

# Tanner Steed And The Profound Process Of Painting

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TANNER STEED OF WHEAT RIDGE HAS NEVER FINISHED A PAINTING because, “There’s always something to improve on and that’s always been my attitude towards painting.” COURTESY TANNER STEED

Don’t ask Tanner Steed if he’s recently — or ever — finished a painting. The Wheat Ridge artist does not consider any of the many oil paintings he’s crafted in his young life as done.

Steed, 25 and a native Coloradoan, grew up in Highlands Ranch and graduated from Thunder Ridge High School, where he only took one art class, in graphic design. “I always had an intrinsic motivation to draw and sketch,” Steed said. “It was kind of a hobby at a young age. I remember I copied cartoon scenes on paper and then later I was sketching what I saw in Denver museums.”

Steed’s grandmother and uncle were among an extended family of painters and designers that also played a role in his journey. “But no one was to the point of saying you must have an art career,” he said. “I was primarily self-taught but I was also exposed to what I consider an exceptional group of artists.” First among that group is Daniel Sprick, a Denver painter who Steed considers his mentor. “He’s given me solid guidance and just completely transformed my technique,” he said. “One of the best things he told me was to be persistent and determined to make myself better and that’s what I always try to do.” Sprick influenced Steed to start a painting with a vine charcoal drawing he then goes over with graphite or pencils, followed by a watercolor wash, then opaque oil paints. At each step, he refines the piece.

In an online video, Steed explained his paintings — still lifes, landscapes, portraits and architecture — are never really finished. “I will work on something forever and my friends have to say ‘Tanner, you’re done.’ But I am never done,” he said. “There’s not a single painting I consider finished. There’s always something to

improve on and that's always been my attitude towards painting. I strive for something further than perfection. It's an internal drive. I aspire to be better than yesterday. I intend on doing this for the rest of my life."

Steed added the only time he considers one of his paintings finished is when it's purchased. Labeling himself a "representational painter," Steed said he did not know what else to call what he does. "There's things like interval, color, edge and placement; each kind of flows into the other," he explained. "I see both abstract shapes and an actual image as I'm creating a piece. It gets highly orchestrated and I'm gratified when a viewer points out each of those things and figures out where to look for them."

His approach also grew from college courses in human development, physical and psychological development, Steed noted. But he does not have any favorite paintings. "The one I'm working on now is most important because I push myself to take every single one of my paintings to the next level," Steed said. The size of the canvas he's painting does not affect how much time he spends on it either. "I've learned that size does not affect difficulty, I can spend much more time on a smaller painting than a 24x36, which is the largest I've done," Steed stated. "I end up spending whatever time is needed, large or small."



"DENVER SUBURB – AFTERNOON" BY OIL PAINTER TANNER STEED of Wheat Ridge. COURTESY TANNER STEED

Teaching classes and workshops — to individuals or groups — are also part of Steed’s creative process. “I don’t think you can fully understand something unless you teach it,” he said. “It’s usually at least as beneficial to me as a teacher as I think it is to a student. And it’s incredible to see a realization in their eyes, so I think I’ll always be teaching.” If a student appears nervous about being able to paint, Steed said he tells them, “There’s no such thing as talent, it’s all pure hard work and being dedicated and motivated to the craft. Then you can become great.”

Steed moved to Wheat Ridge after meeting a local artist and now shares studio space “right in the heart of the city. I’m there every day and I paint a lot of scenes in and around Wheat Ridge.” He was also part of the first Art on The Farm community event in July.

Steed summarized his methods in an artist statement on his website: “My paintings are the result of deep observation and contemplation of light. Through my sensory experience, I create a personal interpretation of the scene using the abstraction of brush strokes. No matter how rendered, it will always be abstraction that formulates my work. Even though the subject matter is more than easily recognized, my paintings are about the quality of the paint itself. I hope to catch the viewer’s attention with a subject, only to inspire them to look closer at the innate beauty of oil on linen.”

Steed seems to know what direction he wants to take his professional life. “I love painting everything because there’s nothing more beautiful than another scene or object or person,” he said. “It’s always a profound process.”