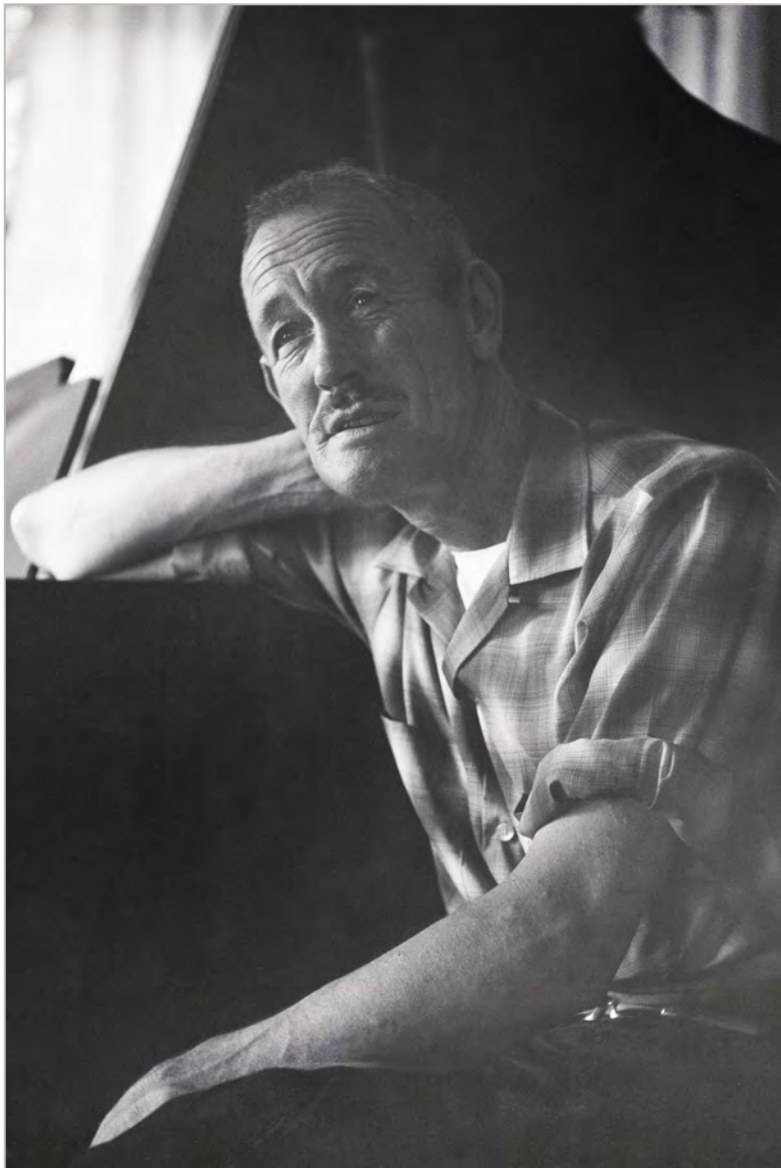
Rembrandt, Degas, Cezanne, Picasso, Wyeth, Pollock, and Munch were claimed by Stockton as his historical art "mentors." He said, "I was also influenced, from example, by my contemporaries: Isabelle Johnson and Bob DeWeese. From Isabelle I learned that what was around me was all important. From Bob I learned that the imperfections of honesty contained the real truths."[1] Stockton passed these ideas on to the next generation of Montana artists.

Bill Stockton, *Self-Portrait*, 1987; Oil stick and graphite on paper. 21 x 15 in. Gift of Miriam T. Sample (2009.44.2).

His passion for Modernism and his need to create extended beyond traditional art media. He remodeled the Sears Catalog house on his family homestead, turning it into a flat-roofed modern dwelling and decorating the newly sunken living room with sleek modern furniture that he built from broken equipment, nails, and rope. He learned to felt the wool from his sheep into swirling abstractions, which he and his wife, Elvia, sewed into hats, mittens, and vests. He also expressed himself in writing: publishing a memoir titled *Today I Baled Some Hay to Feed the Sheep the Coyotes Eat* and assembling a picture book of sheepish puns called *Ewe-phemisims*. Stockton was especially prolific as an artist during the winter, between haying and lambing seasons, and after 1975, when he retired from ranching.

In the 1950s, Stockton combined nonobjective abstraction with the colors and patterns of the western landscape, making paintings that resemble Jackson Pollock's early abstract expressionist works. He introduced his excruciatingly expressive figurative sculpture during the 1960s. The 1970s were a time for experimentation with new media and ideas: felted wool, jewelry, portraits, simplified landscapes, and character studies of people and sheep. From the 1980s through the end of his life, Stockton's mature works—mostly drawn with livestock markers and graphite—represent the immediate environment in and around his home in Grass Range.

Looking back on his body of work in 1999, he noted, "The paintings I have done with the [livestock] markers, of little quasi-abstract corners of nature, have become my favorite series. To me they are a natural evolution from the Avant Garde paintings I did 50 years ago."[2] Stockton is best known for these depictions of the below-the-surface, thriving, interconnected life he experienced on his small patch of Northwestern prairie. The exhibition and catalog survey five decades of art making, beginning with student drawings Stockton made in Paris in the 1940s and ending with his last painting of the scrub brush and reeds on his ranch.



Bill Stockton's modern dwelling near Grass Range, 2019; Photograph by Susan Barnett.

Bill Stockton, undated image courtesy of Gilles Stockton, photographer unknown.

REMEMBERING MY FATHER

Gilles Stockton

It was about 1980 and my father had a small show in a private gallery in Helena. Since I had business in Helena, I went to see it. Besides myself, there was a small group of people in the gallery, one of whom appeared to be a teacher and the others his students. I overheard the teacher comment that the painting they were contemplating was a good example of what not to do. He called it a "muddy" watercolor.

One thing about my father, if it was a "muddy" watercolor, that is the effect that he intended. He had a tremendous facility and control of the technical aspects—the craft—of whatever medium he chose to use, whether it was drawing, watercolor, oils, or sculpture. And what was remarkable in a way, is that in tools, if not in art, he was a minimalist.

I have seen studios laid out with hundreds of brushes and numerous other paraphernalia, all sitting in their correct place, ready to produce art. My father's atelier was a coffee can of various brushes, a palette knife, a jack knife, a pencil, five cattle markers (red, yellow, blue, black, and white), a piece of Masonite to serve as a palette, a can of turpentine, a mall stick, and a couple of soup cans for cleaning brushes. His tools for his sculptures were an old Marquette AC welder, a helmet, a slag chipping tool with a wire brush attached, a small homemade welding table, a bundle of 6013 welding rods, and a couple of buckets of rusty bent nails he had purchased at a farm sale.

The same pattern extended to his passion for golf. His golf bag was lightened to just a wood, two irons, and a putter. He made no effort to dress up for golf. You would usually find him at the golf course in blue cotton overalls and his lace-up work boots. If his overalls were not always pristine, I am sure that my mother never let him out without clean underwear. Thus decked out, he regularly shot two or three strokes over par, confounding his golf partners.

The Widow, 1985; Oil crayons on board; 30 x 23.5 in. Loaned by the Stockton family.

As a child, I never paid much attention to my parents' motivations or what might be driving them in doing what they were doing. I was not yet actually present, so I have no idea why he developed a desire to study and produce art. There most certainly was no influence in his upbringing in Winnett and Grass Range, Montana. Apparently, during his time in the army, he got the exposure. The first piece of art that we have of his is a copy of Rembrandt's mother. It is dated 1942 and must have been painted in a USO.

In the army, he was put in charge of a field hospital's paint shop on the outskirts of Paris and he learned sign painting from French and German (POW) master workmen. This is also where my parents met. They were married in June of 1945.

I was finally present when my father decided to take advantage of the G.I. Bill to attend art school. He first did a year at the Minneapolis Institute of Art and then another year at the Académie De La Grande Chaumière in Paris. Although I was there, I was more focused on having my own needs and demands met, rather than paying attention to what my parents were thinking or doing. Therefore, I can only speculate that for my mother being able to spend that year back in France with her family must have been great. For my father, the intellectual stimulus and ferment in those art schools, following all of those years of war, must also have been mind blowing.

It was after we moved to the ranch in 1949 that I was old enough to start taking notice of others. I know that my father was reluctant to take over operation of the ranch. My grandmother had sacrificed to buy the land and pay the taxes, and she pushed hard to get Dad to come back to rural Montana. Calling it a ranch is a bit of an overstatement. It was just some land, a broken-down house, an outhouse, and a barn. No machinery, and only four or five milk cows. The land however was good and had potential.

Nude Model (Minneapolis School of Art), 1948; Ink and watercolor on paper. 12.375 x 9 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.48).

Coming out of art school, he must have had aspirations of "making" it as an artist in the metropolises where avant-garde art was appreciated. But it was the ranch at Grass Range that gave him his first original idea and a "voice" that ultimately shaped his life and art. The abstracts—based on the patterns of nature—that he produced during the 1950s did not receive much, if any, popular acclaim. The friends he made in Montana's small modern art community encouraged him, but that did not put food on the table.

It was the winter of 1957 or '58, that he accepted an invitation to set up a show in San Francisco from friends from his art school days. We all went, including my dog who had to spend that winter in the car. For my brother and me and our dog, it was a traumatic winter, what with a new school with lots and lots of other kids. More kids in one class than in our entire school back in Montana. It must not have gone well for my parents either, as we returned to the ranch that spring discouraged, or at least my parents were discouraged. My brother, my dog, and I were happy to be back home.

I think it was fellow artist, rancher, and native Montanan, Isabelle Johnson, who gave my father the courage to become an artist of "place." He had to accept that the first person his art had to please was himself, and he slowly came to realize that what he knew and loved was the landscape of central Montana. Having made that decision or transition must have been a relief. At any rate, he never again tried to show his art outside of Montana.

He started his sculpture series in the early 1960s. His high school classmate, Jack French, showed him the rudiments of arc welding, and Dad took it from there. His sculptures were immediately successful, and sold as soon as they were finished. They did not demand big prices, but it was a great help to the family finances.

Blue Formation, 1953; Casein on Masonite; 23.5 x 34.5 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.52).

It was also about then that he started raising sheep. That was a good choice, as the ranch, which had limited pasture but very nice hay meadows, was better suited t sheep. As in any new endeavor, there was a steep learning curve. His first bunch of sheep were old “short-term" ewes with broken mouths,” in the language of livestock producers, and that first winter they died in great numbers. In the spring, as the carcasses thawed, I was set to dragging them out of the dead pile and pulling off what wool I could salvage.

He learned from the advice and experiences of fellow ranchers and ultimately built that small herd into a reputation bunch. Those old ewes became the inspiration for the drawings and text of his book *Today I Baled Some Hay to Feed the Sheep the Coyotes Eat*. All the while, he kept producing steel sculptures that were immediately sold. This exhibition is the first time most of these sculptures have been seen in one place.

But sheep and sculpture took their toll on his back. Plus, he increasingly medicated his bad back with alcohol. His drinking got worse in the late sixties. I was in college by then, so it did not affect me much, but my brother and mother caught the brunt of it. His friends were affected, too, and I wonder why they stood by him, because he could be as obnoxious as hell. But most of his friends did, including those in his art class in Lewistown. Those art classes turned into more of a club than art classes, but they tell me that he was an excellent teacher. Most of those people became amateur/semiprofessional artists and have gone on to create some very nice work.

Finally, he had to quit making sculptures as it was too hard on his back. In the early 1970s he had three vertebrae fused. That helped, but his drinking and smoking did not help the healing process. For the rest of his life, he continued to have chronic back pain. More fused vertebrae in the mid-1990s did not alleviate the pain but did succeed in keeping him out of a wheelchair.

Cain, c.1964-1968. Welded nails; 25.5 x 15 x 15 in. Loan of Kit Hansen and Stephen Greenfield (L2019.8).

Chinese Mountain, 1972; Watercolor and graphite on paper; 14 x 18 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.64).

It was in 1975, when my wife Joan and I graduated from grad school in Bozeman, that my father informed us that we had to take over the ranch or he would sell it. I had always assumed that my brother was going to be the rancher in our family, but his experiences during high school with my father's out of control drinking had soured him on that notion. So, the ranch fell to me, even though Joan and I had plans to take our degrees to Africa, have some exciting experiences, and save some money.

In 1975 my father was only fifty-four years old. The relief from the pressure of the work and anxiety of ranching, along with the continued nagging from my mother, finally got him mostly sober. Those last twenty-seven years of his life turned out to be some of his most productive. I think that it was also one of the happiest periods of his life. He and my son, Antoine, were great buddies and had constant projects together.

What else can I say. He had a photographic memory for visual things. He nearly never worked from a live model. Even portraits he would do from memory. He did not read much, but he incessantly listened to Canadian radio for the news and talk format not available on the local radio stations that we could receive in Grass Range. He loved movies. He thought deeply about things. It drove me nuts as a teenager that his analysis about political and social issues always proved true. In his art and in his life, he was a loner. He valued his friends but did not work on art or anything else collaboratively.

By the way, that "muddy" watercolor hangs in my bedroom and is one of my favorites.

“There is more truth
in imperfection
than in perfection.”

Catalan Peasant, 1973; Watercolor; 9 x 6 in. Collection of the Stockton family.

NO BLUE SKIES

Michele Corriel

“Everything changes but the avant-garde.”

One of the first Modernist painters in Montana, Bill Stockton’s voice called out from Grass Range like the baleful coyotes he tirelessly kept from his sheep. His paintings divulge the sudden blooms of winter’s snow, the boot-sucking mud of defrosting springs, and the dry, brittle grasses of blinding summers, where blue skies meant nothing but cracked soil in want of rain.

Rooted in the tangled gullies and untamed hills of central Montana, Bill Stockton’s notion of place permeates his work. Imbued with fragility and stamina, his paintings and sculptures embody January’s darkness and the anticipated renewal of April. Stockton’s home, a sheep ranch in Grass Range, Montana, marked his physical place on the land, but his art reveals his own experiences, reflecting the power of living in the landscape he loved.

Born in Winnett, Montana, in 1921, Bill Stockton moved to a hardscrabble ranch near Grass Range in 1934, with his mother and sisters. Drought and the Great Depression tainted his childhood as did the death of his sister in 1936. After graduating from high school, Stockton worked briefly in Yellowstone National Park, where he met young people from around the country, put on skits, and was introduced to the arts in way that seeded his natural talents.

Stockton enlisted in the army and in 1944, was transferred to a hospital unit outside of Paris. He was supposed to be part of the refrigeration repair unit, but since no one showed up to teach his unit about refrigeration, let alone repairs, he ended up as a sign painter. In a 1999 artist statement he wrote, “It was [the sign painters] who taught me the right use of brushes and how to apply paint. I use that knowledge to this day.”[1]

Flagstone Hillside, 1954. Casein on Masonite; 22 x 16 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.55).

After the war, he moved with his French bride, Elvia, and his one-year-old son, Gilles, to Billings, Montana, where he worked as a sign painter. In 1947, he enrolled in the Minneapolis School of Art on the G.I. Bill and the next year returned to Paris to attend the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, a school previously attended by Hans Hofmann and Alexander Calder. During the war, Stockton had sent money to his mother to keep the ranch afloat and, after he returned to Montana, she convinced him to come back to Grass Range. There he found his voice, encouraged by fellow Modernist Isabelle Johnson, who helped him to embrace the land through his art, and to express his intimate knowledge of the seasons through line, form, and color.

Early in the 1950s, Stockton had an epiphany while closely observing the intimate details of nature around his ranch. He began to view his landscape with an abstract expressionist's eye. "All of a sudden, I saw all these Jackson Pollocks all around me," he said. There were "hints of

the whole" in the patterns of snow, tree branches, brush, and creek-bottom willows.[2] "It made me see things on that hillside out there that never dawned on me before," he said. "Why the hell do I need to paint a panoramic? Why can't I paint the things that are very close to us? I started looking at the textures, the patterns, the tones….I started to paint that hillside, rearrange it, and compose it, put it in different rhythms."[3] Adopting Pollock's philosophy to portray the patterns of his daily life, not the subjects themselves, enabled Stockton to translate the abstractness of nature into images.

In *Snow Formation*, the driven snow storms across a battle-torn canvas with aggressive swipes of jagged color. Like a blizzard that obscures the horizon line, foreground, and background, *Snow Formation* steals the certitude of safety, of sure-footedness. Wild brushstrokes slash

Snow Formation, 1955; Oil on plywood; 19 x 49 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.56).

black, grey, and white, while the blue underpainting suggests bitter-cold drifts, oblivious to any life they may smother. This reflects the way Stockton internalized his place in the world. The isolation he felt comes through in his stark, limited palette and the frenzied motion of his brushstrokes.

Elvia and Bill Stockton were geographically and culturally isolated, which may have added to the honest bareness of Stockton's work. Living through harsh winters brought added joy to spring. His abstracted painting *Start of Spring* illustrates Stockton's pure elation at the first nibs of grass, the warble of the meadowlarks' call to spring, and the complication of longer, work-filled days. He conveys the feeling of the soft earth thawing through a tough frost and the wakening sounds of the season. "I've always been fascinated by the ugliness of it, the hardness of it. That's me. I'm not dainty. I suppose my lifestyle had something to do with my temperament and my mental processes. Why would I consider a bunch of dead Russian [thistle in a] coulee beautiful? I don't know why. It says something to me."[4]

In 1958, Stockton's work was accepted into three important national exhibitions, including *Art USA* in New York and group shows in Denver and Spokane.[5] But it was San Francisco that soured his attitude on the larger art world. Leaving Grass Range with his wife, two sons, their dog, and the promise of a gallery show, he headed west with his paintings. Once there, he lost his artistic confidence when he heard someone in the gallery say, "By God, people in Montana think they're artists?" Although the show opened the door to invitations to the New York City, Denver, and Spokane exhibitions, for Stockton, it was too late; the dream was shattered. Decades later he recalled, "I came home and said to hell with it. I'm happy to become a Montana artist, a regional artist, and I'm happy the Yellowstone Art Museum has my stuff."[6] In Montana he felt his work could be understood as part of the language of a shared landscape.

Start of Spring, 1957; Casein on canvas; 22.5 x 26.5 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.6).

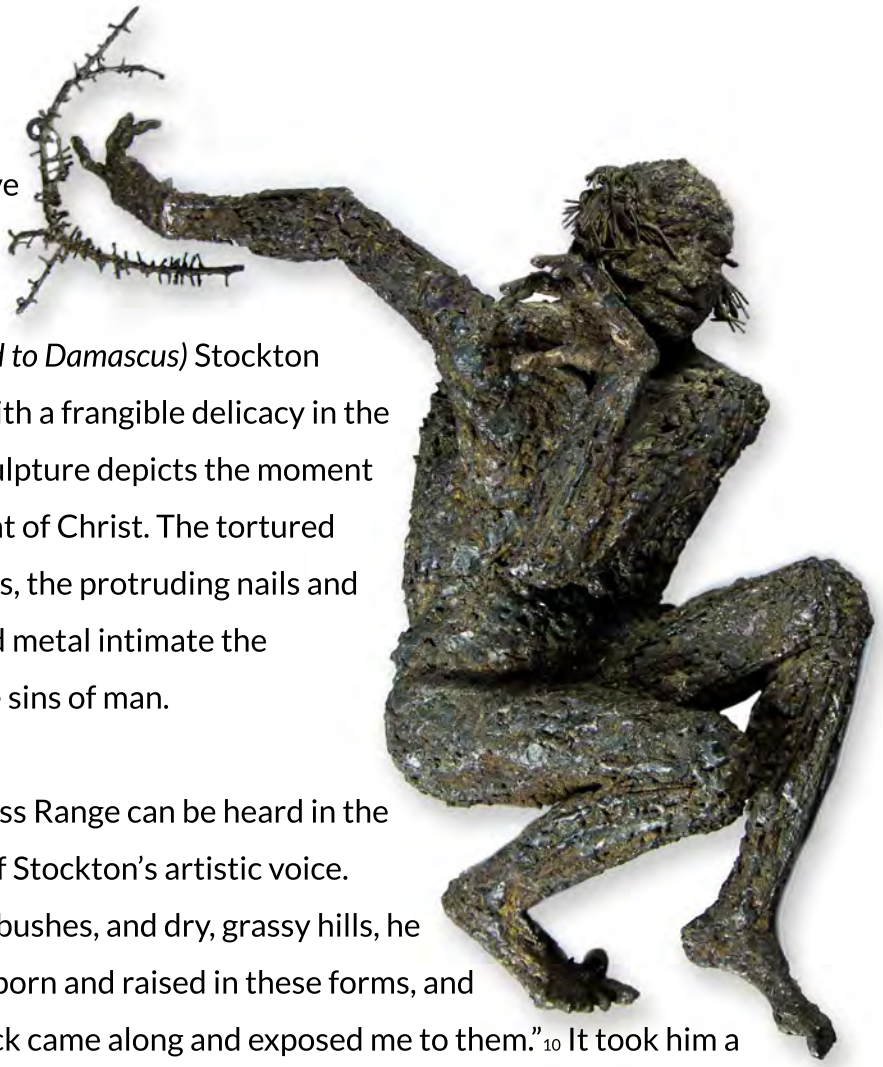
Stockton's work also explored interior places as the site of emotion and memory. One work from his wallpaper series, *Faded Roses*, portrays a repeated pattern of ghosted flowers, disappearing petal by petal into the yellowed and uneven background. The deviation from rose to rose denotes not only a wistful regret, but the countdown of the calendar. Stockton's own bent figure appears angled away from the viewer at the bottom edge of the painting. His white hair and aging face, delicately defined, echo the late self-portraits of Rembrandt. The wallpaper reflects his memories of growing up in small houses, in small towns, where the bare cobbled walls offered little distraction from the hard farm life in central Montana.

Faded Roses, 1992; Livestock marker and graphite on paper; 22 x 28 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.113)

“In an attempt to bring some art into our crummy little houses [my mother would] look in Sears & Roebuck and buy some wallpaper,” Stockton recalled. “And then they’d try to paste it. It came with instructions, but you really need a professional. They [made] a hell of a mess. And those damn things, roses or some kind of flower, never matched, they never got it quite right, they even show up sometimes in an abandoned old farmhouse and you still see wallpaper stuck to it. Nowadays, some artists might think of it as art, but it’s really an anti-art.”[7]

For Stockton, the wallpaper represented a way to think about home and hearth, and an avenue to access the individual’s struggle for beauty under even the most dire of circumstances. There is a certain strength in the recollection of a place that cradles hard memories. Stockton always referred to the decade of his teens as “The Dirty Thirties” because of the hard winters, the dry summers, and the death of his sister. These impactful years laid the foundation from which Stockton based his work and are the reason he never painted a clear, blue sky. “I don’t like blue skies,” Stockton said. “I go back to the Depression. The blue sky and the hot sun and the grasshoppers ate up everything. Even the worms came in and ate everything, then the Mormon crickets came in and they ate everything. Because of the hot sun we couldn’t raise any crops. There’s 'The Dirty Thirties' on top of it. The Depression on top of it. All of it combined, I blamed it on the blue sky.”[8]

Stockton complicated his art with surface and texture, whether working in oil, watercolors, tempera, or cattle markers. Observing each aspect of his ranch, from the coulees to the hillsides, from the sheep he tended to the interior of his home, he never forgot the formal aspects of his art. He created tension through a push and pull of color, line, texture, and form. “Opposing directions…it takes your eye one way and then the other,” Stockton said, talking about the way he thought about composition. “I got very fascinated with the brush, more than the rocks. What I had to learn in painting was to create the surface.”[9]



In the 1960s, Stockton learned to weld and began a series of figurative sculptures made from found nails. In *Conversion of St Paul (Saul on the Road to Damascus)* Stockton imbues the male figure with a frangible delicacy in the face of the divine. The sculpture depicts the moment Saul is stricken by the light of Christ. The tortured figure writhes in blindness, the protruding nails and vertical strokes of welded metal intimate the suffering of Christ for the sins of man.

The stark isolation of Grass Range can be heard in the bare-knuckled rawness of Stockton's artistic voice. Speaking of the hillsides, bushes, and dry, grassy hills, he said, "These forms, I was born and raised in these forms, and thank god, Jackson Pollock came along and exposed me to them."[10] It took him a long time to understand that this was art—his art, his sense of place—and he couldn't help but paint it.

Bill Stockton received the Governor's Award for Visual Arts in 2003, a year after he died of lung cancer at the age of 81. His unique notion of place became part of Montana's artistic history. The Governor's Award program included his statement, "I can get interested in almost anything: welded sculpture, hand-made felt, old photographs, stuff pasted to an abandoned farmhouse, and realistic portraits of my neighbors. But my main interest has been and always will be the harsh, abstract, semi-wilderness qualities of central Montana. Why? Because I born and raised here, I guess."[11]

Stockton engaged with a new language that spoke to postwar Montana, his place in the world, and the ability to translate what he knew and felt into art. He did not paint replicas of majestic mountains. He painted what he saw, exactly as he observed it. His ability to incorporate a ranching lifestyle with an artist's aesthetic showed the way for other artists like Theodore Waddell and Patrick Zentz. Stockton's perspective on where he lived enabled him to express Montana's landscape without nostalgic panoramas, using the elements of form, color, and composition. He offered up something fertile, complex, and expandable, helping the viewer to understand his sense of place, and in some way allowing us to make it our own. He brought his formal training to a location unfamiliar with the modern art world and, working on the vanguard of Montana's art scene, expanded the vocabulary of the day.

Conversion of St. Paul (Saul on the Road to Damascus), 1968; Welded nails; 33 x 37 x 11 in. Loaned by Lyla Dyer.

Village in Winter, 1983; Livestock marker, graphite, and oil pastel on paper; 17 x 23 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.76).

ENCOUNTERS WITH A REMARKABLE MAN

Gordon McConnell

I arrived in Billings from Waco, Texas, in May 1982, the new assistant director of the Yellowstone Art Center. My professional colleagues were Director Donna Forbes, Curator Christopher Warner, and Program Director Patrick Zentz. They introduced me to a thriving, statewide contemporary art scene, with centers of activity widely dispersed among small towns and cities. Many Montana artists were leading rural lives, and some were farming and ranching, carving out time from their chores to make art that offered region-specific contributions to the progressive art of our time.

Pat Zentz and Ted Waddell were two of the rural artists who gained national recognition for the startling originality and conceptual and expressive vigor of their work. The elder artists, Isabelle Johnson (1901–1992) and Bill Stockton (1921–2002) pioneered this cross-fertilization of art and ranching. They were well-trained and committed Modernists—cosmopolitan in their aesthetic sensibilities—and they both found the wellsprings of inspiration in their homeland, in the land and livestock they worked and loved. Embedded in agrarian communities, Johnson and Stockton pursued their highest artistic ambitions but not always commercial careers or critical recognition. In 1958, Bill Stockton's abstract expressionist paintings were shown in important exhibitions in New York, Denver, and Spokane. "After that," Stockton wrote in 1999, "I never entered one of these shows again. I decided to make it or break it in Montana. The density of artists per capita is the same here as anywhere else, and I'm sure that Montanans have an art taste equal to the rest of the country. Time would prove me right!"[1]

"Drawing is the exploration of a form."

Start of Autumn, 1954; Casein on Masonite; 18 x 36 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.54).

Bill was held in high regard in Montana. I anticipated meeting him, admiring the only painting of his in the Art Center's collection at that time, *The Mysteries of Morning Arrive on McDonald Creek*. A watercolor from 1975, it remains central to my appreciation of his work. The title itself is captivating, offering tender, almost prayerful praise, indicating that landscape is not a subject but a process. Description is secondary, nature is embodied in the poetry of abstract, brush-made forms. I was, and am, impressed by the moody atmosphere, the fluid, painterly handwriting—dashes of the pen adding notes of emphasis to this evocation of ground, bushes, and sky. It is a gestural painting—expressionistic and energetic but reserved in tone—muted like this country is for much of the year.

It encapsulates the moods of a landscape and passage of time. It is neither a frozen instant nor an objective description; rather, it is an evocation based in a subjective relativity of living and being in the space. The painting conveys a powerful sense of the artist's home ground and his connection to it.

There were a lot of stories circulating about Bill Stockton—how he grew up on a remote homestead, served in the Army in Europe during World War II, studied in Paris, brought a French bride home to a hardscrabble sheep ranch in what Stockton called the "semiwilderness" of central Montana. It was said that in the 1950s, in his spare time, he made abstract expressionist paintings rivaling Jackson Pollock's masterpieces. He was portrayed by Isabelle Johnson as an eccentric and irascible but resourceful man, whose life was economically marginal but rich with the friendships of other artists who held him dear. An often-repeated anecdote was that he had made his own dentures from sheep's teeth. Another was that, after finding no buyers, he had buried his abstract paintings in his backyard. Having seen one of the extraordinary works from that period in Donna Forbes' home, that thought to me was appalling. (Later, it turned out that he stored those paintings with loving care in a special vault in the backyard. They were in pristine condition.)

Some of the things I heard about him put me a bit on guard. People said he could be blunt, sarcastic, and argumentative, but his views were well reasoned and his rough exterior belied a sensitive soul. I expected that this man of my father's generation would be a bit dated in his views about art and that we might have some differences. Though I was schooled in Modernism and deeply valued abstract expressionism, I was most engaged with the art movements of my day: minimalism and post-minimalism, conceptualism, performance and environmental art, earthworks, post-pop and appropriation, neo-expressionism, and new figuration. As a curator, I believed it was my responsibility to know and understand these trends, and I was zealous in wanting to encourage and support these possibilities for art in Montana.

The Mysteries of Morning Arrive on McDonald Creek, 1975; Watercolor on paper; 13 x 19 in.
Yellowstone Art Museum purchase (1976.1).

On a summer day of 1982, Bill came unannounced in the back door and up the stairs to our offices in the old County Jail building—a rancher dropping in on his city neighbors. Aged 61, he was a striking, weather-beaten figure with bright, intelligent eyes gleaming in a deeply creased countenance. His jaw, broken in a farm accident, was crooked, and he talked and smiled out of the corner of his mouth. His high brow was furrowed and leathery, his longish hair thinning and tousled. He was utterly free of pretense, looking neither like a sheep rancher nor an avant-garde intellectual, though he was both. It was good to meet him.

I was always deferential around him. I knew he was tougher mentally and more firm in his convictions than I was, with my eclectic tastes and tolerance for novelty. He did not read the art journals and keep up with the latest trends, but he was very solid on the formal foundations of painting and the timeless purpose of art. He had a way of clarifying and sorting out what was essential and of enduring importance.

One day in 1983, Bill dropped by the Art Center to show Donna Forbes the cartoon puns he had drawn on half-sheets of typing paper for a little book called *EWE-PHEMISMS*. She did not have the time to give him the attention he deserved that day, so she asked me to look at Bill's book. I went through the whole collection, several times laughing out loud at his punning humor and adroit cartoon sketches. I said I thought some of them were worthy of *The New Yorker* and sent him off to meet with Jon Lodge at Artcraft Printers to put it in print. Earlier that year, Bill had published his great illustrated memoir and meditation on sheep ranching, *Today I Baled Some Hay to Feed the Sheep the Coyotes Eat*. In unaffected prose, as natural as his manner of speech, he detailed his life as a sheep rancher: the harsh conditions, the lives and nature of sheep, predators, and his quiet pride in his agrarian occupation.

In 1985, the Art Center applied to the state legislature for a Montana Cultural Trust Fund grant to support the beginnings of the Montana Collection. A grant of $42,000 was awarded for the purchase of work by ten artists including Bill Stockton and Isabelle Johnson.

Bull Pines was Donna Forbes's pick for the Stockton acquisition. In this beautifully animated composition, Stockton employed calligraphic brushwork to convey the patterns of nature, trees as living processes not botanical specimens, and weather and time as abstractions. This all-over composition, with no center of interest, is a dance of ineffable energies, something like the works of Jackson Pollock, whom Stockton admired, but based more directly on his experiences rooted in nature. As Bill wrote in 1999, he recognized that Pollock "was composing patterns instead of objects,"[2] and "I was influenced by the patterns I walked and the tangle of the brush coulees."[3] Like most of his mature works, it is not a description of things but an embodiment of forces in activated two-dimensional forms.

The brushwork in *Bull Pines* is agitated but refined; the marks are shapely, reflecting Stockton's skill as a professional sign painter. He often said that he learned more about handling brushes and paint from a French sign painter he met in the army than during his formal studies in art schools in Minneapolis and Paris.

Bull Pines, 1955; Casein on plywood panel; 26 x 50 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase with funds from the Montana Cultural Trust Fund (1987.5)

Joseph and Miriam Sample were beginning their careers as philanthropists in 1985, when Miriam read about the Cultural Trust award and the beginnings of the Montana Collection in the Art Center's newsletter. She was impressed with the initiative and committed herself to supporting the state's artists by funding museum acquisitions, publications, and a series of television public service announcements. She accompanied the PSA production team to many of the shoots, and during their visit to the Stockton ranch to film Stockton's *Montana Portrait*, Miriam found Bill and Elvia to be especially endearing and in need of support in their retirement. I believe that of the dozens of artists she supported, Bill was her favorite. In 1993, Miriam Sample pledged $100,000 to be paid to Bill over the course of ten years in exchange for the purchase of a representative cross section of his paintings and drawings.

The day that Donna, Miriam, fellow curator Terry Karson, and I spent with Bill in the living room of his modest, Modernist ranch house near Grass Range to choose work for the Museum was a highlight of my personal and professional life. We chose several dozen works from 1948 to 1993, ranging from drawings and paintings he made while he was a student on the G.I. Bill to several of the great abstract expressionist landscapes. Also among our selections were illustrations for his writings and quite a few of the sensitive paintings on paper made with livestock markers and oil pastels that marked the climax of his career.

Terry interviewed Bill and organized a 1993 retrospective exhibition for the Art Center, which was accompanied by a nice brochure. Bill gave an intimate talk to the docents while his show was up. He talked about the artists he admired, including Rembrandt, Wyeth, Picasso, and Pollock, using postcards on a bulletin board and his pocketknife as a pointer.

Bill's works were given a prominent place in the inaugural survey of the Montana Collection at the new Yellowstone Art Museum in March 1998, and he was among several dozen collection artists who gathered for the grand opening. I grew closer to Bill and Elvia in the years after I left the museum, visiting them in Grass Range a number of times, sharing my "post-western" paintings with Bill. (He puzzled over them and finally concluded that they were "satires.")

A number of us “yuppies,” as Bill called us, would gather with him and Elvia for breakfasts at the Dude Rancher when they were in town. Those were always special occasions.

In 2001, on the Fourth of July, he celebrated his eightieth year with fellow octogenarians Gennie DeWeese and retired MSU drama professor Ben Tone at the DeWeese home in Cottonwood Canyon near Bozeman. It was a fabulous gathering, one of the last where many of the elder Modernists were together. In those years, I was working as a curatorial consultant for the Ucross Foundation near Clearmont, Wyoming, and I proposed and organized a joint exhibition for Bill and Gennie. Bill had been inspired in the early 1980s by Gennie and her husband, Bob, to use livestock markers and other oil crayons in his work, initiating a series of landscapes, abstracts, and figurative works that engaged him for the rest of his life. He truly painted with the markers, blending them into semitransparent glazes with turpentine and finishing the surfaces with a layer of beeswax. With her paint sticks, Gennie worked large on pieces of paper mounted as scrolls. It was my privilege to bring these two old friends, Montana Modernist pioneers, together in a joint exhibition for the first time near the end of their careers. They had been friends since the early 1950s.

That exhibition was in the spring of 2002. Bill died in October, and I attended the funeral at the Methodist Church in Grass Range. Montana State University Billings Art Professor Neil Jussila’s eulogy was magnificent. He had considered Bill a mentor for many years and characterized him accurately and in depth with many pithy quotes and anecdotes. Bill’s coffin was carried to the country cemetery, and his sons, Gilles and Charles, shoveled the earth over him by hand. Family and locals mingled with Bill and Elvia’s art-world friends over a covered-dish lunch at the church.

Bill Stockton and his peers are little known outside Montana. Though they lived their lives and pursued their artistic careers remote from urban cultural centers, they were not truly isolated. They created their own culture and community; they supported and sustained one another. Bill Stockton and his friends made Montana a richer place to live, and the work they left behind continues to enlighten and inspire, to transform how we perceive and do our work in our own space and time.

Reeds (detail), 2002; Cattle marker on board; 21 x 27 in. Loaned by the Stockton Family. (L2019.9.2).

BILL STOCKTON REFLECTION

Sara Mast

I remember Bill Stockton once said, “in order to draw the mountain, you have to work from the inside out.” That is a credo of art making that I live by to this day.

Bill was a dear friend and mentor. I spent hours with him and his wife, Elvia, when Terry Karson, my former husband and Yellowstone Art Museum curator, was working on Stockton’s 1993 YAM exhibition. What I cherish most about Bill’s painting is his lack of separation from the landscape he inhabited. He embodied the hardscrabble of Grass Range, and his work reveals the tactile, bristly nature of life and work in that place. There is both a density and a delicacy to his mark, and a particularly palpable quality of air.

In 2003, I made a painting in his honor titled *Green Sky (for Bill)*. The title refers to a conversation I had with Bill in which he railed, “I don’t know why people always insist on painting the sky blue—the sky is green!” A painting that commemorated his life also had to impart his inimitable character.

Terry stated in the YAM catalog for that 1993 exhibition: “As there is nothing particularly romantic about sheep ranching, there is nothing particularly romantic about Bill Stockton’s landscapes. They are not idealized scenes of a peaceful, leisurely life…He doesn’t see the land that way. He sees a mess of thickets in a coulee as truth; he sees the thorns as fact.”[1]

In one of Terry’s journal entries about Bill is an Edward Abbey quote, followed by his note, “I’ll send this to Elvia.”

> I have been called a curmudgeon, which my obsolescent dictionary defines as a "surly, ill mannered, bad-tempered fellow." The etymology of the word is obscure; in fact, unknown. But through frequent recent usage, the term is acquiring a broader meaning, which our dictionaries have not yet caught up to.

> Nowadays, curmudgeon is likely to refer to anyone who hates hypocrisy, cant, sham, dogmatic ideologies, the pretenses and evasions of euphemism, and has the nerve to point out unpleasant facts and takes the trouble to impale these sins on the skewer of humor and roast them over the fires of empiric fact, common sense, and native intelligence.

In this nation of bleating sheep and braying jackasses, it then becomes an honor to be labeled curmudgeon.

Edward Abbey, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness, 1989*

Wind Bent Trees, 1990; Graphite on paper; 9 x 12 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.101).

CLOSE HORIZON

Theodore Waddell

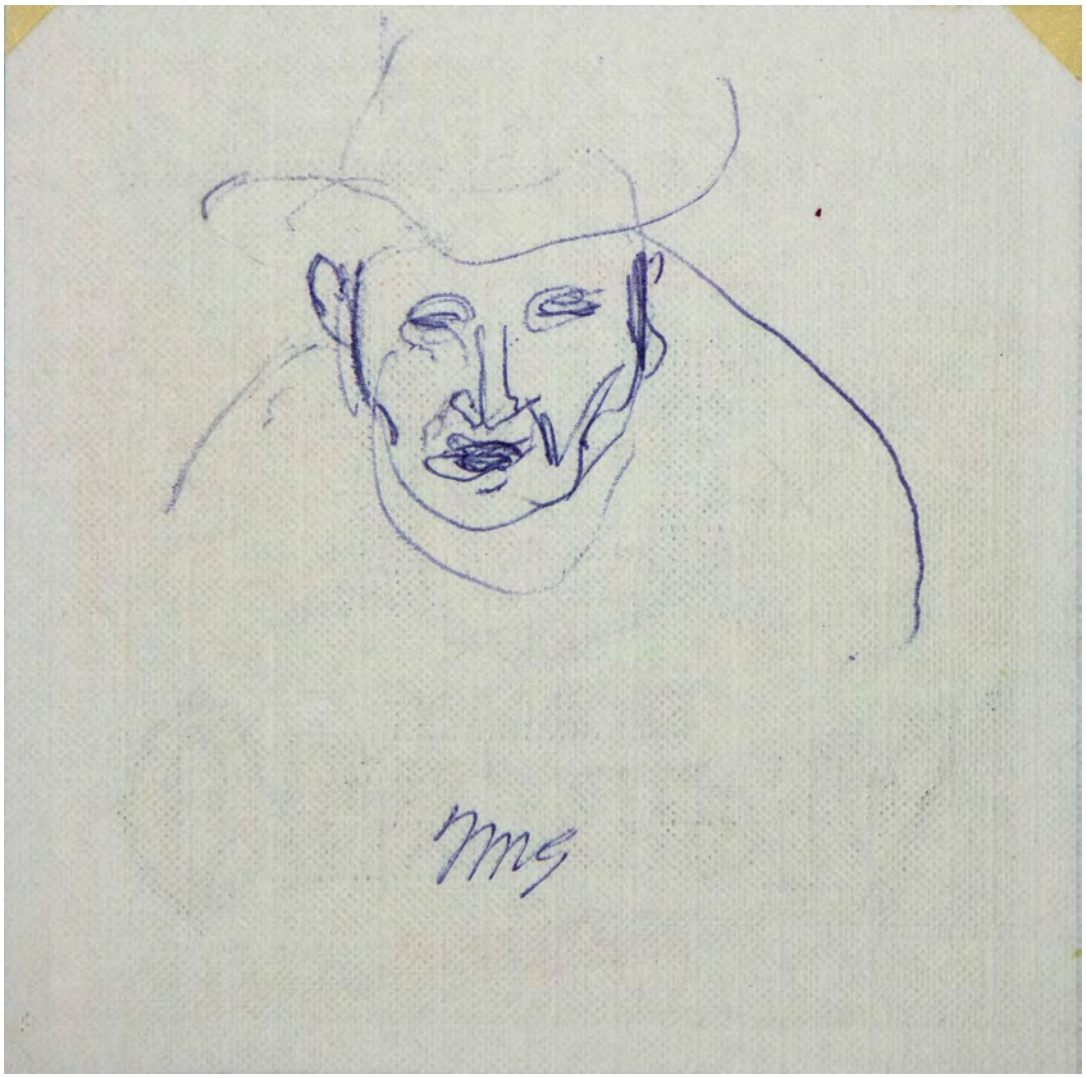
It was around 1965 when I first met Bill Stockton, but it wasn't until 1976, when we took over my family's ranch in Molt, that I got to know Bill and Elvia very well. And what an influence he was. Bill had been in Paris during World War II, then returned to study art. He brought Modernism back to Montana along with Isabelle Johnson, Frances Senska, Jessie Wilber, Gennie and Bob DeWeese, and Rudy and Lela Autio. Bill married his wonderful wife, Elvia, and convinced her to move from Paris to Grass Range by telling her that Montana was warm. She recalled, in her French accent, "Oh Beill, how he lie."

We had many great gatherings in those days. Pat Zentz, Dennis Voss, Bill, and I would meet in Billings, joining Yellowstone Art Center Director Donna Forbes and curators Chris Warner and Gordon McConnell to argue and shout over lunch about whatever subject. Sometimes we moved over to the Empire Bar, a pretty rough place, for more conversation and beers. Bill did a series of drawings on cocktail napkins during one of those sessions. Wonderful works.

Bill was fiercely independent, beholden to no one. He hated the gallery system and refused to participate even though his work was well received and admired. He was senior leader to Pat, Dennis, and me, as we all appreciated his work and his ethic. While his work could have been successful in the larger art world, he refused to acknowledge that system—or any other system. I always thought that he was trying to grab defeat out of the jaws of victory. What set him apart was his independent lifestyle and his love for his ranch and his sheep. Miriam and Joe Sample bought a lot of his work toward the end of his life. Upon receiving this news, Elvia remarked, "Oh Beill, now he can buy some store-bought teeth and a proper bed." (He was too tall for their bed.)

I believe that in our part of the world, if you don't understand the ground, you understand nothing.

Bill's devotion to his beloved Grass Range prairie is a testimony to this understanding. His close horizon afforded us a special vision through his work. His influence on art and life in our beloved Montana cannot be overestimated. He changed the West from its cowboy roots to a contemporary aesthetic that moved all of us to new directions and a broad vision about the importance of our landscape. Thanks, Bill.



The Napkin People (selection), 1982; Graphite or ink on 34 paper napkins; 5 x 5 in. Gift of Bill Stockton (1993.123.1-.34).

The Coulee, 1987; Livestock marker and graphite on paper; 25 x 31 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.90).

ON McDONALD CREEK

Patrick Zentz

I think having land and not ruining it is the most beautiful art that anybody could ever want.
—Andy Warhol

I remember one beautiful fall afternoon when the Stocktons came out to our place on Duck Creek to visit. After they agreed to stay for supper, my wife, Suzie, and Elvia busied themselves with preparations for the meal while Bill and I went outside. We had many common interests given our ranching and art backgrounds, and our conversation soon shifted to how we both valued the advantages of spending most of our lives in one location. The discussion was interrupted when we were called to eat. As we headed back inside, Bill said that he had written something he wanted me to read and would get it to me the next time we met.

A few months later, he handed me a photocopied sheaf of twenty-six slightly rumpled, typed pages that had been edited with a pencil. “This might be of interest to you,” he said. The first page carried the title, “McDonald Creek – a writing by Bill Stockton,” and I realized that it was a continuation of our earlier conversation. The first pages are a wonderful history of the watershed. A rumination over the name of the creek itself and some conjecture as to a more appropriate one is followed by a detailed and colorful physical description. Stockton was a student of the area and exhibited a penetrating understanding of its rich biological diversity coupled to the interplay of the water with the land.

His account is peppered with numerous tongue-in-check barbs such as the following: “City people, who drive by on their Sunday do-nothing-day...are quite unaware of the wilderness aspect of McDonald Creek. To them it is but a drab Eastern Montana valley where there is, in their ignorance, a rancher every 2 or 3 miles 'exploiting' the land, and no 'real' mountains.” He continues then by itemizing the bountiful wildlife that pervades the region while simultaneously offering some mild criticism of the managerial competence of “the boys down at the Fish and Game....”[1]

"There is grace
in awkwardness."

Brush Rhythms in Winter, 1994; Oil on paper; 28.5 x 34 in. Gift to Yellowstone Art Museum in memory of Jean Baucus (2016.7.1).

He also discusses the petroglyphs and pictographs created by ancient indigenous peoples farther upstream. Then, after a riveting exposé of the not-necessarily-obvious connections between beaver, French Canadian mountain men, erosion, Louisiana, and environmentalists, he finally reveals with one abrupt sentence that what he's writing is, in fact, an autobiography. That sentence, coming after a full ten pages about McDonald Creek is, “My father came to Montana in the early part of this century—just to get out of Texas, I think.”[2]

The White Rocks, 1990. Livestock marker and graphite on paper; 18 x 24 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.103).

Stockton's concentrated focus on where he's lived brings to mind other peoples who understand themselves as being entwined with their environment. Australian aboriginals, with “songlines,” seamlessly narrate clan histories to a musical score that evokes their land's topography. The indigenous New Zealand Maori also incorporate geographical links into their personal identities. And in the greater Yellowstone region, the Crow speak of themselves as being “of this place.” All are examples of a powerful sense of belonging to the land, as is Stockton's autobiographical essay.

I think that for Bill, pencils and brushes, as much as being tools of expression, were also instruments of inspection—sensors if you will. Richard Feynman, the celebrated Cal Tech physicist, famously said, “What I cannot create, I do not understand.” Stockton’s creations accommodated his own understanding of and appreciation for the myriad complexities of his environment. His work deftly exposes the intimate and comprehensive knowledge that nature afforded his careful eye. In a postscript to his essay he states:

> *Over the years, I painted more than 100 paintings of the little wilderness areas along McDonald Creek, never with any evidence that humans had ever been there. It was the harsh, abstract qualities of this valley that fascinated me, so, why spoil it with a road, a fencepost or a house.*[3]

He’s not alone with this sentiment. Aldo Leopold, after extolling the incredible advances of twentieth-century century technologies in an essay titled, *Engineering and Conservation*, wrote, “But they do not suffice for the oldest task in history; to live on a piece of land without spoiling it.”[4]

Bill Stockton, who helped introduce Modernism to Montana, held profound reverence for the land and took inspiration from it. I remain grateful to this day that he took the liberty of continuing our earlier discussion with his essay and clarifying his ideas about the land and its critical importance. He was, in his writing as in his life, salty, colorful, and authentic. And while those indelible traits are sorely missed, fortunately his lasting testament is the gift of art that came from that unspoiled place where he spent his life on McDonald Creek.

End Notes

Introduction

1. Karson, Terry and Donna Forbes. *Bill Stockton* (Yellowstone Art Museum, 1993), pg. 6.
2. Stockton, Bill and Maggie Mudd. *Montana Impressions: The Art of Bill Stockton* (Missoula: Museum of Fine Arts at the University of Montana and the Meadowlark Foundation, 1999), pg. 6.

No Blue Skies

1. Stockton, Bill and Maggie Mudd. *Montana Impressions: The Art of Bill Stockton* (Missoula: Museum of Fine Arts at the University of Montana and the Meadowlark Foundation, 1999).
2. Downey, Mark. "Abstract art, timeless terrain" (Great Falls: *Great Falls Tribune*. April 4, 1999).
3. Karson, Terry. Oral History with Bill Stockton (Billings: Dada Documentaries, 1994).
4. Karson. Oral History.
5. McConnell, Gordon. *The Rural Avant-Garde* (Ucross: Ucross Foundation, 2002).
6. Pelosse, Marie-Laure. *Bill Stockton*, 2017 documentary film.
7. Karson, Oral History.
8. Ibid
9. Ibid
10. Ibid
11. Montana Arts Council. (Helena: Governor's Awards for the Arts, 2003).

Encounters with a Remarkable Man

1. Stockton, Bill and Maggie Mudd. *Montana Impressions: The Art of Bill Stockton* (Missoula: Museum of Fine Arts at the University of Montana and the Meadowlark Foundation, 1999).
2. Ibid
3. Ibid

Bill Stockton Reflection

1. Karson, Terry and Donna Forbes. *Bill Stockton* (Yellowstone Art Museum, 1993), pg. 2.

On McDonald Creek

1. Stockton, Bill. Unpublished and undated manuscript (Collection of Patrick Zentz).
2. Ibid
3. Ibid
4. Flader, Susan L. and J. Baird Callicott, eds. *The River of the Mother of God and Other Essays* by Aldo Leopold (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pg. 254.

Bill Stockton Quotes

Stockton, Bill and Maggie Mudd. *Montana Impressions: The Art of Bill Stockton* (Missoula: Museum of Fine Arts at the University of Montana and the Meadowlark Foundation, 1999).

List of Works

All works Montana Collection of the Yellowstone Art Museum unless otherwise noted

All that is Left of Bill Stockton, 1984. Livestock marker and graphite on paper; 18 x 24 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.79).
Another Lamb, 1971. Graphite on paper; 4 x 6.5 in. (1975.12).
Another View of the Chinese Mountain, 1991. Livestock marker, graphite, and wax on paper; 30 x 22 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.11).
Antoine, 1982. Graphite on paper; 11 x 8.5 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.71).
Antoine, 1982. Graphite on paper; 11 x 8.5 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.72).
Antoine & the Chair, 1987. Oil crayon on paper; 15 x 20.5 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.8).
Antoine and His Friend, 1984. Livestock marker and graphite on paper; 8 1/2 x 10 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.78).
Antoine and the Chair, 1984. Livestock marker and graphite on paper; 24 x 18 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.8).
Architectural Drawing, date unknown, c. 1960s. Graphite on paper; 11.25 x 15 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.20).
Arrangement of Just Lines, 1956. Ink on paper; 20 x 13 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.59).
Arrangement of Rocks, 1956. Pen and ink on paper; 20 x 13 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.58).
Aunt Emma, date unknown. Oil crayon on paper; 11.5 x 9.5 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.9).
Backyard Apple Tree, 1990. Graphite on paper; 5.875 x 9 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.99).
Beethoven's Pastoral, 1992. Livestock marker on paper; 22 x 28 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.117).
Bells, Bells, Bells, 1993. Oil pastel on paper mounted on board, beeswax glaze; 16.5 x 21.5 in. On loan from Gordon McConnell (L2019.10).
Blue Abstract Flower Vase, c. 1950. Oil on canvas; 24 x 18 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.12).

Blue Formation, 1953. Casein on masonite; 23 x 34 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.52).

Boy Model, 1952. Charcoal on paper; 19 x 12.5 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.51).

Brush and Hill, 1990. Graphite on paper; 8.5 x 11 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.98).

Brush at the Bottom of the Hill, 1987. Livestock marker and graphite on paper; 24 x 18 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.89).

Brush Rhythms in Winter, 1994. Oil on paper; 19.5 x 25.5 in. In memory of Jean Baucus (2016.7.1).

Bull Pines, 1955. Casein on plywood panel; 24 x 48 in. Museum purchase funded by the Montana Cultural Trust Fund (1987.5).

Cain, c.1964-1968. Welded nails; 25.5 x 15 x 15 in. Loan of Kit Hansen and Stephen Greenfield (L2019.8).

Chair, date unknown, c. 1960s. Hayrake tines, metal, sisal rope. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.7).

Chair, date unknown, c. 1960s. Hayrake tines, metal, sisal rope. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.36).

Chief Joseph, 1965. Oil on plywood; 4 x 8 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.17).

Chinese Mountain, 1972. Watercolor and graphite on paper; 14 x 18 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.64).

Conversion of St. Paul (Saul on the Road to Damascus), 1968. Welded nails; 33 x 37 x 11 in. On loan from Lyla Dwyer (L2019.2a-c).

The Coulee, 1987. Livestock marker and graphite on paper; 18 x 24 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.9).

Cows in the Pyrennes, 1973. Watercolor on paper; 5 x 12.5 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.65).

Cows on Upper McDonald, 1977. Graphite on paper; 8.5 x 11 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.68).

Dusk, 1984. Livestock marker and graphite on paper; 9.25 x 16.75 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.81).

Elvia's Last Flower, 1991. Livestock marker and mixed media on paper; 27 x 19.5 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.108).

Evening Hillside, 1955. Casein on masonite; 24 x 48 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.57).

Evergreen and Tree, 1990. Graphite on paper; 8.5 x 5.5 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.96).

Exposed Roots, 1990. Graphite on paper; 6 x 9 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.1).

Exposed Roots #2, 1993. Graphite on paper; 5.5 x 8.5 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.121).

Faded Roses, 1992. Livestock marker and graphite on paper; 22 x 28 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.113).

The Farmer's Wife, 1976. Watercolor on paper; 11 x 17.5 in. Gift of Ed Stickney (SD2016.1.2).

Felted textiles, various. Wool; On loan from the Stockton Family (L2019.9.26–35).

Fir Branch, 1992. Livestock marker and graphite on canvas board; 18 x 30 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.114).

The First Leaves of Spring, 1993. Graphite on paper; 8.5 x 5.5 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.119).

Flagstone Hillside, 1954. Casein on masonite; 22 x 16 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.55).

The Flat Lands in Montana Come in Small Pieces. Watercolor and graphite on paper; 20 x 26 in. On loan from Donna M. Forbes

Foot Stool, date unknown. Metal, sisal rope. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.37).

From Where The Sun Now Stands, I Will Fight No More Forever (Chief Joseph). Welded nails; 22.5 x 10 x 5.5 in. Montana Historical Society Collection, 2011.45.01 Gift of Kay Hansen Montana Historical Society Collection, 2011.45.01 (L2019.12).

Gertrude Stein Was Wrong, 1988. Livestock marker, oil pastel, and graphite on paper; 17 x 14 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.92).

Grande Chaumeire Model, 1948. Ink and graphite on paper; 11.75 x 8.25 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.49).

The Gray Bank, 1990. Watercolor; 27.5 x 35 in. Gift in Memory of Jean Baucus (SD2018.2).

Hollyhocks, 1987. Graphite on paper; 8.5 x 5.5 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.87).

House in France, 1988. Livestock marker on paper; 10.5 x 11.5 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.3).

Illustration for World War II Novel (Girl on Bed), 1952. Ink and mixed media on paper; 20 x 15 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.61).

Illustration for World War II Novel (Young Man on Bed), 1952. Ink and mixed media on paper; 15 x 20 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.62).

Italian Family, 1986. Oil crayons on linen; 20 x 24 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.14).

Jewelry, various, date unknown, c. 1960s. Ceramic, leather, metal. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.23,25,38)

The Lamb Lot Tree, 1983. Livestock marker and graphite on paper; 24 x 18 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.75).

The Lamb Lot Tree, 1990. Graphite on paper; 9 x 6 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.97).

The Lamb Lot Tree in Better Days, 1987. Graphite on paper; 8.5 x 5.5 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.88).

Lamp, date unknown, c. 1960s. Hayrake and twine; 24 x 15 x 15 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.6).

The Last Snowdrift, 1982. Watercolor on paper; 15.5 x 23.75 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.73).

Laundry, date unknown. Livestock marker on paper; 20.5 x 26.5 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.4).

Lone Pine, 1991. Livestock marker and graphite on paper; 23 x 29 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.106).

Madonna, date unknown, c. 1960s; Welded nails; 14 x 8.5 x 8 in. On loan from Donna M. Forbes.

Man Alone, 1952. Oil on masonite; 20 x 15.5 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.15).

Maybe the one on the left will have twins, maybe not, date unknown. Ink on paper; 11 x 8.5 in. Gift of Isabelle Johnson Estate (IJ1992.777).

Memere's Fig Tree, 1973. Watercolor and graphite on paper; 9.5 x 12.5 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.66).

More Brush, 1993. Graphite on paper; 5.5 x 8.5 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.122).

Mozart in Red, 1992. Livestock marker, graphite and oil pastel on paper; 22 x 28 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.115).

My Mother, 1956. Ink on paper; 14.5 x 11.5 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.19).

The Mysteries of Morning Arrive on McDonald Creek, 1975. Watercolor on paper; 13 x 19 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1976.1).

The Napkin People, 1982. Graphite and ink on 34 paper napkins; 5 x 5 in. Gift of Bill Stockton (1993.123.1-.34).

Nude Chick, 1960. Mixed media on paper; 11.75 x 18 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.63).

Nude Model (Minneapolis School of Art), 1948. Ink and watercolor on paper; 12.375 x 9 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.48).

Old Bill, 1991. Egg tempera, earth and graphite on paper; 12 x 17.75 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.111).

Once a Dinosaur, 1990. Egg tempera and earth on paper; 29.75 x 21.75 in. Gift of Bill Stockton (1993.102).

The Passion, c.1970. Welded nails; 17.5 x 10 x 9 in. On loan from Rocky Mountain College (L2019.15).

Pathway from the Seine, 1982. Graphite on paper; 8.5 x 7 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.69).

Peace, 1989. Graphite on paper; 9 x 12 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.95).

Pine Tree Sketches (A–D), 1986. Graphite on paper; 3.5 x 4.5 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.82-85).

Pine Trees, 1954. Casein on masonite; 18 x 26 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.53).

Portrait Of Elvia, c. 1950. Oil on panel; 14.5 x 12.5 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.24).

Portrait of Sara Erikson, date unknown. Oil crayon on paper; 21 x 15.5 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.11).

Prairie Crocus, date unknown, c. 1950s. Oil on canvas; 22 x 36 in. On loan from Donna M. Forbes.

Reeds, 2002. Livestock marker on board; 21 x 27 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.2).

Rembrandt's Mother (My First Painting), 1942. Oil on canvas; 13.5 x 9.5 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.13).

River Rocks, 1956. Oil on plywood; 24 x 24 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.16).

Saint Francis, c. 1968. Welded nails; 32 x 15 x 12 in. Anonymous loan (L2019.14.1).

Self Portrait, 1987. Oil stick and graphite on paper; 21 x 15 in. Gift of Miriam T. Sample (2009.44.2).

Self Portrait, c. 1987. Cast bronze; 3 x 1.5 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.39).

Side Table, date unknown. Hayrake tines, metal, stone, grout; 14.5 x 17 x 17 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.5).

Snow Formation, 1955. Oil on plywood; 18 x 48 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.56).

Start of Autumn, 1954. Casein on masonite; 18 x 36 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.54).

Start of Spring, 1957. Casein on canvas; 21.75 x 25.75 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.6).

Tchaikovsky in Grey, 1992. Livestock marker and oil pastel on paper; 22 x 28 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.116).

Trade Sign, c. 1960s. Acrylic on wood; 18 x 96 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.22).

Tine Bird, date unknown. Hayrake tines; 24.5 x 20 x 9 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.18).

Untitled, date unknown, c. 1950s. Oil on board; 10.625 x 36.5 in. On loan from Josh Deweese (L2019.13).

Untitled, date unknown, c. 1950s. Oil on canvas; 22.5 x 26.5 in. On loan from Donna M. Forbes.

Untitled abstract, date unknown, c. 1950s. Oil on panel; 15 x 18 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.21).

Untitled, 1951. Oil on panel; 24.5 x 48.675 in. On loan from the Pomeroy Family (L2019.11).

Untitled, 1983. Oil on plywood; 14 3/4 x 24 in. Anonymous loan (L2019.14.2).

Untitled, 1993. Graphite on paper; 24.5 x 48.675 in. On loan from Theodore Waddell (L2019.11).

Village in Winter, 1983. Livestock marker, graphite and oil pastel on paper; 10 1/4 x 16 1/4 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.76).

White Landscape, 1990. Livestock marker and graphite on canvas; 18 x 24 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.104).

The White Rocks, 1990. Livestock marker and graphite on paper; 18 x 24 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.103).

The Widow, 1985. Oil crayons on board; 30 x 23.5 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.10).

Willow Trees, 1986. Graphite on paper; 5.5 x 8.5 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.86).

Wind Bent Trees, 1990. Graphite on paper; 9 x 12 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.101).

Winter Pussy Willows, 1991. Livestock marker and graphite on paper; 22 x 30 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.107).

Woman in Bed, 1986. Livestock marker on canvas board; 13.5 x 17.5 in. On loan from the Stockton family (L2019.9.1).

Mozart in Red, 1992. Livestock marker, graphite and oil pastel on paper; 22 x 28 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.115).

Beethoven's Pastoral, 1992. Livestock marker on paper; 22 x 28 in. Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.117).

Tchaikovsky in Grey, 1992. Livestock marker and oil pastel on paper; 22 x 28 in. Yellowstone Art Museum purchase funded by Miriam Sample (1993.116).

"Go with the flow and
the happy accident."

Maybe the one on the left will have twins, maybe not, Not dated, c. 1970s. Ink on paper; 11 x 8.5 in.
Gift of Isabelle Johnson Estate (IJ1992.777).