A local artist whose expertise is painting the mountains and valleys of Southeastern Utah opens Utah State University's Gallery East spring semester from Jan. 6-31 in the Central Instructional Building.

Capturing the profound beauty that surrounds us is the focus of my art, Terry Willis writes. "I spend my time in outdoors truly seeing the changing light and weather that can transform an ordinary scene into one of magic.

"Each painting is an effort to seize the moment of awe-inspiring beauty. It is a process to give depth to the instant and allow the viewer to truly enjoy that interpretation of my experience for themselves and to give it their own meaning."

Willis has been painting almost 50 years. She joined the Navy in 1974 and painted the landscapes and seascapes of duty stations on both coasts plus in Iceland. Most of her early work was sold and is no longer available.

As a self-taught artist, her style evolved and progressed. She started painting professionally in 2008 and switched from acrylics to oils in 2009.

She grew up in Iowa along the Mississippi River and moved to Utah in 1980 after years in the Navy. Here she was moved by the rugged canyons, peace and solitude found in the wild canyons. She knew she had found her home.

Working as a professional river guide, she shares these places with her clients, seeing firsthand how a little desolation and solitude can change people's lives.

Willis brings this passion to her paintings. She strives to capture a moment as light and shadow play across canyons, rivers and ridges. In each creation she works to express the feeling of being alone and at peace in an incredible but real place. Viewing her paintings is like a little respite in the wilderness.

Her studio is in Price, Utah, where she lives with her husband and enjoys exploring the wild country of the Colorado Plateau and beyond. She admits each of her paintings has a story behind it that goes hand in hand with the adventures they share.

Willis' show, "Seeking Solace," is one of the many shows her art work has been featured in from St. George to Ogden. She has also shown her art in Nevada, Arizona and California.

You can view her work on her Facebook page: Terry Willis-Willis Works Studio or website: www.willisworksstudio.com

An opening artist reception is Friday, Jan. 17 from 6-8 p.m. in Gallery East. The community is invited to attend.

Gallery East is open weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. For information contact Jason Huntzinger at jason.huntzinger@usu.edu.