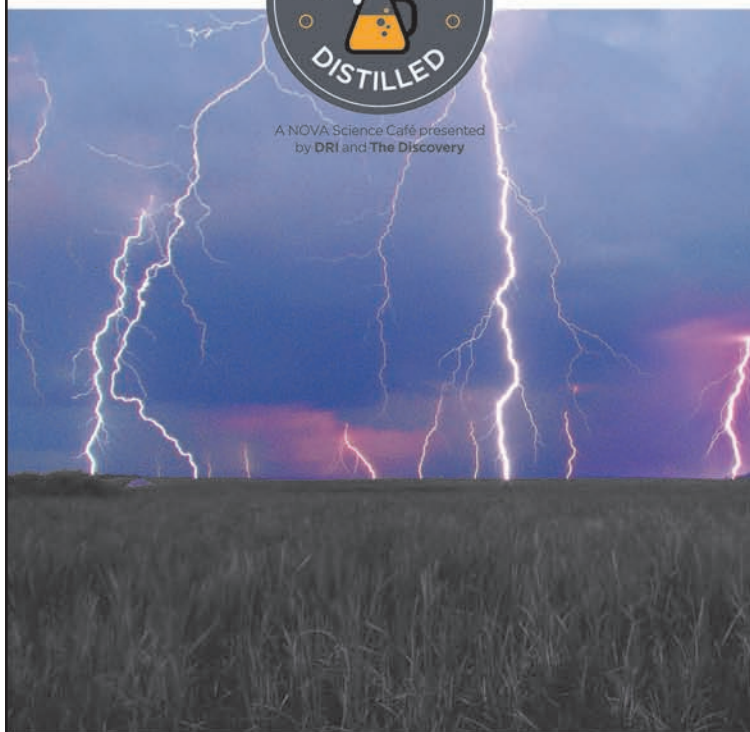




A NOVA Science Café presented
by DRI and The Discovery



"I'LL BELIEVE IT WHEN I SEE IT."

Date: Wednesday, Mar. 4 | **Time:** 7:00–9:30pm

Cost: \$10 members \$15 nonmembers

Location: Patagonia Outlet, 130 S. Center Street, Reno

Ages: Must be 21 or older (I.D. required)

Tickets: 775-786-1000, sciencedistilled.org, at the door

It's safe to assume that we've all seen a weather forecast and muttered, "I'll believe it when I see it." How do we decide when to take warnings about natural hazards seriously? And when do we brush them off, assuming the forecasters are just crying wolf? At this installment of Science Distilled, hear from the researchers probing this decision-making process and the science behind communicating the risks of hazards like extreme heat, earthquakes, and snowstorms.

The Science Distilled lecture series was created by Desert Research Institute and The Discovery to make cutting-edge science approachable through presentations on current and curious topics held at hip locations in a social atmosphere.



Presented with support from:



ART OF THE STATE

BY KRIS VAGNER



After years as a painter, Ahren Hertel turned his artistic attention to the desert vistas he's been around most of his life.
COURTESY/AHREN HERTEL

Where to land

Ahren Hertel

Ahren Hertel spent his childhood in the high desert, much of it in Chile and Bolivia—parts of which look a lot like Nevada—and some of it in Reno's Galena Forest neighborhood.

"Most of the time, my friends and I were just outside running around," Hertel said. "We grew up in Galena Forest, before Montreux [Golf & Country Club] was out there. Into the treeline. We could ride our bikes down into Washoe Valley."

But it wasn't until about five years ago—after art school, grad school and more than a decade as a painter and University of Nevada, Reno, painting instructor—that he started painting desert landscapes.

Hertel built his reputation on technically tight oil paintings—at first splashy, pop surrealist ones with a strong streak of storybook macabre, later, photorealistic portraits, often with the local desert as a background. All along, as much as he's always related strongly to the landscape, he resisted being someone you might call a "landscape painter."

The whole genre just seemed fraught. On one hand, there was the easygoing Bob Ross, popular on television during Hertel's childhood, who attracted legions of fans as he made painting trees and clouds look like it could be done with barely any thought. On the other hand, there were long revered masters like Albert Bierstadt, the 19th-century German-American who brought the romanticism of Hudson River School paintings west, bathing the Sierra Nevada and other Western sights

in dreamy, East Coast lighting. Paintings like these still fetch millions at auctions, and many—including Hertel—find that they still pack a proper emotional punch.

Given that landscape painting carries so much historical weight and pop-culture cachet, Hertel figured, how could any new painter enter the field and actually contribute anything relevant or new to the conversation?

But, eventually, Northern Nevada's sagebrush and hills and valley-wide vistas made

their way from his backgrounds to his foregrounds. At first, painting them was a pretty low-commitment endeavor. After working on a portrait, he'd paint small, muted deserts as a way to loosen up, try a new technique, and use up whatever paint was still on his palette at the end of an evening. Usually, it wasn't quite sage-colored—maybe a sagey turquoise or a military olive instead—but close enough.

He got hooked on the idea of trying to paint a desert scene that felt just right, even with the subjective color choices. And he made it work.

"I'm not trying to represent it exactly as I see it," Hertel said. He used those imperfect colors to portray an experience or an atmosphere—maybe that special, slightly weird feeling of the odd, foggy Nevada day.

Hertel's current show at the Oats Park Art Center in Fallon does contain some portraits, but the room is dominated by that sense the high desert has on those days when it feels a little otherworldly, when the sky seems to hang heavy with frost and magic—or when, after 100 straight days of full sun, someone turned the dimmer switch all the way down at high noon.

He's gotten more comfortable with the "landscape painter" label. Turns out it's a perfectly good genre for all of the overthinking he's inclined to do about images, representation, emotion, light and everything else a painter could obsess over. He might even try plein air next. □

Ahren Hertel's exhibition *Match* is on view at the Oats Park Art Center, 151 E. Park St., in Fallon, along with Austin Pratt's *A Gate, Wild, Breathing*, through April 4. Visit churchillarts.org.