

# Seeking the Light

ARTIST LAUREN KNODE  
CAPTURES THE BEAUTY  
OF THE DESERT IN PAINT

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**Clockwise from opposite bottom:** Artist Lauren Knode paints vibrant renditions of desert cacti, such as *Persimmon Prickly Pear* (left), oil on canvas, 36"H x 36"W, and *Prickly Pear Luminescence IV* (foreground), oil on canvas, 40"H x 30"W. ■ *Oak Creek II*, oil on canvas, 63"H x 42"W, demonstrates the effect of sunlight on water. ■ "I love color," says Knode, who uses rich hues in the skies she paints. Pictured is *The Three Amigos*, diptych, oil on canvas, 46"H x 48"W and 46"H x 60"W. ■ *Persimmon Prickly Pear II*, oil on canvas, 42"H x 36"W

**G**rowing up in Portland, Oregon, award-winning artist Lauren Knode was surrounded by the lush and lovely vegetation only a rain-soaked area can produce.

One could ask why it is, then, that she so loves to paint spiny cacti and desert scenes instead of wispy-looking ferns and Pacific Northwest trees.

"I see beauty in the desert plants," the Phoenix transplant says. "I think it's the contrast of the sharp and prickly plant being able to produce the most glorious blooms I have ever seen. They have an almost ethereal translucency and luminescence."

Knode, who aims to re-create those same light-filled qualities in her works of art, actually started painting images of cacti while still living in Oregon, after admiring them on visits to Arizona. A trip to Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico, during that time inspired her to make old Pueblo Indian homes the subject of her paintings as well.

With degrees in art and education, it would be a while before she would make art her full-time vocation and Arizona her home, however. That is because Knode was enjoying success as a high school art teacher during a career that spanned 20 years.

In 1995, having retired from teaching, she followed her heart, the sun and the lure of "wide open spaces" and moved to Phoenix. Since then, she has become known for her skyscapes as well as paintings of desert plants. It is not unusual for one of her canvases to be composed two-thirds of

color-streaked sky and one-third the earth beneath it. "The landscape is almost secondary," she explains.

But that does not mean the solid ground is unimportant. For her commissioned landscapes, she at times will visit a home and take a walk with the owners to discover features in the natural environment they want in their paintings. In one work, for example, a grouping of three cacti has a special place. The lady of the house used to walk by the prickly trio every day and nicknamed them *The Three Amigos*, which became the title of the painting. Other times, people will ask that a coyote be placed in the landscape or will send Knode photos of a specific mountain range they can see in the distance, or a picture they took of a magnificent sky.

Whether using oil or acrylic paints, the artist tries to capture "nature's light and its miraculous breadth of color and texture." She creates many layers of thin glazes to satisfy her goal, whether that be replicating the weightlessness of the atmosphere or the shimmering effect of sunlight through the delicate petals of a flower.

A long time has passed, but Knode can recall the very moment that art became a strong influence in her life. "I must have been 9 or 10 years old. I was working with a pencil and copying Albrecht Dürer's *Praying Hands*. "My mother said to me, 'You are always happiest when you are doing your artwork.'"

And that "epiphany moment," as the artist calls it, remains true to this day. ■

See Sources.