



*James McElhinney*

# American Nocturnes

**M**aria Hajic, director of naturalism at Gerald Peters Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico, writes of James McElhinney: "In his paintings and prints, McElhinney explores the more ethereal aspects of nature glimpsed only at night, creating haunting landscapes from the Hudson River Valley to the Desert Southwest. Edges dissolve and the landscape is simplified and devoid of details. Capturing the nuances of light, color and shadow, McElhinney evokes a

mood as well as a place."

*American Nocturnes*, an exhibition of his recent work, will be shown at the gallery June 14 through July 20, featuring 15 watercolors, monoprints and intaglio prints.

In 2019, McElhinney worked with Michael Costello, master printer at Hand Graphics in Santa Fe. "I had thought about expanding my imagery from daylight landscapes to nocturnes," he says. "Working with Michael, I had the impulse to experiment with night

scenes making monoprints. Several were successful. That led me to expand the investigation further. Working with a master printer is a collaborative process. Michael is highly skilled, not just a technician. I create watercolors to explore different compositional ideas. I work with the printer in hopes that the process brings the work to a new place. It's surprising at times to see where the process takes us."

He observes, "Night is a time when few people are standing out in the landscapes



*Moonrise Pilar*,  
monoprint with  
chine colle and  
mixed media,  
13¼ x 18½ in.



*Bachelor Mountain: Headwaters of the Rio Grande*, watercolor and mixed media on paper, 5½ x 7¼ in.

making landscape paintings.” If people do stand outside at night they experience an amazing blue light that McElhinney captures in his sketchbooks, paintings and prints. The phenomenon is a result of the Purkinje effect, in which the light sensitivity of the eyes shifts to the blue end of the spectrum in low light conditions. The phenomenon is interpreted as “blue light” by the brain.

McElhinney follows in the tradition of the expeditionary artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who recorded their experience of the “new” landscapes of the West in their sketchbooks.

“Anyone will get more out of the encounters with nature if they proactively engage,” he says. “Taking photos or sketching, taking notes. Drawing and painting provide me with modes of engagement, and the means to develop sensory experience into a species of



*Elegy*, watercolor and mixed media on paper, 7 x 9 in.

knowledge that gives rise to ideas. The lands and waterways, to discover these hope is that my efforts will inspire others wonders anew, perhaps with a sketch- to explore their own homes, settlements, book in hand.”