

# JOHN CATTERALL

## WYOMING DIALOGUES

UCROSS FOUNDATION ART GALLERY  
JUNE 21 – SEPTEMBER 5, 2014

I first met John Catterall – painter and printmaker, art professor, native Wyomingite, graduate of UW, champion of all arts, *fisherman* – nearly twenty years ago. John had played a significant advisory role for Ucross Foundation, and was an advocate for the construction of spacious new visual art studios at Ucross. That dream came true in 2001, and since then, hundreds of visual artists from across the United States and the world have been inspired by those new 400 square foot studios, situated near Piney Creek.

Though John has spent much of his life dedicated to art education at Montana State University, New Mexico State University, and the University of Florida, he is first and foremost an artist. It is an honor to present *John Catterall: Wyoming Dialogues*, an exhibition spanning over thirty years of his work. No matter where John has lived and taught, it is clear that Wyoming runs in his bloodstream – and he has certainly spent much time in the state’s streams, both cultural and hydrologic. Wyoming has shaped how he sees the world, and we are fortunate to have the chance to experience his vision in this wonderful exhibition.

This summer, an exciting collaboration will take place at Big Red, bringing together Ucross Foundation, the University of Wyoming and Sheridan College. The week after the artist reception for *John Catterall: Wyoming Dialogues* on June 21, “Saturday University” will be held at Ucross on the morning of June 28, the culmination of a special art and science retreat spearheaded by Jeffrey Lockwood of UW. As Catterall has said, “*UW is huge in our family story... My grandfather worked in the mines north of Sheridan, rising to management, but also recognizing that if the Catteralls were ever to leave the mines, my father would have to be the one to do it. Grandpa gave him \$100 and the directions to Laramie. The University, especially the College of Arts and Sciences, is fully woven into my work and life.*”

We extend our gratitude to John Catterall, and to Robert Bonner, Emeritus Professor of History and American Studies at Carleton College, for writing the exhibition essay. We also thank the Wyoming Arts Council, the Ucross Board of Trustees and all of the Foundation’s many supporters, in Wyoming and beyond, who have shown such generosity over the years.

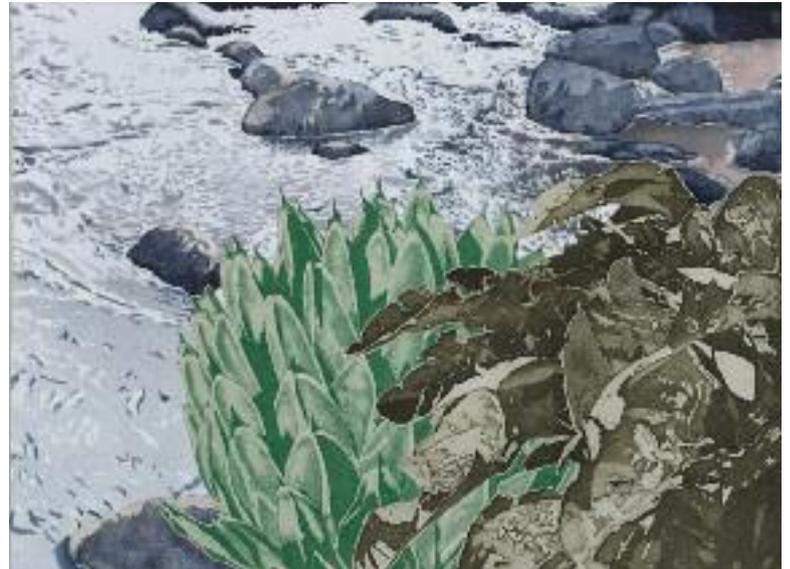
Sharon Dynak, *President, Ucross Foundation*



*"Born in Sheridan, Wyoming, I lived first in Kaycee, then Gillette, Midwest, Elk Basin, Powell, Worland, and finally - Laramie. I grew up in oil field towns on both sides of the Bighorns as my father's professional life advanced. By the age of sixteen I had lived in sixteen houses. My experience with moving from place to place formed an increasing comfort in me—a preference even—for the unknown over the known that is reflected in my later life through a pattern of academic appointments in six different college and universities over thirty-seven years and in a career-long creative wanderlust where I have embraced both a wide range of aesthetic explorations and a bias (increasingly lamentable) for technical complexity over simplicity that can be seen in the works in this exhibition."*



John Catterall received a B.A. in Art from the University of Wyoming in 1966 and an M.F.A. in Painting and Printmaking from Washington State University in 1968. He has exhibited his work at galleries and museums across the United States as well as internationally in Chile, Korea, Iceland, Mexico, Poland and Yugoslavia. His work may be found in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum, Detroit Institute of Arts, the University of Colorado, Boulder, the Cranbrook Academy of Art, and many others. Catterall has taught and headed visual arts programs at Montana State University, New Mexico State University, and the University of Florida. He and his wife, the artist Diane Elmeer, divide their time between Story, Wyoming, and Tampa, Florida.



TOP: *Ghost Brown*, 1979, 18x24", etching  
BOTTOM: *Cranbrook Agave*, 1980, 28x24", etching, airbrush pouchore, chine collé  
OPPOSITE TOP: *Clifton Street Bird Nest*, 2012, 16x24", gouache on handmade paper  
OPPOSITE BOTTOM: *Lower Geyser Basin* (print), 1979, 18x24", etching  
FRONT COVER: *UW Yellowstone*, 1998, variable size, digital print  
BACK COVER: *Green River Formation Fossils & Koi*, 1995, 19x52", screenprint



The waters of Crandall Creek, about to tumble into the upper Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone, have rarely looked as inviting as they do here, but wait! something is happening in the center of *Crandall Creek Diptych*. An eruption of a decorative grass from Florida, *Mother-in-law's Tongue*, occupies center position between the careful renderings of the creek upstream and downstream. What are we to make of this?

When a viewer asks that question, John Catterall has reason to consider his painting a success. In his life as an artist working up, down, and across the Yellowstone River basin, he has engaged the land, the water, the flora, and especially the fish of the many streams that eventually make up the Yellowstone. He loves to hike and fish, and he loves this country, but art is what drives him; he has been pursuing for decades a conversation with the environment and culture of northern Wyoming through his craft as a painter and printmaker.

This has not been a simple conversation. He may appear to take on what nature provides for him in a more or less straightforward, naturalistic way, as in *Yellowstone 1: Lower Geyser Painting*, but he surely punched up the image of the blue pool upon which the painting depends. More often he has felt called to complexify his subject by leaving unmistakable marks of his own painterly imagination on the canvas. The mark is there, as in *Crandall Creek Diptych*, to jar the viewer out of the habitual response to a landscape, perhaps to see the landscape more clearly for the very fact that it is not simply a reproduction of nature. John has been heard to say that art is not a warm bath; its goal is not just to meet the expectations the viewer/bather brings, but to stretch him/her in some unexpected way.



Catterall's earliest artistic encounters were with old stereoscopic slides in the public library in Midwest, where he spent his early school years. The landscapes of Thomas Moran and Conrad Schwiering, which he saw in Jenny Lake Lodge at age twelve, offered him a glimpse of vocation, and his high school art teacher in Powell introduced him to the airbrush, so the building blocks of his artistic life were in place even before he went to the University of Wyoming to study art. Of these elements, those old stereoscopic slides are not the least important. They opened to his curious mind formal questions of representation that continue to infuse his work to this day. Much of his work with landscape, particularly the series of what might be called "botanicals," (e.g. *Arrowleaf Balsamroots*, *Tunnel Hill*) where a photograph of the plant emerges not just against a background of geometric shapes, but through it, carries the double focus of the natural world and formal world of the artist. He wants the close juxtaposition of the created and the natural, and he wants to do it in a manner that moves the formally complex elements of representation to the forefront, as those old slides did for him so long ago.

His work with trout embodies both his affection for our environment and his continuing fascination with the technical. From his early etchings, *Ghost Brown* (1979) and *Rainbow* (1980), the trout has been the talisman for natural force in his work. Complex issues of representation are left aside here while he brings these fish fully to our consciousness on their own terms. From the later 1980s he has been working to paint and display the full variety of trout he has known; the renderings of Alturas brook trout and Yellowstone cutthroat are part of that catalog. Where his penchant for complexity enters his fish work is in the production of the finished image. The trout may be displayed against a background of a Navajo blanket, or a photograph of fishermen on a stream, or, as in his 2011 print *Mint Bar, South*



*Piney Creek*, as second order trophies captured from the wall of the Mint Bar in Sheridan. By manipulating the scale and position of the fish, Catterall makes clear that it is a captured image, doing the bidding of the artist or (as one would hope) the viewer. The men on the Firehole may be catching cutthroat, but the Yellowstone Cutthroat of his representation endures out of time.

The Mint Bar is, of course, one of Sheridan's famous old saloons, a location familiar to hunters and fishermen (as the walls attest). Catterall is interested in culture as well as nature, in reconstituting the natural. *Mint Bar, South Piney Creek*, visually complex by integrating *bas-relief* sculpture and photography, also poses a question about the relationship between the saloon and the stream. In two large, dramatic canvases completed for this exhibition, Catterall presents views of two iconic landscapes of the high Absaroka and Beartooth Mountains. *View from Dead Indian Hill* and *View from Beartooth Pass* will perhaps be read primarily as traditional landscapes, but have characteristic Catterall markers.

These paintings began as photographs taken from roadside viewing stands, which are part of his landscape as much as trees, clouds, mountains or lakes. The artist reminds us that the view itself was created by the Wyoming Highway Department, in imitation of decades of picture postcards. Dead Indian Hill takes its name from the body of an unknown Nez Perce who lost his life in that valley during their long retreat across the northern Rockies in 1877. The modern highway—named, of course, for Chief Joseph—is the artifact of human culture that draws the eye to the center. The historical resonance of this view is as important to the artist as



the artistic challenge of representing the clouds. There is nothing so historically dramatic in the Beartooth Pass painting, but the fact that people have access to that view at all is testimony to the massive cultural modification of nature represented by the Beartooth Highway and its 10,942-foot summit. Catterall renders these lakes and clouds in typically hard-edged style, his painterly trademark. Less complex and less visually aggressive than some of the other works, these large pieces nevertheless show the mind and the craft of the artist in full command, continuing to pose questions in his long conversation with the Wyoming environment.

An interesting new piece, *Clifton Street Bird Nest*, may show something of where that conversation is headed in the next stage of John Catterall's artistic life. It is a simple, careful gouache painting of a nest he found near his Florida winter home. It displays his craft as a painter without the representational complexities we have seen in much of his work. He has spoken with admiration of something Oliver Wendell Holmes once said: "I would not give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity." It is difficult to imagine this artist abandoning the techniques and questions that have been his main occupation for so many years, but some kind of move to realize Holmes's vision in his latter days might not be out of the question.

by **Robert Bonner**, Emeritus Professor of History and American Studies at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. He is the author of *William F. Cody's Wyoming Empire; the Buffalo Bill Nobody Knows* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), and most recently the author of "Buffalo Bill Cody's Artistic Legacy," *MONTANA, The Magazine of Western History*, Spring 2011.

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JUNE 21 – SEPTEMBER 5, 2014  
OPENING RECEPTION: JUNE 21, 3-5PM

JOIN US FOR "SATURDAY U" ON JUNE 28, AT 9AM  
PRESENTED BY UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING, SHERIDAN COLLEGE  
AND UCROSS FOUNDATION

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