



Acacia Alder

For the aptly named Acacia Alder, nature is everything. Alder paints brilliant canvases in which nature comes alive in deeply textural bursts of color. The results are contemporary landscapes, compelling viewers to take a different look at the desert scenery. “I’m very interested in the emotional quality of the botanical world,” she explains.

Alder grew up in Ohio, where as a girl she climbed trees and became enamored of the natural world. She went on to study architecture at Kent State University. When she first visited the Sonoran Desert some 30 years ago, she was “completely drawn to its dramatic landscapes.” In the early 1970s, she, her husband, and their two daughters moved to Tucson. Coming from a family of

craftspeople, her first endeavors in Tucson involved jewelry making. An explorer at heart, Alder began hiking throughout the Southwest, especially the Red Rock country of southern Utah. She soon abandoned the jewelry for a larger canvas to express her love for the natural world.

Classes with painter Andy Rush at Tucson’s Drawing Studio exposed Alder to those European artists whose influence still surfaces strongly in her work. “I am conscious of it,” she points out. “I’ve avoided the more traditional Southwestern landscapes.” Instead, Alder applies the chromatic brilliance of the Post-Impressionists to her arresting canvases. She cites Cézanne and Bonnard—and especially van Gogh—as major sources of inspiration. She was also attracted to Canada’s Group of Seven, landscape painters from the 1920s who shared an intimate relationship with nature. “I also love the Fauves and their wild interpretation of color,” she adds.

Although she first exhibited work solely in pastels, a class with painter Jim Waid introduced her to acrylics, opening another world for her. Acrylics function as a perfect medium for her approach. “Moving back and forth between spontaneous and careful painting, I create many layers.” Therefore she prefers that paint dry quickly. Through this thick use of acrylic gels, Alder achieves a deeply sculptural element in her paintings. “It gives me the ability to mold them,” she observes. “So the surface takes on the quality of a relief.”

That interplay between thick application of paint and vivid chromatic sensibility imparts a strong sense of movement to her canvases. “I can



RIGHT: *Aravaipa Creek Seeds*
BELOW: *Calling the Wind*

bring three-dimensionality into the rhythmic aspects of nature,” she says. Evidence of this aspect surfaces in

of light. “You get a shimmering effect from the shafts of light in certain areas of the painting,” she notes.

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Alder’s painting *Seized by the Light*. The large landscape captures a momentary flash of light in the woods near Flagstaff as rays from the setting sun slice through majestic pines in powerful bursts of color.

In *Seeds Calling the Wind*, Alder reveals the heightened chromatic sensitivity that characterizes much of her work. The canvas’s glimmering contrast between orange and turquoise tones lends a kinetic energy to the painting. Alder was inspired to paint the piece after a walk in the Sonoita-Patagonia area. A spiritual aspect also emerges in the canvas’s vibrant use

Lately, Alder has turned her attention to canyons, where she discovers another chromatically charged environment. “Canyons are calling me,” she admits. “They’re intensely beautiful.” Alder has discovered a new palette in the colors of canyons: “You get everything—sky, water, majestic rock walls, and unique plant forms.” A recent visit to Aravaipa Canyon left her inspired. Another glorious canvas must surely be on its way. **TH**

» *A Fauve at heart, Mark Mussari, Ph.D., would love to step into one of Acacia Alder’s beautiful landscapes.*

See Acacia Alder’s work at Tansey Gallery, 3001 E. Skyline Dr., Ste. 109, 577-6301, www.tanseygallery.com.