



TWO ARTISTS' NATURAL HABITAT

By Suzanne Hazlett

In its fourth year, the Wood River Valley Studio Tour continues to gain momentum in its successful delivery of artful learning opportunities within an array of creative havens where local artists create their work. Each year, professional artists who maintain their art studios within the Wood River Valley join together to host a weekend when visitors are invited to engage in what has become an exceptional artistic adventure for participants and artists alike. The Tour debuted in 2013 and immediately established itself as the largest open studio event in the State of Idaho.

This year from August 20 – 21, studio doors throughout the Valley will open wide again. The working studios range from intimate to grand spaces, and those intrigued with glimpsing an artist's life may engage in conversations while examining the diverse materials and equipment that contribute to the artmaking process. Painters, sculptors, photographers, printmakers, metalsmiths, jewelers, and fiber artists can all be found on the Tour. One measure that sets the WRV Studio Tour apart from similar tours across the country is the close proximity of the four cities that make up the Valley. Artists' enclaves can be found peppered throughout the region. Just 18 miles span the distance from Bellevue to Ketchum, making it feasible and enjoyable for regional and out-of-state visitors, as well as local residents, to make their way through and around the entire community.

In addition to creating admission-free and memorable experiences for participants, the Tour continues to provide the Valley's professional artists with a top-drawer program to showcase their artwork while sharing their processes and inspirations with art lovers, collectors, and those new to art. More than 200 visual artists live and work within the greater Sun Valley community and 92 of those artists have participated in the Tour's short three-year history. Whether the annual mix of featured artists includes returning veterans to the Tour with new work to present, or the addition of those joining the Tour for the first time, the collective of artistic talent and workmanship is always impressive.

Among those artists new to the experience of welcoming visitors from near and far to their studios this year are Valerie Stuart and Wendel Wirth. Both artists are represented by Gilman Contemporary, a Ketchum gallery most recently recognized in 2016 by The Culture Trip as one of "The Top Ten Contemporary Galleries in Idaho." Founded in 2007, Gilman Contemporary has also received recognition each subsequent year as one of the local galleries cited as "Best of the Valley" by *Idaho Mountain Express* in the newspaper's annual survey. Of the 37 artists represented by Gilman Contemporary, Stuart and Wirth are two who call the Wood River Valley home.

Valerie Stuart describes herself as a painter of abstract tonal fields with a focus on layering marble dust and oil paints to create texture and markings while using glazes to create visual depth. Stuart's pieces have the power to convey either an alert, vibrant energy or a quiet serenity, depending upon her intended communication with the viewer. Stuart is a classically-trained colorist continually seeking new combinations and applications, which most recently has led her to incorporate sky formations in her newest work.

Opposite page (top): "I've Looked at Clouds From Both Sides Now" by Valerie Stuart.

Opposite page (bottom): "Horizon I" by Wendel Wirth. 8"x10".

This page: Artist Wendel Wirth in her studio. Photo by Rebecca Walter.



"I visited several artists' studios last year and found it fascinating to learn how each artist approached their work. I'm looking forward to welcoming visitors' feedback and conversations about my own art. It will be interesting to see my work through a different set of eyes," says Stuart.

Wendel Wirth's most recent body of work features a series of large-scale photographs, which capture an abstracted view of the junction between the sky and the Caribbean Sea. Her images provide visual pleasure equally to those art admirers with a preference for realism as well as those with a penchant for abstraction. Wirth is currently invested in the early stages of a new project she describes as "experimenting with mixed media and leaning towards a conceptual approach." With visitors to her studio, she is looking forward to sharing her passion for photography, which continues to serve as the basis for her work. "The Tour seems to really break down some imaginary boundaries and create a great sense of community. I look forward to talking with visitors, sharing my work and my process, and learning about what draws them to art."

WRV Studio Tour visitors will be able to meet artists Stuart and Wirth and dozens more in their creative environments. For more information about the 2016 Wood River Valley Studio Tour and participating artists, visit wrvstudiotour.org. To learn more about Gilman Contemporary and to see other examples of work by Valerie Stuart and Wendel Wirth, visit gilmancontemporary.com.

4TH ANNUAL WOOD RIVER VALLEY STUDIO TOUR

The August 20 – 21, 2016 Tour will extend throughout the Wood River Valley – from Bellevue and Hailey to Ketchum and Sun Valley, artists open the doors of their studios to welcome visitors to this unique and admission-free event. Maps of the artists' studio locations will be available online and at newsstands and businesses throughout the Valley.

CALL FOR ARTISTS: Online call for the 2016 Tour via wrvstudiotour.org through April 30

MOSAIC PROJECT: Friday – Sunday, July 1 – 10

In July, the Tour's primary annual fundraiser and mosaic-like installation of original works of art takes place, each artwork created and donated by a local artist. The Mosaic Project will be exhibited in Ketchum for viewing in person, while the silent auction will take place online.

GROUP EXHIBITION

Tuesday – Sunday, August 16 – 21

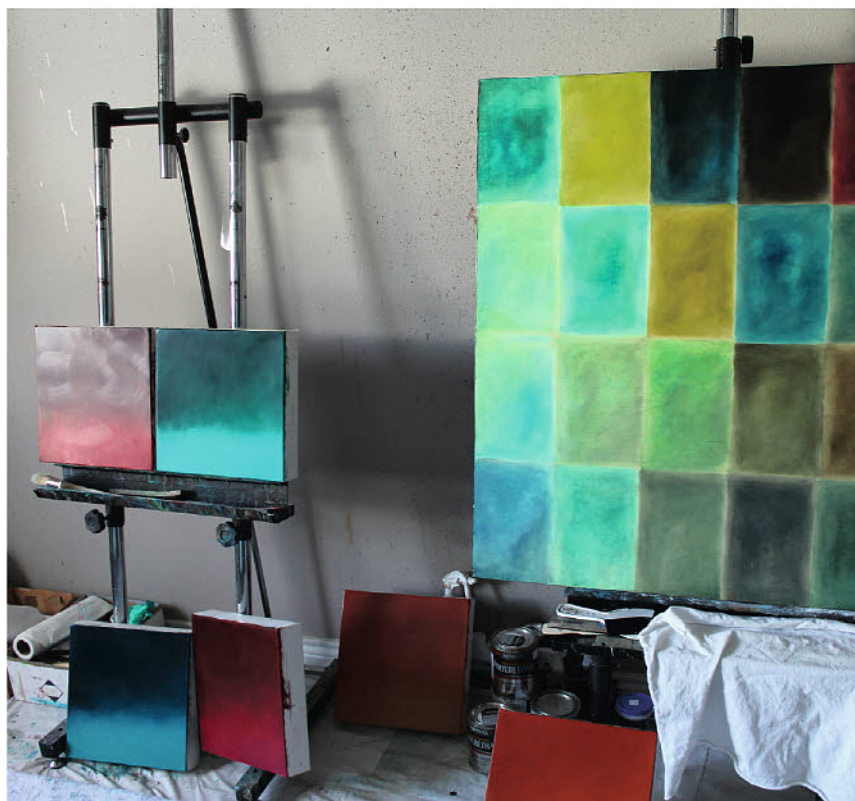
RECEPTION WITH THE ARTISTS

Friday, August 19

STUDIO TOURS

Saturday and Sunday, August 20 – 21

For more information: wrvstudiotour.org



Top right: Artist Valerie Stuart working on a piece. Photo by Beth Stuart.
Bottom right: Valerie Stuart's studio. Photo by Beth Stuart.