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Artist Conrad Schwiering painting plein air, Tetons in the background, circa 1960s. JHHSM Collection 2011.0021.001.



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TRADITION AND TRANSITION: THE POST WORLD WAR II JACKSON HOLE ART SCENE

BY MAGGIE MOORE

While one of the most defining features of Jackson Hole is its physical isolation and natural solitude, in no way has it ever been completely disconnected from regional, national, and international forces. As the community and economy began to shift in the mid-20th century, the growing art scene responded, too.

Once Grand Teton National Park was first created in 1929, pioneer artists such as Harrison Crandall, Olaf Moller, and Archie Teater carved out a living selling art directly to tourists in the park in the summer, and the artistic scene around them grew year after year. This culminated in the

establishment of the Teton Artists Association in 1939. The Association's inaugural show at Moore's Café turned into a traveling exhibition around Wyoming in 1940.

Although Jackson Hole was far from the frontlines, the U.S. entry into WWII in 1941 put that momentum on pause and much of the tourism in Jackson Hole shut down. Archie Teater didn't return to the valley for several summers during the war. The dude ranches that were already struggling to make it through the Great Depression either partially closed or never opened again. The Bar BC was one of them.



Conrad Schwabing, Paul Bransom and Grant Hagen, c.1959. Paul Bransom papers, 1862-1985. Photo: Herb Pownall, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Nathaniel Burt (son of Bar BC founder Struthers Burt) wrote in his memoir *Jackson Hole Journal* that most men of military age served in the war and that helped, "to broaden their horizons and make the postwar valley a lot less parochial than it had been."¹ He goes on to write, "the Hole that those sons came back to in 1945 wasn't much changed; but it began to change almost immediately."²

By 1950, the battle for Grand Teton National Park between conservationists and local ranchers was settled. A new kind of tourism began to emerge. Jackson Hole became more accessible as visitors were driven by consumer prosperity and the rise of the automobile but still influenced by the seasons.

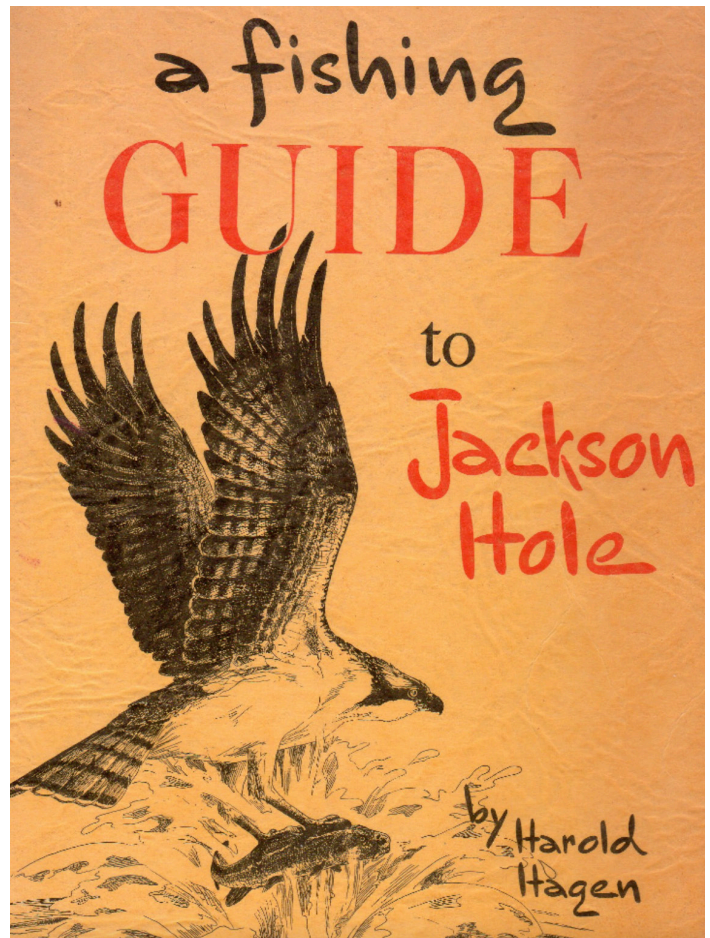
Jackson was still very much a seasonal town by the time Trailside Gallery was founded by Dick Flood in 1963. Trailside was the first gallery in town to represent both local artists and classical and contemporary Western artists from outside of Jackson. The gallery quickly paved the way for Jackson Hole to become a "mecca" for Western art in the 1960s and 70s, which remains true today.

In the years after the war leading up to the founding of Trailside, the roots that were laid down pre-war awoke from their slumber and new artists emerged on the scene. Strongly influenced by and collaborating with the "establishment" artists such as Archie Teater, Harrison Crandall and others, artists of the post-war years helped build a dynamic art scene to support artists year round.

Nathaniel Burt wrote in his *Jackson Hole Journal* that before World War II, "Cattle was primary; tourism secondary." By 1950, all of that had changed. "Tourism is king now; dude ranching and cattle ranching are secondary."³ The new kind of tourism that emerged was different from the dude-ranching kind, which was based on horses and cattle and was indigenously "Western." Instead, Burt observed that activities like mountain climbing, hiking and skiing ousted the more traditional horseback riding as favorite sports.

Another noticeable change, according to Burt, was boating on Jackson Lake. Before the war only a "few freaks" used to have motorboats and the lake was confined to canoes. After the war, one would see sailboats, powerboats and jet-skiers.⁴ Instead of being confined to the dude ranch, these new, post-war tourists were more catered to by the bars, cabin courts, and shops popping up around town.

In addition, Snow King opened in 1939 by Neil Rafferty with a tractor-powered rope-tow, followed by its first chair-lift in January 1947. Before the resort at the Village opened in 1965, Snow King solidified that downhill skiing outstripped cross-country skiing as the primary activity of Jacksonites in the winter (rather than a necessity by ranchers in the winter for travel). Local athletes began to gain national and international fame in the sport, and skiing created a winter economy that didn't exist before the war. This all helped lay the ground for a year-round economy.



Harold Hagen's "A Fishing Guide to Jackson Hole" with illustrations by his brother Grant "Tiny" Hagen.

The first artist to make a living residing in Jackson Hole twelve months of the year was Conrad "Connie" Schwiering (1916-1986). The *Jackson's Hole Courier* announced Schwiering's arrival on June 10, 1947. He was noted as the son of Dean Schwiering of the University of Wyoming (UW). His paintings immediately attracted considerable notice. An alumna of the University along with his wife Mary Ethel, Schwiering was raised in Laramie and studied at the Art Students League in New York City from 1939-1941. While a student in New York, he helped paint some of the display murals at the Museum of Natural History and got to know the preeminent wildlife artist Carl Rungius, who was also working there at the time.

Following a life-long dream to live in the Tetons and the path set by "Teton Teater," Schwiering sold paintings out of his trailer on the Town Square that first summer.⁵ Through his connections that fall he helped organize a show of Wyoming artists at UW in December 1947 that also travelled through the state. Harrison Crandall represented Jackson Hole in the show.

In the summer of 1948, still living out of his trailer, Conrad Schwiering opened the "Paint Brush" studio on the Town Square, which he rented for a few bucks a month.



The painting studio of Olaf Moller in winter. JHHSM Collection 2002.003.003.

He sold his first painting for \$35 after one month and sales didn't pick up until the wife of a local dude rancher held a party for Connie and his wife and invited wealthy hunters and local guests. Soon after, sales boomed.⁶ Just as business took off, the owner of the building wanted to get out of the lease, and suggested the balcony of the Wort Hotel. Brothers John and Jess Wort liked the idea and offered the space for free. A handshake sealed the deal.⁷ Thus began Jackson's first hotel art gallery. A small shingle sign reading: "Conrad Schwiering, Western Paintings; Mary Ethel Schwiering, Prop.," with a finger pointing upstairs, marked the location.

Conrad Schwiering's gallery was at the Wort Hotel for 12 years in the midst of the background noise of the roulette wheel, slot machines, piano music, dancing and revelry of one of Jackson's liveliest post-war watering holes. Schwiering later reflected in *Painting on the Square*, "It was fun. I think in our twelve years at the Wort we met a colorful pageant of the entire West - trappers, traders, prostitutes, cattle kings, millionaires, movie stars, and wonderful, ordinary, God-fearing Americans."⁸

The Wort Hotel opened just before Pearl Harbor was bombed in 1941 and no one thought it would make it. Despite the war, the hotel was propped up by open-table gambling, which paid for itself in the first two years.

When gambling was outlawed in Montana in 1949, it drove customers further south to the Wort, solidifying it as a regional gambling destination.

John and Jesse Wort decorated the hotel in the Western "Camp Style" that consisted of Navajo rugs, taxidermy, local art and lodgepole furniture by Cody furniture maker Thomas Molesworth. When the hotel opened, it was reported to cost \$150,000, which was \$50,000 over the original budget.⁹ The Wort brothers also bought and displayed paintings and hand-tinted photographs from their friend Harrison Crandall and hired Salt Lake City artist Paul Clowes to paint scenes above the Silver Dollar Bar.¹⁰

The young Conrad Schwiering was inspired to paint animals, particularly elk, with Olaus Murie, famed local biologist and amateur artist and a fine draftsman in his own right. They were each other's favorite sketching and painting companions.

In 1950, Schwiering had a successful one-man show at the Cyrus-Boutwell Gallery in Denver that consisted of 30 oils of the Tetons in different seasons. Artist Gerard Curtis Delano noted that at only 33 years old, Schwiering was, "one of the country's best artists."¹¹ The *Courier* that year referred to Schwiering as, "Jackson Hole's year round artist," and noted that he would also open another gallery

on the Town Square opposite the bank in the William Mercill building.¹² Presumably Schwiering ran this gallery during the same time he had the one at The Wort.

In 1950 Schwiering also designed a four-color seal for the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce and depicted elk and the Tetons and a central medallion with the words "Jackson Hole - Last of the Old West."¹³

Jackson's first locally-raised son to emerge as an artist during the post-war period was Grant "Tiny" Hagen (1921-1977). Hagen moved to Jackson with his family from Minnesota at age 10 in 1932 and attended local schools. He was voted President of his class, excelled at sports, particularly skiing, wrote for "The Rustler," the high school newspaper, played in the town band, and was voted most popular boy in the senior class of 1940.¹⁴

Hagen attended the UW, and because of his expert skiing and outdoors skills, he served in the 10th Mountain Division during the war. He took one art class at university and bought his first paintbox with his veteran's allotment. When the war ended Hagen took a position with the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission as a fisheries biologist, but by 1954 he had quit his state position and moved into a career as a wildlife artist, his first love.¹⁵ While maintaining a summer position as a ranger in Grand Teton National Park, Hagen sold paintings through several curio shops in Jackson.

Like Schwiering, Hagen was greatly influenced by the philosophy of his neighbor, the artist and naturalist, Olaus Murie. Hagen's intimate knowledge of wildlife and natural subjects led to several commissions for the covers of *Wyoming Wildlife* magazine in the 1950s. When his brother Harold wrote and published *A Fishing Guide to Jackson Hole* in 1954, Tiny did all of the illustrations.¹⁶ Described as, "decorative and eye-catching," the guide, which gave, "no guarantee of catching fish," included Hagen's illustrations of different fish, contour drawings of the lakes, and several other wildlife sketches.¹⁷

The next summer in 1955, Hagen spent time making sketches and drawings of the wildflowers in Grand Teton National Park that were later included in John Craighead's famous book, *A Field Guide to Rocky Mountain National Flowers*, published in 1963.

In 1956, Tiny was reported to be doing a series of sketches and decorations on the windows and mirrors of the Silver Dollar bar to advertise the cutter races. His exceptional physiographic diagram of Jackson spanning Teton Pass to Flat Creek was first produced in the Wyoming Geological Society Annual Field Conference Journal of 1956. It is an iconic panorama of the valley that is still reproduced today.

Like the artists of the 1930s, Hagen and other artists of the post-war period, including Connie Schwiering and Olaus Murie, painted together. Taking after Olaf Moller,



Grant Hagen painting. JHSM Collection 2011.0022.001.

who founded the Teton Artists Association in 1939 and operated an art school at his cabin in the park, Grant Hagen, Conrad Schwiering and artist Paul Bransom founded "Teton Artists, Associated," in 1957. They called it a plein air art school focusing on painting and drawing of landscapes and animals. *The Jackson Hole Guide* wrote in June 1957 that, "the most picturesque and paintable area of the United States now has an Outdoor Art School so that all who are artistically inclined and have an urge to creatively express that feeling which surges through every appreciative soul upon viewing this superlative scenery may now obey that impulse."¹⁸

The school met on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in July and August and was assisted by Maggie Hagen (Grant's wife), Ethel Schwiering, and Helen West, an artist and summer resident. The school attracted amateur and professional artists throughout the country and ran for at least seven summers, leaving a lasting impact on many of its students.

Paul Bransom was a winter resident in New York City and had established a career illustrating for the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Field and Stream*. He famously illustrated the animal stories *Wind in the Willows* and *Call of the Wild*. He kept a studio at the Bronx Zoo and was a member of the Salmagundi Club (Schwiering was also a member).

Bransom first came to Jackson in 1947 and one of his favorite painting sites was Betty Woolsey's Trail Creek Ranch.¹⁹

In addition to booming tourism in town and an art school in the Park, the 1950s saw a tremendous expansion of park facilities. In 1950, Congress combined the original lands of the 1929 Grand Teton National Park with the Jackson Hole Monument (established 1943) and the lands that John D. Rockefeller, Jr. had been buying up through his Snake River Land Company to create the present-day national park.

In response to an increase in visitation after WWII and the aging park infrastructure from the 1929, Rockefeller commissioned an impressive new hotel and park facility near Willow Flats. Architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood was commissioned to design the Jackson Lake Lodge in an International style with rustic elements to, "let the outside in."²⁰ The facility opened in 1955 and a few years later a new art gallery within the lodge opened.

Artist Carl Roters of Syracuse, New York won a competition and was commissioned to make special murals depicting mountain men and trappers who opened up the early West for the dining room. Roters spent three years working on 10 twenty-four foot high murals and they are largely based on the watercolor sketches of artist Alfred Jacob Miller (1810-1874) painted during an exploratory trip to Wyoming in 1837.²¹ Roters' mural is entitled "The Fur Traders and Trappers of the early West," and continues to span two walls of the Mural Room at Jackson Lake Lodge today.

The art gallery and concessions at Jackson Lake Lodge grew during the same time that the park's first concessionaire, Harrison Crandall, began to wind down. Crandall continued to operate his studios at Jenny Lake and Moran, but by 1953, under the operation of the Grand Teton Lodge Company, the rent at Moran had become too expensive. After receiving a refusal to lower it, Crandall shut that location down in 1955. The film processing plant at Moran moved to the Crandall's new home and studio, "Paint Brush Point," just at the base of Blacktail Butte. The Crandall's had purchased the property in 1941 when it was outside the park boundary, but after the park expansion it became an inholding. A tragic fire on Christmas in 1954 destroyed many of Crandall's precious negatives of his early work, landscape paintings and equipment. Only 1,200 negatives were salvaged.²²

Much like Crandall's Jenny Lake studio, which was a gathering place for artists before the war, the Paint Brush Studio was a gathering place for artists of the post-WWII generation. This is captured by a photograph taken at an open house in June 1957 in the *Jackson's Hole Courier*.

By 1959, Crandall's health was beginning to fade and he sold his concession to the Grand Teton Lodge Company

TETON ARTISTS ASSOCIATED
Jackson Hole, Wyoming

OUTDOOR ART CLASSES
Monday, Wednesday, Friday — 10 A. M. to 5 P. M.
Starting July 1, 1959

Tuition Fees

Single Lesson (one day)	\$15.00
More than one lesson (per day)	10.00
Session of 12 lessons (or \$7.50 per day)	90.00

Teachers

PAUL BRANSOM
CONRAD SCHWIERING
GRANT HAGEN

For Information and Enrollment:
Phone 126J Box 25A
Jackson, Wyoming

Information also available at The Valley Shop

An 1959 Teton Artists Associated ad in *The Jackson Hole Guide*.

that year. He continued to focus on landscape painting and continued to operate a small wholesale business from Paint Brush Point that included his postcards, prints, posters and art.²³

It is worth noting that because of his intimate knowledge of the park, Crandall gave Ansel Adams a tour of the photographic sites of the park during his visit and helped pick the site of Adams' famous 1949 photograph, "The Tetons from the Snake River."²⁴ In the period after World War II from 1947-1963 many of the artists of the pre-war period, such as Archie Teater and Harrison Crandall, continued to visit the valley in the summer, progress their careers and influence the emerging generation of year-round artists led by Conrad Schwiering and Grant Hagen. These artists were supported by local businesses and hotels such as The Wort and by selling directly from their own studios and galleries.

As tourism increased and the art scene flourished, the valley saw the founding of the Jackson Hole Fine Arts Foundation in 1962, led by Baroness Consuelo von Gontard of Melody Ranch. The Foundation put on the Jackson Hole Fine Arts Festival that year, which was the origin of the Grand Teton Music Festival and included art exhibitions under the supervision of Conrad Schwiering and Grant Hagen.²⁵ Two more arts organizations still thriving today, the Art Association of Jackson Hole and Dancers' Workshop, also trace their roots to this time period in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The Jackson Hole Guide headline in 1962 read, "Jackson Hole to Become Cultural Center for Wyoming and the Entire West."²⁶

In the article, Schwiering stated that, "the program will be unique in the United States...it will be the first of its kind to complement the most outstanding work of nature with the best of man's artistic creation."

By 1963, Jackson was on its way to becoming a nationally recognized art destination. What began to emerge post World War II was what Nathaniel Burt described as the, "New West...where painter's flourish and every other store is an art gallery of some kind."²⁷ Burt prophesized that, "sooner or later all artistic humus is bound to produce some sort of native product of high caliber...some day Jackson Hole may be more famous for its artists in some form or another as it is now for its mountains." Burt's foresight was certainly correct.

ABOUT MAGGIE MOORE

Maggie Moore is the founder of Artemis Art Advisory, an art appraisal and collection management service. Part One of Moore's art history of Jackson Hole can be found in the Chronicle, Vol. 42, Issue No 2, June 2021. Maggie is passionate about art, research, and local history. Find more of her work at ArtemisArtAdvisory.com.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Jackson Hole Journal, Nathaniel Burt, pg. 157, 2 *ibid.*, pg. 167-168,
- 3 *ibid.*, pg. 167-168
- 4 *Circling the Square*, pg. 3
- 5 *Painting on the Square*, pg. 14, 6 *ibid.*, pg. 14, 7 *ibid.*, pg. 14
- 8 *Meet Me at the Wort*, pg. 39, 9 *ibid.*, pg. 132
- 10 Jackson's Hole Courier, March 2, 1950
- 11 Jackson's Hole Courier, May 18, 1950
- 12 Jackson's Hole Courier, May 18, 1950
- 13 *The Rustler*, Nov. 16, 1939
- 14 Jackson's Hole Courier, July 21, 1955
- 15 Jackson's Hole Courier, June 17, 1954
- 16 Jackson's Hole Courier, January 12, 1956
- 17 Jackson Hole Guide, June 27, 1957
- 18 *Painting in Grand Teton National Park*, pg. 164
- 19 Grand Teton Lodge Company www.gtlc.com
- 20 Jackson's Hole Courier, June 4, 1959
- 21 Harrison Crandall, pg. 224, 22 *ibid.*, pg. 224
- 23 Harrison Crandall, pgs. 132-133
- 24 Casper Star Tribune, April 27, 1962
- 25 Jackson Hole Guide, April 26, 1962
- 26 Jackson Hole Journal, Nathaniel Burt, pg. 170
- 27 Jackson Hole Journal, Nathaniel Burt, pg. 204

