

**SUGGESTED READING LIST FOR  
"THE LIVING MIRAGE":**

- Water By The Inch**, Herbert V. Young,  
Northland Press
- The Desert Year**, Joseph Wood Krutch, U of A Press
- Home Is The Desert**, Ann Woodin, U of A Press
- The Mysterious Lands**, Ann Haymond Zwinger
- Desert Solitaire**, Edward Abbey
- Cactus Country**, Edward Abbey, Time/Life Books
- Desert Images**, David Muench and Edward Abbey
- The Desert**, John C. Van Dyke
- Land of Little Rain**, Mary Austin
- The Land of Journeys' Ending**, Mary Austin,  
U of A Press
- The Desert Smells Like Rain**, Gary Paul Nabhan
- Gathering the Desert**, Gary Paul Nabhan,  
U of A Press
- Art and Geology: Expressive Aspects of the Desert**, Rita  
Deanin Abbey and G. William Fiero,  
Gibbs M. Smith, Inc.
- The Desert World**, David E. Costello,  
Thomas Y. Crowell Co.
- Under Desert Skies**, W. Phillip Keller,  
A.S. Barnes & Co.
- Desert Notes**, Barry Holstun Lopez

(These titles are non-technical nature writings that center on North American desert experiences by the authors.)

Places you can visit to learn more about various aspects of our deserts and their plants:

Arizona Sonora Desert Museum	883-2702
Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum	689-2811
City of Phoenix Desert Mountain Parks	262-6861 or 262-6696
Desert Botanical Gardens	941-1225
Lost Dutchman State Park	982-4485
Nature Conservancy's Hassayampa River Preserve	684-2772
Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument	387-6849
Saguaro National Monument	670-6680

Mesa Southwest Museum  
53 N. Macdonald  
Mesa, AZ 85201

**The LIVING MIRAGE**  
March 17 through May 27, 1990

# The LIVING MIRAGE



**A collection of paintings,  
drawings, and prints featuring  
plants of the southwestern desert.  
Curated by Sheila Kollasch**

**Mesa Southwest Museum**  
March 17 through May 27, 1990

## ARTISTS REPRESENTED IN "THE LIVING MIRAGE"

Borislav Bogdonavitch  
Walter Bohl  
George Elbert Burr  
Howard Russell Butler  
Earl Carpenter  
Joel Coplin  
Philip C. Curtis  
Lew Davis  
Christine Dawson  
Maynard Dixon  
James Eder  
Jesse Benton Evans  
Hurlstone Fairchild  
Ralph Goltry  
Albert L. Groll  
James Gucwa  
William R. Leigh  
Lon Megargee  
Ed Mell  
Wilma Parker  
Edgar Payne  
Woodward Payne  
Gerry Pierce  
Alfred Rudolph  
F. Grayson Sayre  
Lee Gordon Seebach  
D. Wayne Smith  
Ernest Beach Smith  
Serena Supplee  
David Swing  
James Swinnerton  
Curt Walters  
Gunnar Widforss

## CURATOR'S STATEMENT

The desert is not just the vast uninviting space that we see from a car window. It hides many magical, intimate spaces of intense beauty, although they are not really hidden. Anyone who possesses patience and the desire to walk can find them. There are places where a spring comes to the surface, where a fold in the rock holds moisture a little longer than the surrounding hills. Thus, exotic pockets of greenery spot the colorful landscape, creating mini-oases in a rainbow of rock.

I have lived all of my life in the Sonoran Desert. As a child I played there, digging holes for forts in the shade of bur sage and creosote bushes. My friends and I cooled ourselves in irrigation ditches that meandered more like creeks instead of flowing in the well-engineered straight lines of water company maps. These watercourses were lined with huge cottonwood, tamarisk, mesquite and palo verde trees. My earliest and most intense memories bring back the odor of dust storms and rain on creosote, the perfume of the desert.

I have been backpacking, hiking and river running in the southwest since 1972. I love the light, color, texture and smell of the desert and do not see it as a hostile place. To those who venture into it without hat or water during the sizzling summer days, of course, it is dangerous. I would no more do that than an easterner would take a winter walk naked and wet.

Many of us are descendants of cold climate people. We know the definition of the word "hibernate" well: "to pass the winter in a torpid or resting state in order to conserve body heat." In the desert, an equivalent condition exists. It is one that is necessary to ensure life in a place of extreme heat: that is to "aestivate." Many desert plants, to survive, drop their leaves to prevent excessive evaporation.

I get angry when people describe the desert as barren and bleak. Do they call the bare winter trees in the north and the east barren and bleak? These reveal singular beauty in that state. So, too, does the desert in the summer. The beauty of summer in the desert occurs between twilight and dawn. Then plants and animals attend to living during their brief break from struggling to survive the heat of day.

Winter is the ideal time to explore the desert. The textures and colors in desert flora are greatest at this time. Cottonwood trees turn yellow; some tamarisk trees glow with a rusty orange. Other plants lie dormant; their twigs might be grey, lavender, black, orangey, or any imaginable shade of blue or brown. Some leafy plants wear colors of pale grey-green, blue-green or olive. Wild buckwheat turns a deep rust red. Last year's green grasses are now gold. The ground is littered with dry leaves dropped during the summer. New plants are sprouting to life. These are the plants that will bloom soon after the coldest part of winter.

By the time spring arrives, many of the greens of late winter are fading. Blue and purple flowers, still in bloom, nestle in the waving grasses of gold and orange like desert jewels. Earlier flowers are scattering seeds for the coming year. The desert truly is a tapestry of rich color and texture for those who go looking and see.

"The Living Mirage" is an exhibition of paintings, drawings and prints depicting Southwestern desert flora. This show is not meant to include all desert plants. Photographs and scientific illustrations are not included. The interpretive panels are quotes from desert literature rather than flora reference guides. The works are on loan from private and corporate collections in central Arizona. All works are made by artists who feel a special kinship to this dramatic region.

When I read the articles and biographies of the artists represented, I find that most of them emigrated here from the east. They quickly fell under a magical spell and stayed or returned for extended visits. Common themes include: the vastness of the skies, the clarity of the lighting, and the exotic plant life.

Jesse Benton Evans thinks "...that real beauty exists where we least expect, in an unrevealed sense, disclosing itself only as we earnestly search for it, thus stimulating our creative faculties. The desert seems to me to be always alluring and illusive; its spirit is sweeping and vital and its voices form a chorus of endless song. It never allows one to work in an imitative way, which would certainly rob it of its charm. There is a virgin freshness in the hills and barely trodden trails of the southwest that one misses in tired, worn Europe."

In *La Tierra Encantada*, William Steadman writes about the artist Hurlstone Fairchild: "He knew the open range, the solitude of lonely places, the glory of silent nights alone under western skies. Always he was profoundly moved by the desert's freedom, its spareness and its beauty... In every man's memory, that place remains the best where he has been happiest or where he has begun his essential life. For Fairchild, this was the desert and Arizona."

The works in this exhibition reveal special experiences with desert flora. Many are intimate portraits of a very small portion of the desert. Others show us the heart of a particular plant in an unusual way.

The works of Joel Coplin placed me next to real sycamore trees, or stood me near a wash where the tamarisks are changing color. Lee Gordon Seebach's "Desert Rocks" is an oasis of shade in the desert where one happily rests on a hot day and gazes at lengthening evening shadows. When I look at the work of D. Wayne Smith, I can feel the hot sun on my cheek and smell the creosote odor of the desert. Gunnar Widforss paints as though the land is strewn with precious jewels of vivid color.

I have always been attracted to black and white works. George Elbert Burr's etchings are some of the finest documents of the Southwestern desert. It is fitting to use some of his prolific output to illustrate the theme of this show. I hope that by viewing this exhibition, you will gain a new appreciation for the desert or be reminded of special personal experiences within the living mirage.

Sheila Kollasch  
Curator, "The Living Mirage"