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Unique collection of Western artist on display at Phippen Museum



By Bruce Colbert
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The Phippen Museum displays a fantastic collection of Western art with its exhibition titled "All Aboard! The Life & Work of Marjorie Reed."

Reed, who died in 1996 at the age of 81, started her career as an animation artist at Walt Disney Studios in Los Angeles. But she yearned for open country and left to paint scenes of the Old West.

In 1939, Randall Henderson wrote a story for "The Desert Magazine" about meeting Reed.

"Two years ago, she drove into Palm Springs alone in an old jalopy - and immediately fell under the charm of the desert," Henderson wrote. "Her only companion is 'Boy,' a big Alaskan Husky dog who rides on the seat beside her. These two pals come and go over remote desert trails with all the assurance of a couple of desert prospectors."

Reed befriended Capt. William Banning in the 1930s, and became captivated by his stories about his days as a stage driver on the Butterfield Overland Mail Stage.

In the late 1930s, Reed loaded "Boy" into her Model-T Ford and, over the next 10 years, retraced the old stage route, making sketches along the way. Back in her studio, she created large paintings based on her field sketches.

She finished her "Butterfield Stage" series of paintings in 1957. The Phippen exhibits many



Matt Hinshaw/The Daily Courier
Volunteers and docents stroll through the Phippen Museum Friday morning examining the artwork of Marjorie Reed.



of her original stagecoach paintings from the museum's private collection, and from local private collectors and the Blue Coyote Gallery in Cave Creek.

Gary Fillmore, who owns the Blue Coyote, owns an extensive collection of Reed's work and wrote a book titled "All Aboard! The Life & Work of Marjorie Reed."

"He approached us about doing the show, so we set it up," explained James Ward, volunteer and event coordinator. "This is the first time this collection has been on display."

According to contemporary biographies including Fillmore's, Reed's personal life was as colorful as her artwork.

"With several husbands and a vagabond lifestyle, she showed a strong determination and independence in her work as well as her commitment to personal freedom," reads a brochure about the Reed show.

In addition to her dog, Reed had a love for white horses.

"You'll see a white horse as part of a horse team in a lot of her paintings," said exhibition curator Deb Bentlage on Friday during a preview of the show for museum docents and volunteers.

After Reed left Hollywood and her marriage in 1944, she spent the rest of her life in some of the remotest areas of California, Arizona and Montana painting scenes of a vanishing West.

In 1946, Reed married Harvey Day, an itinerant ranch hand and reportedly the love of her life. However, Day found himself in and out of prison during the course of their marriage, and in 1952 he committed suicide while serving time at the Montana State Prison. After Day's death, Reed signed numerous paintings "Harvey Day," which friends said was her tribute to him.

Ginger Renner represented Reed's work in the early 1960s at Desert Southwest Gallery. She described Reed as a woman who "knew exactly what she wanted to do, and did it damned well."

"All Aboard!" opens at 10 a.m. Saturday and closes June 13. The museum, named after Prescott artist and founding member of the Cowboy Artists of America George Phippen, is located at 4701 N. Highway 89. Admission costs \$5 for adults, \$4 for seniors and students, and is free for museum members.

For more information about the exhibition or the museum, call 778-1385, or visit www.phippenartmuseum.org.