

McCullough paints for love of the land

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Landscape Painter Susan McCullough of Monte Vista captures the beauty of Bristol Head at the June ? Keep the Rio Grande Grand? Plein Air Paint Out above Creede.

MONTE VISTA Susan McCullough always knew she was going to be an artist .

For the third year in a row, McCullough is excited to participate in the annual "Keep the Rio Grande Grand Fine Art Benefit Sale," hosted by the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT).

The event will be held on August 14th from 6 to 9 p.m. at the South Fork Community Center.

Having moved to the San Luis Valley in eighth grade from Sterling, McCullough considers herself a local and is proud to support the conservation of the land she has loved for so long. During college at Colorado State University, McCullough majored in art. "That was during an 'abstract period,'" she said, "But it didn't mesh with me."

After leaving CSU, Mc-Cullough married and returned to the San Luis Valley . She then completed a business degree, which she describes as "a 180 degree turn," at Adams State College .

"After that, I just got really busy raising kids. Painting was just something I didn't do for awhile."

When her youngest son turned 3, Susan started painting again, "I realized that if I don't start now, I never will. You always think you will have time to do things, but then you wake up and say, 'Wow! I can't wait any longer!'"

Always interested in painting landscapes and the Valley's scenery, she began building strong relationships with other local artists who had a similar passion for conservation.

Describing how she has matured through her years, McCullough said she used to think that artistic talent was something you just could naturally possess. It didn't seem like something that needed discipline.

"Now I know you have to work, and you have to work hard," she admits. "There is this idea that you are supposed to be good at it right away. When I realized that's not true, I matured in a lot of ways."

McCullough is particularly excited about this year's Keep the Rio Grande Grand.

"I started painting Plein Air again on Memorial Weekend in 1996." Now 14 years later, this has become McCullough's main genre and she participated in both of RiGHT's "Plein Air Paint-Outs " on conserved ranches on the Rio Grande in May and June.

At the May Paint-Out on the Gilmore Ranch just west of Alamosa, McCullough painted a classic scene of the tractor and old shed.

"I generally love to paint sceneries: wetlands, mountains , trees, etc, but conservation is about keeping the historic buildings too. These buildings are part of the land and its story."

McCullough believes Plein Air painting creates more excitement, while helping people understand the issues better.

"I feel like there is a greater connection between the viewers, the artists, and the surroundings we are trying to connect. You can feel it."

On the evening of August 14th, San Luis Valley residents will have the opportunity to meet fine artists like McCullough and see her passion in person, while having the opportunity to purchase the work of local artists and to support the mission of RiGHT, "to conserve the land, water and way of life in the San Luis Valley."

McCullough observed that, "People tend drive along the highway and they don't see. They have no idea about all of the beauty that exists along the rivers and behind the trees."

Through this event, the public will be given a glimpse into that beauty and a way to help keep it intact for future generations to enjoy it as well.

For more information about the community's land trust and the "Keep the Rio Grande Grand Fine Art Benefit Sale" visit [www.riograndlandtrust .org](http://www.riograndlandtrust.org) or call the land trust's Del Norte office at 657-0800

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