



Montserrat Gallery

584 Broadway
New York, NY
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Alaskan Abstract Artist Comes Home to New York After 30 Years in the Last Frontier

Alan Munro is well known in Alaska as one of the State's premier artists and the former curator and director of the Alaska State Museum. He is such a fixture in Alaska, in fact, that many there do not know of Munro's unique upbringing and apprenticeship in New York. On October 4, Munro will bring his art back to where he started painting, over 60 years ago.

Munro grew up on an Old Westbury estate where his father was the head gardener. As a young boy, he was fascinated by the nature that surrounded him, but his artistic talent did not come to the fore until he was bedridden with a common but severe childhood illness.

"I was laying in bed, really sick, and all of these birds were outside by the window, singing up a racket in the blooming Dogwoods," Munro said. "So I started drawing and then painting them. That was the start. I think that childhood experience led to my lifelong fascination with art, creativity and to my later paintings inspired by nature."

Munro moved to Vermont in 1949, met his wife Connie and began working at the Shelburne Museum. But in 1956 his interest in art eventually led back to New York City, and the American Museum of Natural History, where he began an apprenticeship with the diorama background, master-painter James Perry Wilson.

"Working along with Perry has influenced my work ever since," said Munro. "He insisted that the diorama backgrounds be accurate and highly representational of an actual place, while at the same time, maintaining a sense of a whole artistic concept."

His work there led to an offer to be head curator for Department of Interpretive Arts, Children's Museum, Nashville, Tennessee. In addition to being curator, he continued his diorama work. He did that until 1971, while still producing his own work and exhibiting throughout the southeast. Then he received an interesting offer from far away.

"Remember this was a different time – and my moves to fully integrate the museum programs were not going over too well with some members of the museum board. So I was feeling some pressure there. Then I got an offer from the director of the Alaska State Museum to be a curator," Munro said. "Next thing I know, I'm getting off the ferry in Juneau with Connie and our five kids! Thirty years later, I'm still here."

Munro retired as Director of the Alaska State Museum in 1986 and has been painting full time ever since, except when he has commercially fished for halibut.

"That connection to nature is vital for me. Even as my work has become more abstract in recent years, the inspiration is always organic," Munro said. "To this day, nature and birds affect me the same as they did when I was eight years old and painted my first one. I think it's pretty apparent in my work."

Munro works mostly in acrylics, in the second floor studio room of his house in downtown Juneau. Crammed with the work of a lifetime, Munro continually revisits themes he has worked on since childhood.

"This last painting I did was inspired by a birding book I've owned since the 1950's. Not long ago I was thumbing through it and a photo and the story of the Bristle-thighed Curlew struck me, so that's what I painted," said Munro. "But there's a lifetime -- 60 some odd years -- of abstract thought on that canvas too! So it is something totally different than what I would have done even a few years ago. I've always got to keep moving, pursuing new ideas, re-visiting and trying out new ways, otherwise what's the point?"

Munro will exhibit at the Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, New York, NY, October 2-20. There is an opening reception open to the public Oct. 4, 6-8 p.m.

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