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# The West Meets MODERN

DECEMBER 2017/JANUARY 2018  
FOUR DOLLARS

As seen in  
**COLORADO**  
*expression*

Artist  
**TRACY STUCKEY**

**BY COLLEEN SMITH**

**PAINTING THE WEST IN SATIRICAL STYLE AS A WILY FRONTIER**



**FORT COLLINS ARTIST WANTED FOR PAINTING A DIFFERENT WESTERN HISTORY** Stuckey wearing Boglioli blazer, Eton shirt, Robert Talbott tie, Hiti trousers from **ANDRISEN MORTON**

Photography: Tommy Collier / Photo assistant: Paul Hanon / Styling: Tobie Orr / Makeup: Michael Moore, Moore for Life

TRACY STUCKEY'S AIRPLANE ANSWER—THE SHORT response given when anybody asks what he does for a living—goes like this: “I make satirical western paintings.”

Stuckey's oil paintings suggest quirky narratives that both amuse and disturb. He presents human figures in ironic scenarios. Contemporary cowboys wield plastic squirt guns or ride toy horses. Intriguingly attractive young Anglo hipsters wear Levi jeans and chic sunglasses, cowboy boots and miniskirts, fur coats and feathery Native American headdresses.

Or just their birthday suits. A robust sexual tension underlies many of Stuckey's paintings. He peoples his canvases with nudes or figures in various stages of undress: a Vegas showgirl, a cowboy with his jeans down, and bikini-clad, nubile young women near desert swimming pools or teepees.

Stuckey says, “I'm interested in our ideas about the American West and its history, and how it continues to find itself within our mainstream culture, the interaction with the real past and the romanticized.”

Stuckey's paintings blend a playful graphic novel quality with a somber Edward Hopper existentialism behind per-

fect smiles. Stuckey says his subject matter often is “stolen from reality.” In one painting, for example, a blonde woman in a swimsuit wields a golf club to defend her poodles Souffle and Truffles from coyotes.

For Stuckey, the American West remains a wily frontier, a foreign culture.

“I didn't grow up in the West,” he says. “I didn't come to the West until I was in my 20s, so I had a lot of boyhood fantasies. I'm still trying to remain an outsider looking at it with a fascination, while also realizing my fascination is exaggerated, inflated.”

Born in Indiana, Stuckey grew up in Florida, where he imagined the American West based on popular culture: film and television, fiction, fashion, music and “fakelore.” Pecos Bill inspired him, as did the Mexican bandits of the Townes Van Zandt song “Pancho & Lefty,” made popular by Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard.

**SATIRE ON CANVAS** “A Place for Jane,” 2015





**THE OLD WEST, BUT NOT QUITE** Upper: "A Man, A Woman and A Horse" 2016; Lower: "Giddy Up," 2013

As a boy, Stuckey started drawing racing cars built by his dad. "The first artists I was around were painting cars with air brushes," he says.

By middle school, Stuckey was painting his dad's race cars, as well as signs. He was a natural. He entered college

planning to train as an illustrator.

"When I was learning about modern art and the abstract expressionist painters, that's when I first got the idea that the act of painting is as important as the painting itself," he says. "Jackson Pollock influenced me a lot—even though my paintings are nothing like his."

Stuckey's paintings are part puzzles, part short stories.

"I try to find images to create that narrative. I'm always mining the internet or magazines or my own photographs

## Tracy Stuckey

Represented by Visions West Gallery in Denver, and the Schmidt Dean Gallery in Philadelphia.  
tracystuckey.com

different legs,” Stuckey says.

“I construct the scene digitally and then paint from the digital mockup. It’s sort of like illustrative work,” he says. “Thomas Eakins and Norman Rockwell worked that way.”

In addition to working on paintings, Stuckey serves as an adjunct faculty member at Colorado State University.

“I float around the art department,” says Stuckey, who holds an MFA degree in painting.

“Teaching refreshes me. It’s the classical thing: to teach, you have to practice and experience what you forgot—why you do what you do. These things come naturally, instinctually. You learned it at some point, but you have to reexamine why you do things to explain it,” he says.

“If not teaching, there’s a danger of just getting into the studio and doing my own thing and not having eyes open to what else is happening. There’s a give and take. I get to

or going out and specifically taking photos,” he says. “Then I digitally piece it all together.” Stuckey’s figures also are composites.

“They’re often composed of separate elements: a head from somewhere, or a face on a different body, with

learn from students. They come to me with an artist they’ve discovered that I’ve never seen.”

Along with his CSU students, the Colorado landscape inspires Stuckey. Fort Collins is home to the artist and his wife Erika Osborne—also an artist, represented by Robischon Gallery in Denver—and their young daughter and son.

“Landscape-wise, things have changed in my paintings. The last group of paintings have a lot of snow-covered mountains,” he says.

Stuckey currently is painting a series of moody, nighttime paintings known as nocturnes.

“And I’m working with a different genre of western ideas. Everyone has big fur coats. Buffalo hunting and stuffed bears are a big influence. There’s a different type of western history here. Colorado’s mining history—the silver and gold—makes it very different,” Stuckey says.

“We’re in our fourth year in Colorado, and I’m still trying to figure out Colorado.”

*Colleen Smith is the author of the novel Glass Halo and Laid-Back Skier. The founder of Friday Jones Publishing, she creates multidisciplinary communications, and she writes for a variety of publications including The Denver Post, Fine Books & Collections, Faerie Magazine, Sunset and Coastal Living.*

