

# Museum of Fine Arts' new one-woman Parkite show

The Utah Museum of Fine Arts chooses Susan Swartz's impressionistic landscapes for its Great Hall

By ANNA BLOOM

*Of the Record staff*

Susan Swartz stands at the center of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts Great Hall converted, for the next few months, into an arboretum of her painted aspens on large linen canvases, some that look ablaze, crackling in Utah's deep azure skies.

From her vantage point she can look high above her 14-painting exhibition to the exposed corner of the museum's second floor — to the Andy Warhol exhibit that is packing up and headed for the road. There are other rooms of art also that spans 5,000 years of culture in Africa and Asia. She is in good company.

"When I first saw the show this morning, I was brought to tears," she confesses on Monday afternoon. "It's such a big deal for an artist ... It's something one dreams about, so when it happens, you just keep pinching yourself."

And also a milestone for Park City. According to David Dee, the museum's director, when the show opens up to the public Thursday, Jan. 10, it will be the first large, solo show for a Park City artist in the 93-year history of the museum and the Great Hall, the original gallery space.

Dee says Swartz's dedication to both craft and cause helped her to stand out in the field of talented Utah artists. In addition to celebrating color and life, her underlying hope is that her landscapes will speak to the inner environmentalist in viewers, calling them to not only see the value in protecting nature but to do something about it.



"Purple Majesty 2," acrylic on linen, by Susan Swartz.

"We are excited about Susan's work because she is so committed to her craft and the earth in which we live," he says. "It's unique for a museum to be able to show an artist that demon-

Please see **Swartz's, C-2**

# Swartz's show to open Thursday

• Continued from C-1

strates a passion that also relates to important issues of our time."

Over the years, the Great Hall has served as an exhibiting arena for some of Utah's greatest contemporary painters including abstract figurative painter Brian Kershisnik, and Hyunmee Lee, who integrates the western painting tradition with Asian calligraphy. Past traveling exhibitions in the museum's other galleries have included "Edward Hopper," "David Hockney Portraits," and "Degas to Picasso: Modern Masters." The combination of local and international and historical works makes the building a cultural landmark - the only encyclopedic museum within a hundred-plus-mile radius with a collection that spans 5,000 years, notes Dee.

"We try to find a balance of showing the world and showing what's here in Utah," he says. "As a

state, we've been better known for our natural resources than our cultural resources, so this is an important tourist stop. People travel to specific areas and ask what is unique about it culturally and we show them what Utah has to offer."

Swartz's show is entitled, "Natural Revelations," highlighting the divine connection between nature and art she underscores in her work. Swartz paints from memory and impressions, light and feelings - inspired by what she has seen, she says, but clearly interpreted through her mind's eye: in all her paintings, the colors are heightened and the brush stroke is free to dance and overlap.

"I began in representational work, but now I'm not using models at all and I like that challenge," she says. "I try to evoke a feeling, to make us all stop and look at the world."

She includes a selection of paint-

ings of water lilies and a few strictly abstract pieces in "Natural Revelations," but it is Utah's landscape of mountains, trees and wide-open skies that she has enjoyed since moving to the state 1984 that is her preferred subject and what she says she's best known for.

"The beauty of this state is unsurpassed," she explains. "For me, as an artist, it's just overwhelming... I feel blessed to look at God's creations every day. I get lost in it."

Swartz's sense of spreading environmental stewardship through her work has led to a relationship with animal activist Jane Goodall, whom Swartz met three years ago when a friend suggested Goodall stay at the family's vacation home in Martha's Vineyard.

Goodall's words serve as the conclusion to the book, "Natural Revelations," which includes color prints of the work featured at the museum.

"Susan Swartz shares my concern for the future of life on this planet," Goodall writes. "Susan encourages us not only to experience and savor these images of nature, but also to do what we can to save nature itself. How tragic it would be if people living in the future were to look at these paintings and know that the settings that inspired them were no more."

Swartz plans to attend a joint book signing with Goodall in late February, and to hold a fundraiser for Goodall's foundation, "Roots and Shoots," a program in 100 countries around the world that encourages young people to work for positive change, choosing projects to benefit people, animals and the environment.

Swartz began her career in art as an educator, teaching in elementary schools then high schools, for 20 years. She stopped working professionally for years to raise her children, thinking she would never return. Then, she found herself back at the easel, preparing to show her work to the world. In 2002, she was commissioned to be an official artist for the Winter Olympics and began showing her work at Park City's Phoenix Gallery.

The museum show is one of many honors awarded to Swartz during her 40-year career in art and activism. Swartz holds an award from the Harvard Divinity School in recognition of her interaction of artistry with spirituality, and "Born into Brothels," a 2005 documentary about children who live in the red-light district of Calcutta



"Exploding Sky," acrylic on linen, by Susan Swartz.

that Swartz helped to finance, won an Oscar.

As Swartz's husband, Jim, writes in the introduction to the book, "In her way (Susan) chooses to look at the positive side and not show the evil and the ugly. Rather, to show and to paint the natural beauty, and hopefully each of us will come to see the good and be motivated to keep these places in our souls forever... We are extremely grateful for her brush, but more importantly, for her spirit."

Susan Swartz's exhibit, "Natural Revelations," will show at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts from Jan. 11 through April 13. In conjunction with Swartz's paintings, the museum will offer a lecture series on spirituality and art: On Jan. 16 at 6 p.m., Roberta Rosenberg and Terry Lee, editors of *Double Take/Points of Entry Magazine*, will present "Honoring the Spiritual in Art: the Paintings of Susan Swartz." On Feb. 21 at 7 p.m., Reverend Dr. Gloria White-Hammond will present a lecture on spirituality; On April 3 at 7 p.m., Diane Apostolos-Cappadona will present the lecture, "The Spirituality of vision: Artistic Journeys to the Sacred."

The museum is located at the University of Utah on 410 Campus Center Drive in Salt Lake City. Hours are Tuesdays through Fridays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, visit [umfa.utah.edu](http://umfa.utah.edu) or [susanswartz.com](http://susanswartz.com).