

# Wally's World: The Loneliest Art Collection in Nevada

GALLERY NOTES





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Front Cover & Above Photo Credit: Interior of Wally's Shed Gallery. Photo courtesy of Deon Reynolds, 2013.

# Wally's World



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## Wally's World: The Loneliest Art Collection in Nevada

by Jim McCormick

As a glance at a road map of Nevada will reveal, the town of Eureka is not situated on, or at the intersection of, any major highways. True, this 19th century lead-mining community, which claims about 500 citizens today, is indicated by a small dot on U.S. Highway 50. A mile or so west of Eureka, Nevada State Route 278 begins a 90-mile stretch north until it connects with U.S. Interstate 80, near Carlin. Locals often use it as the most direct route to Elko to shop for provisions — 115 miles.

Eureka is located on what a writer in a 1987 issue of *Life* magazine described as “The Loneliest Road in America,” which runs a meandering east-west course across central Nevada’s ranges and wide valley floors. While this title initially was regarded unfavorably, in the intervening years numerous places and events have employed “Loneliest” in their marketing and promotions. I have chosen to use it in the title of this exhibition because the locality of Wally’s collection is relevant.

I first met Wally Cuchine in 1982, while he was serving as coordinator of a program sponsored by the Nevada Humanities Committee. Wally invited me to Hawthorne, another isolated municipality at the south end of Walker Lake, to deliver a lecture at the Mineral County Library on a subject I can no longer recall. I was an instructor in the University of Nevada, Reno Department of Art, so the title must have had the word “art” in it somewhere. In any case, Wally and I “hit it off,” as they say, and we have remained constant friends for over thirty years.





The Cuchine children 1952, East Helena, MT. Left to right Wally, Mona and Glen.

The particulars on Wally Cuchine: born on September 2, 1947 in Bozeman, Montana, to Merle and Charlie Cuchine. He has two siblings: older brother, Glen, and sister, Mona, now of Helena, with whom he remains close. For a variety of reasons, Wally's early years were difficult. Shuttled back and forth between parents and paternal grandparents, he experienced a number of

academic and personal crises until his graduation from Helena High School in 1966. That same year his parents divorced, and he left Montana.

Let's fast forward to Wally's arrival in Eureka. In the interim, he served a stint in the United States Air Force; lived for a time in Las Vegas, where he survived a calamitous motorcycle accident; and in 1979 he graduated from Sierra Nevada College, on the north shore of Lake Tahoe, with a degree in environmental science.



Sidne Teske  
*September Morning (Lost Wallet Ridge)*  
Pastel  
2004



Dennis Parks  
*Landscape Plate*  
Glazed ceramic  
Undated



Jim McCormick  
 "O' 81"  
 Etching  
 1988

Assuming the title of Eureka County Director of Facilities in 1993, Wally was placed in charge of programming at the recently restored 1880 Eureka Opera House. Until his retirement in 2011, he was responsible for booking all civic and cultural activities in the Opera House. Notable solo artists and musical groups who performed there include western balladeer Don Edwards; rodeo poet Paul Zarzyski, out of Great Falls, Montana; and popular singer-songwriter Richard Elloyan — all intended to cater to the interests of a rural constituency. At some point, I began to call Wally the “Impresario of Eureka.”



Robert Cole Caples  
 Tonopah Houses  
 Oil  
 1950



Wally in front of his 26" Argosy Travel Trailer 1987, Ely, Nevada.

Wally brought a unique pursuit with him to Eureka insofar as conservative, down-to-earth ranchers and business folks were concerned — Art. And he arrived with his *own* gallery. Beginning in 1978 with an 18' travel trailer, expanding to a 26' model after that, and finally moving his 14' x 60' Charter Mobile Home from Ely to Eureka. Wally hung art in every available nook and cranny in each of them. He collected two-dimensional works at first,

small watercolor landscapes by amateurs he had met during his Nevada Humanities Committee days. In time, he started to acquire pictures by artists who initially challenged his then rather unsophisticated aesthetic sensibilities. He also began to discover that there were artists all over Nevada, in both rural and more urban settings.



When Wally's renter vacated the large mobile home next door on Nob Hill Avenue, Wally immediately removed its interior walls and converted the entire structure into a new gallery—the Shed Gallery. He sheathed it in corrugated tin and reduced window sizes for privacy and to minimize sunlight. By the time he finished the conversion, both structures in his compound had his desired degree of anonymity.

A first time visitor to either of Wally's galleries is invariably overwhelmed. A word like plethora might come to mind as one tries to sort out the visual agglomeration. Wall to wall, floor to ceiling, on tabletops and under furniture—a seeming infinity of images that can easily muddy one's attention. It's tiring and amazing at the same time. For some reason, Wally has resisted illuminating his collection to the degree that many works reside in a subdued light that does not effectively show off their subtlety or richness of color. In places, one, two or three pieces may be displayed in close proximity, overlap—a vexing experience for some I am sure. However, visitors to this exhibit are being treated to an unimpeded view of each piece—a genuine treat!



Larry Williamson  
*Wovoka*  
Wood, bone  
2002



Barbara Prodaniuk  
*Make a Wish*  
Ceramic, bone, metal  
2005

Shirley Shaft  
*Alum Creek, Mineral County, Nevada*  
Watercolor  
1983



Max Bunnell  
*Old Ruth, Nevada Home*  
Pencil  
Undated



Ron Oden  
*McGill Depot*  
Oil  
1999



Wally during celebration, Nevada  
Northern Railway Station, East Ely,  
Nevada.

Wally estimates his collection at 1,500 to 2,000 works. Where have they all come from? His approach to acquisition has varied widely. Of course, he purchases pieces directly from artists, often in their own studios. There are galleries he haunts with fair regularity: the Artists Co-op Gallery of Reno and Charlie B Gallery in Fernley among them. He will sometimes negotiate a trade, or will purchase an expensive work only if the seller is willing

to accept payments over time. Wally is particularly proud of the fact that artists have occasionally offered him examples of their work simply because they wish to be represented in his collection. He also keeps an eye on the Internet.

A small fraction of the collection is represented in *Wally's World*. Not surprisingly, Wally can relate the provenance of virtually every piece in his two galleries. He effortlessly recalls names, dates, titles, prices and related minutia; he seems to know exactly where each work is installed at all times, on or off his premises. He also maintains detailed files on each artist whose work appears in his galleries.





Wally in front of Remington Building, Eureka, Nevada.

While preparing these Gallery Notes, it has been tempting to comment on the individual works in the show. However, I believe that the viewer's time at the *Loneliest Art Collection* can be spent best by examining the art, not reading about it. Thus, this narrative has been written primarily as a "chaser," to be savored after the show has been duly absorbed.

Still, yielding to temptation, I want

to discuss three works from the exhibit for the reader's consideration, favorites of mine deserving a second, longer look.

"Peering Into the Past, Eureka, Nevada," is an imposing watercolor by Jeff Nicholson. Unlike the landscapes in the show that explore deep space and the subtleties of atmosphere, Nicholson offers up the dense interior of an unoccupied store. Most impressive are the patterns of the building that play against the shadows that radiate from the center of the composition. It is difficult to avert one's eyes. Hypnotic!

Deftness of touch and a quiet confidence characterize Brent Perkins' 1987 watercolor, "Old Mine." His near cubistic treatment of the dilapidated buildings reveal the effects of age without the usual sentiment that accompanies such subjects. The artist's brush seems to barely reach the paper.



Jeff Nicholson  
*Peering Into the Past, Eureka, Nevada*  
Watercolor  
2008



Brent Perkins  
*Old Mine*  
Watercolor  
1987



Larry Jacox  
"E"  
Watercolor  
2002



It takes Gold Hill ceramicist-sculptor Mimi Patrick to add a needed cocked eye to the exhibit. With "Box Boy," she mixes her media (wood, shell, bone and stone) and transforms these seemingly disparate elements into a caricature of a lad who is at once earthy and goofy. One can almost see a sly smile slide across Patrick's face as she finished it.

It seems essential to this writer that the appreciation of this show hinges on the understanding that Wally Cuchine is more than just an avid collector of art. Here, we are able to sense his overwhelming desire to bring together as many Nevada artists in his two "halls" as possible. Some have called it a passion, others, a compulsion. In recent days, Wally has begun to put the skids on this disposition to amass art. The obvious shrinkage of available space has begun to trump his desire to accumulate new works. However, I think it's easy to conclude that his years of collecting have all been to the good. He has been a relentless and generous patron of Nevada artists. Gallery owners are thrilled when Wally walks through their doors. Hundreds of people have been invited to visit his galleries: artists, friends, journalists, folks on bus tours, the scholarly and the curious. Nor has Wally pushed himself to the edge of poverty. Even with the fact that he has regularly patronized Rick Davis and Jeff Nicholson's Great Basin Gallery and Frame Shop in Carson City to use their framing services, a costly investment over the long run, he has managed to keep his finances in order. No digging out of debt. No need for sacrificing the basics. Please consider this exhibition to be a primary benefit coming from his "unique pursuit."



Mimi Patrick  
*Box Boy*  
Wood, bone, stone, shell, sea creature  
1999



Wally has been asked “What’s going to happen to your collection after you die?” This query, as harsh and premature as it may sound, is relevant. Wally is quite clear in his response. He affirms that he wants the collection to remain on site in Eureka as a cultural resource to the entire state of Nevada. He occasionally reveals that he has named a relative to inherit the collection; specifics as to how the collection will be maintained after his passing have not been disclosed.

The “Impresario of Eureka” has received his share of accolades, particularly as his retirement from Eureka County drew closer: The Governor’s Art Award for Service to the Arts; the Judith Winzeler Excellence in the Humanities Award in 2011; a surprise retirement party in the Opera House attended by hundreds of admirers; a day proclaimed by Governor Sandoval as “Wally Cuchine Day.” His collection has been recognized with exhibitions at the Nevada Historical Society in Reno, St. Mary’s Art Center in Virginia City, and the Northeastern Nevada Museum in Elko. Wally and his collection of Nevada art have been the subjects of countless articles in regional and national publications including *Nevada Magazine*, *National Geographic*, *Sunset* and *Time*.

*Wally’s World: The Loneliest Art Collection in Nevada* is a testament to one individual’s tenacity in expressing his passion for art. His collection and this exhibition are a generous gift to the state he so deeply cherishes.



Sharon Maczko  
*Colin's Room*  
Transparent watercolor  
2009



James Lawrence  
*Washoe Valley Poplars 4/25*  
Lithograph  
1940





In 2011, Wally Cuchine retired as Director of the Eureka Opera House and the Eureka Sentinel Museum, and Director of Cultural Tourism and Economic Development in Eureka County. Cuchine has served on the Nevada Humanities Committee from 1995–2000 and during 2002–2008.

Cuchine's many awards include: the Nevada Arts Council Governor's Arts Award in 2011 for Leadership in the Arts: Individual, the Nevada Humanities Judith Winzeler Award for

Excellence in the Humanities in 2011, the University of Nevada Board of Regents Distinguished Nevadan Award in 2006 and Nevada Commission on Tourism Excellence in Tourism Lifetime Achievement Award.



Jim McCormick was born in Chicago, and attended the University of Tulsa where he received BA and MA degrees in art. He joined the art faculty of the University of Nevada, Reno in 1960, and offered instruction in a variety of disciplines including printmaking, drawing, papermaking and art history, prior to his retirement in 1992.

In 1989, McCormick was honored with the UNR Distinguished Teacher Award, and he received the Distinguished Faculty Award in

1998. A member of the original Nevada State Council on the Arts, the Nevada Governor's Art Award was conferred on him in 1990.

McCormick has been featured in solo and group exhibitions across the United States, including the San Francisco Museum of Art; Pratt Graphics Center, New York; Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana and Dallas Museum of Art; and, in Reno, Stremmel Gallery. His work hangs in private and corporate collections including U.S. Bank, Comstock Bank and Renown Medical Center.

McCormick has illustrated a number of books and co-authored *Brushwork Diary*, published by the University of Nevada Press and, *An Elegant Line: The Art of the Sheppard Family*, in conjunction with an exhibition at the Nevada Museum of Art.

From 1990 to 2005, McCormick directed the Nevada Art Research Project at the Nevada Historical Society, a program that documented Nevada-related artists. In that capacity, he curated several exhibitions, including "Seen About Town: The Art of Lew Hymers" and "A Reunion of Landmarks: The Paintings of Roy Powers."

- Ron Arthaud, *Late Morning, Eureka, Nevada*, Oil on canvas, 2004  
Lyle V. Ball, *It Was a Home*, Ink, Undated  
Cherlyn Bennett, *Inside the Belmont Mill*, Watercolor, 2009  
Ralph Bennett, *Belmont Mill*, Ink and watercolor, 2009  
Max Bunnell, *Old Ruth, Nevada Home*, Pencil, Undated  
Thelma Calhoun, *Nevada*, Watercolor, Undated  
Robert Cole Caples, *Tonopah Houses*, Oil, 1950  
Mary Chadwell, *Silent Vigil*, Watercolor, Late 1990  
Diane Dunn, *Nevada Roots*, Watercolor, 1994  
Ruth Hilts, *Dust Devil Country IV Nevada Vistas*, Watercolor, 2000  
Larry Jacox, "E", Watercolor, 2002  
James Lawrence, *Washoe Valley Poplars 4/25*, Lithograph, 1940  
Jean Legassick, *Fall in the Snake Range*, Oil, 2009  
Laverne Lightfoot, *Como Stamp Mill*, Oil, 1998  
Gary Link, *Looking East from Antelope Valley*, Oil on canvas board, 2005  
Barbara Maclean, *Winter Shoreline*, Oil, Undated  
Sharon Maczko, *Colin's Room*, Transparent watercolor, 2009  
Jack Malotte, *The Pyramid*, Pastel, 1993  
Jim McCormick, "Ol' 81", Etching, 1988  
Marilyn R. Melton, *Chapin-Cavanaugh Lodging Howe, Virginia City, Nevada*, Oil, 1992  
Jeff Nicholson, *Peering Into the Past, Eureka, Nevada*, Watercolor, 2008  
Ron Oden, *McGill Depot*, Oil, 1999  
Nancy Peppin, *New York Canyon, Eureka, Nevada*, Watercolor, 2000  
Brent Perkins, *Old Mine*, Watercolor, 1987  
Roy Powers, *Abandoned Gas Pumps, Smith Valley, Nevada*, Acrylic, 2003  
Shirley Shaft, *Alum Creek, Mineral County, Nevada*, Watercolor, 1983  
Annabelle Shelly, *View From Attic*, Etching, Undated  
Craig Sheppard, *Untitled*, Watercolor, 1962–1963  
Sidne Teske, *September Morning (Lost Wallet Ridge)*, Pastel, 2004  
Mary Lee Fulkerson, *Twirling Man Basket*, Rattan and found objects, 2001  
Dennis Parks, *Landscape Plate*, Glazed ceramic, Undated  
Mimi Patrick, *Box Boy*, Wood, bone, stone, shell, sea creature, 1999  
Barbara Prodaniuk, *Make a Wish*, Ceramic, bone, metal, 2005  
Wally Wallace, *Chicken*, Glazed ceramic, 2010  
Larry Williamson, *Wovoka*, Wood, bone, 2002





Photo Credit: Interior of Wally's Shed Gallery. Photo courtesy of Deon Reynolds, 2013.



Craig Sheppard  
*Untitled*  
 Watercolor  
 1962–1963



Wally Wallace  
*Chicken*  
 Glazed ceramic  
 2010

## Nevada Arts Council

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