

## ABOUT THE PAINTINGS

By Erin Hanson

This collection of National Park paintings has been in the process of creation since I was a young girl growing up in Los Angeles. When I was a child, I would look forward eagerly every year to escaping the ordinary routine of city life and exploring the great outdoors. I remember laying on my back under these impossibly tall pine trees, after hiking all day to reach a forested peak in the Angeles Crest National Forest.

All I could hear was the surprisingly loud and changing melody of the wind moving through the pine boughs. I was only one day away from my concrete-lined home life, but it felt like an entirely different world.

The National Parks and other protected lands have been a source of artistic inspiration for me ever since. I have always considered landscapes to be the most beautiful thing I could paint, from stark mountain peaks to dramatic canyons. Exploring these landscapes for a few days' backpacking or camping trip would be something I would plan for months in advance, and as soon as it was over I would eagerly begin planning the next escape. I have always enjoyed the physical exertion that let me attain amazing mountain heights and views that only the most adventurous could achieve. After college, I began rock climbing in Red Rock Canyon, Nevada, and I became inspired anew to pursue a career as an artist. I wanted others to experience the magic I felt from these dramatic landscapes.

When I was invited to show my paintings at the St. George Art Museum, I was delighted at the opportunity to share with the world my vision of the National Parks, up close and personal. I love the intense, saturated colors I see at dawn and sunset, and many of my paintings are re-imagined creations of those times of day. I use vivid colors to excite the imagination, allowing viewers to explore their own experiences and dreams of the wide outdoors. My thick, chunky style of laying on paint strokes has an impressionistic feel that makes you want to reach out and touch the canvas. I want my paintings to be as alive and vibrant as the scenery that inspired them.

This collection of oil paintings is drawn exclusively from rock climbing, hiking, and backpacking trips I have done throughout the Western states. I plan several trips every year to explore and re-explore my favorite parks, including Joshua Tree, Zion, Bryce, Cedar Breaks, Canyon de Chelly, Monument Valley, Arches, Canyonlands, and all the beautiful Parks in between. No matter how many times I have been to a National Park, every morning when I wake up in the campground or in a bivy sack at a backcountry camping spot, I feel a complete sense of joy and overwhelming awe of my surroundings. I return from each trip with thousands of photos that I use to try to re-capture these moments of peace and beauty on the canvas.

I am always impressed at how well the National Park Service maintains the trails in the little-traveled lands I love to hike. I marvel at the way the earth is cut and fortified to create an easy-to-walk path. I especially like the way artistic boulders and fallen tree trunks are used to build up and protect the hiking trails, complementing the natural beauty surrounding the trail. The trails have minimal impact on the environment, while making it safe for millions of people to travel through these parks every year.

Recently I did a 50-mile backpacking trip from Kolob Canyon to the East Gate of Zion National Park. On the fifth and last day of the journey, it snowed on us all day long. The trail led us through some impossibly steep cliffs, showing us dramatic views that only a mountain goat should be able to see. The steep and narrow switchbacks were cut out of the sandstone cliffs like a geometric staircase, sometimes only a few feet wide. Even in the snowy and slippery conditions I was hiking in, I felt completely confident in the trail before me, and the beautiful staircase-shape of the trail inspired the painting *First Snow*, included in this collection.



Without the National Park Service, I would never have been able to see these beautiful and dramatic views of our country's natural landscape. I will continue to paint the National Parks for the rest of my life, and I hope my paintings inspire you to visit your favorite Park this year.

-- Erin Hanson

(left) Erin Hanson on a trans-Zion backpacking trip with her brothers.

