

March 8, 2012

**Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art
presents *Staged Relics: Recent Work by
Gordon McConnell***

When: Thursday from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Where: Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, 1400 1st Ave. N.

Admission: Free

Contact: Corey Gross, interim curator of art, 727-8255, ext. 310

Billings artist Gordon McConnell approaches his paintings not as creations on a canvas but as black-and-white stills from a 1950s film.

A free reception for "Staged Relics: Recent Work by Gordon McConnell" at the Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art takes place Thursday at 5:30 p.m.

McConnell's work went up for display last week and will remain at the Square through June 2.

The evening also will include an ArtShare presentation at 6 by the museum's new curator of art, Laura Cotton.

McConnell's paintings reflect 20th century Hollywood Westerns and how they have come to represent the history of the American West. The images in his paintings come from classic films such as "Stagecoach," "The Westerner," "My Darling Clementine," "Red River," "Yellow Sky" and "Rio Grande." The paintings resemble flickering black-and-white film frozen in time, capturing that split second of intense action.

Corey Gross, interim curator of art at the Square, said McConnell's style is a product of how he places the acrylic paint on the canvas.

"It really does look like a muddy black-and-white film," Gross said.

Gross said McConnell sees his paintings as an authentic view of how Western culture is interpreted.

"All of his work is based on old black-and-white Western films," Gross said. "And he sees them as true, almost pictorial, histories of the West."

In his artist statement, McConnell says he pulls at memories of popular images throughout history.

"By re-enacting and redefining the frontier, we establish new and complicated connections with what historian Patricia Limerick has called the West's 'legacy of conquest,' its 'unbroken past.' The Western is our national drama. The subjects of the films are great subjects, the realities and myths they depict as grand and tragic as any in the world.

"The landscapes in my paintings tend to be even less featured than the Southeastern Colorado prairie where I grew up. Settings blur or dissolve in light-shot dust as bandits, cowboys, cavalry troopers and Indians ride. Emblematic of vitality, fearlessness, austere self-reliance and intimacy with nature, my work is darkly nostalgic, haunted by the legacy of popular Western imagery and the savage, tragic and, yes, heroic aspects of human nature and history portrayed in it," McConnell writes.

Gross said it's that approach that sets his art apart from other types of similar work.

"It's in my view what separates it from other Western art," Gross said. "It's definitely a contemporary take on this kind of nostalgic view of the West."

For more information, contact the Square at 727-8255.