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# Tom Gilleon

Altamira Fine Art, July 12-24



Altos Llanos, oil, 50 x 80.

VIBRANT COLOR is on the menu when 12 new paintings by renowned Montana artist Tom Gilleon are featured in a solo show titled *Bears and Bulls* at Altamira Fine Art. The title is taken from one of Gilleon's new paintings, a nine-panel grid depicting Native American symbols rendered in the artist's signature high-key palette. The gallery hosts an opening reception on July 12 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

*Bears and Bulls* is Gilleon's ninth show at Altamira, and gallery director Mark Tarrant couldn't be happier. "Tom is one of the most gifted and original contemporary realist artists," he says. "His compositions are always simple and direct, and

he's a master of color." Tarrant adds that the artist's uniquely spacious sensibility creates a contemporary tone: "He's not a traditional western artist."

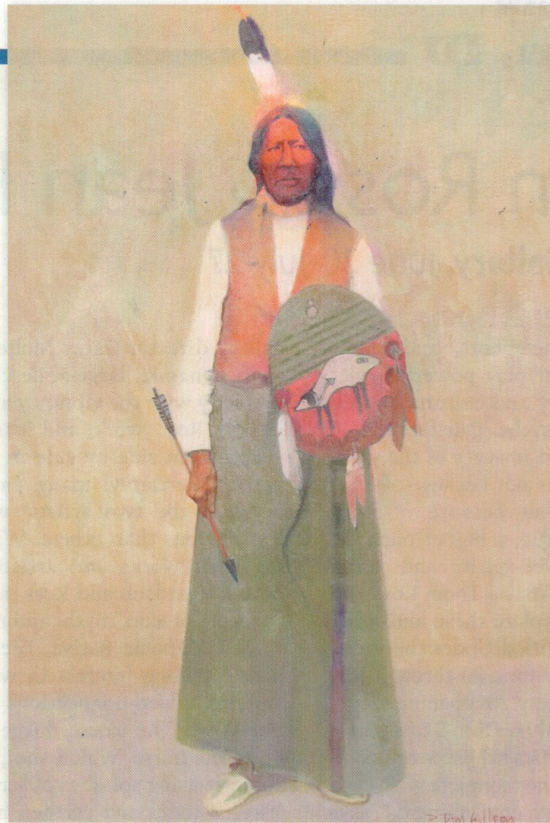
Gilleon would agree. "My work is not high detail," he explains of his brilliant, airy canvases. "It's not so much about what's in the painting but rather what *isn't*." The paintings in this show feature many of his favorite motifs, including Native American images presented in a new light. "In my teepee paintings," he observes, "you don't see meat drying, cooking utensils, old wagons, or camp animals." Instead, their power comes from a strong, minimalist spatial sense and bold color.

In two pieces in the show—*RED ARROW* and *LITTLE PLUME*—Gilleon depicts full Native figures standing in profile or facing the viewer, surrounded by planes of color. "They almost look as though they're floating," he says. "I've taken away everything that would detract from them." The absence of detail and expansive sense of space create an almost dream-like effect—an intention on the artist's part. "They have an other-worldly quality," he says. "We have enough great, traditional 'western artists.' Though I'm technically able to do a lot of detail, I choose not to."

The show's centerpiece, *BEARS AND BULLS*, recalls the iconic imagery of Andy



Little Plume, oil, 40 x 28.



Red Arrow, oil, 40 x 28.

Warhol's pop art confections. The title also reflects a play on words. "Each panel has a bison, bull, or bear," indicates Gillean. "I'm fascinated by parallel universes. In the market today, bears and bulls are an important part of our day-to-day life. Bears were not a good element for Natives, either, but bulls meant clothing and food. I see parallels between our lives and their lives."

Trained as both an architect and an illustrator, Gillean worked for years in illustration, including contract work for the Walt Disney Corporation. "There's a discipline in working in illustration," he says, and he also cites that background as a source for his intense compositional sense and daring use of color. "I'm completely visual," he adds. "I understand color and color theory. At the end of the day, you have to go with what looks right." —Mark Mussari

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Bears and Bulls, oil, 60 x 60.