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Masters of the arts: State Capitol Museum exhibits Tubac artists

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Three Tubac master artists were honored Saturday at the Arizona Capitol Museum in Phoenix. From left, Barbara Jean Luebke Hill, Barbara Ann Gurwitz and Virginia Hall. Tubac Center of the Arts

Tubac's 15 master artists are being recognized at the State Capitol Museum in Phoenix, where their artwork is on exhibit through May 29.

"This is a milestone for our artists, our master artist group," said Karin Topping, Tubac Center of the Arts executive director. "It has raised the profile of our artists."

"These are part of our permanent art collection because they are the artists that lived and worked in Tubac and made it known for being an art colony."

The exhibit is expected to attract more art lovers to Tubac, Topping said, bolstering its brand as Southern Arizona's leading art center.

The exhibit includes pieces from five living master artists, including those who attended the museum's exhibit and a reception for the artists on Feb. 14.

Topping said Tubac Center of the Arts established the "master artist" designation based on outstanding artists who show resilience and originality. Tubac master artists are recognized for their work and contributions to the community.

Topping said the master artist exhibit in Phoenix was achieved through a collaboration with the Museum of Arizona Artists and Tubac's Lorna Holmes.

Holmes is an arts advocate in Tubac who has been a key figure in the Arizona arts scene since the early 1970s. In Tubac, Holmes is recognized for her leadership in the community, specifically for her role as the Southern Arizona liaison for the Museum of Arizona Artists.

Meet the living master artists:

Barbara Ann Gurwitz

Gurwitz was born in 1942 in Ayer, Massachusetts, and raised in West Hartford, Connecticut.

She attended Boston University and the Katharine Gibbs School in NYC. While living in Boston, she spent time with the artist community there and traveled to India in 1970. Upon returning from India, she settled in Southern California where she performed in local theater productions and exhibited her paintings.

In 1975, Gurwitz moved to Brooklyn. She again became involved with the artist community and exhibited her work, primarily figurative, in several galleries. In 1976, she spent three months in Madrid, Spain, sharing an apartment with Flamenco dancers and completing a series of large surreal paintings.

Gurwitz arrived in Tubac in summer 1979, and fell in love with the village and the openness of the desert. In Tubac, she participated in several annual festival projects, and her studio in Tubac exhibited her work and that of other artists.

Gatherings at her studio also included poets such as Will Rogers Jr., and Elizabeth Lamb, as well as groups such as the Tucson Flamenco dancers and local Middle Eastern dancer "Jiff" Tougas. After spending several months painting on the Island of Ithaca, Greece, her focus turned to landscape painting.

Gurwitz was a featured artist in the KNewby gallery and the Wilde Meyer Gallery in Scottsdale and Tucson. Her work has been exhibited in numerous galleries throughout the U.S. and is included in the collection of four museums.

While living as an artist-in-residence at the Desert House of Prayer, she met William Hall. They were married in 1991 and built their home and a studio in Sahuarita.

Virginia Woodman Hall

Woodman Hall was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1934. Her earliest memory is that of arranging paper doll scraps on a dark rug. Hall greatly admired the work of Henri Matisse, the post-war modern artists as well as artists of the '60s and '70s New York School. She was recognized in 2017 when the Tubac Center of the Arts broadened its view to include one of her contemporary works in the Master Artist collection.

Hall graduated from Lindenwood College for Women in 1956, with a bachelor's degree in art and English with an emphasis on art history. She received a fellowship from the University of Iowa where she studied printmaking with Mauricio Lansansky and painting and drawing with Stuart Edie. She continued her art history studies with Lester D. Longman. After graduate school, Hall and her husband, Roger, lived in the household of Virginia and Ansel Adams in Yosemite Valley. Off the dining room in the Adams's home was an enlarged photograph of an eclipse of the sun.

“Imagine this black orb surrounded by a brilliant white aura on a gray field shown in a black frame on a white wall,” Woodman Hall said.

That was it. An affinity for black and white was born.

Many years later, in 1979, she moved with her partner T. Dan Gilmore to Tubac. Woodman Hall knew most of the artists that preceded her as artists living and working in Tubac. She had a special relationship with the founder of the Tubac Historical Society, Elizabeth Brownell. She saw the Tubac Center of the Arts grow and change.

In 1997, Hall was invited by the Tucson Airport Authority to produce a body of work commemorating its 50th year. A painting from that exhibition remains as part of their permanent collection.

Barbara Hill

Hill was born in 1932 in Great Bend, Kansas. She was raised part of the time in a small rural town and on her grandparents’ farm. During childhood and into her teen years, she loved to draw and paint.

Hill graduated from Colorado State University as a microbiologist and worked in that field. In the 1960s, she attended Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill, California, where she studied watercolor painting. She also studied with professional watercolorists from across the country.

Hill taught classes in watercolor for Acalanes Adult Education in the San Francisco Bay Area as well as for Jade Fon’s watercolor workshop at Asilomar, California. After marrying Tom Hill and moving to Arizona, she expanded to working in oil as well as watercolor.

She taught classes in oil painting at the Scottsdale Artists School.

Hill has written and published a book on painting animals titled, “Painting Animals Step by Step.” Her love for animals began in her early childhood years spent on her grandparents’ farm in rural Kansas. Her love of the outdoors, nature and animals is an integral part of her paintings.

“My goal in painting is to portray to the viewer those special moments in time, whether in a landscape scene or in an animal’s life. The moment, the color and light the mood and feeling that I have for that scene is what I then express in my paintings.”

She assisted her husband, Tom, taking students to many foreign countries on watercolor workshops. They then settled in Tubac where they built their studio home, and both continued working on their careers in art.

Tom Hill was inducted as a Master Artist in 2013.

Bobb Vann

Vann was born in Philadelphia in 1939. After graduation from Germantown High School in Philadelphia in 1957, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, serving in armored units at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

After a three-year enlistment, Vann spent two years as a student at Philadelphia College of Art. Following his formal studies, he served as an illustrator and art director for a variety of advertising agencies in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, D.C.

In the early 1980s, Vann became interested in the role of African Americans settling the American West. With his own artistic output, he began to concentrate in western themes. He is particularly known for his paintings of Buffalo Soldiers.

After several visits to Arizona, Vann and his wife, Pat, relocated from Philadelphia to Sierra Vista, adjacent to Fort Huachuca, home of the Buffalo Soldiers—10th Cavalry. In 1995, Bobb and Pat Vann moved to Tubac, site of the 18th century Spanish Presidio.

In 2015, a solo exhibit featuring Bobb Vann's work was presented at Tubac Center of the Arts.

Vann's paintings hang in the permanent collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Bell Atlantic Company's headquarters in downtown Philadelphia, the Pentagon, in Washington, D.C.; Kentucky Horse Museum in Louisville; State Capital Building in Phoenix; Fort Huachuca Annex Museum, The Booth Western Museum in Cartersville, Georgia; Tucson Museum of Art, and in numerous private collections.

Nicholas Wilson

Wilson was born in Seattle in 1947, and decided to become a wildlife artist at age 8. As a self-taught artist, he developed his own style and technique.

As curator of exhibits at the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum in the 1970s, he developed his artistic techniques for expressing his deep love of nature. He painted a 16,250-square-foot mural in the 1980s at the Jungle World Exhibit at the Bronx Zoo of New York. His gouache paintings, which depict his unique style of texture and whimsy, have been exhibited around the world and are in permanent collections at the Booth Western Art Museum in Cartersville, Georgia, and the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City.

He has also enjoyed the challenges of monumental bronze sculpture commissions such as "The Wildcat Family," an 11.5-foot sculpture at the University of Arizona, the "Natural Flow," a 14-foot sculpture at the Booth Western Art Museum, Cartersville, Georgia, and "The First Responder," a 6-foot-3 sculpture for a firefighters memorial in Noblesville, Indiana.

In addition to gouache oils, watercolors and bronze sculpture, he has also created copperplate etchings. His etchings and wood engravings are being distributed and can be found in homes around the world as well as in the permanent collection at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., and the Leigh Yawkey Art Museum in Wausau, Wisconsin.

Wilson has been painting and sculpting in Tubac 20 years with his wife, Debbe.

Wilson said he is especially pleased to have his 7-foot bronze jackrabbit sculpture, "Tubac Jack," which was installed at a permanent location at the Tubac Center of the Arts.