

Previews of Works For Sale at Upcoming Shows

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WESTERN ART

COLLECTOR



PLAIN HIDDEN IN SIGHT

Maine painter **T. Allen Lawson's** examinations of farms and wildlife to open at Simpson Gallagher Gallery in Cody, Wyoming.

By Michael Clawson

When T. Allen Lawson started working on a painting featuring a hay shed, he envisioned a piece that illustrated a very specific problem for farmers: deer nibbling on the hay. "The deer will find a way in. They always do," he says. "That's why the hay has a hodgepodge of fencing, boards and bailing wire around it."

But then Lawson witnessed something high up in the hay shed that changed the focus of the piece. He watched a single magpie flying through the beams of the roof. "He would stand next to another magpie and hop around two or three times, and then dive bomb and loop through the crossbeams. His patterns were quite elaborate as he went from one end to the other," he says. "It looked like a courtship. I've heard they mate for life, so it makes sense that these two magpies would be there together, and one would be doing this amazing show."

The two birds, perched up on a beam and silhouetted against a hazy sky, made it into Lawson's final piece, *The Proposal*, which was suddenly less about deer and their hay heists and more about the mating ritual of two courting birds. Interestingly, though, the two feathered subjects are so small that many viewers might miss them entirely.

These features—clever titles, seemingly mundane scenes of farm life, and tiny details that lead to larger ideas—are the hallmarks of Lawson's new work, which will be on



Backlit Sheep, oil on linen, 20 x 18"



Wyoming Playground, oil on linen, 30 x 30"

exhibition during his new show, *Neighbors*, opening September 18 at Simpson Gallagher Gallery in Cody, Wyoming.

Lawson takes great pleasure in stating the obvious, and then hiding it in plain sight, within his works. In one of his new pieces he paints a Texas home on cinder blocks. The paint is fading, the roof needs work, the stained glass in the windows looks foggy and dirty. But right in

the center of the painting, sticking out of the side of the house, is a brand-new satellite dish. He calls the piece *Priorities*, a biting commentary that is easy to miss in Lawson's splendid work.

In *Wyoming Playground*, he paints wooden boards in various stages of rot and rusted barbed wire. They're assembled in a corral that has more slanted lines than straight ones. The painting and its playful title have nothing to do

with the humans that created it; the "children" in this scene are the birds that use the wood and metal as their playground.

"I found that scene in La Barge, Wyoming, and it's where I realized that a Wyoming rancher is not unlike a Maine lobsterman: they have the same natural phobia of throwing things away," Lawson, a farm owner himself, says. "They'll hold onto a 3-foot piece of wire for a decade



Candelabra, mixed mediums on paper, 40 x 30"



Priorities, oil on linen, 26 x 38"

because they might need it. It was when I was noticing this—and let me add that I think the Maine lobstermen are worse at holding onto things—that I saw all these swallows flying in and out of the landfill-like collection of materials. It was a jungle gym to them."

Many of Lawson's works feature these subtle wonders: birds flickering like flames

on tree branches in *Candelabra*, a blanket of untouched snow leading up to three gagging geese in *New Year's Resolution*, pink ears lined up on the horizon in *Backlit Sheep*, and a deer's cautious glance in the winter scene of *More to Come*. His animal portraits—including the hen-starring painting *The Forecaster* and the sheep scene *Bernadette*—offer their own

reward: Lawson's impeccable command of light and color.

"If I see something that is inspirational—and I never know what that will be—I'm excited to try to paint it. I've found these inspirations come to me at the least opportune times. I'll always carry a little sketchbook with me to capture these ideas as they come," he says. "For me it's a matter of making a decision to prioritize, to orchestrate, rearrange, edit... when I'm out in the field my notes are usually filled with things that struck me about scenes I see. Some of it is technical information about color, proportions or value. Mostly my notes are about the feeling and emotion I'm trying to capture in the scene." 🍷



The Proposal, oil on linen, 25½ x 48"

T. Allen Lawson: Neighbors

When: September 18-October 18, 2014

Where: Simpson Gallagher Gallery,
1161 Sheridan Avenue, Cody, WY 82414

Information: (307) 587-4022,
www.simpsongallaghergallery.com