



TOP "Hillside Village," oil on linen, 48 x 60 inches.
ABOVE Artist Nancy Monsman.

A Love for **Light**

Sun and shadow are the inspirations for one local landscape painter.

BY GREG BUTLER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILSON GRAHAM

The sun spills across the sky ... a billowy bunch of clouds sweeps in ... and suddenly, you see details in our neighboring mountain ranges that you've never noticed before.

Nancy Monsman's oil paintings mimic Nature's daily show, even while they take you to places you've never been before. Her soft brush strokes combine with a flowing palette of colors in a way that's ever mindful of one critical thing. "Light is, for me, the most important element in landscape painting — the direct light shapes the image and the ambient light makes the difference between a scene that is grim or alluring," she elaborates. A glimpse of her paintings gives you a sense of serenity. As you look closer, you may feel the turmoil building from the clouds that seem to be brewing above distant peaks.

Given the sense of rhythm in Monsman's work, it's no surprise that she is not only a gifted painter, but also a talented cellist. Although she has been painting for most of her life, she chose to attend college to study music, and had it not been for an accident, the world may never have seen her work.

Growing up in Hannibal, Missouri — a hilly town along the Mississippi River — she was surrounded by the raw ingredients necessary for an artist's life. The stone house she was raised in was an added attraction for the Mark Twain tourist trolley. "Summers we heard their loudspeaker blare, 'Notice the fine cottage architecture!' Eventually I did," she notes. "I've observed that the houses I like to paint echo my former home."

Monsman received a set of oils when she

was nine years old and quickly took to her new hobby. Although there wasn't much artwork around her, the surrounding scenery more than compensated for inspiration. When it came time to pursue a higher education, however, her love of music won out and became her course of study at Northwestern University. After graduation, she joined the cello section of the North Carolina Symphony. She settled down with her husband and had three children, which only left enough time to sketch quick images of them playing.

One day on the way to an ice rink with her daughter, Monsman slipped and broke both wrists. What could have been a devastating accident brought her the free time to rediscover her passion for art. "It was thrilling to paint again — it was hard to stop, even to eat," she reveals. When her wrists healed, she resumed playing cello, but allowed herself time to paint on the side.

Eventually, Monsman and her family relocated to Tucson where her husband joined the English department at The University of Arizona and Nancy began post-graduate work in studio art. She became inspired by several artists at the university, crediting a majority of her inspiration to landscape painter Bruce McGrew. Often while she is out hiking with her dog she finds something to spur her imagination.

"An artist paints what most keenly captures his attention, and for me that is landscapes," she says. "They are so amazingly varied in Arizona. I am also drawn to the wonderful adobe houses found in the Southwest, so I often incorporate these into the overall image. I love eroded hills — the shadows are



magnificent. I admire the skies here, especially at the moment the 'earth's shadow' effect occurs opposite the sunset. If you're going to paint," she sums up, "this is the place to be."

Nancy Monsman's artwork is on display at the Steinway Gallery in Tucson and Victoria Boyce Gallery, Scottsdale. **HG**

For more information, see The Source on page 44.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT "Ocotillos Near Redington," oil on linen, 31 x 47 inches; "Afternoon Rays," oil on linen, 30 x 36 inches; "Lost Hills," oil on linen, 22 x 30 inches.

