



THE ICONIC WEST
OF R. TOM GILLEON

BOOTH WESTERN ART MUSEUM

R. Tom Gillean

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CARTERSVILLE, GEORGIA

JANUARY 28, 2012 - MAY 27, 2012

The Iconic West of R. Tom Gilleon

January 28, 2012 – May 27, 2012

Booth Western Art Museum

Seth Hopkins, *Executive Director*
501 Museum Drive | P.O. Box 3070
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Charles M. Russell
Charles M. Russell and His Friends, 1922
Oil on Canvas, 42" x 81"
Montana Historical Society, Mackay Collection, X1952.01.10

Andy Warhol
Elvis 11 Times [Studio Type], 1963
Silkscreen ink and silver paint on linen
82" x 438" (208.3 x 1112.5 cm)
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172 Center Street | P.O. Box 4859
Jackson, Wyoming 83001
www.altamiraart.com | connect@altamiraart.com
307.739.4700

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R. TOM GILLEON, *Big Dogs*, 2009, Oil on Board, 30" x 30"
On Loan from the Private Collection of Lou and Christy Cushman - Houston, Texas



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FORWORD: DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

by Marshall Monroe

I first met Tom Gilleon in the halls of an unmarked warehouse in Burbank, California. I was carrying parts of a soon-to-be robot, and he had a little Tupperware tub of acrylic paints from the supplies crib. The wires and gears I was hauling became an animatronic character in the Walt Disney Theme Park attraction called Star Tours. His raw color materials became the first comprehensive aerial vision for a multi-billion dollar Disney park in Paris, France.

As a young designer out of college who had tumbled down the rabbit hole of the Disney Imagineering creative laboratory, I got to see a lot of neat things. But none of what I got to see stopped me in my tracks like the first time I saw what Tom could do with a few tubes of paint. I simply couldn't shake the wonderment of how such an image of beauty, romance, elegance, fantasy, reality, and joy could be cast like a pixie dust spell over a canvas or otherwise common matte board.

Over several years, Tom and I got to know each other through a shared love of the process of bringing ideas to light, and then to life. And it was in that period that I also watched Tom use his talents for personal artistic pursuits, in capturing visions of the American West, and in building a personal life among the landscapes he loved so much in Montana.

Since then, I've had the pleasure of studying with Tom, and working together creating outrageous visions, and in looking toward the future of visual arts in new media. Most recently, I found it so poetic that together we created the conceptual visions of what has become the first purpose-built commercial spaceport in the world, working with Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic Company and the state of New Mexico. I say poetic, because that little goose droid I was working on so many years ago when I met Tom was for a pretend space tourism business themed like the movie series Star Wars. Now here we are building the real thing!

I guess that's proof of the power of a vision well rendered.

Tom's impression on me over the years has not been about how an image can be worth a thousand words. Rather, it is that every day is a chance for us to take the materials around us and make the world a thousand times better.

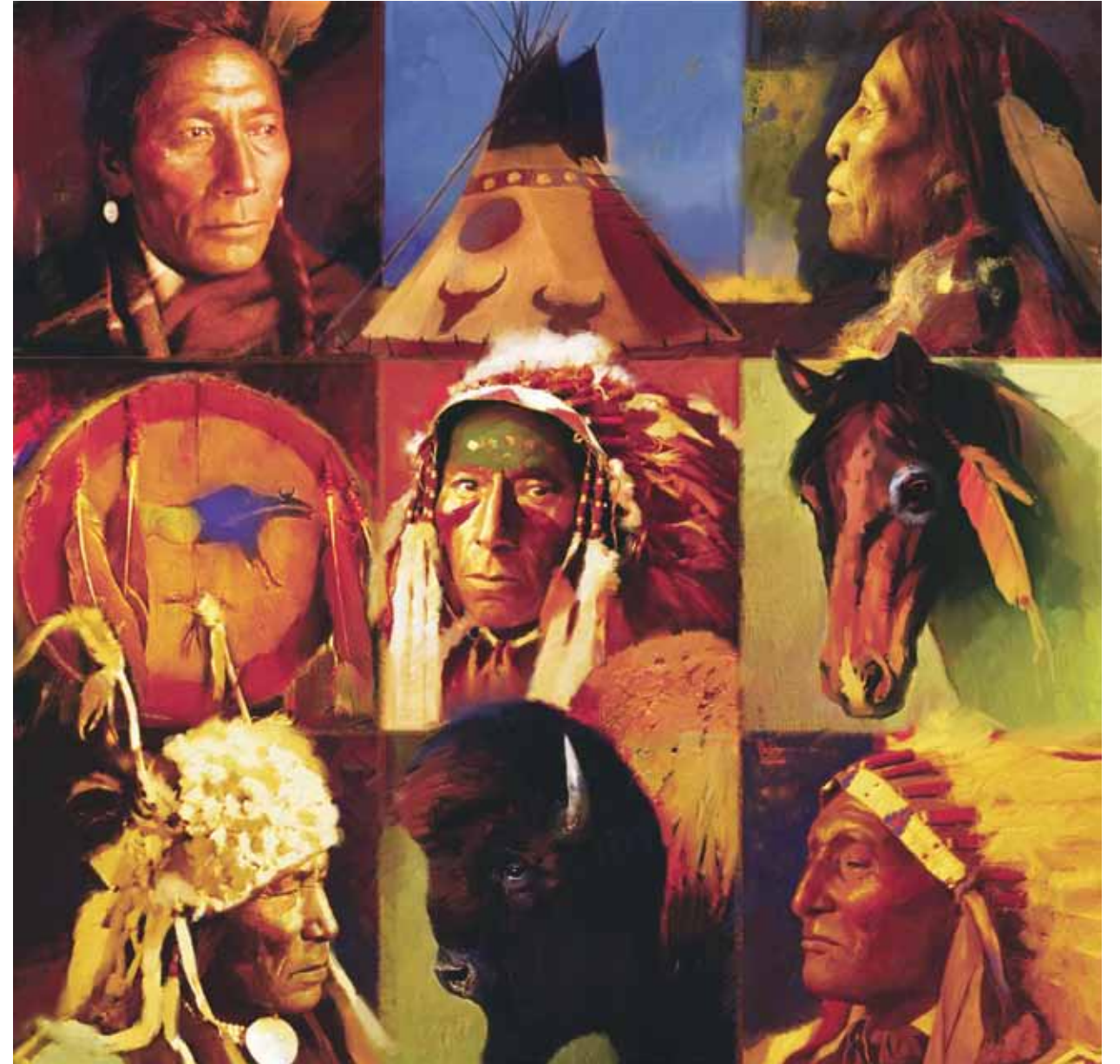
After all, isn't that what art is for? ■

~ Marshall Monroe

President and Chief Creative Officer of Marshall Monroe MAGIC. A friend and collaborator, who, like Tom, has a giant mind, imagination, and talent.



R. TOM GILLEON, *Sundown*, 2006, Oil on Canvas, 48" x 48"
On Loan from the Antonello Family Foundation - New Brighton, Minnesota



R. TOM GILLEON, *Northern Plains*, 2008, Oil on Canvas, 60" x 60"
Permanent Collection of Booth Western Art Museum - Cartersville, Georgia

INTRODUCTION: A NARRATIVE OF LIFE IN THE WEST

by Mark D. Tarrant, *Altamira Fine Art, Jackson, Wyoming*

Driving north on I-15 from Helena, the interstate gains elevation as it approaches the Missouri River on the way to Cascade County, so named because it contains the Great Falls of the Missouri River. For the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery Expedition (1804–1806), the mighty Missouri was the way west, the super highway of the day. Crossing back and forth and back again over the river, in the tight turns of the canyon, through the awe-inspiring rock walls near Wolf Creek, you pass Tower Rock. It is noted in the Lewis and Clark journals that they stopped here to climb to the top and look back for the Great Falls. Now the terrain opens up again into the high plains of Cascade County, the location of Timberline Studio and Ranch. Square Butte is the dominant landform as you continue towards Great Falls. Gilleon uses it as a recurring element in his work, artwork grounded in the geography, history and narrative of life in the West.

Standing in the driveway at the ranch and looking full circle, the skyline has a familiarity to it, like something from a

Charles M. Russell painting. This was the William Taylor ranch back in the day. The three Taylor brothers homesteaded here. Charlie Russell and William were fast friends. They celebrated birthdays together, and Charlie wintered his horse in a barn on the property. This “IS” big sky country. To the southwest is Mt. Cecelia, named after one of the Jesuit Sisters at St. Peter Mission on the west slope. To the east, the Big Belt Mountains continue the breathtaking landscape.

Montana has a deep art tradition, for both artists and collectors. The influence of Charles M. Russell is pervasive. Russell moved to Montana from St. Louis as a teenager and never left. He loved the life, the romance and the people. It is this full engagement with the West that sings in his artwork. Gilleon has that same connection to place and people. On the ranch, the history is rich and the lifestyle is still a function of land, sky and wind. To meet him, you would think he has always lived in Montana. He is casual—yet serious, thoughtful and generous, and naturally committed to making art that

is authentic and potent in portraying a modern vision of the western mythos. His artwork, like Russell’s, is “of this place.”

And there is that something else. His renditions of the American West create an iconic and transformational quality. The celebrated mythos of the West is brought forward and given new energy. This is Western Contemporary. These depictions portray the spirit and enchantment of the West, more powerfully and compellingly than most of what is known as traditional Western art. Even the lonesome grain elevators, once-upon-a-time symbols of encroaching civilization as railroads opened the West, become heroic.

Gilleon’s research and source material are critical when conceptualizing a painting. Once the composition begins, these elements are reduced to keep a strong line; the images are not meant to be literal representations. His development of the grid painting (sometimes referred to as a nine panel) is a step beyond the influential work of Andy Warhol (1928-1987).

The Warhol grid paintings contain a single image that is repeated throughout the canvas; often interpreted as a statement on popular culture. A Gilleon nine panel takes another direction, developing drama in its composition and palette, and inviting a re-engagement with a mythology grown tired.

His use of color is never casual, always carefully planned to give the painting distinction. The highly saturated vivid hues create juxtapositions that surprise the eye. Viewers are caught by the captivating compositions and mesmerized by the color. At an opening in 2004, he was asked by another artist to describe the palette he used. The question was really, “tell me the secret.” Gilleon responded “sure but you’ll be disappointed — cadmium red, cobalt blue, ultramarine violet, cadmium yellow,” and before he could finish the list the inquisitor interrupted, “That can’t be. That’s what I use, and my paintings don’t look like yours.” ■



R. TOM GILLEON, *Northern Plains Stop Sign*, 2008, Oil on Canvas, 60" x 72"
Altamira Fine Art – Jackson, Wyoming



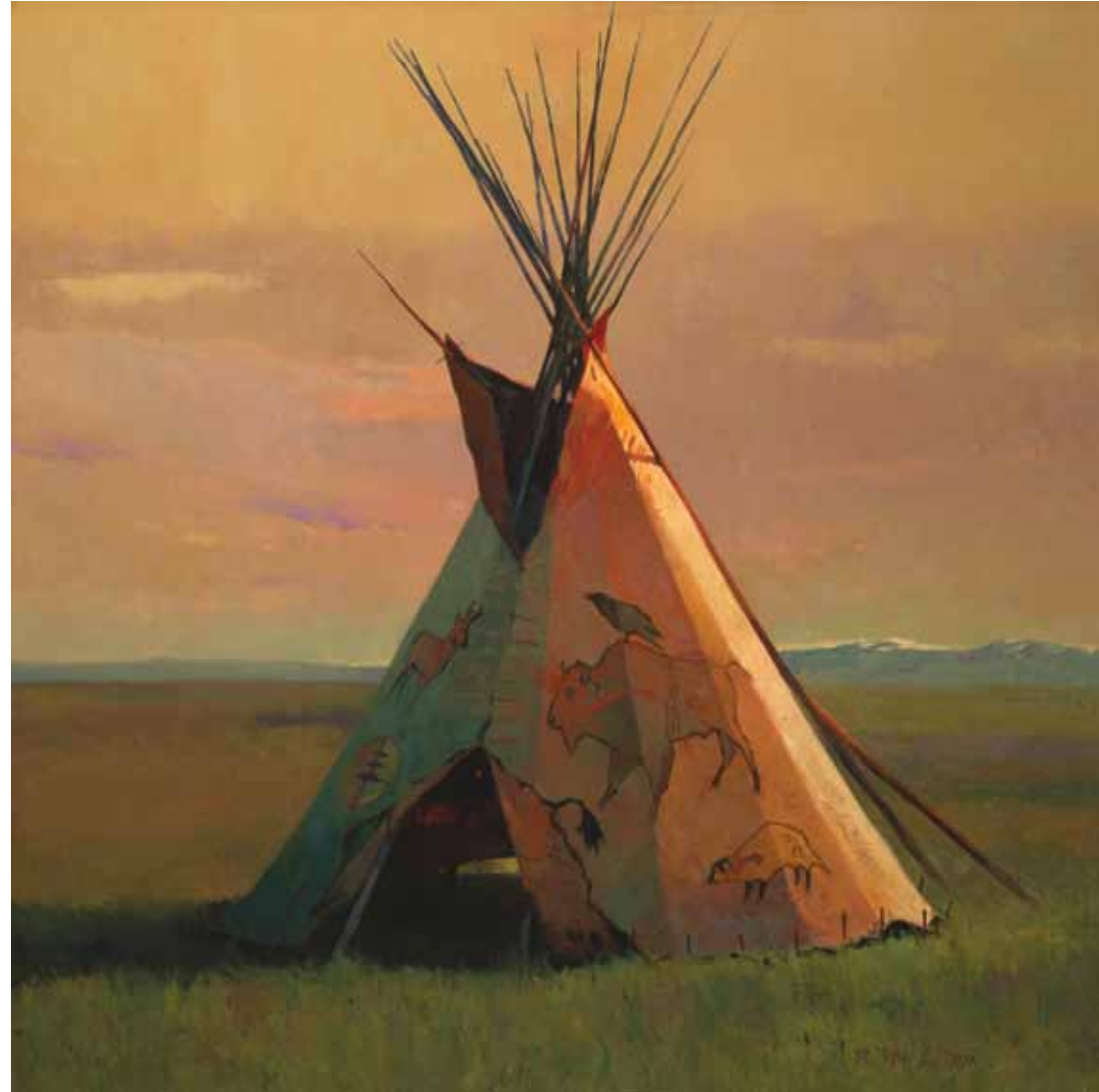
C.M. RUSSELL, *Charles M. Russell and Friends*, 1922, Oil on Canvas, 42" x 81"
Montana Historical Society – Helena, Montana



R. TOM GILLEON, *Blood Brothers II*, 2011, Oil on Canvas 60" x 60"
Altamira Fine Art – Jackson, Wyoming



ANDY WARHOL, *Elvis 11 Times [Studio Type] (Detail)*, 1963, Silkscreen Ink and Silver Paint on Linen, 82" x 438"
Collection of The Andy Warhol Museum, – Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



In pioneer French, the title of this piece translates roughly to “the animal shelter of Napi.” In Blackfoot legend, Napi and his wife Kipitaakii were the first humans on earth and were responsible for appointing human beings rulers over all other animals. Like Noah and his ark, Napi and Kipitaakii understood caring for all living things in the natural world to be a sacred duty of humankind.

R. TOM GILLEON, *E' Table de Napi*, 2010, Oil on Canvas, 60" x 60"
Altamira Fine Art - Jackson, Wyoming

MUCKLE FLUGGA TO BELLE FOURCHE

by Carleen Milburn

Tom Gilleon lives on a Montana ranch where American Indian and Wild West cultures have, for two hundred years, shared an enchanted land. The barely discernable ruts of an old wagon trail disappear over the hills and stone tipi rings from Indian encampments are overgrown with range grass. It is on this land that Gilleon balances a commitment to life and work.

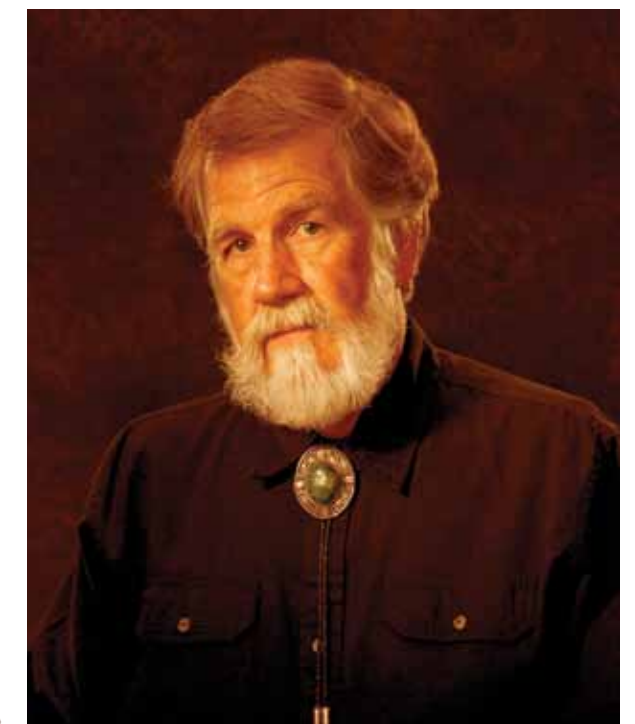
Tom’s story is one of dedication to his family, his art, his friends, his country and the land. He and his wife, Laurie Stevens, have pulled together a 2000-acre ranch that had been abandoned for fifty years. They reclaimed the land from the rattlesnakes, patched up old buildings, and tore down the dilapidated homestead ahead of one more good wind. Because of their stewardship, the land is now a model of healthy range grass. Their home built in post-and-beam style of salvage bridge timbers and 30-foot beams from an old copper smelter, fits comfortably into the landscape.

His grandparents, who imparted an historic and vibrant perspective of what it is to be an American, raised Tom Gilleon near the small town of Starke, Florida. On that big, open grassland with clusters of trees, pockets of water and alligators, his grandmother instilled self-sufficiency and his grandfather, an interest in art. In the evenings his grandfather

drew pictures for the young boy by kerosene lamplight. These simple images gave flight to Tom’s imagination. In a childhood made quiet without the barrage of media, television or radio his power of imagination grew. He began to draw his world with a stick in the white construction sand in the yard. Even as a child, he started with the horizon line for spatial definition. It oriented where things went and gave his drawing stability. That same horizon line is seen in a Gilleon painting today.

After he started school Tom spent the quiet summers with his grandparents. Content with his solitude, he threw rocks for hours at the nearby railroad tracks, developing an arm that earned him a position on the pitcher’s mound in high school and later a baseball scholarship at the University of Florida. There he took courses in architecture and played in the minor leagues for the Dodgers his first summer at Vero Beach. The glamour of playing baseball gave way to the reality of brown bag lunches and long school bus rides in the Florida heat. “Yeah, I’ll never forget the smell of baseball,” he says and adds with a wry smile, that his college baseball career was the longest two weeks of his life.

Gilleon’s love for the ocean and his country inspired him to join the Navy. He marched in John F. Kennedy’s inaugural parade, was on board ship in the blockade during the Cuban



R Tom Gilleon

missile crisis, and as a cryptographer he decoded the message that the President had been assassinated.

When his service was over he became an illustrator for NASA's Apollo space program in Cape Kennedy. As a result of the technical, detailed drawings that his job required, he has eliminated—squeezed out—every ounce of detail that's not essential in his art. The discipline of drafting instilled in him focus and the technical precision that his next job would require, as an illustrator for Disney's EPCOT Center in Orlando. Later he accepted a position with Disney Imagineering in California, where he created conceptual renderings of theme parks for the Disneyland Tokyo, Disneyland Hong Kong and Disneyland Paris.

In California Tom met his wife, Laurie, who painted murals for Disney and is an artist in her own right. Together they attended a painting workshop in Montana and soon after made

the pivotal decision to move there. Tom was drawn by the beauty of Montana's mountains, rivers and sky, but it was the people he admired. He found them different—still connected to day-to-day life and survival. They were self-sufficient, as were his grandparents. About the Montana winters Gilleon says, "You just deal with it. I call it Montana's filter. Only the best survive."

Gilleon is effortlessly witty but there is also an utter seriousness to him. His studio is crowded with artifacts and his personal art collection. When painting the dwellings and the noble plains Indians, Gilleon carries the burden of history. The clean, bold, geometric shapes of his iconic tipi images are a symbolic representation: the square is the symbol of justice; the triangle, creativity and the horizon, stability. He works in an aura of quiet mystery making paintings of mythic quality and a richness of color and light. Tom said of his childhood, "We lived in a little place where there was no electricity and our

home was lit by kerosene lanterns. I always felt drawn into the light and everything around that glow disappeared into a blur. To me, other details of the scene are important and you can tell they are there, but I want to bring people into the welcoming light." ■

Carleen Milburn documents the landscape, art, and people of the West. She lives with her husband on a small ranch in Montana's Missouri River Valley.



R. TOM GILLEON, *The Enemy to My Enemy is My Brother*, 2008, Oil on Canvas Wrapped Board, 24" x 24"
Altamira Fine Art - Jackson, Wyoming



R. TOM GILLEON, *Drifting for Rainbows*, 2011, Oil on Canvas, 24" x 24"
Altamira Fine Art - Jackson, Wyoming



R. TOM GILLEON, *Brushed Up*, 2011, Oil on Canvas, 24" x 24"
On Loan from the Collection of Joe and Linda Roberts, Nashville, Tennessee



R. TOM GILLEON, *Muckle Flugga To Belle Fourche*, 2010, Oil on Canvas, 48" x 36"
On Loan from a Private Collection - Zurich, Switzerland

The abandoned railroad tracks in the painting once carried Scottish immigrants from Muckle Flugga to settlements in the West such as Belle Fourche. Their attendant grain elevators are like the cooling, abandoned handprints of a bygone era – a meditation on human fragility in the face of time.



R. TOM GILLEON, *Magpie and Owl*, 2007, Oil on Canvas, 60" x 60"
On Loan from the Collection of Bettina M. Whyte - New York City, New York



The green grasses of spring last a short time on the plains, but they make visible nature's cycle of death and revitalization. The tipi's sun iconography pays homage to the longer days and warmer weather of the coming summer. Seasonal changes guided the movement of the great herds of bison that once roamed the American grasslands, as well as the migrations of the Native American nomads who depended on them for survival.

R. TOM GILLEON, *Green Grass Camp*, 2010, Oil on Canvas, 36" x 48"
Altamira Fine Art - Jackson, Wyoming



Red Bonnet / Holy Smoke / Green Bonnet is a meditation on the nature of human conflict: for every one man devoted to peace there are two who favor war. The center figure holding a glowing peace pipe is outnumbered by two chiefs wearing the trappings of wartime leaders. They are detached from historical surroundings, their story timeless and universal.

Opposite Page:
R. TOM GILLEON, *Red Bonnet*,
2011, Oil on Canvas, 30" x 22"

Above Left:
R. TOM GILLEON, *Holy Smoke*,
2011, Oil on Canvas, 30" x 22"

Above Right:
R. TOM GILLEON, *Green Bonnet*,
2011, Oil on Canvas, 30" x 22"

On Loan from the Collection of Joey and Kristi Schaeffer - Memphis, Tennessee



R. TOM GILLEON, *Shadow of the Sixth*, 2009, Oil on Canvas, 60" x 120"
On Loan from a Private Collection - Virginia Beach, Virginia

Five tipis glowing with the light of evening fires dominate the balance of this painting. Gilleon playfully acknowledges the world outside the painting — a sixth lodge the viewer cannot see.

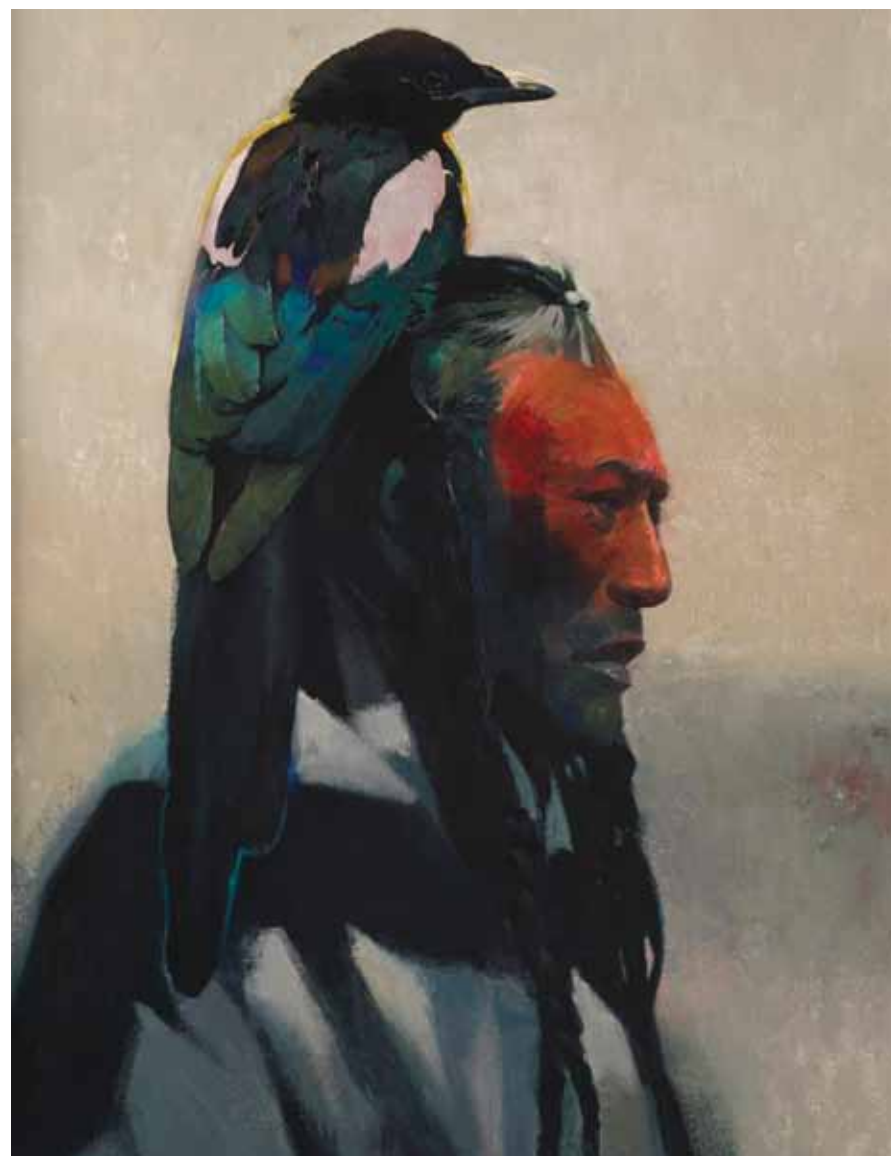


R. TOM GILLEON, *Going to the Sun*, 2008, Oil on Canvas, 60" x 60"
Altamira Fine Art - Jackson, Wyoming



This piece is a nod to Andy Warhol's grid paintings, fusing the historical legacy of the American West with modern graphic art. Bold primary colors and a minimalist geometric composition create a powerful presentation of the Native American art of war.

R. TOM GILLEON, *War Shields*, 2008, Oil on Canvas, 60" x 60"
On Loan from a Private Collection - Chicago, Illinois



Western European culture considers man and nature to be bound together in a Hobbsian struggle, but Native American religion regards all living things as brothers and sisters. The figure's clothing emulates his brother magpie — he finds wisdom and guidance in his communion with the natural world.



The tragedy of Western expansion in the days of the Wild West is often expressed in its cost to Native Americans: their loss of independence, respect, and self-fulfillment. But this was often the plains woman's lot, with or without the influence of the white man. Ghost Woman is painted in the muted colors of a female pheasant, almost invisible, perfectly silent. She has nearly faded out of the painting, just as women are often written out of history.

Opposite Page:
R. TOM GILLEON, *Bird Brother Magpie*,
2010, Oil on Canvas, 30" x 22"
On Loan from a Private Collection -
Snowmass, Colorado



In Native American tradition, the owl is a deadly omen. Perched on the shoulder of a proud warrior, it foreshadows the demise of his way of life and the hopelessness of his struggle to salvage it.

Above Left:
R. TOM GILLEON, *Ghost Woman*,
2010, Oil on Canvas, 30" x 22"
On loan from the Collection of
Joe and Linda Roberts - Nashville, Tennessee

Above Right:
R. TOM GILLEON, *Bird Brother Owl*,
2010, Oil on Canvas, 30" x 22"
On Loan from a Private Collection -
Marfa, Texas



The day's light fades, as does the Native American way of life. Those who pause to look back are, like Lot's wife, unable to move forward. Nostalgia demands a terrible price.

R. TOM GILLEON, *Pillar Assault*, 2011, Oil on Canvas, 36" x 48"
Altamira Fine Art - Jackson, Wyoming



The “bloodline” in this painting creates a striking composition, but it also has meaning as a double entendre. In one sense, the word means a line of descent or heritage. The younger figure is connected to the older by the red line in the background — a reminder of the importance of passing the torch. But the title of this painting also refers to the frequent warfare among plains tribes. The younger figure wears the uniform of destruction, while the wise elder wears an uncanny wing: a means of transcending a legacy.

R. TOM GILLEON, *Bloodlines*, 2008, Oil on Canvas, 60" x 72"
On Loan from the Collection of Lawrence and Linda Perlman - Minneapolis, Minnesota



R. TOM GILLEON, *Yesterday's Tracks*, 2009, Oil on Canvas, 48" x 36"
On Loan from a Private Collection – Wickenburg, Arizona



R. TOM GILLEON, *Stars Snow and Silver*, 2004, Oil on Canvas, 36" x 36"
On Loan from the Collection of the Willemain Family - Grosse Point Farms, Michigan



R. TOM GILLEON, *Purple Scarf*, 2007, Oil on Canvas, 24" x 24"
On Loan from the Collection of John and Debbie Hirtle - Wayne, Pennsylvania



The phrase “hoi polloi” means common folk. Gilleon enjoys the ironic comparison to the English phrase “hoity toity.” This piece is dedicated not to great warlords and famous leaders, but to ordinary men of their time.

R. TOM GILLEON, *Hoi Polloi*, 2005, Oil on Canvas, 48" x 48"
On Loan from a Private Collection - Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania

THE ELEGANT REALIST

by Patrick Hemingway

There were four characteristic responses to photography by painters of talent at the close of the 19th century: the cartoon of Daumier, the dream of Chagall, the block abstraction of Cezanne shamelessly exploited by Picasso and the elegant realism of Degas. Tom Gilleon is an elegant realist. Elegant Realism is what Keats meant by “beauty is truth, truth is beauty.”

How badly most people understand this was brought home to me the other day when I showed the first painting I was lucky enough to own of Tom's, “Freezeout Farewell,” to a friend who shares my love of goose hunting and is very good at it, too. The painting shows ten snow geese in powerful climbing flight five hundred feet above the red suffused post-sunset marsh landscape of the Feezeout Wildlife Management Area near Choteau, Montana. This picture packs for me about as big

of a punch as the Gettysburg Address. My shooting friend, but not a painting friend, pointed out to me in what I suppose he thought was a lesson on natural history, the feet of the snow geese were painted black, a grievous error, since they should have been pink! Ah yes, and George Washington should have been sitting down in the boat crossing the Delaware.

I hope my heirs and assigns manage to hold on to the three paintings of R. Tom Gilleon I now own, but if they don't, I guess my greatest chance of relative immortality is my place in the record of their provenance for as long as our republic or any other subsequent form of civilized government lasts. ■

~ Patrick Hemingway

Patrick Hemingway, Ernest Hemingway's only living son, edited the posthumously published Hemingway fiction memoir "True at First Light" about his father's final African safari. He also spent 25 years in East Africa as a safari guide and instructor in wildlife management and has lived in Montana since 1975.



These pieces draw their titles from color and iconography. Ah Wa Cous means “antelope” in the Blackfoot language, and refers to the tipi's spirit animal. Red Horse is a study in ambiguity — has the tipi been stained red by paint or by the brilliant sunset behind it? Cold Blue and Wyakpa Kpa Yela are both night scenes. Cold Blue conveys the quiet stillness of winter dusk and Wyakpa Kpa Yela (“star that falls from the sky”) depicts an event considered sacred to Native Americans — the passage of a distant comet.

R. TOM GILLEON, *Ah Wa Cous, Cold Blue, Wyakpa Kpa Yela, Red Horse*, 2011, Oil on Canvas, 40" x 40" each
Altamira Fine Art - Jackson, Wyoming



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R. TOM GILLEON, *Teton Snow Melt*, 2007,
16" x 20", Oil on Canvas Wrapped Board,
Altamira Fine Art - Jackson, Wyoming

ART SHOW

by Kristi Gilleon, *Daughter of R. Tom Gilleon and Laurie Stevens*

I was six years old and, having been bounced on the laps of countless painters as they worked, thought I had been born an artist myself. I often climbed the stairs to my dad's studio to watch him strike a final petal of red across a painted horizon, or memorize the names of his oil paints.

Al-iz-ar-in, I would murmur to myself. Man-guh-nee-z. Winsor and Newton oil color 319: Indian Yellow – the color of sunflowers. Color 056: Brown Madder – the exact shade of summer storm mud. 465: Payne's Gray – November's first snow.

One day, with the house to myself, I climbed to his studio to find a painting of a magnificent goat balancing on a mountain ledge. Its mane was a tapestry of Davy's Gray, Pewter, and I even detected a pinch of Jaune Brilliant (a nice touch). Decent, I thought. But what it really needed was 748: Zinc White. I took my time selecting the appropriate brush. My discerning eye preferred one of fine male pig bristle, with a polished oak handle and rounded tip. I delicately dabbed at the white smear on the palette and stood back to take stock of my task.

I had watched dad do it a hundred times: first lean toward the painting, carefully observing a particular detail. Then step back (preferably with crossed arms) and stare intently without saying a word. This phase should last at least thirty seconds. Next, slowly move the brush toward the painting and stop just short of the canvas – a brief moment of suspended consideration. And then, with great finesse, add a subtle but important dash of color for a perfect compositional balance. It was all very simple.

I slowly moved my brush toward the goat's body. I paused thoughtfully. Then, flick! A small spark of brilliant white illuminated the goat's windblown mane. Pretty good, I thought, but more would be better. Flick, flick, flick. When I was finished, the mountain goat positively glowed. I dropped the brush into a canister of turpentine, satisfied with a job well done.

An hour later, we both stood in silence before the luminescent goat. Slowly dad turned and peered at me over the rim of his glasses.

"You decided to help me paint, didn't you?"

"I felt it needed something." Toes together and hands clasped behind my back, I must have looked like a plucky, loveable duckling.

Having two artists for parents meant that their love often expressed itself in paint. At other times it was clay or glue. The grey, sculptural mishaps of five-year-old hands were chef-d'oeuvres to my parents, as invaluable as any Rodin. Through the lens of affection, my ill-advised experiments in abstract painting were as miraculous as any Jackson Pollock. Art, in my family, was love made tangible.

Over the next few days my dad patiently toned down his goat, dotting the subtler shades of nature over my gleaming lunar pearl. He smiled to himself as he did so, every now and then letting a small blemish of Zinc White shine through. ■



R. Tom Gilleon / Timberline Studio at work on *Bloodlines* for the Northern Plains one-man show 2008.

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