

**ROBERT TOWNSEND**

# Wanderlust

**I**n 2014, Robert Townsend bought a few amateur 35-millimeter slides on eBay featuring a “mod woman.” He found her so compelling that he contacted the seller of the slides and eventually purchased nearly 3,000 more.

The woman was Helen Conley, and the slides documented her adventures with her husband, Roy. “She was colorful and happy and playful. She just lit up the camera,” Townsend says of the images. “I knew right away that I wanted to do them very large.”

From the get-go, Townsend knew that Helen had the potential to change his life. “I was happy with the work I was doing before, but I’d been doing it for a while, and I was looking for something that would really baffle me and push my limits,” he says. “I knew that was what was in this box of slides.”

After discovering his subjects’ names from a single slide where they wore nametags, Townsend endeavored to find out anything he could about her. The journey is the subject of a documentary directed by Ric and Jen Serena titled *My Indiana Muse*. He got in touch with Helen’s niece, he realized that Helen and Roy, “lived this fairy tale life that’s just unheard of outside of the movies. They were married for 69 years and traveled around their whole lives—they went to Hawaii something like 15 times.”

Townsend will show four of his “Helen”



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**1**  
*Wanderlust (Roy)*,  
oil on canvas, 51 x 76"

**2**  
*Cotton Candy Galaxie*,  
oil on canvas, 28 x 42"

**3**  
*On the Road Again*,  
watercolor on paper,  
48 x 37½"

**4**  
*Keeping Up the Conleys*,  
oil on canvas, 69½ x 104"

**5**  
Robert Townsend with  
his first monumental  
“Helen” painting.  
Courtesy Serena  
Creative.



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paintings at Scottsdale, Arizona-based Altamira Fine Art in a show titled *Wanderlust*, on view April 15 through May 5. Displayed will be *Keeping Up with the Conleys*, which features Helen, Roy and friends on one of their many trips to Hawaii, and a diptych that shows both Roy and Helen standing at the Four Corners. Other pieces of Townsend's signature Americana will also be featured, and *My Indiana Muse* will show at the Phoenix Film Festival the week prior to the start of the Altamira exhibition. ●

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