

---

# Artists push boundaries at Roaring Fork Open

[STEWART OKSENHORN](#)  
ASPEN, CO COLORADO,



ASPEN — Among the first pieces visitors to the Aspen Art Museum’s Roaring Fork Open will see is the most standard of local icons: a photograph of the Maroon Bells.

But the piece, by Brad Yule, does more than present a straightforward image of the Bells. Titled “Telepathic Market,” the print uses a digital coloring process to offer a trippy take on the most natural of settings. A small bit of text in the middle of the photo — “Focus Here” — raises questions about the experience of being in nature, and of making mountains into art.

Yule’s contribution to the Roaring Fork Open is representative of the exhibit as a whole. The biennial Open, which opens with a reception from 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, is not, on the whole, an example of the cutting-edge — certainly not along the lines of *To the Wall*, the two-person exhibit opening tonight in the museum’s upstairs gallery, which features conceptual, somewhat humorous installations by David Shrigley and Lily Van der Stokker.

But the hundred-plus works in the Roaring Fork Open do tend to show the contingent of local artists pushing at the boundaries of the traditional. Ada Christensen’s untitled work uses a striking staining process to bring out the grain of a board of wood. “Mexican Gothic,” Shelly Bogaert’s image of a Latino couple working in a butcher shop, is emotionally fraught, and employs a technique that gives the photograph an aged, painterly feel. Joel Belmont’s disquieting depiction of nudes and a rope, “Inner Child,” employs a technique known as “oilgraph,” which does, in fact, combine photography and paint. And right beside Yule’s photo is “Flue Traps: Pink and Yellow,” a work by Matthew Fischer, a studio manager at Snowmass Village’s Anderson Ranch Arts Center, which combines elements of sculpture and painting to uncommon effect.

“It’s surprising how many artists invented their own techniques, or altered a technique to suit their liking,” said Matthew Thompson, the museum’s assistant curator. “It’s a very DIY show. They came up with their own ways to do something. It’s a group of artists that likes to explore a lot of different media, and explore the limits of the medium.”

That said, there is plenty of painting in the exhibit. But some of the finest pieces in the exhibit — which is open to all residents of the Roaring Fork Valley — are examples of more or less traditional painting techniques. Jennine Hough’s “Playing Juliet,” an oil on linen, is a complex scene, with elements of character and setting interacting. “Homage to Aspen’s Weather,” an acrylic painting by Royle Freund, is whimsical and accessible, as the white-on-white look mimics the subject. “The Child,” an oil on canvas by Shelly Safir Marolt, is a moody contemplation of youth; Thompson notes it wouldn’t be out of place in a leading contemporary-art gallery.

Thompson added that, even in the two years he has worked at the Aspen Art Museum — a span which includes just one previous Roaring Fork Open — the level of the art has taken a noticeable jump. “They seem to be much more serious,” he said. “About every artist we met was very excited about the development of their work. There was hardly anyone who came in and said, ‘Here’s something I made.’ They all self-identify as artists. They take themselves seriously as artists. They talk well about their work.”

Talking, in fact, is one of the keys to the enhanced quality of the Open. When Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson became the museum’s executive director and chief curator two years ago, she reworked the process for the Open. Instead of artists simply dropping off a piece, she required each artist to have a brief meeting with her and Thompson, with a request that each artist bring three pieces to be assessed.

“The great thing about that is, we can sit down and get into the artist’s head, see what they’re thinking about,” Thompson said. “And that lets us see what the artist is up to, know how to group the show, rather than guess at it from one piece of art.”

Stewart Oksenhorn’s e-mail is [stewart@aspentimes.com](mailto:stewart@aspentimes.com)

<http://www.aspentimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071025/AE/71024040&template=printart>

---

Copyright 2009 All Rights Reserved