



Rebel Spirit

Ahead of a new solo show, Greg Overton reflects on his punk roots, his art career and what he values most.

By Alyssa M. Tidwell



Above: Utah-based artist Greg Overton; Opposite page: *The Peacemaker*, oil on canvas, 78 x 62 in.

Dive bar fights. Drugs. Alcohol. Dilapidated apartments. Loud music dominated by power chords and off-tune vocals. A general disdain for authority. A life free of the constraints of the status quo. These aren't the kinds of things you usually imagine when thinking about Utah, but that contrast is exactly what made the '80s and '90s Salt Lake City punk scene stand out. (Writer and director James Merendino even made a film about it.)

In his youth, SLC-based Western artist Greg Overton took a stage dive headfirst into that wild world of anarchy, underground music and parties that lasted until 5 a.m. He got into trouble and hung out with seedy crowds, marked by their nonconformity. He was even friends with iconic punk figures like Sean Fightmaster.

"It was a real tight-knit scene. You knew everyone who was into it," says Overton. "You had to pay for it, too. I got locked up as a kid. I got my ass whooped a few times. That was the price of rebellion back then. It was real. But just good stories now." Born in 1970, Overton has been creating art since he was a kid, but first started making an earning off it doing tattoos and artwork for punk bands in his 20s. Salt Lake is also known for its haunted houses, which Overton worked on extensively in his mid 20s and early 30s. "I was the 'King of Haunted Houses' in the SLC area," he says, adding that he worked on Rocky Point Haunted House, at one point the number one haunted house in the world.

Today, Overton is known for his striking portraits of Native Americans, some real life people and others the artist has crafted from imagination. Featuring bold colors against stark white backdrops, his

paintings often feature subjects clad in traditional regalia, faces dripping with war paint.

And despite Overton's punk beginnings, the leap to oil paintings of Native Americans isn't a big one. When you really think about it, it's not much of a leap at all. He's been hanging out on reservations his entire life, getting to know the people who live there and connecting to a shared sense of otherness—a deviation from the norm. The antithesis to straight-edge ideals, Overton was never meant to just sit quietly. "[One time], I was hanging out with...a group of Apaches, drinking and smoking, and they said to me, 'You don't seem like you're freaked out to be here,'" he reflects. "It's just amazing some of the people you meet. [You get stories] you couldn't get in the history books."

The artist went to his first powwow in 1990 and was hooked the moment



The Enemy Fears His Horses, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 in.

he heard that rhythmic, traditional drumming. “This is how they keep their traditions and culture alive,” he says. Overton’s process involves working directly with Indigenous models and experts who tell him stories firsthand. Often, he works closely with acclaimed Alaskan Tlingit/Cherokee photographer Zoë Urness.

“You have to read a lot of basic history, Native history, reservation history and history straight from the horse’s mouth,

and then triangulate all of it,” he adds.

As a kid, Overton would pore over books like *Fighting Indians of the West*, which had pictures of Sitting Bull, Red Cloud and Dull Knife, completely absorbed with the warrior spirit. “[Native American culture is] something I’ve been completely obsessed with since I was a kid. My toys were bows and arrows, and I wore moccasins around the neighborhood and got made fun of,” he says, laughing. In fourth grade,

Overton won an art contest for a painting of Dull Knife and told his mom he’d become a professional artist some day.

That vision has come full circle with a new one-man exhibition at Trailside Galleries, where Overton will be showing the second portrait he’s ever created of Dull Knife. The show also features a massive 78-by-62-inch painting called *The Peacemaker*, depicting an elder chief in an elaborate headdress holding a peacepipe. If you look closely, you’ll



Her Voice Shakes the Mountain, oil on canvas, 54 x 60 in.

notice the figure is wearing an Earth pendant around his neck.

"I want to cast a spell on the world with peace. That's what this whole show is about: the Warrior's Wisdom," says Overton. "I know war and violence." He's been a bar bouncer, he's had a gun pulled on him. "Everything you do to

others, you do to yourself. Everything you do to the earth, you do to yourself... We need balance and harmony... That's the message I want to send with my art. People say that art can't change the world, but what else can? I'm an old elder now; I'm the peacemaker."

A lifelong martial artist, Overton

credits his study of Brazilian jiu-jitsu, Russian sambo and Thai boxing as catalysts for his growth as both an artist and a human being. "I was hanging out with all the punks as a kid, and martial arts got me down the path of discipline, doing things for the long term. I got serious with it at about age



Roman Nose, oil on canvas, 52 x 56 in.



Kills Plenty, oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in.



Crazy Horse, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 in.



Wolf Shadow, oil on canvas, 56 x 54 in.



Holy Eagle Runs Into the Wind, oil on canvas, 64 x 78 in.

19...That's what's helped me overcome all of the adversity and get as far along as I have in my art career."

Overton is turning 55 this year, but he still skateboards, snowboards and kick-boxes. In addition to his portrait paintings, his website also has a skateboard shop where he creates custom deck designs, which ship all over the world. "I want to inspire the next generation too...I think my art is kind of different. It resonates with younger audiences," he says.

And while Overton has achieved the kind of success that warrants selling

strictly originals, he offers prints of all of his artwork so that it's accessible for everyone. (Side note: Post Malone has purchased about 300 Overton prints, including every skateboard print, every metal print and about half the originals in his last Trailside Galleries show.)

"I want to do my part to show what's cool about Western art to the next generation," he says. "Look, this is what's cool about being human. Same with punk rock. It's not this glitzy glamorous, 'only the most talented people can do this.' It's about [showing] your soul. You just have to find what your

voice is and say it, and it's going to resonate with the people who get you. It's up to them."

The Warrior's Wisdom will be presented online on Trailside Galleries' website from August 1 to 31 and features eight brand new, large-scale paintings. 🐾

The Warrior's Wisdom

August 1-31, 2025

Trailside Galleries

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