



Nature's Painters

Have you ever wondered whether landscape artists successfully paint from photos or from their direct vision of the wilderness itself? It turns out that the answer is both.

WTA members share a common love for the trails that take us into wilderness. Some express that appreciation artistically, through landscape painting.

In this feature, Joan Burton talks with four landscape artists who translate their outdoor experiences onto canvas.

Above: "On Marmot Pass" by Niki Sherey



Cecile Disenhouse

Cecile Disenhouse carries paper, a few brushes, and a small palette of paints along with her to paint in the wild. She seats herself in a beautiful spot, makes a preliminary pencil sketch to determine the composition and range of values, and then takes out her paints. This technique, used for years by painters such as the Impressionists, is termed *plein air* painting. Of course the beauty of the surroundings influences her, and photographers can capture it with a quick click, but she insists, "To really see a landscape, you've got to paint it."

She relishes the immediacy and sparkle of painting in the wild, but confesses that she often also takes a photo and paints the same scene again at home, using the original painting and her photo to craft an improved final version.

Cecile studied art in New York City from when she was twelve, and also as a college student. She didn't study painting again until she retired thirteen years ago and took up watercolor painting, but has painted since while backpacking with her husband, David Jette, better known to some *Washington Trails* readers as "Mountain Man Dave." Watercolor supplies are perfect to take along on a backpacking trip because they are lightweight and because the painting dries within minutes. She carries her painting materials in her pack along with her. She says she doesn't wait for an inspiration, but starts out anyway. The inspiration comes from being there.

"I have to sneak up on it," she insists. "If I try to get the perfect painting by preparing too carefully, I am doomed to fail. My best paintings are often on the back of another painting that I was going to toss. You don't get a second chance with watercolors. If a watercolor gets overworked and loses its transparency, it cannot be salvaged."

"You have to get the light on the sky and water right the first time," Cecile says. "People who don't paint don't understand. Painting is like all the arts, requiring hard work, high discipline and good technique. Inspiration is only a small part of it."



"You have to get the light on the sky and water right the first time."



Above: "Baker River;" at top: "Park Butte"

Niki Sherey

Niki Sherey works with acrylic paints to create her landscapes, but her paintings could also be considered to be photographic collages. Niki takes outdoor photographs, brings them into her studio and embeds them in a corner of her paintings. If you look closely, you can see the photos adhering to the paintings.

Her technique, she says, came about nearly by accident. She had always painted from photos, and one day she realized that the photograph sitting next to the painting she was working on really made her colors "pop." Without much thought, she glued it into her painting, painted around it, and liked the total effect. Today, Niki says, her paintings spring from the photograph to create an altered landscape; the photo is the seed. She looks to the photo for color and structure, and then allows her painting to break free from the confines of the photo.

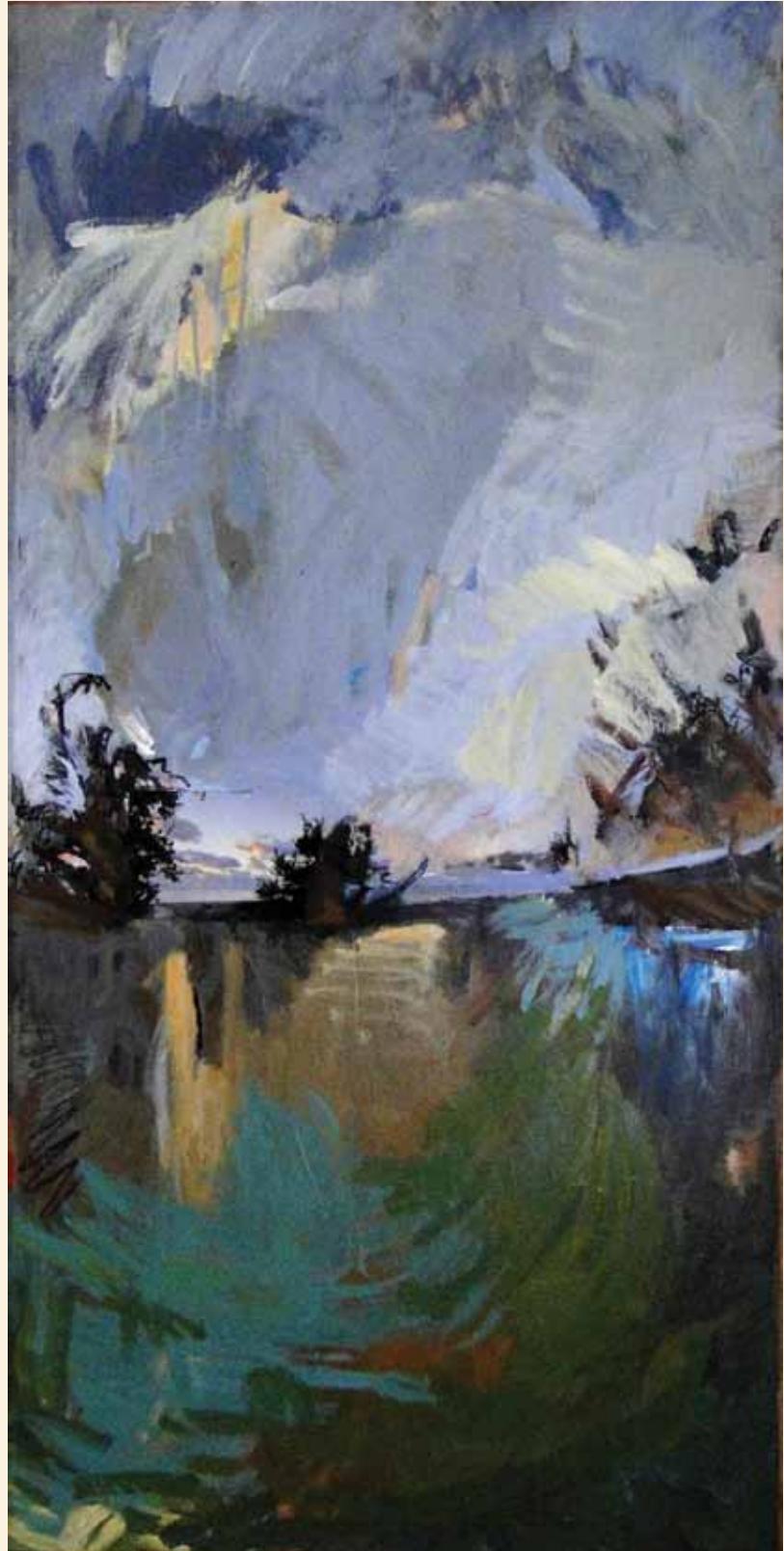
She calls her most recent series of paintings "The Whole Picture." She believes that in photographs things seem smaller than the grand reality. She hopes to capture the complexity of the total scene, as opposed to photographic reality, in her paintings. She does not want to represent just a documentation of the scene, but an addition of the passage of time and the feelings the landscape evokes.

Growing up in Texas, expansive skies and endless horizons influenced Niki's perception of the natural world. She says she dreamed of mountain ranges and waterfalls, and when she finally saw them, she began to paint them and has been changing the landscape through scale and exaggeration ever since.

Niki has also been influenced by her experiences rowing on Lake Washington for more than ten years. While rowing, she feels she becomes a part of the landscape. On the water, the horizon expands in every direction, encompassing the viewer. She wants her paintings to provide that same sense of being surrounded by the view.



"I give space to these photos in my work to highlight the parts I like, to expand on what's at the core, and to create a new scene rooted in reality."



"Vortex at Land's End"

David Bobroff

David Bobroff is a painter with a message. All of his work is about the relationship between the natural world and the manmade world. He believes he is making an editorial statement and telling a story with his paintings.



His work "Hamma Hamma Dream" shows a distant vista of The Brothers on a summer day between buildings, city streets and large signs. The story is about the temptation to go hiking when the viewer cannot do that. If we are trapped in mundane and banal everyday routines, at least we can dream of hiking in the Olympics.

His painting "Our Sacred Way" is a scene of the Issaquah Highlands and West Tiger Mountain. Two long rows of earthmovers in the foreground are tearing up land for a new housing division. He calls it a lament.

David says yes, he uses photographs, but they only help him customize and alter the composition and time of day in his work. His painting style is called photographic realism, which means the details are so meticulously rendered that a photograph or computer could portray the scene in the same way. But David insists it is his individual interpretation of the events that makes them uniquely his own.

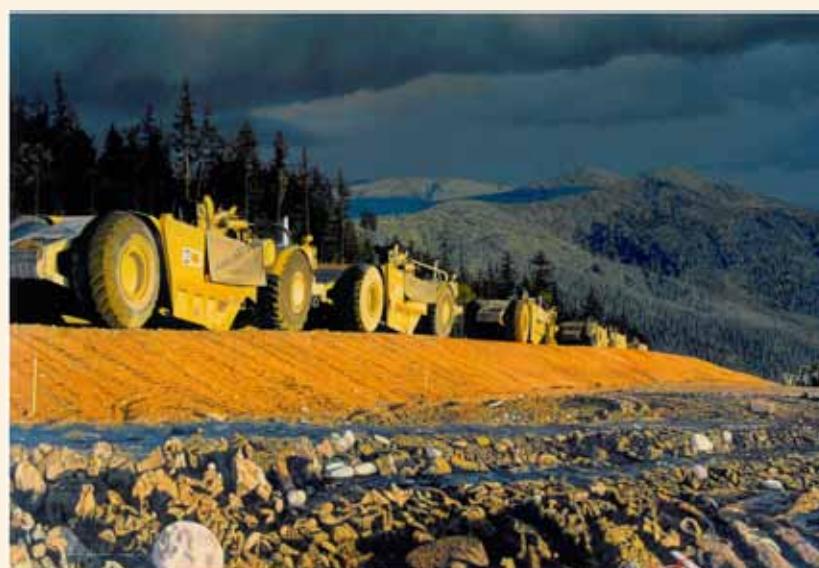
All of David's paintings are in oil. Each one takes from nine months to two years to complete. They are large—generally 4 feet high and 5 to 7 feet long. He says painting them slowly in oil gives him enormous personal satisfaction and he likes to think he is continuing in the use of materials and techniques that are 800 years old.

David is an active member of the Washington Trails Association who skis, backpacks and bicycles. In 2009, his work was featured in a one-man show sponsored by Everett Community College. He hopes to exhibit his work to the public again in that way but in the meantime, his paintings can be seen in private collections.



"Hamma Hamma Dream"

"Spending many months on the details of a scene heightens my awareness of its particular narrative."



"Our Sacred Way"

Find More Work by These Artists

Cecile Disenhouse's paintings are on view and available for purchase at Gallery North in Edmonds, Washington.

Niki Sherry's work is available directly through her. Visit her website, www.nikisherey.com. Niki also creates custom paintings for patrons seeking a representation of a favorite scene.

To connect with **David Bobroff**, call the WTA office. We'll pass your message on.

Sally Rawlings's work may be seen at Art Stall Gallery in the Pike Place Market, at her home studio by appointment or online at artstallgallery.com. To see a video of her paintings set to music, search for "Night Songs From Around the World by Rawlings-Cantilena" on YouTube.



"I like to be outdoors whenever I can. Maybe painting just gives me a good excuse."



Sally Rawlings

Sally Rawlings believes one of her roles in life is to share the scenes of beauty she sees around her. She says that when she is with other people, she's the one most often calling out, "Look!"

Sally wants to stop viewers with her art, draw them into the painting and provide an awareness of what is right with the world. As a painter, she says she is also saying "Look!" by pointing out the sights she has enjoyed. If the viewer's mind can travel ahead to new places or back to beautiful places visited in the past, she believes she has done her job.



Sally always wanted to be an artist but was afraid to declare herself as an art major in college. Only when she was in Steamboat, Colo., did she finally take a watercolor class. She has since studied at the Chicago Art Institute, Fort Lauderdale Museum of Art, Colorado Mountain College and Coupeville Arts Center, as well as with various teachers.

Watercolors became her medium of choice because, "as in life, it cannot be completely planned. There are happy accidents and unhappy ones you can make work for you." She likes plein air painting and carries her pad and palette with her in a small sandwich bag while she hikes. She admits she also takes photos to capture the light and record the scene, and of subjects she has no time to paint on location. Later she studies the painting to see what additions may be required.

Making the painting simpler and more abstract is part of this artist's goal, one that the photographer usually cannot achieve. Sally likes to work with the challenge of getting the shapes, rhythm and the contrast of lights and darks right.

"A painting can have special effects a photo can't convey," she says, "and at the same time a painting can add feeling that might not be obvious to other viewers of the same scene." She admits to moving mountains or rivers if it improves the composition.

Sally is a member of a hiking group that hikes in the Cascades once per month. She also sails in the Sound, so many of her paintings portray Northwest water scenes. Skiing and walks around Green Lake have provided painting inspiration, too.

Sally belongs to the Northwest Watercolor Society, the Art Stall Gallery Coop and Seattle CoArts.

At left, above: "Simply Snowy," at left, below: "Ebey's Amber"