

Gwen Meyer Ethelbah

In love with the Southwest

I was raised in Carmel in an artist's household, but according to my family, I wasn't supposed to be an artist. Even though art was an everyday experience in my life, my family decided I would become a scientist like so many of my relatives, and indeed, I worked my way through UC Berkeley in a science lab (it was fun!). It really upended my family's dynamic when I became an artist instead.

Being the major breadwinner ate into my forward motion during the succeeding years, but I never stopped painting. I explored incredible American impressionistic art up close, particularly the West Coast artists. I could stand in their footsteps, see what they saw, and what choices they made. My mother was also part of the Monterey and Carmel artist community in the early 1900's, and of course her work influenced me, particularly in terms of what makes a painting.

I have become involved in several arts organizations, particularly Women Artists of the West and Plein Air Painters of New Mexico, serving in several positions in both. I have chaired several shows and instituted the first online blind jurying for WAOW.

In 2005, we moved to the Pinetop area in Arizona to "retire." We loved the area and had been vacationing there for years, painting and fishing, dependent on the weather and the appetites of the fish. I opened Joyous Lake Gallery in Pinetop that year, held shows, both local and national, and created "Paint the Aspens," a plein air show celebrating the local fall color.

It's hard to underestimate the impact of the work of Maynard Dixon, Edward Hopper and impressionists on both coasts on my art language. In particular, I resonated with Dixon's authentic depiction of the Southwest's barren geography. Modern teacher-artists who were also influential: Mary Bentz Gilkerson, Kevin MacPherson, Emil Gruppe, Rachel Pettit, John Carlson, Stephen Quiller, and of course, my own mother, Flora Macdonald, who studied with Armin Hansen and in the ateliers of Europe. Mostly, though, my style has been formed by study and the hours at the easel - the miles of canvas so necessary to a creative practice.