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Previews of Works For Sale at Upcoming Shows

SEPTEMBER 2019

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WESTERN ART

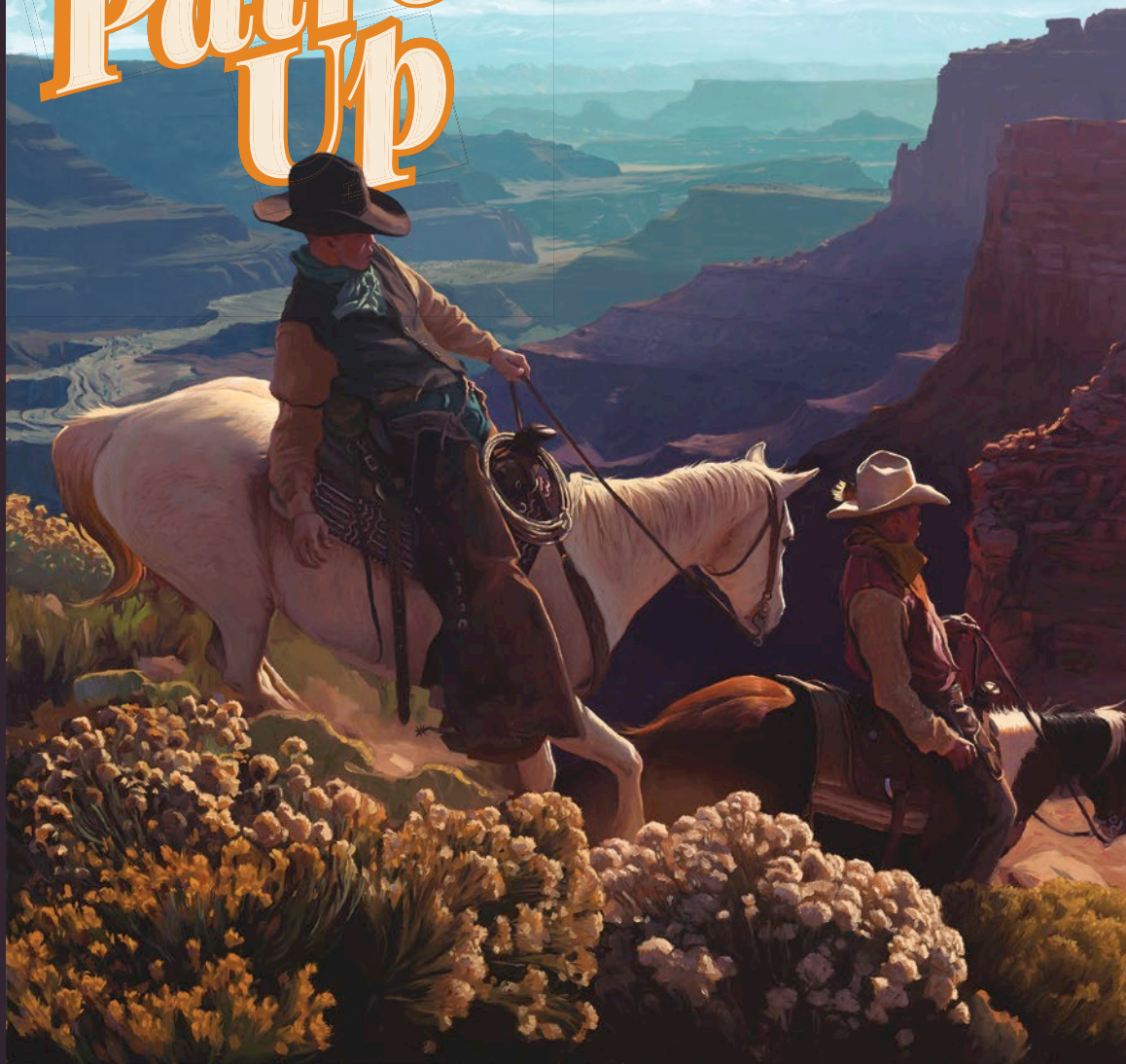
COLLECTOR



Concurrent shows for Mark Maggiori and Thomas Blackshear II explore new aspects of the West at Trailside Galleries.

By Michael Clawson

Paired Up





Above: **Thomas Blackshear II**, *Hummingbird*, oil on canvas, 27 x 23"
Left: **Mark Maggiori**, *Boys of the Land*, oil on linen, 40 x 40"

What will hit you first is the color. Golds that shimmer and radiate from the paint surface. Blues so electric and vivid they seem to jolt to life when you approach them. Sunsets filled with pinks, oranges and purples, each new hue caressing the one before it in an intoxicating dance of light.

The color will spill from the doors at Trailside Galleries in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where two of Western art's newest phenoms will be presenting new solo shows: Mark Maggiori's newest collection of work, *One With the Sky*, and Thomas Blackshear II, who will have his solo show debut at Trailside with *Western Nouveau*. Both shows open September 9 and continue through September 21.

For Maggiori, whose star has been ascending within Western art for several years, his new show will offer a chance to not only show his romanticized views of the West—the result of a

cross-country trip across the United States the French artist made as a teenager—but will also show his affection for the American cowboy, which is the subject that brought him into Western art in the first place. Cowboys are larger-than-life figures that are represented in his paintings as living monuments riding through the desert. Japan has the samurai. England has the knight. America has the cowboy.

"I do like to play with the scale of the cowboy in my paintings, just so I can show them large in the landscape. I'll play with that scale until it gets all the important stuff in—the horizon line works well for this," the artist, who now lives in Los Angeles, says. "The cowboy is timeless, and I want to rise to that by creating timeless work. They've been around so long in America, and I've been able to spend time with so many of them who are working today, that they are who I paint for. It all comes back to the cowboy."



He adds: "I love that song *You Just Can't See Him From the Road*, by Chris LeDoux, because it captures the big idea about the American cowboy, always out there and working, but unseen. Maybe my next show I'll use that title." As an aside, the song has an ironic line about "some Frenchman's name embroidered" on jeans. Ironic because some Frenchman

is now one of the biggest supporters of the American cowboy, the myth and the modern-day equivalent.

New works in Maggiori's show include *Mesmerized*, which shows a rare sight of a cowboy taking in all the landscape, sort of just inhaling all the beauty around him for a couple minutes with his leg propped up on his

saddle. "I have a lot of friends who are working cowboys and they always send me photos of the things they see and they are always really incredible. 'Hey, Mark. We were thinking of you,' and then they include this amazing photo of a sunset or clouds—I get so many cloud photos," Maggiori says. "Cowboys get a front row for the best Mother Nature has to offer. They



Thomas Blackshear II,
Brother Eagle, oil, 31 x 43"

see this stuff every day because they're out there and probably just as mesmerized as these figures."

In *Boys of the Land*, the artist paints a trio of riders in Canyonlands, Utah. The idea for the painting was always based around a triangle composition, with three figures leading down into a more and more complex arrangement of shapes and lines in the canyon. "Every time I would see this in my head I would see a fantasy, this triangle arrangement that seemed very obvious," he says. "I like to think these are just some guys going down to have a good time. I imagine they are riding from somewhere in Arizona and they are here with this view and they are at one with the land."

Another new piece in the show is *Trail Blazing*, which pulls from Maggiori's own cultural heritage. "I was chatting with Z.S. Liang and he was curious why I don't paint Native Americans. He told me, 'It's good you don't paint them. You're French so you should paint the mountain men.' Well, I thought about it and he was right and it made a lot of sense because a lot of those early trappers and mountain men were French, so there was a connection there to my own heritage. Since then I've been reading a lot about the mountain men and it's made me appreciate them as a subject more," he says. "It's kind of fitting because back in my animation days in France I was working on this Rolling Stones animated film and [filmmaker] Luc Besson was the producer. At the time I had long hair and a nasty beard and Luc Besson would always call me a mountain man. I didn't know what he meant then, but I do now."

For *Western Nouveau*, Colorado-based painter Blackshear will be debuting new works that play directly into the title of the show, a term that the artist himself has championed. "This is something I've been preparing for quite awhile. It's a look I'm doing with my Western work that I call 'Western Nouveau.' It began when I was an apprentice for painter Mark English. I learned from him all about design, and in fact I regret not learning more," Blackshear says. "After working with Mark I really tried to learn everything I could about design, from art nouveau, art deco and Arts and Craft. It's become part of my work, which is great because no one else in Western art is really doing it. Maynard Dixon had a sense for art deco, and he was an incredible designer, but this is really wide open for me to explore."

Some of the characteristics of Blackshear's *Western Nouveau* works include bold compositions, vivid color rendered in a slightly exaggerated intensity, dynamic forms with stylized elements, and an exploration in medium and methods, such as gold leaf. This style can be seen in a work that was still on his easel, but destined for the Trailside show, a work titled *Buffalo Hunt*, with its golden-maned horse rearing up in an iconic pose.

"For me, I just don't want to be pegged as an artist. In my past I was an illustrator for many years, and I was pegged as a black artist who tended to do black art, but I don't see myself that way. I'm an artist that happens to be black. So now, for this show, I want to make sure that people see all of me, and not just one look or style," he says. "So people will see a lot, including more representational work, more stylized work and then the more decorative pieces that have the gold leaf. And when they leave the show, they won't have me pegged. That's my hope, because it will allow me to work on anything I want in the future."

One of Blackshear's newest pieces is *Brother Eagle*, showing a Native American figure holding an eagle amid a desert scene. "I have to admit, this was very much influenced by Maynard Dixon. I had fun coming up with the pose and then working through the design," he says of the piece. "If you just squinch your eyes the union of the Native American and eagle becomes one shape. I liked the idea of this monumental shape as the figure holds the eagle."

In *Hummingbird*, Blackshear paints a Native American man glancing down at a hummingbird feeding on a hollyhock bloom. The painting is





Above: **Mark Maggiori**, *Trail Blazing*, oil on linen, 24 x 18"
Left: **Mark Maggiori**, *Mesmerized*, oil, 38 x 40"

bathed in the last light of the day, it's moody and dramatic and vibrates with energy. One of the pieces in the solo show will be one of his famous paintings of black cowboys, which will allow the artist to again dispel a myth about the Old West: "There were black cowboys in the West. It was something like 30 percent of the cowboys were black. You don't see it all the time so it's something I like to show in my artwork," he says. "But black or white, I will be painting more cowboys in my work. Cowboys and Native Americans...there's so much there to paint and explore."

The solo shows for Maggiori and Blackshear will both have an open house on September 14, from 4 to 7 p.m. 🍷

Mark Maggiori:
One With the Sky
Thomas Blackshear II:
Western Nouveau

September 9-21, 2019

Trailside Galleries, 130 E. Broadway,
Jackson Hole, WY 83001

(307) 733-3186, www.trailsidegalleries.com