

SILVER SCREEN INSPIRATIONS

Local artists find their muse at the movies.

By Richard Chang and Laguna Beach Magazine Staff

CLIFF WASSMANN



"Approaching Storm" by Cliff Wassmann

CAPTURING THE FORCE

Laguna Beach oil painter and photographer Cliff Wassmann has found his artistic inspiration in both the natural and fictional worlds. An officially licensed artist for the "Star Wars" franchise, Wassmann paints original scenes inspired by the visually captivating blockbuster sci-fi film series.

It's not a bad gig for a "Star Wars" fanatic, who saw the original 1977 movie on the first afternoon it was released in theaters. His love for the films has not dissipated in recent years, as he also saw "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" on the first day of release in December 2015.

"I love all science fiction, but 'Star Wars' was really something different when it came out," says the 57-year-old artist from his studio, gallery and home on Ocean Avenue. "And 'The Empire Strikes Back' especially was a great film."

The artist drew inspiration from the opening scenes of "Empire" in two of his paintings,

CLIFF WASSMANN FINE ARTS

419 Ocean Ave.

949-291-6718; artseek.com

"Approaching Storm" and "Attack on Hoth." He depicts the gigantic AT-ATs (All Terrain Armored Transports) preparing for battle on the icy planet of Hoth, where the rebels are holed up.

A third painting, "Escape from Cloud City," also borrows from "Empire," portraying bounty hunter Boba Fett fleeing Cloud City after Han Solo is captured. One new work, "Jakku," captures an AT-ST (All Terrain Scout Transport) patrolling an orange and red rock canyon, similar to the terrain found on the desert planet of Jakku in the newest movie.

"You actually see the remains of these things on that planet that are leftover from a previous battle," says Wassmann, who started the painting

before "The Force Awakens" was released. "It was so surprising to see the ruins [of AT-ATs] in the new movie. I kind of predicted it."

An exhibitor at Sawdust Art Festival for seven years and Festival of Arts for more than 20 years, Wassmann also does landscape photography and painting. It was actually an earlier series of Antarctica paintings that caught the attention of representatives from Acme Archives Direct, a licensee of LucasFilm, at an art expo in New York.

Wassmann gets permission from Acme Archives to create his "Star Wars"-inspired paintings and giclee prints, which he sells with a certificate of authenticity. His works have sold at Comic-Con, galleries and other big sci-fi gatherings where new and old "Star Wars" fans congregate.

"I'll definitely continue doing these for a while, see if there's a good market for it," he says. "You could go on and on with these things. The details are very important to people."

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