



## Arturo Chavez

**S**TANDING IN FRONT OF ARTURO CHAVEZ'S ART, YOUR EYES BECOME TRANSFIXED ON A PLACE IN THE painting that almost feels beyond the canvas. His luminous and expansive landscape paintings depict the magnificent wide-open views of inspiring New Mexico vistas. But unlike so many landscape artists, Chavez manages to endow each image with a transcendental quality.

A former search-and-rescue mission pilot for Civil Air Patrol and a trained classical concert guitarist, Chavez paints with a symphonic, almost aerial, quality. But even more than the soaring musicality of his landscapes, it's the light and perspective that transcend the plane of the paintings.

In *On a Grand Scale*, the light appears like a character, shimmering over every rock and sticking to the hazy air. In *As the Crow Flies*, the askew bird's-eye view renders the far-off valley floor streaked with snow with an engrossing abstract patterning. In each, the quality of the landscape is enhanced by Chavez's masterful sense of detail and scale. The horizon line doesn't so much ground each vista as it seems to force the scene to recede beyond itself.

Chavez grew up in these settings, spending his youth running around Chimayó and Los Alamos and creating art all the while (though he wouldn't turn to it as a career till the age of 30). He is a 13th-generation native New Mexican, who traces his family tree back through the explorers Christopher Columbus and Francisco Vásquez de Coronado. That legacy is important to him. He was born Arturo Usner in 1949, but he took his mother's maiden name to indicate the closeness he feels to his Hispanic roots. Chavez also sees his painting as a kind of participation in a legacy of the land that birthed him. Painting is an act of preservation, he says, melding the landscapes he loves with his particular experience in them.

Chavez's process begins with trips to the real settings. During site visits he makes sketches, takes photographs at different times of the day, and creates at least one plein-air rendering, a color study painted on location. The process doesn't end there. Sometimes the artist uses topographical maps to help measure out distances between the objects in his scene.

Time spent in the landscape, carefully studying every aspect, allows Chavez a familiarity that aids his sense of detail as well as his romantic sensibility. Back in the studio, he prepares the final painting using oil paints made by hand. Commercial paints, Chavez says, contain uniform particles of pigment, which don't catch the light in the same way handmade paints can. The results are noticeable even to the untrained eye.

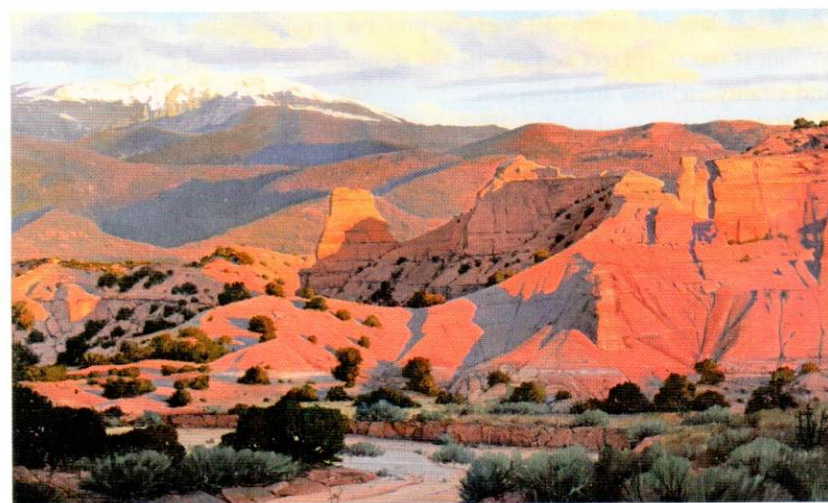
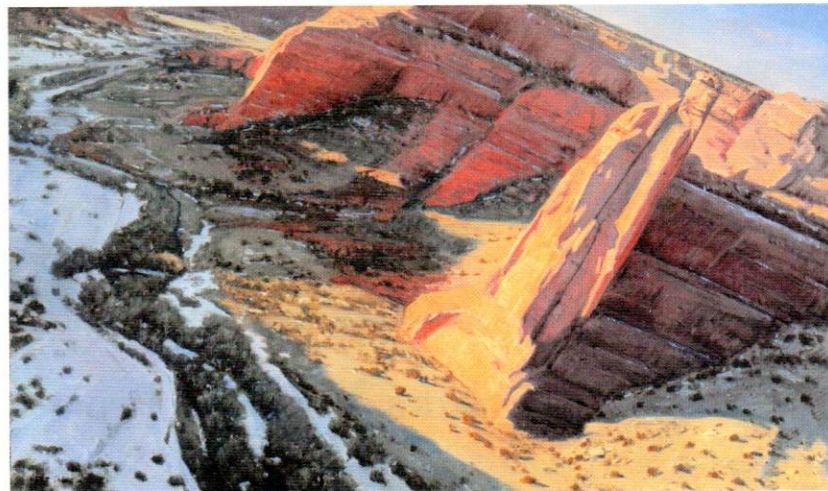
The paintings appear to shine from within and without, the light that fills them emanating from the rich textural quality of the paint. It's a quality that pushes the work beyond mere representation.

Chavez knows a painting works when it achieves an immersive reality, when the scene has a life on the canvas. The effect is transportive for the viewer and exciting for the artist.

"I'm so enthralled with capturing the illusion of space on canvas," Chavez says. He strives for that—and to ultimately be remembered as America's greatest landscape painter.

"How do we get that emotion into a painting? I view my paintings as musical compositions," he says of the artistic drive behind his process. The viewer, too, is stirred beyond paint, beyond dimension, to music.

—Peter Simek



Arturo Chavez is represented by Gerald Peters Gallery in Santa Fe; Trailside Galleries in Scottsdale, Arizona, and Jackson, Wyoming; and Tucson Desert Art Museum/Four Corners Gallery in Tucson, Arizona. [www.arturochavez.com](http://www.arturochavez.com), [www.gpgallery.com](http://www.gpgallery.com), [www.trailside-galleries.com](http://www.trailside-galleries.com), [www.tucsonart.com](http://www.tucsonart.com)

**OPPOSITE: Sunset Solstice.**

**THIS PAGE: Luminous Twilight, Airborne Over De Chelly, Cuyamungue Sunset.**