

Plenty of plein air

Paint-Out pits painters against land and time

Western Montana Paint-Out

Artists will begin arriving into town for the five-day Paint-Out on Friday of this week. By Wednesday, each will have completed several paintings, which will be presented in an exhibition that opens on Friday, Aug. 4, at 5 p.m., at the Dana Gallery downtown. Each artist will also present two studio paintings in the exhibition.

By **JOE NICKELL**
of the Missoulian

Trappier Peak is Trapper Peak, and Caras Park is Caras Park.

But Parvin isn't Neil Patterson.

That, in a nutshell, is what makes the annual Western Montana Paint-Out one of Missoula's most perennially popular and thought-provoking art shows.

Seeing familiar landmarks of our western Montana environs through the eyes of some of the best landscape artists in this part of the

country provides a glimpse into both the technical processes and the aesthetic perspective of those artists - while giving area art collectors an eclectic crop of canvases to covet.

"We really like to make this a diverse show," says Dudley Dana, owner of the Dana Gallery, which organizes the five days of plein-air painting and subsequent gallery exhibition. "A lot of paint-out shows focus on one particular style of artist, but I'm more interested in seeing how different artists see our landscape in different ways."

This year's group of 20 artists does indeed cover plenty of territory. Seattle-based artist Parvin is known for emotional, almost abstract renderings of western landscapes. Robert Moore's paintings are more impressionistic, often focusing simply on the play of light through leaves. Janet Sullivan is more likely to look to the skies for inspiration, often painting vast swaths of clouds with little more than a fringe of earth to anchor her compositions.

The other artists in the

show are similarly diverse, and include Greg Scheibel, R. David Wilson, **Richard Scott Morgan**, H. Steven Oiestad, Robert Schlegel, Bruce Park, Ron Ukrainetz, Nick Oberling, Neil Patterson, Ken Roth, Hadley Ferguson, Jeff Walker, Troy Collins, Loni Browning, Mary Carlton, Bob Barlow, Joe Halko and Tom English.

Dana notes that this year's Paint-Out includes several artists who have never been invited to participate before. Hadley Ferguson - best known as the painter of the "Heart of Missoula" murals affixed to the Allegra Printing building in downtown Missoula - will participate, as well as David Wilson, an artist whose work was recently featured in the Oil Painters of America 15th

annual national juried exhibition at the Dana Gallery.

"I'm really interested to see what they will do," says Dana.

For this fourth annual Paint-Out, expect more paintings of familiar Bitterroot landscapes, as the group of artists plan to spend a day painting at the Stock Farm outside Hamilton. Look also for scenes from Lindbergh Lake and other spots in the Seeley-Swan valley.

Beyond that, artists are largely left on their own, to paint where and what they will. And even if this year's exhibition brings the now-predictable flood of depictions of Trapper Peak, it's still likely that no two paintings will be remotely alike.

"What's really interesting is,

they all manage to paint those same scenes so differently," says Dana. "People may stand in the same place, and yet you'd swear the painting was done from the other side of the mountain. Somebody will paint the vista, somebody will focus on the trees."

Hopefully nobody will zero in on the smoke. Depending on which way the wind blows and whether more fires flare up, this year's Western Montana Paint-Out could potentially be the worst since the event's founding in 2003 in terms of dealing with the effects of fire.

"I guess it's a good thing that, in pictures, you can't tell the difference between fog and mist and smoke; so it sometimes adds a really nice effect," offers Dana.