

In Memoriam

Wilson Hurley 1924 — 2008

By Lynda Haller

Wilson Hurley once said, "If I have an opportunity to see anything pretty outside, that preempts just about any other pleasure." One of the world's finest and most respected landscape artists died August 29 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He was 84. His wife of 39 years, Rosalyn, said a private service was held and he is buried at National Cemetery in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Hurley was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, son of Ruth Wilson Hurley and Patrick J. Hurley, the secretary of war under President Hoover. His family moved to Santa Fe in 1935 and in 1941 he graduated from Los

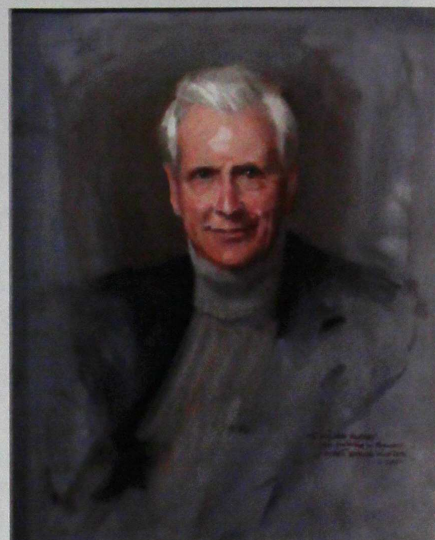
Alamos Ranch School.

Hurley earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in engineering, his wings from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, and a law degree from George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Hurley practiced law in New Mexico until 1964, when he abruptly closed his law and engineering practice to devote himself fully to the real passion in his life, painting.

"With law, I didn't burn with a gem-like flame. With painting, I do burn, and that's the happiest of all situations," he said.

Although often compared to 19th-century landscape painters like Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt, Hurley's style presents a



Photograph courtesy Albuquerque Museum Foundation

This 1994 28" x 22" oil on canvas portrait of Wilson Hurley was painted by Everett Raymond Kinstler. It was a gift to the Albuquerque Museum Foundation from Wilson and Rosalyn Hurley.

different view of landscape painting. He said, "I'm amused at people who say the measure of an artist is a nude . . . and that anybody can paint a landscape, because you can have all kinds of unplanned excur-



Photograph courtesy NCM Dickinson Research Center

Hurley's 1984 Prix de West Purchase award-winning oil, Los Alamos Country.

sions in your line and your drawing and still come within the possibilities of nature.

"The more I polish myself as a landscapist, the more I realize that the proper tree, the proper mountain, the proper cloud follows as defined a line and a law as the accepted proportions for the fingers and the hand and the forearm."

He credited his tour of duty as a military pilot in World War II and Vietnam with giving him a far wider view of the world.

"The world is so vivid, we don't have paints on our palette that are one-tenth bright enough," he said.

The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum® held a special affection for Hurley as a painter, engineer and man. When plans were being made to add a 16,000 square foot special events center to the Museum, it was Hurley's unique imagination that created a space that drew people in. He used his engineering skills to design a polygon-shaped room to display

five paintings depicting his favorite Western landscapes. He called them *Windows to the West*.

Although "breathtaking" seems like a well-worn cliché, there is no other word to better describe the 16' x 40' triptychs portraying the Grand Canyon, Sandia Mountains, Monument Valley, Lower Yellowstone Falls and Point Lobos Beach. He titled each separately to identify their locale: *Arizona Suite*, *New Mexico Suite*, *Utah Suite*, *Wyoming Suite* and *California Suite*.

A master of light, Hurley was not concerned with the illumination with which architects are concerned. "I try to understand the magic of light," he said. "I wanted to make the paintings actually create the light in this space."

It is virtually impossible to stand inside the Museum's Sam Noble Special Events Center and not marvel at the luminescence in his clouds, canyons, mountains, massive cliffs and broad vistas.

"Wilson Hurley was a man of

the richest talents. He gave us his wonderful works of art which will remain forever as an inspiring testimonial to his creative gifts," Executive Director Chuck Schroeder said.

"But, he was so much more than a great artist. He was a thinker, a learner, a seer and a doer. He used his broad ranging technical knowledge and capacity for complex thinking to enhance his art in ways most viewers will not readily comprehend. They just know a work by Wilson Hurley has a special feel that invites them into the painting for a look around, whatever the subject might be. Thus, was his mastery."

Hurley was a founding member of the National Academy of Western Art (NAWA), predecessor to the Museum's Prix de West®. He was presented with a Trustees Award in 1977, for contributions to Western art on the occasion of his one-man show at the Museum.

In 1984, *Los Alamos Country* was selected as the Prix de West Purchase Award winner. Hurley exhibited 21 years in Prix de West. Other Hurley oil paintings in the Museum's fine art collection include *Grand Canyon — The Face of Creation*, *Hesperus*, *Sunlight & Shadow* (Storm Shadows), *Tseghi* (White House cliff dwelling) and *Canyon De Chelly*.

The Museum staff, docents and art patrons will miss the tall, lanky Hurley who frequently shared his profound knowledge of art, his love of the Museum and his wry, witty sense of humor. The Museum will be eternally grateful for his contributions.

"Beyond his artistic talents and knowledge of subjects both broad and deep, a visit with Wilson Hurley was invariably highlighted by his quick and clever sense of humor," Schroeder said. "He had a talent for offering his grand perspective on the world with a surprising wink that made you want to pay special attention to anything he had to say. For what he did and who he was, the world is a better place for Wilson Hurley having lived." 🐾



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Wilson Hurley rented a tourist boat for the a week to paint California's Point Lobos. "I painted from the ocean looking toward the beach to get a feeling of the surf," Wilson said in the Spring 2008 issue of *Persimmon Hill*. This is just one of the five *Windows to the West* that grace the walls of the Museum's Sam Noble Special Events Center.