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Contact: Heidi Hagemeyer, Arts & Culture Communications Coordinator, 971-518-0966,
Heidi.Hagemeyer@biz.oregon.gov

Art in the Governor's Office Presents Painter and Printmaker Erik Sandgren

The 2026 art exhibition series continues with the work of Erik Sandgren, who explores the Pacific Northwest landscape through the lenses of myth and history

SALEM, Oregon — The Office of the Governor, in partnership with the Oregon Arts Commission, will open the second exhibition in the 2026 Art in the Governor's Office series on Friday, July 17, featuring the work of Oregon-born painter and printmaker Erik Sandgren. His work will be on display in the Governor's Gallery (formerly the Ceremonial Office reception room) through October 8.

Art in the Governor's Office brings the works of some of Oregon's most distinguished artists to the state Capitol. This longstanding tradition, which began in 1975 and celebrates the diverse creativity of Oregon's professional visual artists, relaunched this year following a pause due to the pandemic and the restoration of the Capitol building. The 2026 series opened with an exhibition by photographer Harrison Branch and continues with Sandgren's paintings and prints.

Throughout his career working across many media, Sandgren has explored the Northwest landscape as a witness sensitive to myth and history. His large-scale murals, paintings and prints are held in private and public collections as diverse as the Maryhill Museum of Art and the Yale University Art Gallery.

"We're delighted to continue showcasing some of Oregon's most accomplished artists through Art in the Governor's Office," Oregon First Lady Aimee Kotek Wilson said. "Art provides inspiration, sparks conversation and helps tell the stories of who we are. And through our next artist, Erik Sandgren, visitors to the Capitol will encounter dynamic interpretations of some of our state's most iconic landscapes."

Sandgren's Art in the Governor's Office exhibition is titled *Oregon: The Figured Landscape*. The selection for the exhibition demonstrates the breadth of Erik Sandgren's practice through a compelling survey of Oregon's diverse landscapes, showing his ability to move fluidly between iconic landmarks, working waterfronts, intimate industrial scenes and lush interior environments. While each painting is rooted in a specific place, together they transcend documentation, becoming meditations on the ways people experience and shape the Oregon landscape.

Born in 1952, Sandgren grew up in Corvallis near Oregon State University, where his father, noted painter and OSU art professor Nelson Sandgren, filled the family household with a visual culture that shaped Erik's early education as a painter and printmaker. He studied at Yale (Bachelor's, 1975) and Cornell (Master of Fine Arts, 1977), expanding his painting and printmaking under mentors Bernard Chaet, Gretna Campbell and Erwin Hauer. He returned to the Pacific Northwest in 1989, "[the headwaters of his art and early life](#)," drawn by the raw nature of a vivid landscape.

"I hope viewers in that space will sense the dynamics of movement in my work – of the landscape as animate," Sandgren said. "I call this, for myself, the Deep Northwest – a feeling that our awareness of the living, working landscape enlarges any single view or moment. Focus on the most local can become the most universal experience. My long familiarity with the Pacific Northwest allows each painting of a representative site to be observed, remembered and imagined."

In Aberdeen, Washington, Sandgren served as a one-person art department at Grays Harbor College from 1989 through 2017. Several sabbaticals and the Fulbright program allowed him to teach and pursue artist residencies in England and France, which deepened his firsthand knowledge of history, Western art and architecture.

His work is represented in numerous collections, including the Franklin Furnace Gallery of the Museum of Modern Art, the China National Academy of Fine Art in Hangzhou, the University of Oregon Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art and the Hallie Ford Museum. His large-scale public projects include two notable murals: the 4,600-square-foot mural of Oregon landscapes he created with his father at the Eugene Airport in 1989 and the Centennial Project mural for the Port of Grays Harbor's Commission Room, commemorating a century of marine commerce.

"The Capitol Rotunda is exactly astride a striking north-south axis," Sandgren said. "I am honored to be there, included as one point on that axis of Oregon's evolving history, art and social self-images."

Upcoming 2026 Exhibition

Following the exhibition by Erik Sandgren, the Governor's Office will share the work of Nancy Watterson Scharf from October 9 through December 31. Scharf is based in the Southern Oregon coast range. Her acrylic paintings provide a "voice for nature," investigating the complex relationship between humans, animals and the ecosystems they share.

Public Access

The Governor's Gallery is viewable most Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Visitation information is available at 503-986-1388.

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The [Art in the Governor's Office Program](#) honors selected artists in Oregon with exhibitions in the Governor's Gallery in the state Capitol. Artists are nominated by a statewide committee of arts professionals who consider artists representing the breadth and diversity of artistic practice

across Oregon, and who are then selected by the Oregon Arts Commission with the participation of the Governor's Office. Only professional, living Oregon artists are considered, and an exhibition in the Governor's Office is considered a once-in-a-lifetime honor. Artists whose work has previously been shown in the Governor's Office include Henk Pander, Michele Russo, Manuel Izquierdo, James Lavadour, Margot Thompson, Gordon Gilkey and Yuji Hiratsuka.

The [Oregon Arts Commission](#) provides leadership, arts programs and funding for nonprofits and artists through its grants, special initiatives and services. Commissioners appointed by the Governor establish policies and provide advisory support for public investment in the arts. The Arts Commission is part of Business Oregon in recognition of the vital role the arts play in supporting the economies, educational opportunities and vibrancy of communities throughout the state.

The Oregon Arts Commission is supported with funds appropriated by the Oregon Legislature, as well as by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Oregon Cultural Trust. Learn more at oregonartscommission.org and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).