

# Back to school

Stephen Elliott, Staff Reporter | Posted: Tuesday, October 20, 2015 5:41 pm

In early November, clocks around here seem to slow down as fallen aspen leaves are plastered to the concrete and light snowfall hints at the winter to come. The empty streets do not profess a dearth of cultural offerings, though.

The Ah Haa School for the Arts has several offerings during the next month: most notably, the Telluride Painting School's The Central Image Still Life, taught by acclaimed artist and professor John Lees over the course of two weeks, from Nov. 9-20.

"Students who take Telluride Painting School classes usually have some experience painting, either in other Ah Haa classes or on their own, but occasionally we get people who've never painted before," said Kris Kwasniewski, adult curriculum manager at Ah Haa.

The class Lees is offering takes place from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. daily and students will have 24-hour access to the painting studio. For those who cannot take the class, Lees will give a public lecture at the Wilkinson Public Library on Nov. 11.

Lees is a contemporary expressionist whose paintings have been included in collections at the Museum of Modern Art, The New Museum and the Fogg Art Museum, among others. He has taught art for the last 40 years, alternately at the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, the School of Visual Arts, Sarah Lawrence College, the State University of New York at New Platz and Mt. San Antonio College.

"John Lees' landscapes and heads are almost incidental to his technique. This, in turn, is less a matter of applying oil paint than of allowing it to accumulate until the canvas looks like a fragment of some ancient, lumpy wall," reported the *New York Times* in 1983. "The work is on the precious side and might pall if administered in large doses, but there's scant danger of that, given the artist's glacial rate of production."

Twenty-five years later, the newspaper was still writing about Lees.

"Lees is one of the most accomplished expressionist painters of his generation. He is also one of the



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A painting by John Lees, the contemporary expressionist teaching a course through the Telluride Painting School and Ah Haa next month. [Courtesy image]

most under-recognized, at least when it comes to inclusion within museum collections and the sort of group exhibitions that help build a reputation,” the *Times* said in a review of a 2007 Lees show in New York.

For the Telluride Painting School class, Lees will use portraiture techniques to approach still life. The artist believes that, when seen as a portrait, an object becomes more vivid or real and the work more intimate. “Students will learn to create images that are alive, honest and unique,” according to an announcement from Ah Haa.

“Lees focuses a lot of his work on painting the mundane in phenomenal and intriguing new ways,” added Kwasniewski.

The Telluride Painting School offered a two week course with Robert Weatherford, concluding Friday. Another course begins Monday with artist Ying Li, but that class is already full.

Kwasniewski, interviewed for this story Tuesday afternoon, said she had just poked her head into the Weatherford class, now in its second week of intensive instruction.

“From continuous painting and critique and self-study, internalization of technique, the students have come leaps and bounds,” she said. “It’s phenomenal to see some of the work they’re doing.”

There are still a few spots left in the Lees class, The Central Image Still Life. More information about Telluride Painting School offerings this fall can be found at [ahaa.org/adult/painting-school/](http://ahaa.org/adult/painting-school/).