



The soil throughout Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana might not really be the vibrant purple it sometimes is in K.L. McKenna's landscapes. And if there's blue sagebrush in those same western states, it has remained hidden to most. Despite the liveliness of the colors, looking at McKenna's paintings there is no doubt she knows, and loves, that soil and sagebrush intimately.

K.L. McKenna's paintings aren't so stylized as to render the Western mountains, rivers, and bluffs she has spent upwards of 40 years exploring unrecognizable, but there is no denying hers is a West of perception. Whereas traditional paintings of the West idolize it with precise and picture perfect representations, McKenna's contemporary paintings invite viewers into this unique area one small, loose, imprecise impression at a time. And though McKenna's colors stray from reality and she plays with shape and structure, her results end up perhaps being more real than the precise pieces. The West, whether in historic or modern times, is not picture perfect. It is a place of imagination, of individuality, of opposition, of energy, of strong emotion, of struggle, and of both harmony and discordance. And McKenna captures all of this in her paintings in a way only someone closely familiar with the area can.

McKenna's paintings of the West are undeniably landscapes – albeit not strictly representational ones -- and can be appreciated at face value, but, as the West has given her more than mere vistas, she seeks to pass that depth on. Each of McKenna's bold brushstrokes is as much about what the West makes her feel as what she sees there. She sees soil and feels purple. She sees (or smells, even) sagebrush and feels a brilliant blue. "If you define color traditionally and you go by what the eye sees, most people would say much of the West is barren of color. I feel the desolation of the area and look out at its vastness and see energy. The energy, the area's spirit, becomes color in my paintings."

Looking at McKenna's paintings, you would (correctly) assume the energy of the West has been positive, even exuberant, for her. Colors and shapes are uplifting rather than dark and brooding. Reds, yellows and greens make you want to, ideally, see her landscapes in person or, if a trip West isn't in the cards, at least smile. Each piece – and McKenna's work is not cookie cutter, each painting is obviously individual – challenges your assumptions about what landscapes can be; even what a landscape can teach.

"I'm trying to expose a different opinion of a landscape. I like showing there is something more to be seen than the usual realism," McKenna says. "There are things to be felt as well."