

# Willard Louden paints up a storm – always inspired

By **TIM KELLER**  
The Chronicle-News

Perhaps the grand landscapes of Willard Louden's paintings first entered his blood on the way home.

Born in the Trinidad hospital on January 16, 1925, his parents struggled through a blizzard to get him home to the family ranch east of Branson, his father sometimes climbing out to walk ahead of the Model T and scout the dirt road.

"I think of myself as a landscape artist," Willard says, surrounded by acrylic landscapes he's painted, most from within a sixty-mile radius of that first ride in a Model T. Many feature big clouds and dramatic weather. They display his obvious love of the land.

"I'm interested in the flora and fauna of the area, and I have a lot of environmental concerns. I never considered myself a wildlife artist, but I got an invitation to join a show with the 'big boys'. I couldn't turn that down, so I painted one

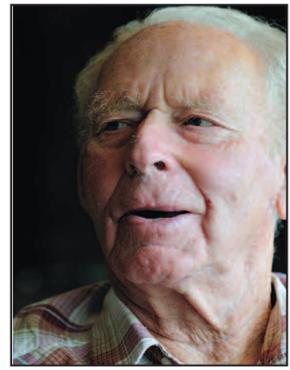
of my landscapes, then painted some antelope onto it. When I put deer into a landscape, sometimes you have to look pretty hard to find them."

After attending a 2-student school near the ranch, Louden moved into Branson for eighth-grade through graduation from Branson HS. "I stayed with my grandmother here. She taught art in the WPA program, and she got me started," he recalls. He made his first painting at age 14, a snow-covered lakeside cottage in moonlight. He still has it.

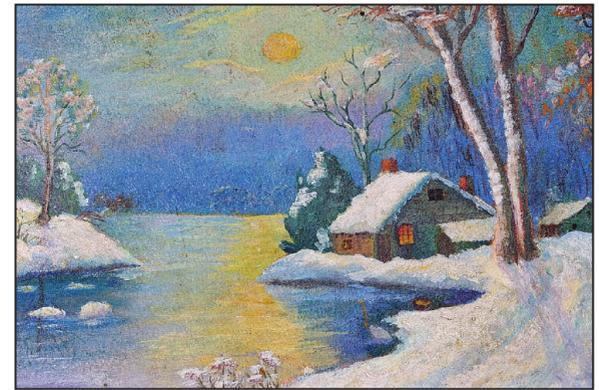
He went to TSJC, then the army. When he came home, A.R. Mitchell had arrived in Trinidad. Louden studied art under Mitchell for two formative years. Then he went off to the University of Missouri. Asked now what his major was, he laughs, "A lot of deans used to ask me that, too." He explains, "I wanted an education, not a livelihood. I planned to come home and work the ranch." He studied art, archaeology, geology, psychology – lots

of -ologies – and ended up serving in the first year of the Peace Corps, in Iran, where he became so enamored of the vistas that he hunted for pigments to mix with oils and make paintings. The return trip home took two years – he and friends bought a Land Rover and circled the world.

When Parkinson's disease



struck ten years ago, Louden and his wife, Mary Ann, left the ranch and bought a house in Branson. He built himself a spacious second-story painting studio. For the first time, he pursued painting in earnest. Since then, he's created well over 200 paintings. Trinidad's La Quinta Inn bought dozens of his paintings – they're in every room and hallway. He shows at Studio C and the Mitchell Museum, which he co-founded. "I have a need to use my hands to create," Louden says. "Painting is a way of recalling. Most memories are like reflections in rippled water. They're transcendently beautiful. They give me a sense of warmth."



Willard Louden started painting – this was his first – in 1939; fifty years later, he started to take it seriously.

Willard Louden enjoys a light moment at home with his wife, Mary Ann.

Photos by Tim Keller

"Back when we started recycling our tin cans," Branson artist Mary Ann Louden recalls, "we'd wash them and remove the labels. I thought some of the lids were pretty. Then I saw a woman's tinwork in New Mexico Magazine and I admired it. Next thing I knew, I was making art from can lids."

Her tin ornaments and angels pushed aside the watercolor paintings she'd been creating. They have been compared to styles popular in America in the 1930s, though Louden says she had never seen those. Her husband, artist Willard Louden, compares them to traditional New Mexico Hispanic tinwork, but again, Mary Ann says she just came upon her designs naturally. "I was encouraging her to get back to her watercolors," Willard says, "but then she got so good with her tinwork that I just figured she might as well go that way."

She was late coming to art. Growing up in South Dakota and eastern Oregon, she went off to nursing schools in Idaho and Nebraska, then took a series of nursing jobs around the United States. From California, in 1969, she answered an ad for a nursing job in Trinidad. Months later, her Trinidad health depart-



Mary Ann Louden laughs at a remark from her husband, Willard.

ment co-workers took her to a picnic at a turnout atop the Raton Pass, with views of the Spanish Peaks. There, they introduced her to a young rancher named Willard Louden who dabbled in geology, archaeology, airplanes, and art. They married within the year.

"Mother had me take art lessons in high school, but I didn't think I was much of an artist," Mary Ann recalls. "My parents were musicians, which they did

not pass on to me. I've always enjoyed arts and crafts, but I never became serious about art until I had Willard as a teacher. Then, I learned I could draw with charcoal."

She tried painting with acrylics but found them too strong. "They were so bright that I felt I had to back away from them. For me, watercolor was softer, and easier."

She traveled to Ruidoso, NM, to take classes at the art school there, studying with Paul Milosevich and Michael McCullough. She returned to Nebraska for watercolor classes. She entered her work in shows while teaching nursing classes at TSJC. For a while, her work hung in the gift shop at the Mitchell Museum. She currently shows at Studio C in Des Moines, where she has also taught classes in her tinwork art.

"I want to get back into my watercolors," she says, "but I haven't done it yet. I've no longer felt driven as I was before, but it's coming back." One look at her watercolors displayed around the Loudens' Branson home would make anyone cheer her on.

## His wife & fellow artist Mary Ann also enjoys tinkering with tin



Mary Ann Louden's watercolors have taken a back seat to her tinwork which she has been enjoying.

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## Troop 2D of Trinidad welcomes new trooper John Ziadeh to the area

John Ziadeh (Z-A-DI) was a student at the University of Northern Colorado and Metropolitan State College. He worked in a variety of fields before coming to the Patrol in January 2009. John came to the Colorado State Patrol because he had always wanted to be in Law enforcement. He also appreciated that the State Patrol's number one goal is protecting the people of Colorado. He hopes he can make an impact in our community and help the public better protect their lives by driving safely.

In his free time John enjoys spending time with his family, friends and dogs. He is also climbing all of Colorado's 14,000-foot peaks



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