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The 1989 Fall Arts Festival photo featured a Jackson Hole Historical Society & Museum image of Edith Sargent playing her violin on a porch overlooking Jackson Lake. Poster image courtesy of Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce.



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FROM COW TOWN TO ART TOWN

JACKSON BECOMES AN 'ART MECCA'

BY MAGGIE MOORE

In 2019, Wilcox Gallery celebrated its 50th anniversary. The gallery's founder, Jim Wilcox, reflected on the Jackson Hole art scene in an interview with the local paper. He observed, "The biggest change is that it's gotten from being a cow town with a couple art galleries to being the premier place to buy Western art in the country."¹

When East Coast art fair promoter Rick Friedman announced his intentions to host the inaugural Jackson Hole Fine Art Fair (JHFAF) in September 2019, the headline of the online art publication *Artnet* read, "A New Art Fair is Coming to an Unexpected New 'Art Mecca': Jackson Hole, Wyoming."² However, to those in the know, "unexpected" and "new" were not surprising words to precede "Art Mecca" and "Jackson Hole." After all, the valley has always been an artist's ideal environment. The area attracts people who are naturally concerned with beautiful things and whose aesthetic appreciation is high. The first newspaper headline to identify Jackson Hole as an "Art Mecca" can be found in the *Jackson Hole News* in August 1976, a good 40 years earlier.³

Starting where Part 2 in this series on Jackson Hole's art scene left off, with the founding of Trailside Galleries in 1963, Part 3 will provide a sweeping overview that traces the development of Jackson into a national arts destination with the growth of the gallery scene alongside the rise in popularity of Western art. Changes began around the year 2000 when a major shift in the Jackson Hole art scene coincided with the growth of the luxury travel industry and an increasingly wealthy second-homeowner and high-end traveler to the valley. These changes created what we see in the thriving Jackson Hole art scene today, which boasts more than 30 galleries, an art auction, a national museum, a national music festival, a film festival, and the world-class Center for the Arts.

Although artists such as Archie Teater and Conrad Schwiering had been selling directly to customers from their studio galleries since the 1940s, and local hotels and

businesses had been hosting exhibitions of local artwork since the 1930s, Trailside Galleries forever changed the art scene when visionary Dick Flood opened its doors in the summer of 1963. Flood had been selling Western art and Indian artifacts from his home in Idaho Falls since 1952. He was a passionate collector of iconic Western artist Charlie Russell (1864-1926), sourcing his work directly from people who knew Russell, and he wanted to expose others to his work. Trailside showed work by Russell alongside other early, non-local Western masters such as Frank Tenney Johnson (1874-1939), Olaf Wieghorst (1899-1988), and Joseph Henry Sharp (1859-1953).

Trailside first opened in the present-day Wyoming Outfitters building. The town was skeptical. Dick Flood's son, Daro, reflected years later that, "People thought that Dad was crazy for opening a shop that was devoted entirely to Western art.... Western art wasn't anything back then. There was no money in it, for galleries or artists. I don't even remember that Santa Fe or Scottsdale had galleries yet."⁴

Wanting to hide what he was doing for as long as possible, in a move we might associate today with the game 'Wheel of Fortune,' Flood had his painter paint a different letter above the awning each day, skipping a letter or two, eventually revealing the name of the gallery.⁵ To demonstrate the relative quiet and safety of the town back then, the night before the opening, a gallery in New York sent Flood a present, but it arrived after everyone had gone home for the evening and was left outside. Flood opened two large crates the next morning to find paintings by Charlie Russell and Joseph Henry Sharp inside, which had been left out on the Town Square overnight, unprotected!⁶

Trailside was only open from Memorial Day to Labor Day, but it was immediately a success. It drew a mix of visitors and locals, and alongside Western masters, sold Western memorabilia and Indian artifacts. Flood was the

first gallerist to successfully host artists-in-residence, who would set up easels in the front room of the gallery. Important guests over the years included John Clymer, Archie Teater, and Conrad Schwiering. Flood was a pioneer and sold the gallery in 1967 to Don Stevning, president of Sunkist, who five years later in 1971 sold it to Ted and Christine Mollring. The latter owners opened a branch in Scottsdale, AZ and continued the tradition of showcasing museum-quality artwork by artists in the Western and wildlife genre for many years.

Encouraged by the success of Trailside, pioneer artist Jim Wilcox opened his own gallery in 1969. It originally opened as the Four Seasons Gallery in the Pink Garter Plaza. In 1974, Wilcox designed and built the Wilcox Gallery that is now located on Highway 89 and still in operation today, along with a second gallery in downtown Jackson. The once aspiring architect also designed the furniture. He called the gallery, "the sculpture with paintings inside it."⁷

Between 1969 and 1974, there was tremendous national

growth in the genre of Western art, and the number of galleries in Jackson increased to 10 by the time of the nation's Bicentennial in 1976. The craze for Western art in the mid-70s was noted by Jim Wilcox in an interview from 1974 when he said that, unbelievably, most of his buyers were between the ages of 25 to 40, "doing without a couch in-order to buy a painting." He reported that a kid came in and spent his life savings of \$1,500 to buy two paintings to hang in his tent. "Those kinds of buyers are really much more common than the wealthier clientele," Wilcox remarked.⁸

By the time of the Bicentennial, when interest in our nation's identity and mythology was high, staple galleries of this era specializing in Western art emerged such as Main Trail Gallery (opened by Daro Flood's brother Dick Flood III), the May Gallery, and Boyer's, which still sells Native American jewelry off the Town Square today.

1980s: Slowly throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, restaurants and clothing boutiques began to replace curio



WACO KID
7/4
1985

JACKSON HOLE FALL ARTS FESTIVAL '85

Artist Bill Schenck's painting "Waco Kid" was featured on the first Fall Arts Festival poster in 1985. Schenck returned in 2015 as the featured poster artist once more.

“Depicting a cowboy roping a horse, the image was chosen not only because of its graphic strength, but its blend of romanticism and Pop-art made a contemporary statement about Jackson Hole as a major art center of the West.”

shops on the Town Square. By the mid-1980s, there were over 30 galleries in town. However, the season was still primarily Memorial Day to Labor Day, and most galleries shut their doors and moved their business to Scottsdale or Santa Fe for the winter.

Gallery owners began a movement to extend the season into the fall, and after years of talk, finally partnered with the Chamber of Commerce and nonprofits to launch the first Fall Arts Festival in September 1985. An article in the *Jackson Hole News* reported that a recent Chamber economic study showed that taxable sales of the art business had increased 81% between 1980-1985, while during the same period, “there was no real growth in the economy as a whole.”⁹

Jeanny Promack, owner of the Powder River Gallery and one of the festival’s founders, said that the community should therefore “stick with a good thing” and promote the arts.¹⁰ According to Promack, Jackson had all the elements needed for a successful festival, and there was no reason why it could not be as successful or prestigious as the Santa Fe Festival of the Arts, or others held in resort communities.

The first Fall Arts Festival committee held a contest and chose the painting “Waco Kid” by local summer resident artist Bill Schenck for the first festival poster. Depicting a cowboy roping a horse, the image was chosen not only because of its graphic strength, but its blend

of romanticism and Pop-art made a contemporary statement about Jackson Hole as a major art center of the West. Sales of the poster helped fund the festival.

The first Fall Arts Festival, despite its lofty ambitions, was not the success the organizers had imagined. Due to limited funds and a short window of time for regional promotion, they did not attract the crowds they wanted. For example, the Beaux Arts Ball, an event that capped off the festival, was expected to attract 200-300 people. Only 75-100 tickets were sold and 50 people showed up.¹¹ An Art Collectors Dinner at the Wort Hotel that was supposed to attract 100 people but only materialized 25 diners.¹² However, those who attended the festival had a good time, and the founders were not discouraged to do it again and grow it into the premier arts and social event of the Intermountain West. Elaine May, a founder of the May Gallery, told the paper, “Anything and everything we can do to attract people interested in buying art in the valley should be done. The high-end traveler is the solution to Jackson Hole’s future.”¹³

1990s: Although the 1980s saw the founding of the Fall Arts Festival in 1985 and the National Museum of Wildlife Art two years later in 1987, the art scene was still very seasonal. In the 1990s, tourism and the economy began to change, and conditions for a year-round art scene started to flourish.

Tourism has long been a driving economic force in Jackson Hole. However, during the 1990s, local tourism stagnated yet Teton County’s economy still boomed. For example in 2000, Grand Teton National Park visitation was four percent lower than in 1993, but during that same period Teton County’s population increased by a third, and constant dollar-per-capita income was up by a quarter, as chronicled by long term resident and data-scientist Jonathan Schechter.¹⁴

Furthermore, between 1991 and 1999, the price of a family home tripled, and Jackson Hole began to attract rich and famous newcomers seeking a quiet alternative to the rarefied airs of Aspen, Colo., and Sun Valley, Idaho. Real estate prices soared when World Bank President James Wolfensohn and Vice President Dick Cheney joined Hollywood celebrities like Harrison Ford on the list of second homeowners.¹⁵

In 1990, the Gallery Association published the first gallery guide and started the first Thursday Art Walk in January to attract skiers coming off the slopes. Jackson galleries opened and closed during the decade and mainly showcased regional artwork that catered to regional visitors’ tastes. One staple gallery during this time that pushed the envelope was the Martin-Harris Gallery, which



In 2003, Trainside Galleries celebrated its 40th anniversary. This photo appeared in a Jackson Hole News&Guide article.

paved the way for galleries like Altamira.

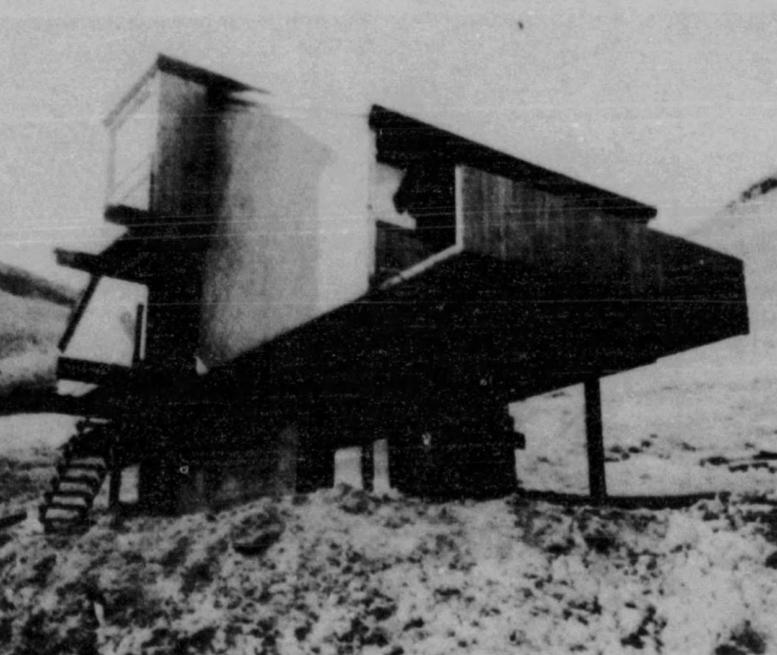
Opened in 1992 by partners Martin Kruzich and Ron Harris, Martin-Harris featured art of the “New West,” choosing artists who were, “grounded in tradition yet moving the Western style forward...spotlighting new vistas, new horizons, new mediums and new styles of the West.”¹⁶ Donna Howell-Sickles, Theodore Waddell and Bill Schenck, among others were represented by the gallery before it closed in 2001.

Jackson’s art scene didn’t just attract and cater to artists or tourists, it permeated down into all walks of society. In speaking with a second-generation Jackson resident, James Mathieu about this time period, he remembers telling his river guide/ski bum/local restaurant owner friend, a typical Jacksonite in the 1990s, about how he was going to buy pieces by the hot Western artist at the time, Russell Chatham, and sell them to museums when he retired and be rich. This man was not just looking to enjoy art but looked at it as an investment. Mathieu was really struck by the level of interest in art in this typical Jacksonite.

1998-2007 beginnings of the “New West”: The growth of the real estate market in the 1990s and the popularity of the valley with well-heeled second homeowners accelerated in the first decade of the millennium. With the rise of the internet and the arrival of the luxury hotel market, the physical and artistic landscape of the town and its art galleries began to change away from being almost exclusively Western and regional to something more global and contemporary.

When the Amangani, a pioneer in the luxury hotel market, opened in 1998, it was viewed as “out of the ordinary” for Jackson Hole and it was a “whole new character” for the town.¹⁷ Mark Huffman reported that the resort would cater to an upscale market that hadn’t been captured yet, people who normally frequent places like St. Moritz, Beverly Hills, and Aspen. In 2003, the Four Seasons Resort in Teton Village followed suit and opened its doors, catering to a new global, ultra-wealthy clientele, and by consequence, bringing a new kind of art buyer to town.

It was not just new hotels, but the architectural landscape of the town that began to change around the millennium.



YOU'VE BEEN WONDERING
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Wilcox Gallery

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one mile north of town
733-6450

Local ad announcing the opening of the Wilcox Gallery in 1974.

Construction during this time reflected new tastes and styles trickling into the valley. The emergence of a new vision of the West showed up most acutely in “New West” architecture.

Early examples of this new architectural style are the Mad River Boat Building on Highway 89, designed by Will Bruder (1997), and Terroir Restaurant (now Trio) (1999), on Glenwood Street, designed by Stephen Dynia.

These new buildings and architectural styles called for new art, and there are some names worth mentioning in the early 2000s that shaped the changing gallery scene. Meyer-Milagros Gallery, 2005-2008, promoted regional and national contemporary artists and contemporary Western artists. Originally the Meyer Gallery, established in 1965 in Park City, Utah, opened a Jackson branch in 2001 to complement locations in Santa Fe and Scottsdale. Mariam Diehl had been the director of the Meyer Gallery for two years before she purchased it from Susan and Russell Jones in 2005 to become the single owner. Diehl re-named the gallery Meyer-Milagros and introduced new, less traditional Western artists. In 2008

she re-named it Diehl Gallery after a move to its present-day location.

Jackson Street Gallery, established in 2004, was a contemporary gallery that grew out of the Martin-Harris Gallery with owners Martin Kruzich (Martin-Harris) and Lyndsay McCandless. McCandless took over the gallery space on Jackson Street in 2007 and changed the name to Lyndsay McCandless Contemporary (c. 2007-2009). Tayloe and Mike Piggott started the Muse Gallery, or JH Muse, out of their business The Art of Framing at the current Stockton and Shirk building on West Broadway in 2003. The gallery moved to its current location on Glenwood Street in 2007 (operating today as the Tayloe Piggott Gallery). These galleries brought in new artists working outside of the traditional, realist Western vein and pushed the Jackson Hole art scene into a more contemporary focus.

The year 2007 was pivotal. When the Muse Gallery moved to town, the *Jackson Hole News and Guide* wrote that while contemporary art had been on the rise over the last few years, “The Muse’s move into the heart of Jackson’s art scene reflects something of contemporary art’s encroachment upon the traditional Western art market.”¹⁸ That year the secondary auction market moved to Jackson when the first Jackson Hole Art Auction - a joint collaboration between Trailside Galleries and Gerald Peters Gallery in Santa Fe and New York - premiered in September. The last art auction in Jackson held in 2021 totaled \$8.9 million with an impressive 95% sell-through rate.¹⁹

In 2007, the town also celebrated the completion of the state-of-the-art Center for the Arts, designed by Stephen Dynia. The multi-disciplinary building centralized Jackson’s dance, theater and other arts nonprofits under one roof. When the *New York Times* reported on the opening of the Center, the article also boasted about the Four Season’s Hotel’s art collection, which includes works by Joan Miro and Alberto Giacometti. The *Times* also noted that local sensibilities, while still firmly rooted in the classic Western and wildlife art aesthetic, had moved away from being entirely “insular and regional” to more “cosmopolitan and diverse.”²⁰

2008-Present: When the Great Recession of 2008-2009 swept the nation, Jackson’s strong tourist economy slightly buffered the effects. The recession hurt many Jackson galleries, but gave opportunities to newcomers, such as Heather James Fine Art. Founders James Corona and Heather Sacre further raised the bar when they brought art by Blue-Chip artists such as Picasso and Monet to the Town Square in 2010.

Reflecting on the last 10 years, and looking to the future, one can ask the question, are Jackson's art galleries a victim of their own success?

Efforts from galleries and others in the local arts community to raise the profile of Jackson as an arts destination worked. The Art Fair in 2019, wanting to seize upon that success, was a testament to that, but it did create a lot of backlash. Some of the contemporary galleries, such as Tayloe Piggott and Diehl Gallery, decided to participate in the fair. But many of the more traditional local galleries did not welcome encroachment by a national art fair upon the profitable climate that they had worked for years to cultivate. Reaction to the art fair was mixed, and galleries showcasing Western art fared better than those pushing contemporary art, perhaps signaling that the town's taste for traditional genres is still very strong.

In an article from the year 2000, architect Stephen Tobler saw Jackson as a "micropolitan city," an "urban community."²¹ Our art scene rivals that of any major city and certainly punches above its weight for our relatively small population. However, it is increasingly becoming one with an identity crisis. There is tension between Jackson's perceived Western heritage and regionalism and the forces of globalization. There is a battle between the "Old" and "New" West, urban and rural, and it will only get stronger and continue to play out in the types of art galleries that come and go.

In 2019, Legacy Gallery, a traditional stalwart on the Town Square, closed to make way for a Five-and-Dime. Our Town Square features shops selling souvenirs and t-shirts one block away from the Heather James gallery selling Warhols and Picassos. A new boutique hotel, The Cloudveil opened in 2020, currently reflects the sharp divide between a higher and lower-end tourist and consumer, and something of the forces dividing the town itself. Will art galleries catering to the middle, representing local artists or reflecting the more traditional character of Jackson, be able to survive or find a home?

Jackson Hole's newest art gallery, Foxtrot Fine Art, was opened by local artist Katy Ann Fox in February of this year. Its welcoming space and representation of regional artists working in traditional mediums is a reflection of the continuing legacy and entrepreneurial spirit of Jackson's pioneer artists and galleries who have shaped the character of the town for decades.

Yet, it is miles from the Town Square and over a mountain pass, in Driggs, Idaho.

When Rick Friedman reflected on the 2019 art fair, he said

that it, "far exceeded expectations. In our search for a little gold mine in 'parts unknown,' we uncovered an incredibly well-funded and knowledgeable oasis of art lovers... Just get ready to cowboy and cowgirl up."²²

¹ Leonor Grave, "Wilcox Gallery to Celebrate 50 Years," *Jackson Hole News&Guide*, July 17, 2019.

² Artnet Gallery Network, "A New Art Fair is Coming to an Unexpected New 'Art Mecca': Jackson Hole, Wyoming" December 12, 2018, [artnet.com](https://www.artnet.com).

³ "Jackson Hole Western art mecca", *Jackson Hole News*, August 11, 1976.

⁴ ⁵ ⁶ Dina Mishev, "Trailside was town's 1st Western gallery", *Jackson Hole News*, September 12, 2001.

⁷ "Wilcox Galley 'sculpture with paintings inside it'." *Jackson Hole News*, June 20, 1974.

⁸ Patti McDonald, "Jim Wilcox- Another Artist Drawn to the Tetons", *Jackson Hole Guide*, August 15, 1974.

⁹ ¹⁰ Marylee White, "After years of talk, Festival nears reality," *Jackson Hole News*, September 4, 1985.

¹¹ Marylee White, "Festival had problems, but improvements seen," *Jackson Hole News*, September 18, 1985.

¹² "Off to a good start", Editorial, *The Jackson Hole Guide*, September 17, 1985.

¹³ Marylee White, "Festival had problems, but improvements seen," *Jackson Hole News*, September 18, 1985.

¹⁴ Jonathan Schechter, "Remember Charture during Old Bill's", *Jackson Hole News&Guide*, September 10, 2008.

¹⁵ Todd Wilkinson, "wanted: spouse with a home in resort town", *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 4, 2001, [csmonitor.com](https://www.csmonitor.com).

¹⁶ Lisa Flood, "Gallery to feature art of the 'New West,'" *Jackson Hole News*, February 12, 1992.

¹⁷ Mark Huffman, "A shining light upon the hill, like it or not," *Jackson Hole News*, October 7, 1998.

¹⁸ Melanie White, "Muse Gallery plans move into downtown space," *Jackson Hole News&Guide*, April 4, 2007.

¹⁹ "Jackson Hole Art Auction Announces New Managing Director," November 2021 press-release, [jacksonholeartauction.com](https://www.jacksonholeartauction.com).

²⁰ Bonnie Tsui, "In Jackson, Wyo., an Art Scene Pushes Beyond the Old Frontier," *New York Times*, January 21, 2007.

²¹ Allison Arthur, "Building the Future of Jackson," *Jackson Hole Guide*, January 26, 2000.

²² Artnet Gallery Network, "'Get Ready to Cowboy and Cowgirl Up': The Inaugural Jackson Hole Fine Art Fair Shows a Strong Appetite for Western Art," September 24, 2019, [artnet.com](https://www.artnet.com).

ABOUT MAGGIE MOORE

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Part 1 of Moore's art history of Jackson Hole can be found in the *Chronicle*, June 2021, and Part 2 in the *Chronicle* November 2021.