

Ray Swanson

**Ray Swanson (b. 1937-)
Organizations: CAA, AWS**

“When you get to know people through painting them, you dig deeper than the wrinkles in their skin. You understand why they have that twinkle in their eye.” A painter of contemporary life, Ray Swanson focuses his attention on real people he has met during his journeys throughout the desert Southwest, Morocco, China and Europe.

However, Swanson is best known for his paintings of Native Americans, who he discovered in the mid-1960’s when he visited Arizona. His friendly, soft-spoken persona found a welcoming response on the Navajo, Hopi, Zuni and Apache reservations. From that time on, Swanson has documented hundreds of Indians, young and old, many of whom have become members of his extended family, painted from birth through adolescence to maturity.

In that same trip to Arizona, Swanson also began visiting the state’s working cattle ranches. Taking thousands of photographs of men at work, he transformed them into quintessential portraits of the cowboy way of life, from preparing food at the chuck wagon to roping a calf for branding.

By the mid-1980’s, it was clear to Swanson that he had to live closer to his subjects, and so he moved from California to Carefree, Arizona, where he built his studio, decorated with his personal collection of artifacts. The textures of his collection, ranging from worn leather to rusted tin and silky velvets to silver conchos, inspire Swanson, who challenges himself to convey these inherently different qualities in oil and watercolor.

Swanson’s childhood, growing up on a farm in South Dakota, colors his choice of subject matter. Hands-on farm work, grueling and yet rewarding, was the substance of his own upbringing and is a continuing theme in his paintings. He often shows Navajos caring for their flocks or processing the wool that will become a fine rug. Or he may show them weaving baskets, making piki bread or carving kachinas. His interior scenes are noted for their dramatic lighting and for the still-life compositions the artist so carefully constructs using the tools and objects used by the subject to create their product.

Swanson is a member of the Oil Painters of America, the American Watercolor Society, the National Association of Western Art, and the prestigious Cowboy Artists of America.

#21 Lufkin City Hall – 1974- Oil on board. Oil prospector and Indian guide on horseback. Snow-covered mountains in background. Brilliant Blue Sky.