

Tea and triceratops: Ghost Ranch's dinosaur days

Part of
'New Seens'
art series

By CHRIS HUMPHREY

Take a close look at the painting on this page, titled *Tea in China*. A sharply detailed still-life of what appears to be a Victorian tea — an elegant china set, lacy table cloth, a bowl of peaches. Through the window, the viewer can see out into a background landscape of lush forest, Oriental pagodas, and a lone triceratops standing in a clearing.

Come again? A triceratops? Oriental pagodas? What exactly is going on here, and where is here, anyway?

Welcome to the slightly surreal world of painter Jennine Hough, where seemingly innocuous landscape or still-life paintings veer sharply into the fantastic with the surreptitious addition of a dinosaur or two wandering in the background.

An exhibit of Hough's recent dinosaur series, titled *New Seens*, is on display at the Ghost Ranch Museum northwest of Abiquiu and the artist will be at the museum for a reception from 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday.

The idea for the *New Seens* series came in 1991 when Hough went to a show on dinosaurs in Atlanta, where the artist now lives. Hough is not sure what drew her to the exhibit, but she was immediately captivated and set about learning all she could about dinosaurs: reading books, going to museums, talking to people.

Although Hough knew she wanted to incorporate her newly found passion into her paintings, it took almost a full year to work it out. Before the *New Seens* series, Hough had been a still-life or small-scale landscape painter, but she soon realized that gigantic,



'Tea in China' by Jennine Hough prehistoric creatures might be a little overwhelming in that setting and began to consider other possibilities.

It all came together on a trip to Aspen. "I knew that the source of my paintings was here — this landscape I had enjoyed and hiked. I kept thinking about these views, the Rockies, and the fact that so many dinosaur remains had been discovered here."

To accommodate the dinosaurs, Hough's paintings took on a much larger scale, bringing in sweeping vistas of mountains and forest that allow

almost hidden. One of her favorite views, of Maroon Bells, became the source for her first major piece in the series, *Arcadia — Dawn*.

Rather than give up her interest in small scale, Hough also has worked a meticulously detailed foreground scene into each of the 14 *New Seens* paintings. One has a family picnicking on Independence Pass while watching a herd of stegosauri in the valley far below. In another, four deer are eating a watermelon, left, one imagines, by hikers who fled in fear at the sight of the brontosaurus poking its head up in the background.

Making use of the dramatic tension inherent in her foreground-background style, Hough has built narratives into each of the paintings in the series. Not only that, she has written fictitious newspaper stories that go with the works, imagining modern-day hikers, boy scouts or airline pilots who might have come across these *New Seens* of dinosaurs wandering the countryside.

Is Hough worried the *New Seens* series will be pegged as children's art since kids always seem to have a fascination with dinosaurs. "Oh, that wouldn't bother me a bit. I think they are (children's art). I have a lot about children in my paintings.

As much as Hough has enjoyed the burst of enthusiasm and creativity that her dinosaur passion has engendered, her paintings have seen the last of prehistoric reptiles. "This was an isolated thing for me. These 14 paintings are about

something. I did it and it's over. It was a wonderful experience, but I don't need to drag it out."

DETAILS

WHO/WHAT:
Jennine Hough
'New Seens'

WHEN:
Reception
2-5 p.m. Sunday

WHERE:
Ghost Ranch Museum,
Abiquiu

INFO:
Children's Day
Saturday

enough room to work in dinosaurs in the distance,

