



# *Collecting Colorado*

## Landscapes from the Platt Collection

---

August 14 – September 14



VICKI  
MYHREN  
GALLERY

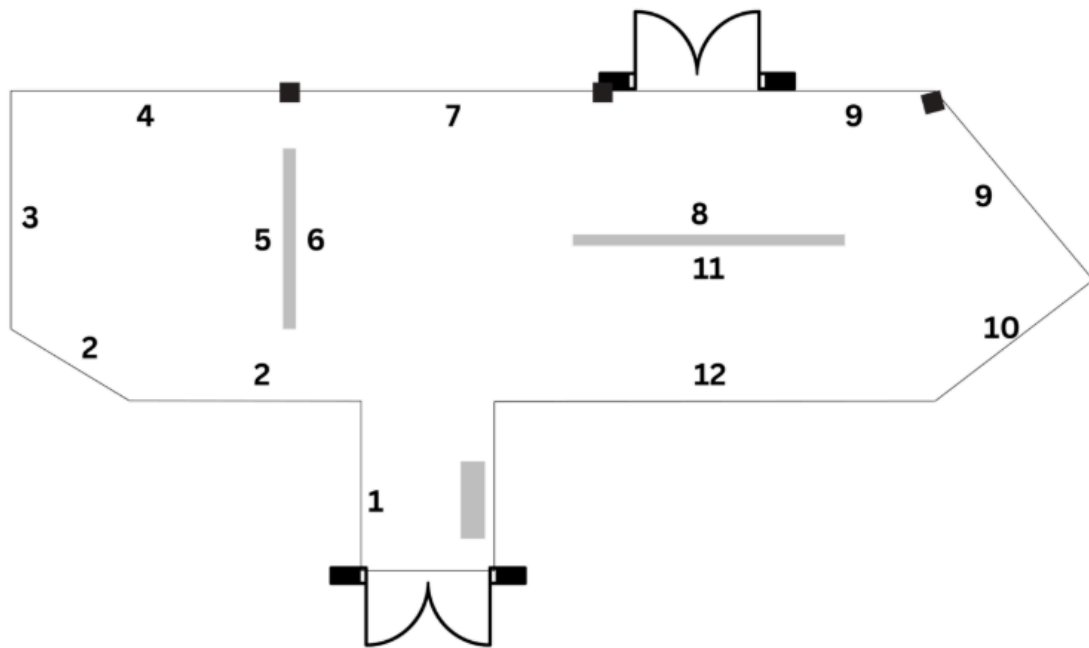


# Collecting Colorado

## Landscapes from the Platt Collection

Artists have long been drawn to Colorado for its colorful scenery, breathtaking mountain vistas, and clear skies. Over several decades, Constance “Connie” Platt assembled an expansive collection celebrating artistic responses to this remarkable landscape. Featuring a wide range of artists, styles, and media, “Collecting Colorado” traces the evolution of landscape art in the state from the late nineteenth century to the present, underscoring the enduring power of the natural environment as a source of inspiration.

This exhibition is dedicated to Connie Platt who earlier this year donated her collection of more than ninety artworks to the University of Denver Art Collection. In doing so, she ensured the lasting impact of these artworks and their availability to the public. Connie’s generosity and dedication to Colorado art will live on in this collection, enriching future possibilities for display, research, and public engagement.



This gallery guide offers background on the Platt Collection and traces some of the major trends in Colorado art. The exhibition is largely organized chronologically, but also includes groupings based on theme or medium, as well as juxtapositions between historic and more recent artworks.

## 2) Art in Early Colorado

Decades after the first settlers arrived in the 1850s, Colorado's art scene began to emerge in the 1870s. At this time, American artists were largely working in the style of the Hudson River School, representing the national landscape in a highly detailed and idyllic style that emphasized the beauty and grandeur of nature. Inspired by the unfamiliar and magnificent landscape, artists featured soaring mountains and expansive vistas as main subjects in their artworks. All subjects that endure to this day. While many artists traveled west before retreating to their studios in the East, some crossed the plains and established themselves as artists in Colorado and neighboring territories. The artists featured in this section helped to establish a homegrown art scene that flourished by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and achieved a national presence.

Two of the most important and prolific artists in Colorado's early art history are Charles Partridge Adams (1858-1942) and George Elbert Burr (1859-1939). Adams was raised in Colorado and thoroughly dedicated his life to painting the Colorado landscape. He is most well-known for his watercolors featuring vibrant sunrises or sunsets and stately mountains, often painted near his home and studio in Estes Park called the Sketchbox. Burr, a noted etcher, moved to Colorado in 1906. He achieved national and international acclaim for his refined prints of mountains and trees.

## 3) Women and the Colorado Art Scene

Women were active participants in the emerging Colorado art world, working as patrons, teachers, and artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Several of these women studied in important art schools in the East and in Europe, and brought their polished artistic skills to Colorado and the local landscape. They often painted outside—“en plein air”—a tradition that had grown in popularity throughout the nineteenth century with the rise of Impressionism. Women artists trekked through the Colorado mountains, just as their male counterparts did, to capture more realistic and immediate renderings of the landscape.

The artists featured here worked across a variety of styles and media, including prints, oil and watercolor painting, pastel, and even collage made of natural elements. Pansy Cornelia Stockton (1895-1972) grew up in Colorado and became known for her “sun paintings,” collages of landscapes made of natural elements like plants and sticks. She referred to them as “sun paintings” because all the materials received their color from the sun.

## 4) Changing Times: 1930s and 1940s

During the 1930s and 1940s, Colorado art ranged from traditional, conservative, regional scenes to a more stylized modernism. The Platt Collection is particularly strong in artworks created during this period, and this selection highlights the diversity of the moment.

Early artists like Burr and Adams focused on mountains and trees, representing them naturalistically, to emphasize the beauty of the natural world. This conservative style was still popular several decades later during the 1930s and 1940s as seen in the works of Lyman Byxbe (1886-1980) and Raphael Lillywhite (1891-1958).

At this same time, however, other Colorado artists began to expand their subject matter and style. Artists started to incorporate traces of human presence on the land, featuring buildings, roads, and settlements. Some artists, like Arnold Rönnebeck (1885-1947) even turned to the city as the subject of their landscape. Many of the prints that came out of this era, amidst the Great Depression, are literally and figuratively darker, reflecting larger trends in American art. They present a harsher picture of life in the West: abandoned ghost towns and dry, hostile environments offer a bleak image in comparison to earlier ideals.

In addition to more diverse subject matter that reflected the changing physical realities of life in the West, these artists began to venture towards modern, abstracted, and stylized representations of the landscape. Their work emphasized geometric forms and flattened renderings that aligned with the Regionalist art coming out of the Midwest.

## 5) Golden Glow

The golden glow of aspen trees in autumn is irresistible. Artists across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have taken aspens as their subject, including David Stirling (1887-1971), Gustave Baumann (1881-1971), and contemporary artist Angie Coleman.

## 6) Birger Sandzén (1871-1954)

Birger Sandzén's style is singular and rich. His bright, pastel palette, undulating forms, and heavy application of paint make his paintings a visual treat. Sandzén was born in Sweden and moved to Kansas in 1894 to teach. In the mid-1920s, he taught at the Broadmoor Art Academy in Colorado Springs as well as Denver's Chappell School outpost in Estes Park. The mountains in Rocky Mountain National Park made a significant impression on Sandzén and feature in many of his most iconic works.

## 7) Watercolor

Watercolor played an important role in Colorado landscape art, allowing artists to paint en plein air, outside and surrounded by nature. Early artists like Charles Partridge Adams (1858-1942), H. L. Richter (1870-1960), Elisabeth Spalding (1868-1954), were particularly lauded for their exceptional watercolor paintings. The use of the medium expanded through the twentieth century, with artists like Earl Hammock (1896-1974), Vance Kirkland (1904-1981), Richard Sorby (1911-2001), and Rita Derjue (1934-2020). Each of these artists found their own voice in watercolor, embracing the medium's versatility to develop distinct styles. Some adopted a more restrained approach, using tight, crisp lines to convey clarity and control (Richter and Hammock). Others leaned into watercolor's fluid, mixing effects, allowing colors to bleed and blend expressively (Adams, Kirkland, and Sorby). Still others emphasized negative space, using light and separation to create contrast and precision (Spalding and Derjue). Together, these varied techniques reveal the medium's capacity for both subtlety and spontaneity.

While Adams made watercolors on a small scale to sell more easily and cheaply, Kirkland and Sorby pushed the medium to a much larger scale, presenting watercolor not just as a tool for sketching, but as a medium capable of creating evocative modern landscape art. Vance Kirkland, the founding director of DU's School of Art in 1929, was a prolific painter and excelled at watercolor landscapes. Kirkland's expressive rocks and swirling tree are echoed in the nearby painting by his student, Richard Sorby. Their surrealist landscapes, though recognizable, are enchanting and otherworldly. Kirkland's jewel-toned aerial painting evokes the Rocky Mountains as well as a churning sea of clouds.

## 8) Colorado Printmaking: Burr, Byxbe, Kloss

Throughout the twentieth century, several printmakers found great success representing “Colorful Colorado” in black and white. Working on a small scale with incredible detail, artists like George Elbert Burr (1859-1939), Lyman Byxbe (1886-1980), and Gene Kloss (1903-1996) captured monumental Western landscapes. Burr achieved subtle variations in tone, crafting dramatic silhouetted trees and moody mountain scenes. His trees have a strong presence and clearly inspired Byxbe’s renderings of resilient, scraggly trees near his studio in Estes Park.

Gene Kloss is one of the most celebrated printmakers of the twentieth century. Based in New Mexico, she became famous for her high-quality prints of the desert and mountain landscape. Kloss lived in Colorado briefly during the 1960s and made these prints of the Rocky Mountains and Gunnison River Cliffs near her home. Though small in scale with high contrast and wide angles, the works evoke the expansive, open Colorado landscape.

## 9) Colorado Springs

Colorado Springs rose to national attention as a major art center in the 1920s with the opening of the Broadmoor Art Academy in 1919. The Broadmoor attracted prominent American artists and nurtured local talent. Whether an artist spent a single summer or much of their career in Colorado Springs, the landscape made a lasting impression.

Most of the artists featured in this section studied and/or worked at the Broadmoor Art Academy (later the Fine Arts Center) during its most active and significant period of activity from 1920-1940. Birger Sandzén taught painting there during the summers of 1923 and 1924. His students included Thomas Berger Johnson (1890-1968) and Charles Ragland Bunnell (1897-1968), who later taught at the Broadmoor himself. Colorado Springs became a hub for printmaking; Adolf Dehn (1895-1968) taught printmaking in the 1940s and Archie Musick (1902-1978) produced a series of Regionalist prints during the Great Depression. Colorado Springs remains a center for Western art and creative practice, drawing contemporary artists such as Len Chmiel (b. 1942), who find fresh inspiration in its enduring landscapes and artistic legacy.

## 10) Mid-Century

The middle of the twentieth century saw a schism in the Colorado art community as the more abstract and avant-garde artists broke away from the traditional Denver Artists Guild, creating their own group dubbed the “Colorado 15.” Of the original 15 artists, several are featured in this exhibition: Vance Kirkland (1904-1981), Duard Marshall (1914-2010), Richard Sorby (1911-2001), and Paul K. Smith (1893-1977). Their works on display are largely from their earlier careers when they employed more traditional subjects and styles before moving fully into abstraction and non-referential painting.

Alongside new trends towards abstraction, many artists remained dedicated to the well-established landscape painting traditions rooted in naturalism and impressionism. Hal Shelton’s (1916-2004) training as a cartographer and “terrain artist” is reflected in the detail and precision of his paintings. Shelton merged his artistic and scientific training to produce the first natural color trail maps for Colorado ski resorts including Alta, Jackson Hole, Aspen, Mammoth Mountain, Winter Park, Sun Valley, Purgatory, Waterville Valley, and many others.

Paul K. Smith is known for his stylized paintings of Colorado mining towns characterized by bright colors and flat, geometric shapes. Smith had moved almost entirely into abstraction by the 1950s, which makes this naturalistic landscape even more surprising. “Chalk Cliffs” displays Smith’s technical abilities with form and color. He deftly renders the trees and details of the cliff face which could easily dissolve into undifferentiated bands of color. This large painting is composed of small brushstrokes and daubs of paint. this pointillist style appears more abstract when viewed up close and comes into clear focus when viewed at a distance.



## 11) Magafan and Wolle

Ethel Magafan (1916-1993) spent her life studying and painting Colorado. Ethel and her twin sister Jenne (1916-1952) were raised in Denver and studied with leading Colorado artists Boardman Robinson (Colorado Springs) and Frank Mechau (Redstone). Both sisters received mural commissions through the WPA and established themselves as talented and capable artists from an early age, excelling at Western American subjects such as horses and ghost towns. Even after relocating to Woodstock, New York in 1945, mountain landscapes remained at the heart of Ethel's artistic practice. Often returning to Colorado for artistic inspiration, she began painting brightly colored, expressive, abstract mountain landscapes in the late 1940s. The painting on display here exemplifies Magafan's distinctive style and reveals her continued interest in the forms of mountains.

Muriel Sibell Wolle (1898-1977) was an artist, educator, and authority on Colorado's lost towns. Originally from New York, Wolle taught art at the University of Colorado, Boulder from 1926 to 1966. She was fascinated by Western ghost towns and set out on the ambitious and invaluable project of telling the stories of these forgotten places through research, writing, drawing, and painting. Wolle found a wealth of information in the dilapidated ruins of mining settlements and recovered histories of Colorado's boom-and-bust towns.

## 12) Contemporary Colorado

Landscape remains central to Colorado's artistic identity. The mountains and prairies that frame the green forests and clear blue sky have long attracted people to the state and particularly captured the attention of artists. As development in Colorado has boomed in recent decades, the natural landscape has changed and become more precious. Many of the artists working today look back to those that came before them. Landscapes and art connect us across time.

The orange glow of red rocks in Susiehyer's (b. 1955) 2008 painting resonates with the vibrant warm tones of Ferdinand Kaufmann's (1864-1942) painting of "Red Rocks" from the 1930s and contemporary artist John Lintott's "Millenia" from 2021. These paintings highlight the enchanting character of Colorado's red sandstone and capture the wide range of colors present in the landscape.

Cecy Turner's (b. 1947) painting of "Fish Creek" is paired (across the entryway) with Charles Partridge Adams' painting of the same location from more than one hundred years earlier, reflecting the enduring power and allure of the Colorado landscape.

## Constance Platt (1937-2025, PhD 1980)

Constance and Fred Platt moved to Colorado with their daughters in 1965. This move would inspire a lifelong dedication to Colorado's cultural and natural landscape. In Denver, the Platts built esteemed careers; Fred established a medical practice, and Connie took on community engagement and education. She received her PhD in English from the University of Denver in 1980 and continued to teach at DU for several years.

Like many of the Western artists featured in their collection, the Platts were drawn to the mountains. They had a treasured cabin in Allenspark with a view of Long's Peak—a favorite subject of one of Colorado's most important early artists, Charles Partridge Adams. Both Connie and Fred were passionate about travel and art. Fred would often sketch the art he saw throughout their travels, and the two began collecting artwork even when they were young students in Chicago. It was Connie who developed a passion for collecting Colorado art. She built her large collection over several decades, and it blossomed after moving to Longmont in 2016, totaling nearly one-hundred pieces.

The Platt collection not only offers a wide-angle view of Colorado's art, but also reflects Connie's love for nature, her keen eye, passion for learning, and thoughtful, dedicated assembly of a portrait of Colorado culture. The University of Denver is honored to receive the Platt Collection and carry forward Connie's passion for collecting Colorado art.

Visit our website and Instagram to learn more about the artists featured in this exhibition.

Stay in touch and learn more about our upcoming projects at

[vicki-myhren-gallery.du.edu](http://vicki-myhren-gallery.du.edu)  
[@myhrengallery](https://www.instagram.com/myhrengallery)



VICKI  
MYHREN  
GALLERY

---

Curated by Lauren Anuszewski

Thank you to our student staff who helped make this exhibition a reality: Tiffany Jessen, Abigail Kopetzky, Chloe LeRoy, Walker Lynch, Emily Maiwat, and Magdalena Sterling. This project would not have been possible without the help of MG Bernard, Geoffrey Shamos, and Tonya Kelly. We extend our deepest gratitude to Connie Platt's family for their support and generosity.