

denver life

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Colorado's leading lifestyle magazine

[BEAUTY]

EYE ENVY

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MIGRAINE REMEDIES

A new way to get rid of your head pain.

[TRAVEL]

GOLDEN GETAWAY

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MOTHER'S DAY

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CULINARY PRO

Top Chef's Carrie Baird shares her advice for aspiring chefs.

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TAVERN TASTIES

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watercolorist

Steve Griggs

AS A FULL-TIME ARTIST, STEVE GRIGGS NEVER TIRES OF PAINTING THE BEAUTIFUL MOUNTAINS, VAST PRAIRIES, CANYONS, AND RIVERS IN COLORADO. *by Kerrie Lee Brown*

Watercolorist Steve Griggs has always enjoyed art. He recalls the time when he received his first set of tube watercolors as a child as the moment that energized him to start painting. But he was shy and kept his work hidden. That all changed as he grew up. Today, Griggs is an *alla prima* painter, meaning he completes a painting from start to finish in a single session whether in studio or painting *plein-air* (in an open space or outdoors). Hence, his favorite expression is “you can’t ruin a watercolor.”

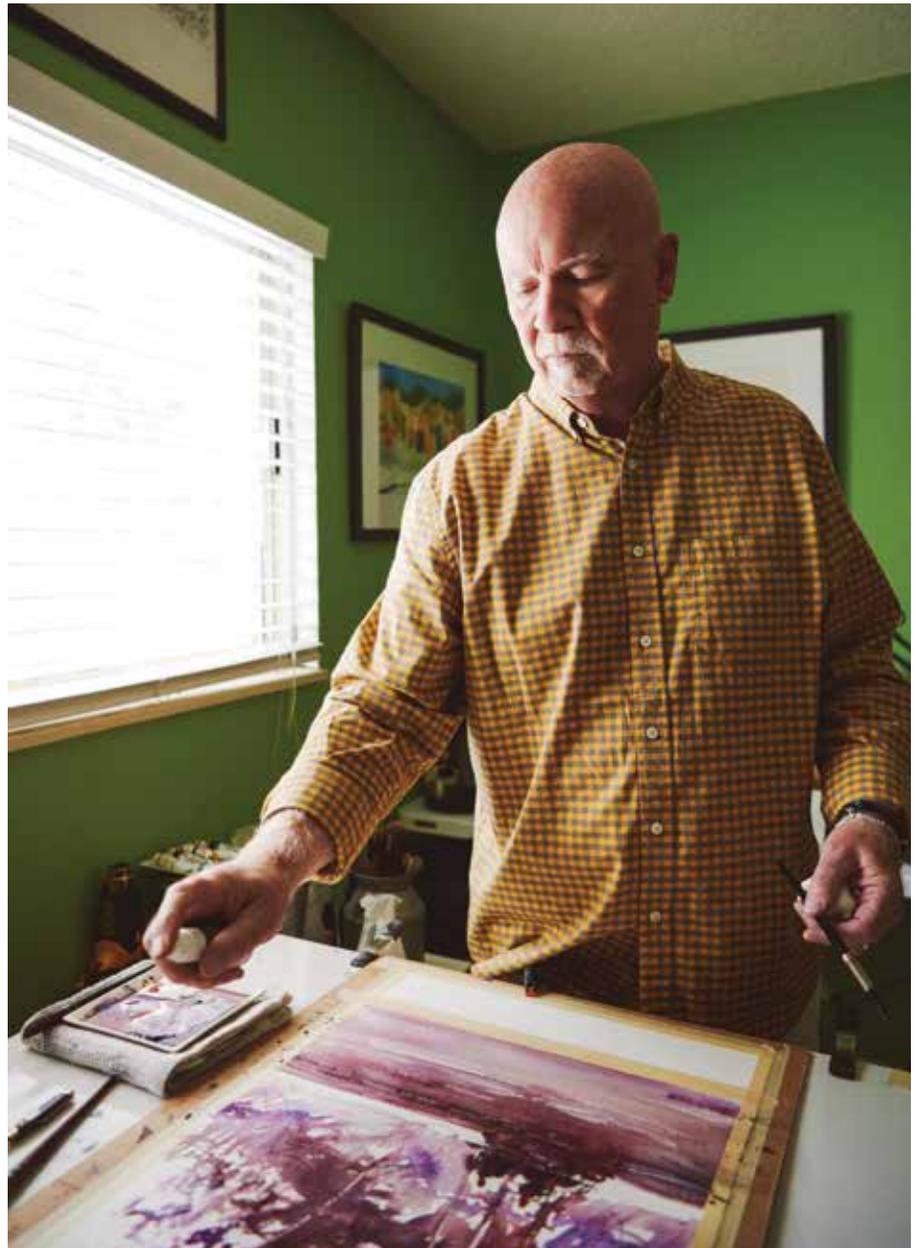
How did you discover art?

“I went to college at Michigan State University and jumped from major to major in the hopes of finding what I wanted to do. I joke that I’d thumb through the catalog in search of a major that didn’t require much math. At some point, I was taking landscape architecture courses, and one of my classmates who was a Studio Art major, noticed that I didn’t think or draw like anyone else in the class. While I could draw in the structured way of an architect, I always found a way to add a little flair to what I was doing, ignoring the rules and adding less precision and more movement. My classmate suggested I try out some classes in Studio Art. I did and I was hooked! In the art department, I learned traditional drawing and painting techniques. Once I had a deeper understanding, I could push the boundaries and develop my own style.”

Did you always want to be an artist?

“My story is the classic trope of misunderstood art student. My family laughs about my white-collar father’s response when I told him I was changing my major to art. He frowned and said, ‘When you get done playing around, come and talk to me and I’ll get you a job.’ His expectation was that I’d follow his footsteps and work in the manufacturing plant in downtown Detroit. Instead, I finished an art degree at MSU and was the Student Merit Award winner the year I graduated. From there I moved to Pasadena, California and attended Art Center College of Design. I never did ask my dad for help finding a job. I did, however, have a career in the design field, still painting as a hobby and dreaming that one day I’d be a full-time artist.

It wasn’t until the very early 2000s that I started sharing my paintings, entering them into competitions, and calling myself an artist.”



Why do you love Denver?

“I was born in Detroit and grew up in the suburbs. I remember looking at a map of the United States when I was in college, considering where I might want to live in the future. Although I’d never actually been to Denver, there was something about what I’d heard that seemed alluring. Sunshine, mountains, city, but still somewhat rural. I recall thinking Denver might be the place

for me. When we moved here, my wife and I found the people to be so friendly and welcoming, and everything was accessible: culture, opportunity, blue skies, sunshine, mountains. It is just so beautiful! Despite the jokes about unpredictable weather, I appreciate that there are four distinct seasons. Time seems to slow down a bit when a year is marked by seasons.”

What makes your paintings so different?

“The three words I most often hear, relative to my work, are loose, moving, and evocative. My marketing and promotion team recently suggested we start calling my workshops ‘Loose Watercolor Painting – Steve Griggs Style’ because my style is so different.

Watercolor is a difficult medium and mastery of it is really an illusion unless you paint with a very exacting and tight style. Many watercolor painters have a photorealist or realist style. Their work is beautiful and intricate, and I have great respect for this style of painting, but over time I’ve moved away from traditional painting techniques. My work has evolved to my own loose style. I like to say that I make friends with my watercolor paint rather than exercising control over it.

My paintings are intended to provoke a memory or feeling. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve had someone say they know the exact location of a painting and proceed to tell me the story of what they were doing or experiencing there. In reality, I may not have had that place in mind when I painted it but what I intended isn’t important. What matters is that they feel a connection to the painting and the story it evokes in them. All of this is achieved by keeping things loose, creating movement, and taking risks.”

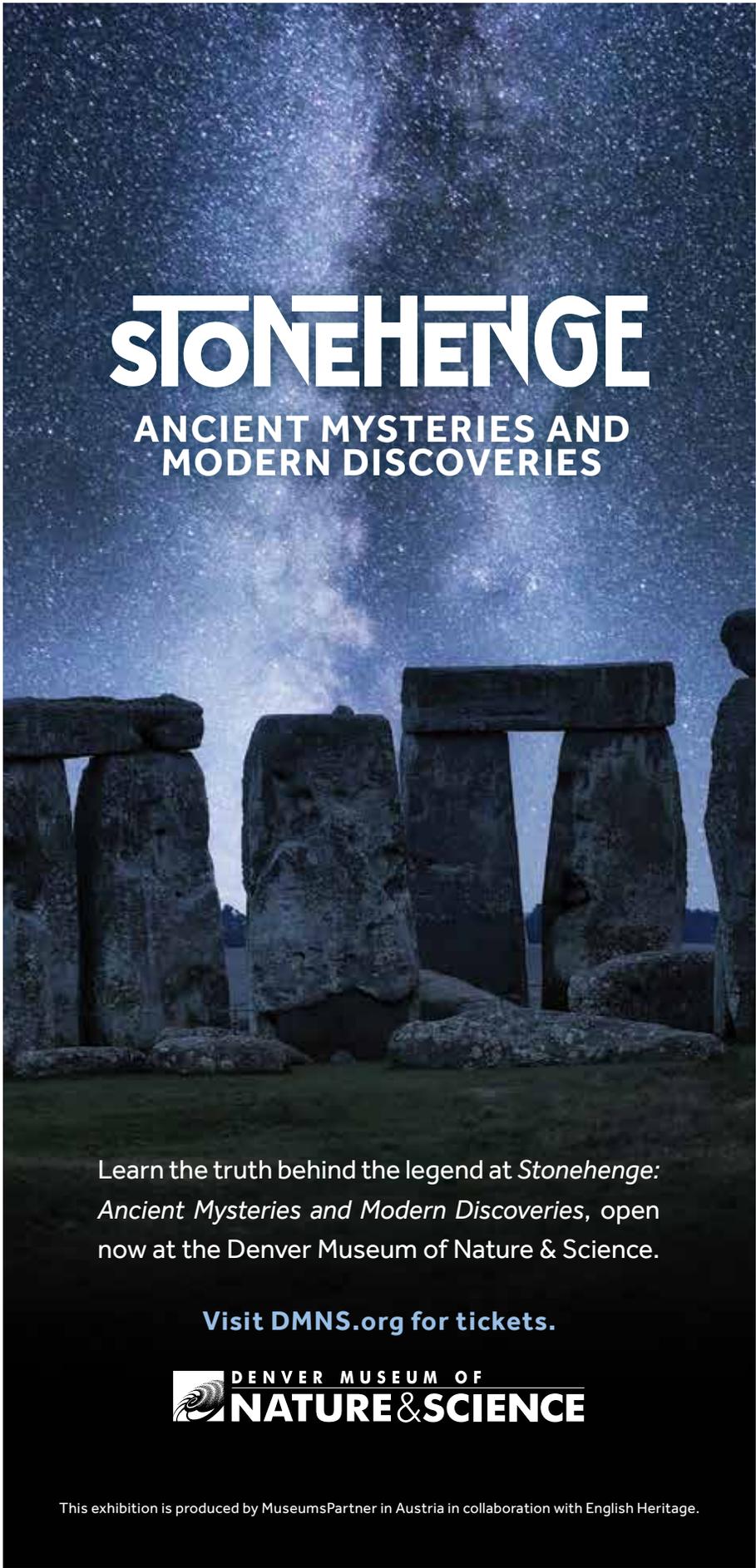
Tell us about your classes.

“I’ve taught classes with the Art Students League of Denver for several years, and most of the local artist guilds and groups have invited me to teach a workshop at least once. I’ve also been invited to teach for a number of watercolor societies throughout the U.S. Workshops can range from one to four days depending on the desire of the group. As with so many things, when COVID struck, my in-person classes were abruptly shut down when stay-at-home orders were put in place. I had no idea how long we would go without being able to do face-to-face classes, so we had to get creative and start teaching on Zoom. It has actually been a great way to reach so many more people than I would have otherwise. I ended last year teaching online workshops with a couple of groups and the Art Students League. Since then, I’ve developed my own class offerings and have had a great response. Students enroll from all across the globe, and I teach right from my studio. Once COVID is behind us, I’ll return to teaching in-person classes and workshops, but I plan to continue teaching online because it provides the opportunity for me to work with people worldwide.” **OLW**



STEVE GRIGGS

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