

Our Town: Paul Manes

By Barbra Dills



If you haven't made it to the R2 Gallery at The Launchpad this month for Paul Manes' solo exhibition of paintings, you have a couple more chances before the show comes down this weekend. The gallery will be open during First Friday, September 1 from 6 to 8 p.m. and on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Manes (pron. May-nis) was born in 1948 in Austin and studied art at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas before moving to New York City in the early 1980s, where he continued to paint in earnest, over time gaining international

recognition. Paul and his wife Brenda moved to the Roaring Fork Valley in June of 2014. The Sopris Sun caught up with him in his Dolores Way studio (and on his Harley Davidson).

THE SOPRIS SUN: Was there a magic moment in your early days in New York... when you knew you were breaking into the art scene in a bigger way? Or did it happen incrementally over time?

Paul Manes: I met several very influential people in New York that helped me greatly. And I was in a group show at Kouros Gallery in 1985, and that gallery picked me up from that show and then it just took off from there.

Q: What's been the biggest change for you artistically moving from there to here?

A: I've been painting now for almost 40 years, and there wasn't really that much of a change when we moved here, my activities haven't changed. In New York from 1999 on, I had a separate studio from the loft where we lived. I had a studio in Jersey City, I had studios in Brooklyn, and I would go from my house to my studio, and that hasn't changed. I get up and come here 10 miles from my home. And my work really hasn't changed. There's a pattern of my development that has been continuous, pretty much from the beginning.

Q: What about your life here are you most grateful for?

A: Well, New York was fun, it was great fun. I was there for 32 years. And I played a lot of pool. I don't have my pool buddies here — that's what I miss about New York. But when you live in New York, you carry a healthy paranoia on your shoulders because there are so many people and there are so many situations. When you leave New York City, after about two weeks, that feeling leaves you. And here, that's completely gone. This is Happy Valley.

Q: What made you choose this valley?

A: I agreed with my wife to leave New York City after Hurricane Sandy. We were not affected by Sandy, but that was the catalyst. I was familiar with the area from coming skiing here, and Brenda knew this area from a different time in her life, and my friend James Surls told me at dinner one night, "If you move here, you'll never be sorry." And it's true. Nice things have happened and it's not slowed me down at all. I still have shows in many places.

Q: What are you reading these days?

A: I just finished a book by a woman named Jackie Bograd Weld entitled “Peggy: The Wayward Guggenheim.” It’s a great book. She’s a friend of mine and she was the last person to interview Peggy Guggenheim.

Q: And I see Al Franken’s on your table over there.

A: I love Al Franken. Oh, boy, wouldn’t he make a great president?

Q: You mentioned that you practice tai chi. And you also ride motorcycles. How do they factor into things?

A: I’ve practiced tai chi for a long time and I think I understand a little bit about chi movement in your body, and that’s what it’s involved with. Tai chi clears out blockages. I think tai chi would keep a person spry into old age. It’s a great exercise to do.

As for motorcycles, I’ve ridden them since I was a kid. A buddy and I went to Europe in 1970 and we bought two new Triumph Bonneville and spent the summer there, and went to art museums. We went to the Louvre, we went to the Prado, we saw Rodin’s museum, we went to museums anywhere we could, and that set me on this course. Before that, I didn’t know anything about art.

Q: If you were a magical creature, what would you be?

A: Well, I am a magical creature. We’re all magical. [Laughs.]