

# Artist paints lands jeopardized by progress

**What:** Art by Travis Walker

**When:** Hangs through October; reception to be announced

**Where:** Betty Rock Cafe

**How much:** Free

*By Nick Donowitz*

Travis Walker may be a fresh face in the art scene around Jackson Hole, but being a newcomer has not kept his voice or his art in the shadows. After moving to the area in early May, Walker has hit the ground running. The young artist spent a brief stint waiting tables, then decided to commit to his art full time.

It appears to be paying off. Between the months of June and August, Walker has produced numerous pieces, eight in July alone. His show hangs in Betty Rock Cafe through October and will be featured throughout town at other locations later in the month.

Walker grew up in Delaware and attended a well-respected school in Virginia to study art. He and his wife then moved to Kansas City, but soon began looking for something beyond the flatlands of the Midwest.

"I wanted to move to a small mountain town," Walker said. "There is a lot of news that says Jackson is a great art town." So in May, Walker and his wife made the move here. "Everything

changed so quickly," Walker said. "So did I."

Jackson Hole may be known on the East Coast as a progressive art town, but upon his arrival Walker was not impressed. Scanning the galleries that line Town Square, even the untrained artistic eye can decipher a few common trends. "Everyone's just painting the Tetons," Walker exclaimed. He was not necessarily surprised at the common subjects painted around Jackson Hole, but was somewhat taken aback that so much emphasis was on tourism alone. "A lot of the work around [Jackson] is for tourists," Walker said. Unsatisfied, he began taking a look at different landscapes around the Jackson Hole valley, paying specific attention to those parcels of land that seemed to have been overlooked.

## Overlooking the popular

Much of his concentration has been on land that is now threatened with development. Many artists, who may be focusing on a tourist market, have concentrated their work on the most striking elements of the local landscape. Images of the Tetons, Yellowstone National Park, and the Snake River are some of main reasons tourists frequent this area. So to use those landmarks as subjects for local art seems like second nature. Walker has taken a different look at the area,

turning almost a blind artistic eye to the typical local focuses. "Grand Teton National Park isn't going anywhere," Walker said. With that view on the local landscape, Walker decided to focus on land that seemed to be in jeopardy of drastic change. "I wonder what Jackson Hole will be like in 5 years," Walker said. "I'd like to capture [the present landscape] before it's gone."

Another quiet motive of Walker's seems to be a call to attention for local citizens. His art may focus on pieces of the landscape that are threatened by development, but the paintings now hanging are not simply a recording of what once was. Under the shadow of the striking Tetons, many pieces of important and aesthetically valuable land may prove to be plots for further local growth. Walker is trying to spotlight these areas before they are gone. "There should be more of a celebration of what's around here in the galleries," Walker said. "If it's not there in a few years it will be kind of sad."

This artist may have motives that extend beyond town limits, but many of his goals lie within the confines of Jackson Hole's art community. "When they build the Arts Center in 2005 it will have a huge impact on the town," said Walker. "People will get to see art like they would in New York City." Walker is gravitating towards a local movement that seems

to be pushing the limits of art in Jackson Hole toward a greater acceptance of diversity.

## Painting feelings

Walker's style does not coincide with much of the gallery art in Jackson. He credited Edward Hopper as being an influence and spoke of the realism Hopper used to accurately represent New England Americana at that time. Walker calls himself an expressionist when pushed, but he is hesitant to adhere to a stringent label. "I don't like just saying I'm one thing," said Walker, "because that's what you end up painting for the rest of your life." He primarily used acrylic on panels to represent the downtown scenes and local landscapes in the Betty Rock collection. Walker has placed his own lens over many aspects of the Jackson Hole scenery, and in essence has added a new perspective to fixtures of the town and the surrounding land. "[This exhibit] reflects how I felt about this summer in Jackson," Walker said. "It's like taking a photograph of your feelings."

Walker will continue to display in town after the exhibit leaves Betty Rock. Snow King and the Wort Hotel will feature this new local artist in October. A date for the opening reception for Walker's exhibit will be announced soon.