Aspen Art Museum

637 East Hyman Avenue
Aspen, Colorado 81611
aspenartmuseum.org
(970) 925-8050

Hours
Tuesday–Sunday, 10 AM–6 PM
Closed Mondays

Admission to the AAM is free courtesy of Amy and John Phelan.

March 22–May 31, 2026

Keith Mayerson: My American Dream (Rocky Mountain High)

This exhibition is dedicated to Lois Mayerson, Keith Mayerson's mother.

Keith Mayerson: *My American Dream (Rocky Mountain High)* is curated by Simone Krug, Curator, and Daniel Merritt, Chief Curator.

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and pioneer Bill C. Brown), Mayerson brings it to life in a manner reminiscent of some of the visionary landscapes of the early Hudson River School. Transforming the poster into a textured version of these map worlds that skiers might use to plan their next runs, the poster becomes a beckoning dream of contemporary travelers and joy seekers yearning to explore nature.

16. *Aspen Panorama*, 2025
Oil on linen, 40 × 130 in.

Juxtaposed with the 1980 simulacra version of the four mountains, *Aspen Panorama* is based on a contemporary aerial photograph that Mayerson saw in the Aspen Mountain ticket office. Here, he reinterprets the landscape with a nod to Cézanne and modernist visionary painterly depictions of mountains and nature. Like Cezanne when he painted his beloved Mont Sainte-Victoire, Mayerson likewise meditates on painting, projecting his subconscious onto the visual maps of his landscapes, with the aim of opening up the world of the painting beyond the geography itself and into sublime visions of nature. In the painterly complexity of the panoramic image, Mayerson not only depicts a contemporary view of the real Aspen region, but also a liminal space of finding oneself in the wanderlust of the world.

17. *View from Aspen Mountain*, 2026
Oil on linen, 46 × 70 in.

18. *View from Buttermilk*, 2026
Oil on linen, 46 × 62 in.

19. *View from Snowmass*, 2026
Oil on linen, 46 × 70 in.

20. *Stairway to Heaven: Highlands Peak*, 2026
Oil on linen, 65 × 60 in.

21. *Highlands Vista*, 2026
Oil on linen, 60 × 80 in.

These five works are painted from photographs Mayerson took on a 2025 Aspen site visit. The scenes are reminiscent of German Romantic painter Casper David Friedrich's meditative, deeply spiritual portrayals of the natural world. The artist likens this wall to a Japanese seasonal screen representing winter— the final stage of life—informed by the recent loss of his mother and a profound concern for the state of the world and the nation.

22. *Earth Snoopy*, 2026
Acrylic on wood and steel, 48 × 49 × 18 in.

Earth Snoopy, one of the first sculptures created by the artist, reflects peace through turbulent times. In this show, Snoopy acts as a conduit, traveler, or pilgrim. The artist painted Snoopy with stars in his eyes and his being constituted by the celestial heavens, his puffy jacket painted in the two sides of Google Earth, the Northern Hemisphere with North America, and the sun in his hat, the other with the Eastern Hemisphere with the moon in his hat. Placed between landscapes, Snoopy appears to step out of the landscape from the heavens.

The works in the alcove depict a trio of celebrities who loved Aspen. The notion of music and art united with community comes to the fore in the spirit of the Aspen Idea.

23. *Diana Ross Skiing in Aspen*, 2026
Oil on linen, 10 × 6¾ in.

24. *Andy Warhol, Mountain Man, New Year's, Aspen 1982–83 (After Mark Sink)*, 2026
Oil on linen, 10 × 6¾ in.

25. "*Lady Day" at the Onion Wintersköl, 1952 (Billie Holiday)*, 2026
Oil on linen, 35 × 28 in.
Reference photography Patrick Henry

26. *Copper Mountain Ski Passes, 1981-83 (from when the artist was ages 15–16)*, 2026
Oil on linen, 7½ × 7 in.

The artist grew up skiing every weekend at Copper Mountain, Colorado. This work reproduces his "coming of age" in the mountains, serving as a signature for this deeply personal exhibition.

Keith Mayerson (b. 1966, Cincinnati, Ohio) lives and works in Riverside, CA. He studied Semiotics and Studio Art at Brown University in the 1980s and received an MFA from University of California, Irvine. He is a tenured professor of art at the Roski School of Art and Design at the University of Southern California, where he has also created a visual narrative art program. Mayerson's work can be found in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, Los Angeles; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Santa Barbara Museum of Art, California; Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio; Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia; American University Museum of Art, Washington, DC; Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Massachusetts; UC Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, California; RISD Museum, Providence, Rhode Island; Fairfield University Museum, Connecticut; Rennie Museum, Vancouver; and the Institute of Contemporary Art Miami. His graphic novel *Horror Hospital Unplugged*, made with the writer Dennis Cooper, was published in 1996 by Juno Books. Mayerson is currently creating a graphic-novel biography of James Dean to be published by Fantagraphics, and was co-editor of the 2024 *Frank Johnson: Secret Pioneer of American Comics Vol. 1*, from the same publisher.

8. *Fourth of July, Aspen, Colorado, 1971 (After Henri Cartier-Bresson)*, 2025
Oil on linen, 28 × 42 in.

While painting this work, Mayerson researched photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson's compositions and influence. The artist also read books about this Aspen era, with a focus on the confluence of hippies and their preserve in the utopic Aspen area. He also listened to popular music of 1971. The artist considers this group's specific politics and how its beliefs play into an extension of the Aspen Idea, as he aspires to bring the black-and-white original image to new life in color and synaesthetic resonance, in an effort to honor the perpetual spirit of Aspen bohemian life.

9. *Peanuts Aspen Highlands*, 2025
Oil on linen, 58 × 40 in.
Private collection, Aspen

This painting merges a famous 1967 Aspen ski poster with the artist's beloved *Peanuts* characters. The artist has taught comics at various universities for decades, and sees anthropomorphized animals and simplified comic figures as the ultimate icons that people can relate to. For this work, Mayerson inserts an image of Charlie Brown and Snoopy taken from a vintage story collection. This particular cover was not drawn by *Peanuts* illustrator Charles M. Schultz, but was approved by him. As such, the artist appropriates images on multiple levels—from the Aspen ski advertisement poster, to the *Peanuts* image that is itself a copy, to bring about a renewed feeling of a time when skiing was a new national fad and the *Peanuts* gang were at their height of influence.

10. *Hunter S. Thompson, 1990 (After Paul Harris)*, 2025
Oil on linen, 26⅛ × 39⅛ in.

American journalist and author Hunter S. Thompson lived in Aspen's Woody Creek community from 1967 until his death in 2005. A pioneer of "gonzo journalism," a style that incorporates first-person narrative, Thompson is also renowned in Aspen lore for his anti-establishment 1970 run for sheriff of Aspen and the surrounding Pitkin County area. Thompson was an early influence for Mayerson, who paints him ruminating in his cluttered cabin workplace. To create this work, the artist immersed himself in Hunter S. Thompson's world—listening to his books in chronological order, as well as interviews, films, and documentaries—while reflecting on his singular moral compass and the far-reaching impact of his transgressive writing on society and popular culture.

11. *John Denver and the Muppets: Rocky Mountain Holiday*, 2025
Oil on linen, 70⅛ × 70 in.

This 1983 album cover (from an original 1983 television special), sited in Aspen's renowned Maroon Bells scenery, imbeds renowned fictional and real pop-cultural figures directly into the Aspen landscape. Mayerson's source material almost reads as his own fabricated composite. This painting indicates a way to travel toward that time and place.

Here, Mayerson commemorates John Denver, one of Aspen's most iconic residents, celebrated for his gentle folk-pop music, environmental advocacy through the Windstar Foundation, and global message of peace. The Muppets, created by Jim Henson, likewise fostered joy, community, and compassion—values that deeply influenced both Mayerson and the American cultural imagination. Here, appearing clockwise from Denver, are Fozzie Bear, Floyd Pepper, Janice, Kermit the Frog, Animal, Rizzo the Rat, Camilla the Chicken, Gonzo, Scooter, Rowlf the Dog, and Robin, Kermit's cousin, on Denver's knee.

12. *Fire on the Mountain: The Grateful Dead at Red Rocks (Premiere Performance, July 7, 1978)*, 2025
Oil on linen, 46 × 64 in.
Collection of David Kordansky and Mindy Shapero, Los Angeles

The Grateful Dead and the Deadhead community assume an unconventional place in rock music counterculture, which is a prime subject for Mayerson. The artist cites one of his pinnacles as coming of age at Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Southwest Denver, where the Grateful Dead play their inaugural show at this venue in his painting. Growing up, Mayerson's access to culture was through comics and music, so this painting takes on great personal significance. Here, he aims to capture the essence of the Dead's greatness, considering their idea of listening to one another to create cosmological music that is a performance for a spiritual communal happening.

13. *10th Mountain Division*, 2025
Oil on linen, 30 × 38 in.

This image, derived from a black-and-white photograph, shows the 10th Mountain Division pioneers—the 87th Mountain Infantry Battalion—training in the US in 1941. This cohort formed a deep brotherhood, training in harsh conditions near Aspen at Camp Hale and in Texas before deploying. In 1945, they helped dislodge German forces by launching surprise night attacks on Riva Ridge and Mount Belvedere in Italy's Northern Apennines, enabling an Allied advance and continuing to fight successfully.

After the war, the surviving soldiers maintained their brotherhood and sense of purpose, striving to "make the world a better place" and to share their love of the outdoors. Veterans like Friedl Pfeifer and Percy Rideout helped found Aspen, envisioning it as an American version of the Swiss Alps, and members of the division went on to found, manage, or instruct at more than sixty US ski resorts, helping to build the modern American ski industry.

14. *Mayerson Ski Clan Family, 1977*, 2025
Oil on linen, 36¼ × 50⅛ in.

This full family portrait shows Mayerson's immediate family at Copper Mountain, where they skied each weekend. For the artist, the work commemorates a winter when his sister worked on the mountain as a ski instructor and patroller. This photograph on which this painting is based also became the family Christmas card that year, and holds particular significance for the artist.

15. *Aspen Poster, Bill C. Brown, 1980*, 2025
Oil on linen, 40 × 62 in.
Kenneth C. Griffin Collection

This 1980 poster hung in many of the bedrooms and condos of Mayerson's youth. Inspired by the blue-sky idealized utopias of painted ski maps and this poster (first created by ski map master

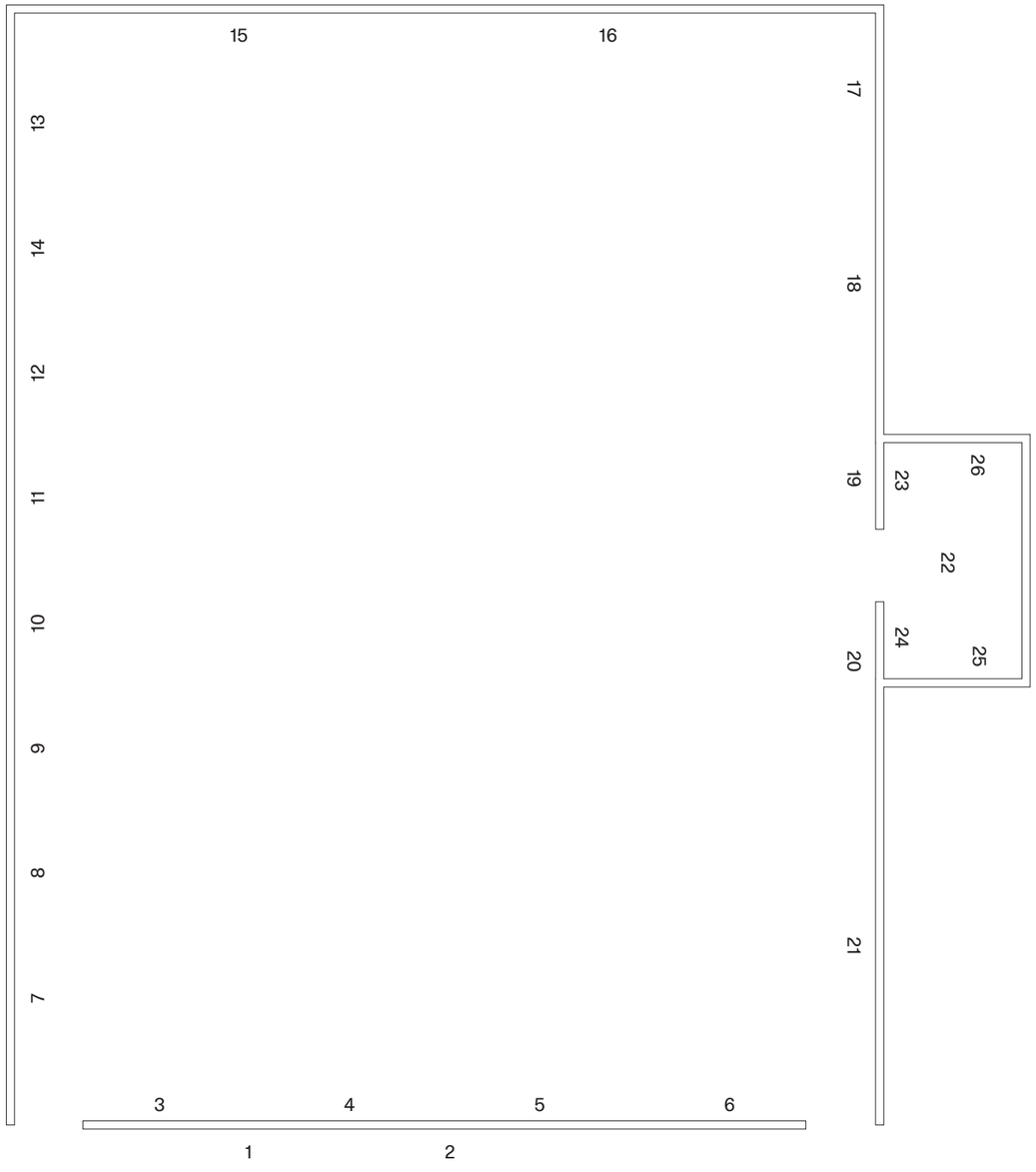
Hippies, rock bands, mountain warfare military units, and beloved comic strip characters converge in Keith Mayerson's *My American Dream (Rocky Mountain High)*. For over two decades, Denver-raised Mayerson (b. 1966, Cincinnati, OH) has turned his focus to the cultural heritage and folklore of the United States, scrutinizing the visual symbolism of Americana. The artist's paintings immerse viewers in the media culture, political history, and pop icons that characterize his perception of the world. His decade-spanning project, titled *My American Dream*, is equal parts pop and personal, juxtaposing paintings of family photographs with those of both little-known histories and mainstream visual culture.

Aspen Art Museum presents the latest chapter of *My American Dream*, composed of all new paintings, focused on Aspen and its idiosyncratic identity and underground, avant-garde pasts. Mayerson's *Rocky Mountain High* pays tribute to his childhood in 1970s suburban Denver and his impressions of Aspen and the mountain towns he visited as a teenager. The Aspen Idea, a concept formed by Aspen's founders in the postwar era to unite mind, body, and spirit for individual and collective betterment, looms large within the exhibition.

Community and family are central to the Aspen Idea, and many works explore the utopian idealism that colored Mayerson's upbringing, apparent in a painting of long-haired youths in front of Aspen's famed Jerome Hotel, modeled after a 1971 photograph by Henri Cartier-Bresson. Elsewhere in the exhibition, country folk singer John Denver serenades the Muppets at the base of Aspen's iconic Maroon Bells, the Grateful Dead play their inaugural show at Red Rocks, and the 10th Mountain Division assemble by a scenic slope. On another canvas, Charlie Brown, Snoopy, and the gang ice-skate under a galactic canopy.

Mayerson's images narrate a celebratory, wistful time capsule of this pocket of the world. The artist appropriates the aesthetic of a famed Aspen ski map poster from 1980, presenting this familiar panorama anew. Throughout the exhibition, he lingers on landscape as subject more broadly, transitioning out from these depictions of Aspen's ski mountains in varied ways. Many works are painted from his own photographs shot last year from the tops of Aspen's ski mountains. Across these majestic vistas, the sublime unfolds.

The accretion of Mayerson's memories, both legible and unfamiliar, forms an antidote to a world inundated with images. These analog moments, long ago erased, still allude to a present rendered by Mayerson's vivid, polychromatic brushstrokes. Each character fits into their own imaginary, forming an autobiographical yet spectral vision of Colorado's *My American Dream (Rocky Mountain High)*.



List of works

1. *Rocky Mountain National Park*, 2024
Oil on linen, 60 × 90 in.

The exhibition opens with an iconic image of the American West, a lush mountain vista and sunny horizon that speak to Keith Mayerson's deep love of Colorado. He grew up in the nearby suburbs of Denver and, in this show, presents various memories of the region that tap into its surreal, nostalgic qualities. This image of a great vista one might see as one heads farther into the mountains from Denver, is framed with the "iris shot" lens to open the peaks, like a scene in an old movie. The artist taps into the metaphoric power of these images, mapping his own reading of Aspen. In so doing, Mayerson takes his viewer on a journey based on juxtapositions of images that culminate in a greater nonlinear narrative about what it is to be hopeful for our country and world, inspired by this place.

2. *Picnic in the Aspen Grove with Mom, at the Old Cemetery in Central City, CO, Fall 1972*, 2025
Oil on linen, 27 × 40 in.

This family portrait of Mayerson as a child lounging in an aspen grove with his mother and his sister is painted from an old family photograph taken by his father. The image of the family matriarch takes on expanded meaning after his mother's passing this past fall. It was painted in their home as a memento mori to her life.

3. *Smuggler Mine, Aspen, 1908*, 2026
Oil on linen, 40 × 68 in.

Mayerson's research into Aspen's eccentric histories led him to old photographs, postcards—where he first encountered this image (postmarked 1908)—as well as and records from the Aspen Historical Society archives. There, he located the original 1895 panoramic photograph, which he examined in greater detail while still cropping it to echo the postcard to reflect the popular interest in Aspen and mining in that era. Before Aspen was a renowned site of culture and recreation in the postwar era, the town was home to a booming silver mining infrastructure. Smuggler Mine, depicted here from a 1908 postcard, remains the oldest operating silver mine in the region. The largest silver nugget was discovered here in 1894, shortly after the Silver Panic of 1893.

4. *The Silver Queen of Aspen Over Buttermilk, 1893/2026*, 2026
Oil on linen, 35 × 28 in.

The artist is captivated by the chronicles of Aspen's rich mining history and illustrious lore. No tale is as astounding as the Silver Queen of Aspen sculpture, constructed in 1892 with funds from local Aspen citizens to promote the monetary standard of silver against gold just before the government repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, bringing an end to the boom. The 18-feet sculpture depicted a woman in a chariot flanked by the Greek god of wealth, Plutus, as cherub twins, one representing silver, the other gold. The figurine traveled to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair to promote the silver cause, only to be mysteriously deconstructed upon its subsequent return to Colorado, where the original (or surrogate) was on display at Colorado Mineral Palace in Pueblo, and then lost when it shuttered its doors in 1939. Mayerson's painting riffs on the fantastical appearance—and disappearance—of the infamous Silver Queen statue, depicting the sculpture mid-flight above Highland peak, a psychedelic image of prosperity.

5. *Peanuts Skating Under the Cosmic Sky (Dwarf Galaxy Wolf–Lundmark–Melotte Captured by the James Webb Space Telescope)*, 2025
Oil on linen, 52 × 40 in.
Collection of Kristen Boggs Jaeger

Mayerson came of age reading the Peanuts comics and book collections and watching the animated specials back on network TV in the 1970s. Though the image is drawn from the 1965 A Charlie Brown Christmas special, Mayerson gives it a nondenominational twist. The artist broadens the scene to include Franklin—introduced in 1968 in response to the Civil Rights Movement—as well as Peppermint Patty and Marcie, later characters embraced by the LGBTQIA+ community for their close relationship, and Woodstock, named in 1970 after the 1969 festival. In this surreal dreamscape, instead of skating under the North Star, he envisions the entire gang under a vast cosmos from a recent image from the James Webb Telescope. For the artist, we are all interconnected in our time on Earth, and he hopes, here, to invoke the sublime in the spiritual aspects of Charles M. Schulz's original creation.

6. *Rocky Mountain Babies (Chaya Rivka And I)*, 2025
Oil on linen, 24¼ × 32 in.

This faded early 1970s portrait depicts the artist and his sister from their snowy Denver suburban home with the Rockies behind them. For the artist, the work represents a new home in the idealistic West, which his parents had recently moved to from the South. In making that move, they felt like pioneers. This photograph captures the mountain range and the fields of snow, both witness to this new home.

7. *Group Outside the Red Onion 1947*, 2025
Oil on linen, 20 × 22 in.

The famed Red Onion restaurant was one of the longest-operating establishments in Aspen history, operating from 1892 onward as a saloon and gambling hall that served the local mining community. While the watering hole boarded its doors on various occasions, it consistently served the local community as the town shifted and evolved. The original black-and-white reference image comes from the Aspen Historical Society archives. The reflection depicted in the window of this painting hearkens back to Aspen's "Quiet Years," an era marked by the dwindling silver mining populace and before the recreational and cultural economic boom of the postwar years. The reflection on the window reads like a painting within a painting. Mayerson sees this reflection as another dimension into the spirits of the ghost town from a previous era, standing behind the group that helped move Aspen toward what it is today.