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WESTERN ART ICONS

*Painter Tom Gilleon and Photographer Rusty Yates
Discuss Their Debut at Scottsdale Ferrari ArtWeek*



From March 20-23, Scottsdale Ferrari ArtWeek will turn Scottsdale's WestWorld into a premier destination for art enthusiasts, solidifying the Valley of the Sun as a global art hub alongside events like London's Frieze Art Fair and Miami's Art Basel.

Among the standout participants are Tom Gilleon, a Montana-based oil painter renowned for his modern interpretations of Native American and Mountain West themes, and Rusty Yates, a fine art photographer from Texas Hill Country celebrated for capturing the beauty and mystery of Western landscapes.

ARTICLE BY NORMAN KOLPAS

For Tom Gilleon, painting is both a passion and a connection to his roots. “My time at Walt Disney Imagineering taught me how visual art connects with audiences,” he explains. “I hope visitors leave inspired by my work and with a deeper appreciation for the Mountain West and the Native American heritage I inherited from my grandmother.”

about ships and whales and his own childhood, and he drew me pictures while he talked. I thought everyone did that. Inspired by him, I loved to go outside and use a stick to draw giant pictures in the white sand that covered our front yard.

RY: I bought my first camera in the '80s while managing Angelina Farms to document the herd.



Rusty Yates, meanwhile, infuses his photography with a deep sense of purpose.

“With over 40 years in photography, my work reflects the elemental mystery of my subjects and my dedication to ethical land stewardship,” he shares.

“With 20,000 attendees, this event offers their art the exposure of nearly eight years in a traditional gallery,” says Richard King of KingArts, their exclusive representative.

Here’s our exclusive Q&A with these remarkable artists.

What first ignited your artistic passion?

TG: Most nights when I was growing up in my grandparents’ little house in Starke, Florida, my Scottish grandpa would tell me stories

Spending long days on the ranch surrounded by stunning landscapes and light, I caught the photography bug—and the rest is history.

Western icons are a central theme in your work. Could you share the story behind one of your most celebrated pieces?

TG: Back in the '80s, while transitioning from Disney illustrator to fine artist, I painted a tipi on a large canvas in my Montana studio, unsure if it would resonate. To my surprise, it sold immediately, and the gallery wanted more. Tipis, like blank canvases, continue to inspire me—just as they did for the Native Americans who painted their stories on them. This inspiration lives on in works like *Gibbous Ravenous*.

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RY: Around 1980, after a long day of ranching, I captured a photo of our horses backlit against the setting sun. Years later, I transformed that image, adding backgrounds in Photoshop, to create *Angelina's Horses*.

Which of your creations holds the most special place in your heart?

TG: I strive to give my best to every painting, no matter the size. Recently, I've focused on larger, museum-scale works, like *Blood Chief*, a 50-by-50-inch portrait of a Native leader completed in 2024. If you visit ArtWeek, you'll notice a small bronze plaque on the stretcher bar with the Roman numerals "MMXX," marking 2020—the year I began creating these large-scale pieces, a project I humorously call my "20-20 vision."

RY: The day before Thanksgiving, my mother, Elsie Yates, passed away at 105. A gifted gardener, she taught me to love nature and flowers, especially her favorite, the Texas American basket flower. I created a still-life in her honor, aptly titled *Ode to Elsie*.

What else inspires your creative process?

TG: The early 20th-century photographer Edward S. Curtis, known as the "Shadow Catcher," has long inspired me with his 40,000 portraits of American Indians from over 80 tribes west of the Mississippi.

RY: Some suggest I should "focus" on one subject, but I refuse. From horses to wildflowers, landscapes to insects, I'm drawn to the elemental mystery in their beauty. My goal is to evoke an emotional response in the viewer.

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Rusty Yates