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A TRIBUTE TO WILSON HURLEY

## AEROSPACE ART

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*Wilson Hurley*



# A TRIBUTE TO WILSON HURLEY

by Ann Cooper

In his tome, *A History of Knowledge: Past, Present, and Future*, Author Charles Van Doren identified Renaissance Man. He described him as an Aristotelian ideal of the educated person, critical in virtually all branches of knowledge, an individual blessed with broad intellectual interests and accomplished in the arts and the sciences. This description fits our very special member, our recently departed Wilson Hurley. One couldn't be in Wilson's presence for more than a moment without recognizing the depth and breadth of his knowledge, his passion for history, his intellect, and his talent. His passing on 29 August 2008 left holes in our hearts. He will be sorely missed.

An internationally known artist and renowned in aviation art, Wilson has been called the "Landscape of Grandeur." In 2004, Santa Fe, New Mexico gallery owner Nedra Matteucci, wrote of him, "He is the premier American landscape artist working today and his majestic panoramas echo the grandeur and brilliance of our country's most distinguished landscape artists before him. Hurley's five monumental triptychs on permanent exhibit at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, in particular, are a profound testament to his place in this American tradition."

Between 7 and 22 November 2008, the Matteucci Gallery presented an exhibition of Wilson's remarkable art and also that of his lovely wife, Rosalyn. Entitled *Rosalyn Roembke & Enduring Vistas, A Tribute to Wilson Hurley*, the paintings were juxtaposed, which highlighted two accomplished and commanding artists with distinctly different and mutually enhancing styles. Wilson's canvases depicted the grandeur of vast distance, the play of light and shadow, and palpable atmospherics and Roz demonstrated an exceptional command of beautifully executed and elegantly styled still life.

It is fitting that the art works were exhibited in Santa Fe. It was there and to New Mexico's Taos that Wilson's mother took her son for art lessons when he was but a boy. She encouraged his artistic capabilities and saw to it that he was trained extensively, yet he was discouraged from pursuing a career in art. Wilson's father was a lawyer who served as the Secretary of War under Herbert Hoover and his grandfather had served as an admiral in the U.S. Navy during World War I. Wilson entered the United States Military Academy at West Point from which he graduated in 1945 with a degree in engineering, his commission as an officer, and his pilot's wings.

After World War II, Wilson graduated from George Washington University with a law degree. For thirteen years he practiced law until the fateful day he assisted in preparing the will for a young, terminally ill, doctor. It was 1964 and the experience caused Wilson to analyze his own life choices. Deciding that he wanted "to paint one really good painting," he

closed his law practice and proceeded to hone his acute powers of observation and to translate that which he discovered in the natural world into the fine art renderings for which he is internationally acclaimed.

A budding artist can learn a wealth of information from Wilson's legacy, which is rich and varied. However, if that artist is only to learn one thing, it is valuable to know that Wilson said, "A painter, to be valid, has to create a realistic environment throughout the surface of the canvas. If it is to be well done, before painting the sky, know where the sun is, know what the condition of the sky is, note the color of the surface, if any, under the object you are painting and whether it is light or dark on either side. ...When you find a painter who puts the entire surround of his universe into that painting, I'll show you a painter who ends up in the National Gallery or the Metropolitan or elsewhere."

In 2007, Wilson authored and published a book he had carried in his heart and in his mind for more than 50 years. His *The Chinese Widow* is reminiscent of an autobiographical novel and is illustrated with drawings Wilson created when the concept of the story first began. Having kept the novel from the public for the half-century, it is intriguing to find Wilson in both of his major characters – the protagonist and the storyteller. This captivating story recounts missions on which Wilson might have flown just after World War II. Like his series of paintings created from his memories of service in Vietnam that are permanently exhibited at the National Museum of the United States Air Force, they are historically important and artistically compelling.

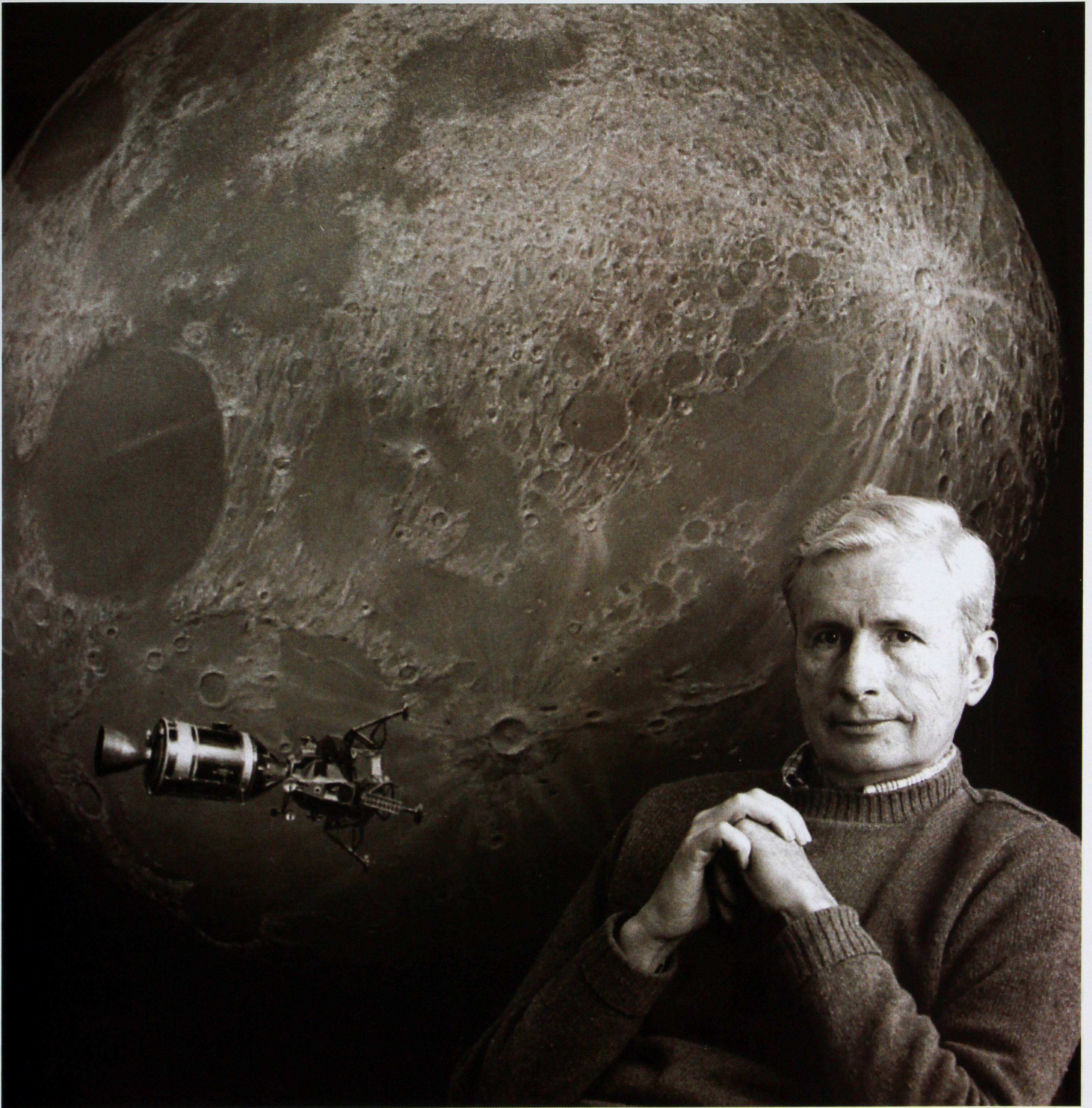
Indeed, Wilson was truly a Renaissance Man. All of us who knew him could call him friend. We are better for the opportunity to have learned from and been inspired by this great man. We miss him.

Wilson Hurley received numerous awards for his landscapes, and more than 800 of his paintings have gone into private and corporate collections. Most notably, his paintings hang in the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City, the Oklahoma Capitol, and the Albuquerque Museum.



# ... A RENAISSANCE MAN

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Wilson Hurley 1924 - 2008



*Sun Sets on Werner Voss* by Wilson Hurley



**A Tribute to Wilson Hurley by Keith Ferris, ASAA**

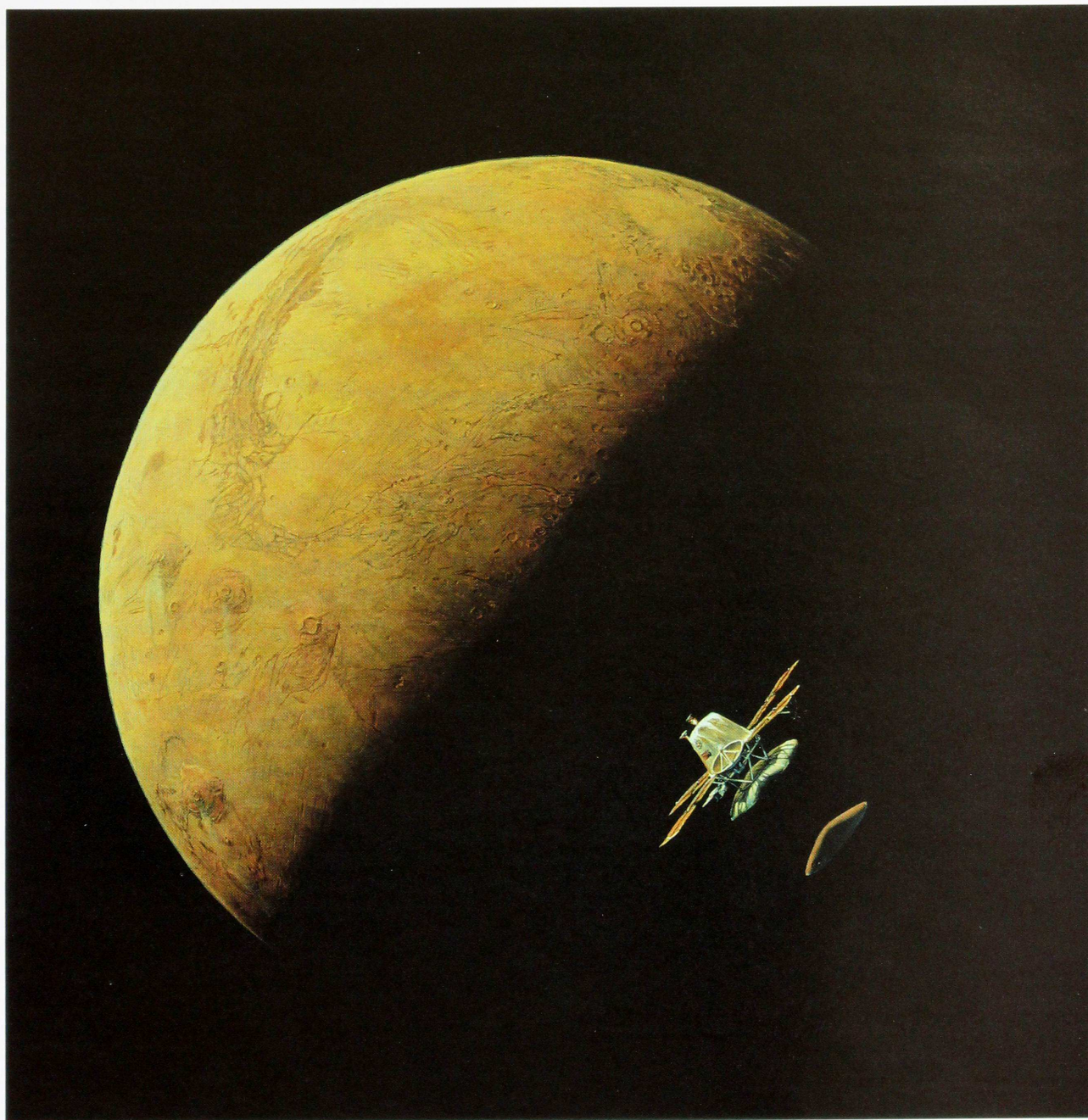
Peggy and I were very sorry to hear of the illness and the passing of Wilson Hurley.

Known for his monumental western landscapes, he was also a storyteller equally comfortable with aviation subjects as evidenced in his documentation of his Vietnam experiences to be found in the National Museum of the United States Air Force. Wilson was a master of the drama, composition and atmospheric perspective inherent in nature. He was a curious student and a natural teacher. ASAA members are the better for having experienced his wisdom and guidance on many occasions. We have marveled at his work, his quest for knowledge, and his study and application of science in his art. His mastery of drawing, light, color and atmospheric perspective have been an inspiration, as has his understanding of the eye's visual process in planning and executing his paintings. Wilson's most important lesson for all of us may be that one can never possess too much knowledge and, if we are serious about our profession, we are therefore forever students.

Our thoughts are with Wilson's wife Roz and family, whose loss we share.



*"Paint from the heart, and don't be persuaded by what's in fashion. Most people whose works endure are not those who followed the fashion. We all want recognition and sales, but if you paint for that purpose, you're chasing a mirage." ...Wilson Hurley*



*Viking-Mars Encounter by Wilson Hurley*

*A visit to the Modern Art Museum in New York in 1966 by Hurley to view a Monet and Turner exhibition became a revelation. He noted that both artists were saying the same thing. "It blew me over. It made me realize . . . I didn't have to follow anybody. I had a look at the world, bringing it to the canvas and interpreting it, and that was my ambition. It wasn't learning tricks from different artists." ...Wilson Hurley*





**Wilson Hurley – The Passing of a Renaissance Man** by John W. Clark, ASAA

ASAA recently lost one of its most cherished members. Wilson Hurley was a true Renaissance man – a remarkably knowledgeable and talented individual. He was, among other things, a lawyer, banker, an engineer, West Point graduate, fighter pilot, and artist.

Wilson painted big (largely because of his intellect) and produced paintings that reflected that intellect. His works would literally take one's breathe away by their mere size and scope. He had a passion for landscapes and was known as "a landscapist in the grand tradition," following in the footsteps of Thomas Cole, Frederick Church, Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt.

On a personal note, I first became aware of his paintings in Southwest Art magazine during the 1980's. Printed in the small format that appeared in the magazine, one sensed immediately that these were special works because their realism went beyond the photographic – the sign of a true painter. They possessed a quality that challenged the viewer to want to see more.

Wilson showed up at the first ASAA forum in Colorado Springs. I recall sitting outside in the courtyard chatting with fellow ASAA members and watched, in disbelief, this towering figure striding towards his hotel room. We were being honored with his presence.

Later in the week, the group headed to the art museum and I somehow missed my ride. Luckily, I saw Wilson in the hotel parking lot and he offered me a lift. From that moment on, I knew I had found a new friend.

Over the years, I would call Wilson and tapped into his vast knowledge on topics concerning art, philosophy - you

name it. Whenever one would ask him a question, you could expect an in-depth and thoughtful response. For example, one day I asked him how an artist could best represent the blackness of outer space with pigments. Expecting to hear comments on the different blacks available as colors, Wilson began by reciting studies done by Lord Kelvin and the experiments with the heating of iron. By the time he'd finished, I had a somewhat explicit understanding of how temperature dictated color. One always gained a treasure trove of knowledge from his conversations.

ASAA has been graced with Wilson's paintings in our exhibitions over the years. They were of particular interest to us as aerospace artists. (He also had a passion for this genre). His Viet Nam paintings are among the most compelling ever conceived. The painted works for NASA include the Space Shuttle and the Apollo lunar program. He also embarked on a series of works depicting the planets and the ethereal Cosmos. Sadly, no longer will the world or we be in the presence of his spirit, but we will be able to view and marvel at the vast vistas he left behind.

I am reminded of the following saying:

*"It appears to me impossible that I shall cease to exist, or that this active, restless spirit, equally alive to joy and sorrow, should only be organized dust. Surely something resides in this heart that is not perishable – and life is more than a dream."*

*Death is that state in which one exists in the memory of others. Therefore, one lives forever."*

Farewell my friend.



*Air Strike In Happy Valley* by Wilson Hurley



Wilson Hurley was a founding member of the National Academy of Western Art and the recipient of their highest honor, the Prix de West.



*The Sandia Mountains from Algodones* by Wilson Hurley



*Chalice of Light-Morning Light on La Cueva  
Canyon Sandias by Wilson Hurley*



**Wilson Hurley - Renaissance Man by Don Malko**

A **Renaissance man** describes a person who is well educated, excels in a wide variety of subjects or fields, and synthesizes the disciplines of the arts and sciences.

Wilson Hurley was well educated; a West Point graduate, engineer, lawyer, pilot, author, mentor, and artist. When he decided to pursue his art rather than practice law he engaged himself fully in creating visual art, studying its history, technique and scientific foundations. His body of work is a testament to his extraordinary abilities in communion with brush, paint and canvas, whether it is aerospace, landscape, portraits or still-life subjects. He painted large. His work is monumental.

Wilson Hurley commanded attention when he walked into a room just as his paintings hanging from museum or gallery wall. When he spoke about the art of painting you listened carefully. His oratory was profound whether about art, life or the aircraft he flew as a pilot. He was a master of his craft whereby he continually sought to learn and educate those in his presence.

My baptism to the painting technique of Wilson Hurley occurred at the first ASAA forum held at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. Hurley talked us through a still-life he had erected in one of the painting studios at Wright State. As he discussed the theory of color he preceded to place on canvas, with a brush, an exact collection of color and value of what he perceived in a corner of the studio. The ease in which he created the still-life with paint was masterful. Of course, it was then our turn to do the same and what appeared so obvious through his eyes and hand was not as obvious to mine and several others attempting the same. He made it look effortless. Plein air painting sessions would follow at ASAA forums in Colorado and Seattle with Wilson

tending to those ASAA artists who painted sharing his expertise.

The more I studied the work of Wilson Hurley the more I appreciated his presence in the ASAA. Even though he was better known for his landscape art, he is revered as one of the leading landscapists of our time often compared to such noted painters as Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Cole, and Thomas Moran, his paintings of aerospace subjects are equally evocative, compelling and masterful. His participation with the ASAA provided all of us in his presence a connection between academic painting and the genre of aerospace art. His fine art skills of composing are invaluable for study. His knowledge of color and how it works transcends basic color theory with the skills of a scientist and surgeon. His command of linear and atmospheric perspective expands his visual world beyond the surface of the canvas. He continually demonstrated, by example, that there was always something new to learn about the art of painting. His words were profound.

Wilson Hurley synthesized the work of the impressionists with classical academic painting seeking to articulate on canvas his personal direction and style; a perpetual student of painting his ability to extract from nature, through his powerful observation skills, produced images with pigment that were full of light and energy. A grasp of the psychology of perception was integral to his work enabling him to produce convincing landscapes that shimmered with light and color.

Wilson Hurley joins the legion of master artists that form the compendium of art history from which all future artists will come to study and revere.

He will be dearly missed.



*D a s   S h e r e   b y   W i l s o n   H u r l e y*



*"I think the first thing that fascinated me about the West was the direct light.... When you paint in this country, you have the direct wash of light from the sun, the bounced light, and the mild, cold wash of light from the top of the sky. ... To show the beauty of the sun reaching and really hitting some object could be likened to the chiaroscuro of Caravaggio... applied to landscape."...Wilson Hurley*



*W y o m i n g   S u i t e   b y   W i l s o n   H u r l e y*