



BY NORMAN KOLPAS

Shifting Perspectives

Dinah K. Worman shares a very personal vision of the landscape



▲ Orange Field, oil, 20 x 20.
 ◀ Off Road, oil, 16 x 20.

DINAH WORMAN remembers clearly the key moment when her perspective as a landscape artist began to shift. It was January 2013, and like several years before, she had been invited, among dozens of top artists, to submit her work to the prestigious Coors Western Art Exhibit & Sale in Denver.

Up to that point, she had been winning acclaim for her painterly, realistic landscapes, works that had won her recognition as a Master Pastelist in the Pastel Society of America. The crowds attending the Coors show that year no doubt expected more of the same.

“That year I did a really contemporary piece,” Worman recalls. Her 48-by-48-inch work titled HISTORY OF A FIELD pushed the landscape almost to the point of abstraction with its arrange-

ment of rectangles and trapezoids in bold strokes of blue-grays and taupes, diagonally slashed with near-vertical roadways and dotted with tiny white-faced cattle, scrubby representations of trees, and an iconic white barn. “When it was time for me to turn it in,” she says, “I felt like I had maybe broken a rule because I wasn’t delivering the same kind of work I usually did.”

A couple of days later, while being driven to the exhibition opening, Worman felt more than a little trepidation. “And then one of the guys in there said to me, ‘You know, I think you won an award,’” she says.

The award in question turned out to be Best of Show. “A lot of calls from galleries came after that,” she notes.

Today, Worman humbly adds, “I’m



representation

Act I Gallery, Taos, NM; Ann Korologos Gallery, Basalt, CO; Saks Galleries, Denver, CO; Trailside Galleries, Jackson, WY, and Scottsdale, AZ.

upcoming shows

Group show, Saks Galleries, August 28-September 18.

Group show, Trailside Galleries, Jackson, WY, September 7-20.

Coors Western Art Exhibit & Sale, Denver, CO, January 9-24, 2016.



Red Barn, Three Cows, oil, 10 x 10.

doing pretty well.” At the age of 64, her fine-art career has taken off at a time when other artists might be thinking about retirement. “I’m shocked,” Worman says, “at how nice my life is.” That’s a good place to be for an artist whose life to date has demonstrated a rare combination of natural talent and indomitable spirit.

WORMAN WAS BORN in Midland, TX, to a family that, she says, “always had an appreciation for art,” with a geologist father who had minored in fine art in college. They moved to Durango, CO, when she was 9 years old, but by then she had already experienced an unusually acute immersion in the pleasures offered by creativity.

When she was just 4 years old, while crossing the street in their Midland neighborhood, Dinah was hit by a car. “I

broke my arm and had a brain injury,” she states matter-of-factly. “So I didn’t get to roughhouse and play with my older brother and younger sister and brother for quite a while.” Though she eventually healed, she adds, “a lot of that time is still fuzzy.”

One memory that remains crystal-clear, though, is the desk her father built to fit over her bed. “I was really good with my fine motor control,” she says. “So my comfort was drawing. I just liked to try to draw the things that I saw.” She also enjoyed “simply scribbling and then filling in the scribbles.”

Though “painfully shy” in school, she says, “I always got attention for my art.” But when the time came for her to enter college, she says, “My parents weren’t comfortable with my majoring in it.” Still, during a couple of years at Colorado State University in Fort

Collins, she “took a whole lot of art classes,” always doing well. “I never had to work at it.” Then her family moved to Oklahoma, and Dinah transferred to a university there.

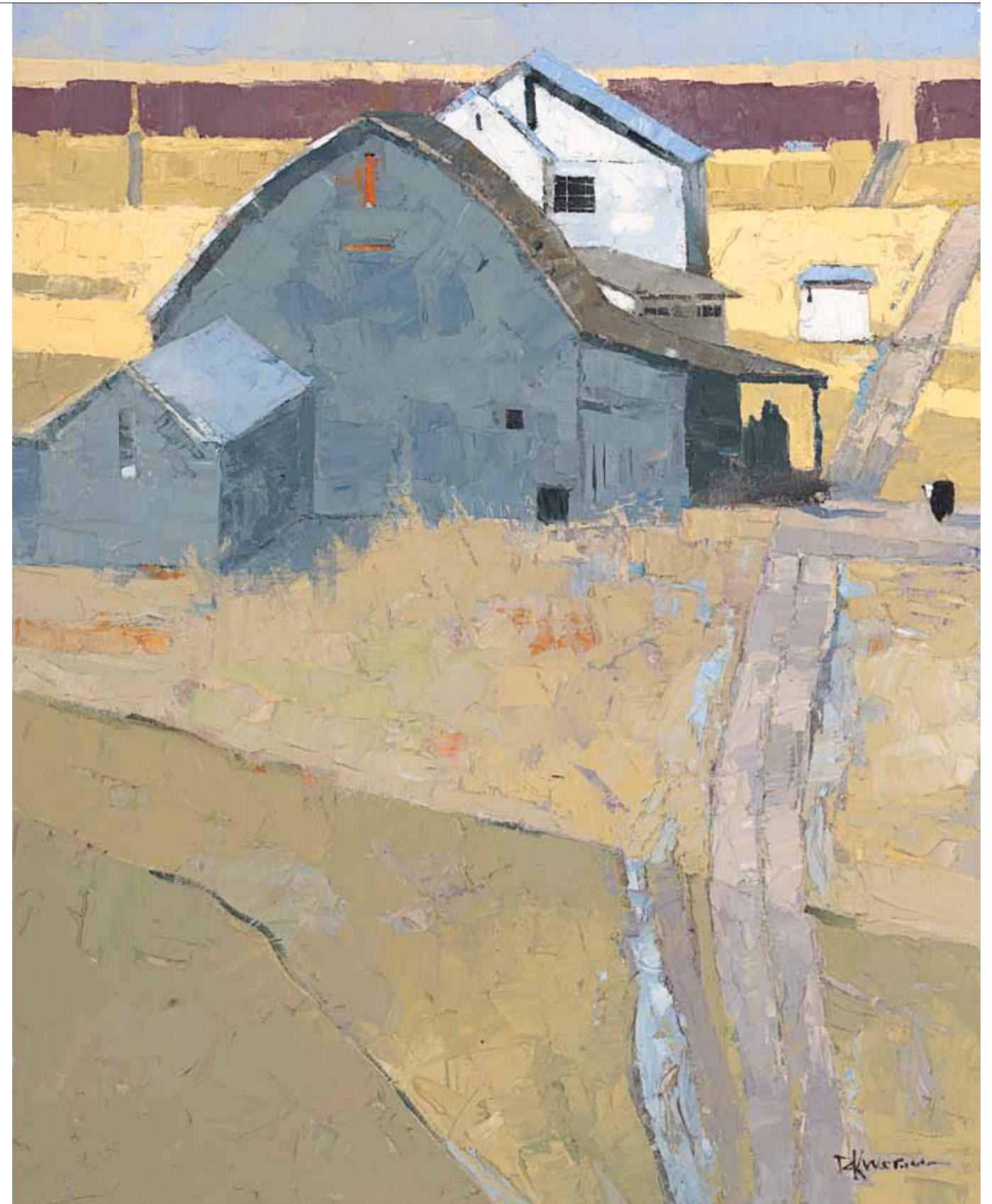
That’s when she met David Worman. They fell in love and married. As the Vietnam War was winding down, he became a Navy jet pilot, but he never had to serve in Southeast Asia, being posted instead to Naples, Italy, for three years. “Those were wonderful times,” Worman says wistfully, noting among many happy memories all the “great Italian art” she got to witness firsthand.

The Wormans later settled down to happy domestic life stateside and raised two daughters: Sarah, now 38 and a nurse in Denver, and Kate, a 34-year-old

“I use cows as punctuation marks to draw people through the composition.”

musician and psychotherapist in Taos. David, meanwhile, began a career as a commercial airline pilot.

All the while, Dinah continued with her art. While David was based for three years with a regional airline out of Sheridan, WY, she would drive out to the surrounding countryside to paint the landscapes she’s always loved. That’s where she became friends with the late pastel artist William Wright, who introduced her to the expressive powers of that medium. “By the time I was 31 or 32,” Worman says, “I had my first gallery, a little place in Sheridan.” And her pastel landscapes began winning awards in national shows. Another gallery, in Denver, soon took her on after David’s employers were bought by Continental Airlines, which relocated the family to Colorado. Soon, she also found gallery representation in Tucson and Taos.



Road to Gray Barn, oil, 20 x 16.



Layered Green, oil, 20 x 15.

As her career began to take off, tragedy struck. David, just in his mid-40s, was suddenly diagnosed with a congenital brainstem abnormality. Seven months later, he passed away, leaving behind Dinah, 14-year-old Kate, and 18-year-old Sarah.

Dealing with the tragedy, she says, “the idea of moving south appealed to me,” she says. “Denver was a big city, and I wanted something smaller.” So, with Sarah starting college, she and Kate relocated to Taos in 1995. “And I started turning to art as my solid income source,” she says.

The vast New Mexico countryside appealed to her. Perhaps that’s what gradually began to influence the way she saw other landscapes, too. She remembers in particular a journey home from a visit to Oklahoma, when she was suddenly struck by a scene she now refers to as a “stacked landscape,” a near-vertical composition of abstracted fields and “roads ending at the horizon. I pulled over and began walking around, photographing, and sketching until it was time to start driving again. When I got home, I started painting different iterations of that scene, and I

am still doing them,” she says.

Her 12-by-12-inch study *COWS ON THE EDGE*, completed some five years ago, is the earliest example of the ultimate result. She used pastels on a sanded board, diluting the solid sticks of color with mineral spirits to make them run in places, adding to the work’s sense of spontaneity. “That little piece still feeds me,” she states simply. “I can’t let go of it. It’s like a magnet.”

She felt an irresistible urge to do more like it, quickly transitioning to oils for the lush brushwork they enabled. And she developed a process she continues to follow to this day.

First she travels the back roads she knows are likely to yield the stacked landscapes that so compel her, mostly around northern New Mexico (where she’s usually accompanied by her heeler/border collie mix, Claire) but sometimes as far afield as Italy. She relentlessly snaps reference photographs, which offer inspiration. On an 8-by-10 or 12-by-12 panel, she then blocks out a composition in slashes of watered-down black paint. “I know immediately if the composition works,” she continues. “And if it does, I put a wash over the whole thing and start laying down juicy, thick oil paint.” At seemingly random spots, she’ll also position small white-faced black cows. “I use them as punctuation marks to draw people through the composition. I even put those in before I put more paint on, so they look kind of carved out of the landscape,” she says.

She often finds these studies completely satisfying in their own right. But often, they’ll also lead to larger pieces measured in feet rather than inches, like her recent painting *ROADS*. “I have two easels,” she explains. “I put the study on one and a big canvas on the other.” But she doesn’t produce merely a larger copy, instead using the study much as she did her original reference photos. “They barely resemble the original,” she notes.

Describing an approach to painting that has become more than just process or style, Worman explains that she is now “wanting to paint from my eyes back rather than from my eyes forward”—meaning, in effect, that her own interior vision of the scene is the



Roads, oil, 48 x 48.

ultimate goal. “My interpretation is more important to me than the object itself.”

When it all goes well, she says, “It’s just euphoric. I look at a painting and I’ll say to myself, ‘Who did that?’ You realize that your wisdom is coming from some subconscious place rather than from copying something else.”

With that in mind, Worman continues

to make her paintings “more me than Mother Nature. I want to do work that, though rooted in reality, is more and more conceptual.” And, she says, “Painting and drawing have given me a lot of comfort, challenge, direction, goals—about everything I’ve needed to keep myself moving forward. I’m at my best when there is no real break from painting and it is part of my daily life.” ❖

Norman Kolpas is a Los Angeles-based freelancer who writes for *Mountain Living* and *Colorado Homes & Lifestyles* as well as *Southwest Art*.

See more of Worman’s work at www.southwestart.com/featured/worman-d-aug2015.