

# ARTIST TO WATCH

the editors' choice for up-and-coming talent



GET YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW, OIL, 40 X 90.

## Arin Waddell

Whimsical works with a message

When Arin Waddell was growing up on a ranch in Montana, the last career she considered was art. "With my dad being an artist, I thought that he pretty much had the market covered," Waddell says. "I was interested in botany and zoology." So, instead of following in the footsteps of her accomplished father, painter Theodore Waddell, she initially studied a whole variety of other subjects at Hamilton College, a private liberal arts school in Clinton, NY. However, she was frequently singled out by art professors, who encouraged her to pursue what they saw as her talents: drawing and photography. Waddell eventually graduated with a degree in fine art and later earned a master's degree in sculpture from the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Today, she calls Wyoming home and lives in a small town much like the one she grew up in—a rural, ranching community. The lessons she learned on the ranch, such as a strong work ethic, continue to influence her now. "You learn that as farmers and ranchers, some years are bad and some years are good. You just have to be persistent, work hard, and stay humble," Waddell says. "It's the same thing with art. Sometimes things don't sell or people don't 'get' your work. Again, you just have to be persistent, work hard, and stay humble."

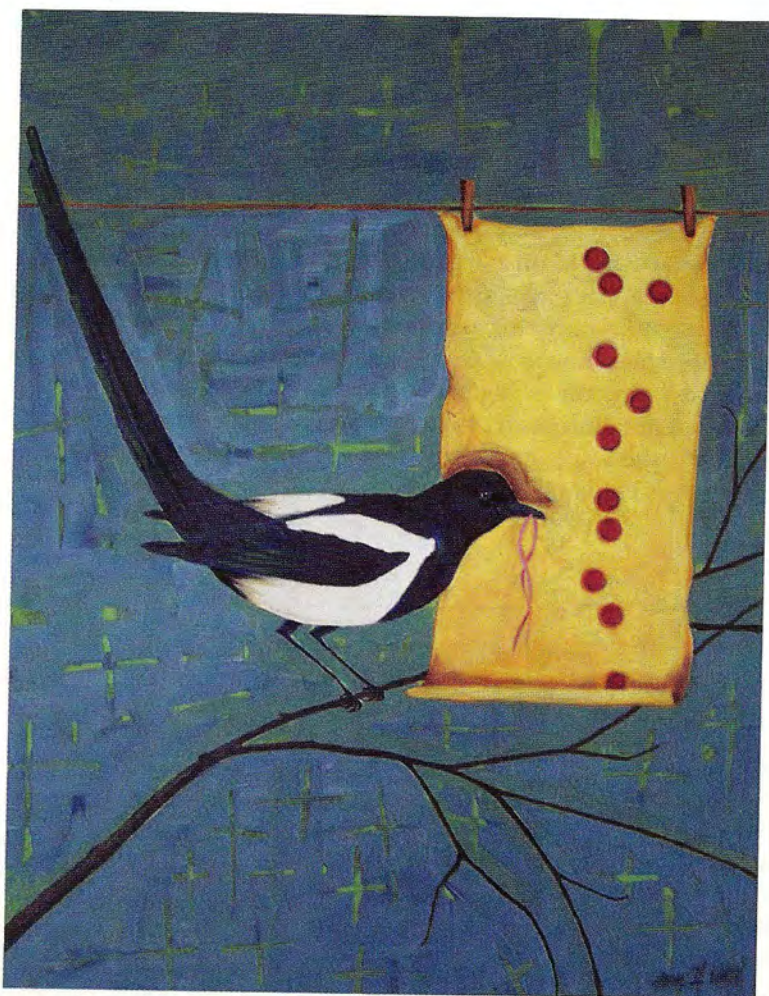
Many of the objects that appear in her still-life paintings reflect ranch life and her early interest in the flora and fauna of

the West: birds, grasshoppers, ducks, poppies, and daisies. But she often mixes these natural elements with manmade items, incorporating everyday things like chairs, pencils, and little girls' sundresses.

There's a touch of whimsy in Waddell's works, but their playfulness can belie a more serious meditation on anything from her thoughts on relationships to the current state of education in this country. One day recently she recalls getting so frustrated with the public school system that she decided to create a piece attacking the subject. In the resulting painting, GET YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW, she portrays a series of chairs, which feature three sitting ducks, all facing the same direction. A fourth duck sits on the floor facing the opposite way. Waddell explains that the piece may seem humorous at first glance, but for her it also speaks to the nature of public education. "The ducks are all stiff in a row. That's what everyone wants—to make kids conform," she says. "As a teacher and a parent, what I would hope for in education is to allow individuals to learn at their level. Some kids are auditory and some are visual. Not every child can sit still and regurgitate facts."

Waddell says her work has gone through many evolutions. It's all part of the process—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Periodically, she purges the bad and the ugly. She creates a huge bon-





▲ **MAGPIE TIC-TAC-TOE, OIL, 40 X 30.**

fire and casts her worst pieces into the flames. "Burning the bad work is really freeing," she says, adding that in her early days as a sculptor, she created a lot of "bad, totemic, skinny Giacometti pieces." Waddell says that those terrible pieces of sculpture were important to her formation as an artist because it was a phase that got her to where she is today. And at the time, she recalls, she didn't think the pieces were that hideous.

These days she hopes her work conveys not only a sense of whimsy with a message, but also a sense of sheer joy. "I hope people will think about the small, ordinary things that can become extraordinary by changing their focus," she explains. "I want people to say things like, 'Wow, I couldn't get over the robin landing on the tree on the first day of spring.' I just want to give people a quiet acknowledgment of the world around them."

—**BONNIE GANGELHOFF**



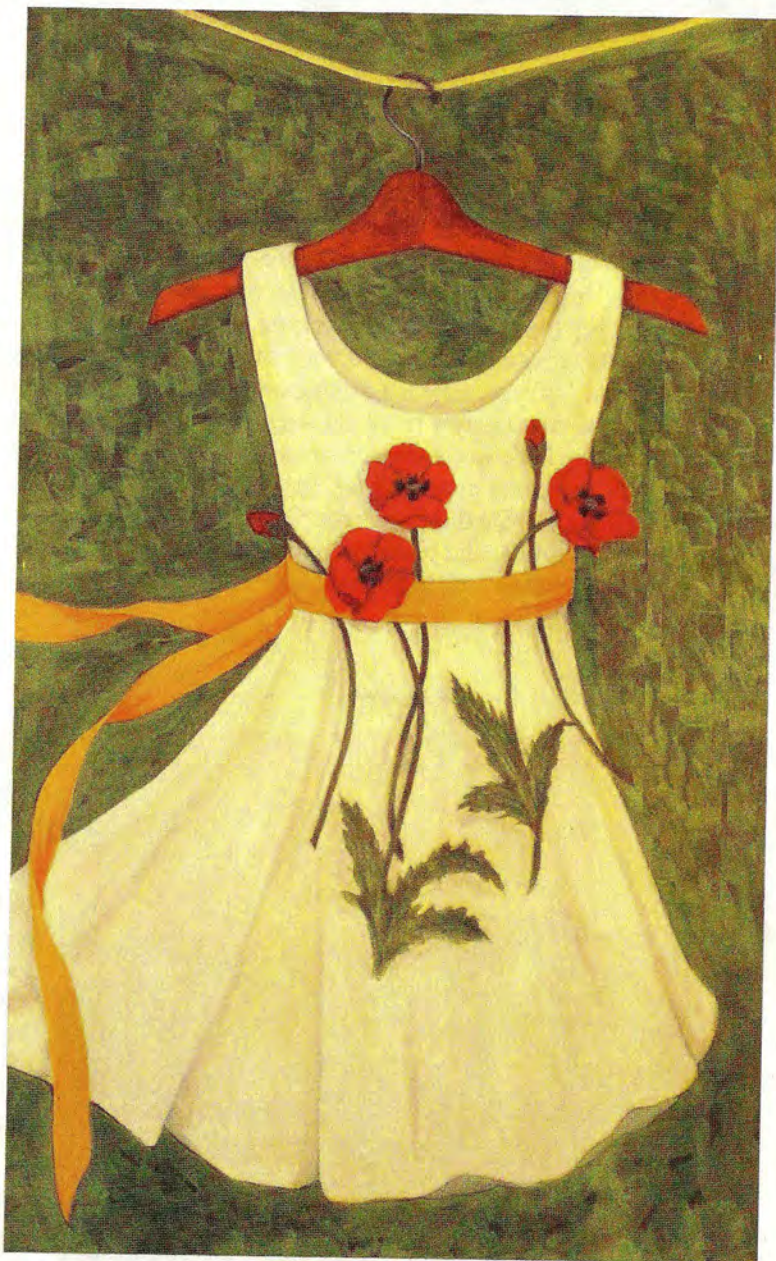
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▲ **CATAPULT: G IS FOR GRASSHOPPER, OIL, 10 X 15.**



▲ **SUNDRESS, OIL, 46 X 32.**