

The state of the art is Oregon in dusky, glowing landscapes



JOHN FOYSTON/THE OREGONIAN

Dan Robinson, in his Fossil studio, also entertains at a rest home. He can spend 10 hours a day as a "studio rat."

Dan Robinson: Northwest Paintings

When: Sept. 5-29

Where: Charles A. Hartman Fine Art, 134 N.W. Eighth Ave., 503-287-3886

Artist's Reception: 5-8:30 p.m. Thursday

Web site:

www.hartmanfineart.net
www.mercurygallery.com/DanRobinson.html

Dan Robinson | The painter from Fossil, highly regarded back East, offers a rare show in Portland

By **JOHN FOYSTON**
THE OREGONIAN

Dan Robinson's Oregon landscapes are finally coming home.

For more than a decade, Robinson has been showing at Boston's Mercury Gallery, where his large paintings sell for as much as \$12,000. But he's seldom shown in Portland, where he went to college, married, lived and painted for several years before moving to the tiny Eastern Oregon town of Fossil. That changes Wednesday, when "Daniel Robinson: Northwest Paintings" opens at Charles A. Hartman Fine Art. The monthlong show features a dozen of his oils and five sepia-tone drawings.

"It's kind of bizarre that he's been showing successfully on the East Coast for several years but never had a one-man show in Portland," said Charles Hartman, "and these are very regional paintings."

They're all of that: grain elevators, powerhouses, loading docks, bridges, a tiny boat laboring through the vastness of the Columbia River Gorge. "I've always been addicted to rural scenes," Robinson said, "especially grain elevators, whose forms are so compelling and abstract."

They're beautifully rendered; Mercury Gallery director Amnon Goldman calls Robinson's

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DAN ROBINSON

Grain silos stand amid the orange light of late afternoon in a work by Dan Robinson, who's the subject of a one-man show opening at Charles A. Hartman Fine Art in Portland.

Robinson:

Quality of light a key element in the paintings

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surfaces painterly and shimmering. But craft alone doesn't explain why these scenes grab you — and why Oregon grain elevators and bridges presumably adorn many walls around Boston.

"Part of what makes his work so intriguing is the quality of light," Hartman said. "It always seems to be late afternoon and he's always working with that orange light." That's usually called the golden hour, but not here. The moody hour, maybe, or the mystery hour: His subjects hunker under vast, rarely blue skies, where haloed clouds sail through like invading spaceships. The edges are hard and blueprint-precise and the perspective is perfect. But the shadows are deep — as in an Edward Hopper painting, they suggest tumult beneath the placid surfaces, or, like the surrealist de Chirico, half-concealed mysteries.

"I don't like the term 'Surre-

al,'" said Amnon Goldman, "because it's been co-opted by Dali and others for what can be very manipulative work, but Dan is not painting the subject matter — he's starting there but going beyond to tell a story. I think he likes dusk because it obscures things; he can paint forms without getting hung up on details."

"As an art dealer, I want work that's technically excellent," said Hartman, who was a private dealer and a gallerist in San Francisco before moving to Portland a couple of years ago. "But I want it all; I want the person who has something to say. I want to love the work. I want to sell art that people want to live with, that I want on my own wall."

Goldman loved Robinson's work from the first, after another gallery owner recommended him and he saw the slides. "It was love at first sight; he's fabulous," he said. "He was every gallery owner's dream, to find this talented artist toiling in the darkness — Joseph Solman, who founded the group of New York painters called The Ten, saw Daniel's work and paid it his highest compliment, 'This is a genuine artist,' he said."

A genuine character, too, as a visit to Fossil soon reveals.

Robinson has assumed the coloration of his world, and you wouldn't pick him out from any other working stiff having a happy-hour Bud down at the Shamrock. He's compact, wiry and often unshaven; he wears work clothes, boots and a gray baseball cap always. The rough clothes aren't affectation: Robinson, 44, can chop wood, string fence and start his wife's car when the battery is dead. He stretches his own canvases using a recipe that requires sizing linen with rabbit glue and makes his own frames. He plays guitar and sings for the old folks at the rest home every week and recently for the firefighters battling the central Oregon wildfires.

His studio is an old house next to the big house that he and his wife, Melanie, bought on the hill up by the school. It's small, with paintings on the wall and several uncompleted

canvases leaning against them. Materials are scattered around, jars of brushes and tubes of paint, and several guitar cases lean at the end of a battered couch. There's a wood stove and a busted office chair now reserved for his cat Hector — a homey place, which is just as well, because Robinson can spend 10 hours a day and more there when he's in his "studio rat" phase.

"He doesn't crank them out," Goldman said, "and he has a hard time letting go. You wouldn't believe how many times he's asked me to send a painting back so he could work on it."

"He really works his paintings," Hartman said as he pondered which would hang where in his just-opened gallery. "In fact if he was here now, he'd probably be fussing with them."

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