



Shortening Days, oil on canvas, 24 x 30.

PAINTING THE SUBLIME

Brett Scheifflee's landscape paintings are nostalgic, romantic interpretations of terrain from across the country.

BY BONNIE GANGELHOFF

SHADES OF PINKISH-LAVENDER in the sky dissolve into the colors of a setting sun. A shabby barn strikes a lonely pose in the middle of a field. It's fall at dusk near the Finger Lakes in Upstate New York. In the painting **SHORTENING DAYS**, artist Brett Scheifflee evokes a nostalgic feeling of days gone by. The viewer can imagine that perhaps a farmhouse once stood in the deserted field and creatures once roamed the surrounding terrain. "The old barn stood as such an icon for the area," Scheifflee says. "In 2020 it blew away in a windstorm."

Scheifflee painted the artwork in 2025 from reference material and memory. It is a place he knew well. He purposely changed the color palette from the original, drab reference photograph. "I wanted colors to reflect a more romantic interpretation, to echo the ephemeral nature of the scene," he says.

These days the artist is fond of pulling subject matter from his past to inform the present. For example, in **MEMORY RAFT**, Scheifflee is again reflecting on the fleeting nature of things, the loss of the familiar. The scene depicts a raft floating on Lake Cayuga in a community swimming area in Aurora, New York. But recently when he visited, the raft had disappeared. "It seemed the raft had been part of the lake forever," he says. "Then it was gone. Suddenly it felt as if part of the summer just got put away. The swimming area was closed off when Wells College shut down in 2024."

After graduating from college, Scheifflee worked at Wells as a tennis coach to support his burgeoning art career. Now 39 years old, the artist thinks part of the reason for such reflections lately, may be that he is entering middle age, a new phase of life. "The world just doesn't feel like it used to," he says. "I have started missing stuff I took for granted."

SHORTENING DAYS and **MEMORY RAFT** both appeared in group shows last year at Robert Lange Studios in Charleston, South Carolina. They are two of the seven gallery exhibitions that featured works by Scheifflee in 2025. By all accounts last year was a busy but rewarding one for the artist. And a hectic schedule has become routine. "These days, I move from one painting to the next fairly quickly as show deadlines and commitments require that," he says. "But every painting is coming from some special place in my heart."

Scheifflee is known for finely detailed, layered artworks that feature landscapes stretching from the Eastern Seaboard to Colorado's Western Slope. A master of mood, Scheifflee likes to say he is trying to "turn paint into atmosphere." "The style of my paintings is generally highly representational though I often deviate considerably from my references," he says. "The details and accuracy of a place matter to me, even if the mood and palette is totally invented."

Robert Lange has represented the artist for more than a decade at Robert Lange Studios. Lange points out that although Scheifflee is a representational artist his realism isn't cold or photographic. There is always a sense of the human within the environment," Lange says.

The gallery owner is most impressed with Scheifflee's talent for "elevating the ordinary to the sublime." Lange notes, "In Brett's work a closer look rewards the viewer with thousands of curated and meditative brushstrokes. Looking at his work is like therapy; no matter how frenetic or anxious the day, a few minutes with one of Brett's paintings will surely calm the mind."

SCHEIFFLEE GREW UP in the country, amid the wooded hills of western New York. His hometown, East Aurora, is about 20 miles from the city of Buffalo. When he wasn't in school, Scheifflee was free to explore outdoors. "I was very aware of how short the days would get, how cold the winter nights were,



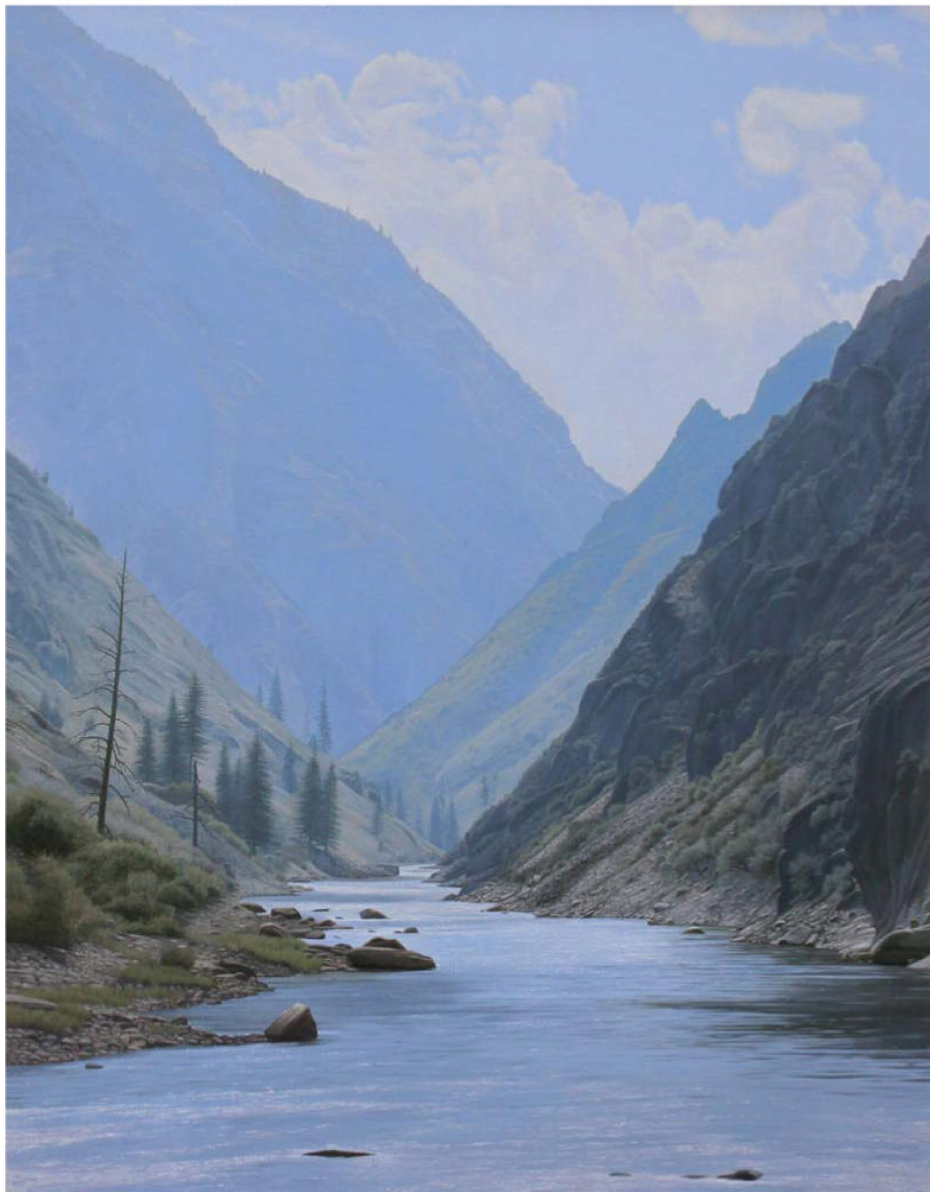
Honey Hole, oil on panel, 10 x 10.



FROM LEFT

Coalescence, oil on canvas, 30 x 24.

Colorado River, oil on panel, 20 x 16.



how soft the hot summer sun felt, and how fleetingly beautiful the red leaves of autumn were,” he says. “There was always an urgency to experience and hold a little of each season before it slipped away. Now, I find myself recording the landscape in oils, often from a solitary perspective where one is alone in a quiet, contemplative environment.”

Scheifflee believes that art was something that came naturally to him. He remembers that his drawings gradually took on a certain degree of accuracy not attributable to lessons or disciplined practice. “My mother also seemed to have this talent,” he says. “I figured I’d push it as far as I could. But I didn’t have much modeling for how doing it professionally would look.”

Following his instincts, he enrolled in the New York’s Rochester Institute of Technology after graduating from high school. In 2008 he earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts and wasted no time in launching his professional art career. At the time, Scheifflee lived at home to save money. “I remember painting in the morning, coaching NCAA tennis in the afternoon into the evening, and then coming home to paint again sometimes until 2 a.m. to

get my work done,” Scheifflee says. “The most difficult part of launching a painting career is the uncertainty and willingness to be poor.”

In 2009 he acquired representation at a small gallery in Cazenovia, New York. Scheifflee’s paintings sold well right from the start, and in 2011 the gallery hosted his first solo show. A few years later, in 2014, *Southwest Art* featured Scheifflee in our annual “21 Under 31” story spotlighting emerging artists. When asked about the best art advice he

ever received, the then 27-year-old artist replied, “Sink into who you are.” His professional goal, he said at the time, was “to keep improving as a painter and gain more success along the way.”

MORE THAN A decade has passed since Scheifflee first appeared in that *Southwest Art* story. Indeed, success has come his way. Today, Scheifflee lives in Ithaca, New York, a college town located at the southern tip of Cayuga Lake. A small brook runs close by the artist’s studio. Birds and

critters visit regularly. “My favorite things to paint here are the autumn landscapes, trees, and the atmospheric perspective that turns distant hills into sapphire blue formations,” he says. “Sometimes an old barn or two will speak to me.”

The artist’s subject matter often veers beyond New York and is inspired by familiar scenes from where he lived in the past, landscapes ranging from the barrier islands and marshlands of South Carolina’s Lowcountry to the craggy,

towering Rocky Mountain peaks of Colorado’s high country.

The main difference in painting in the east and west is the humidity and terrain, Schefflee says. Humidity creates a much softer “atmospheric perspective”



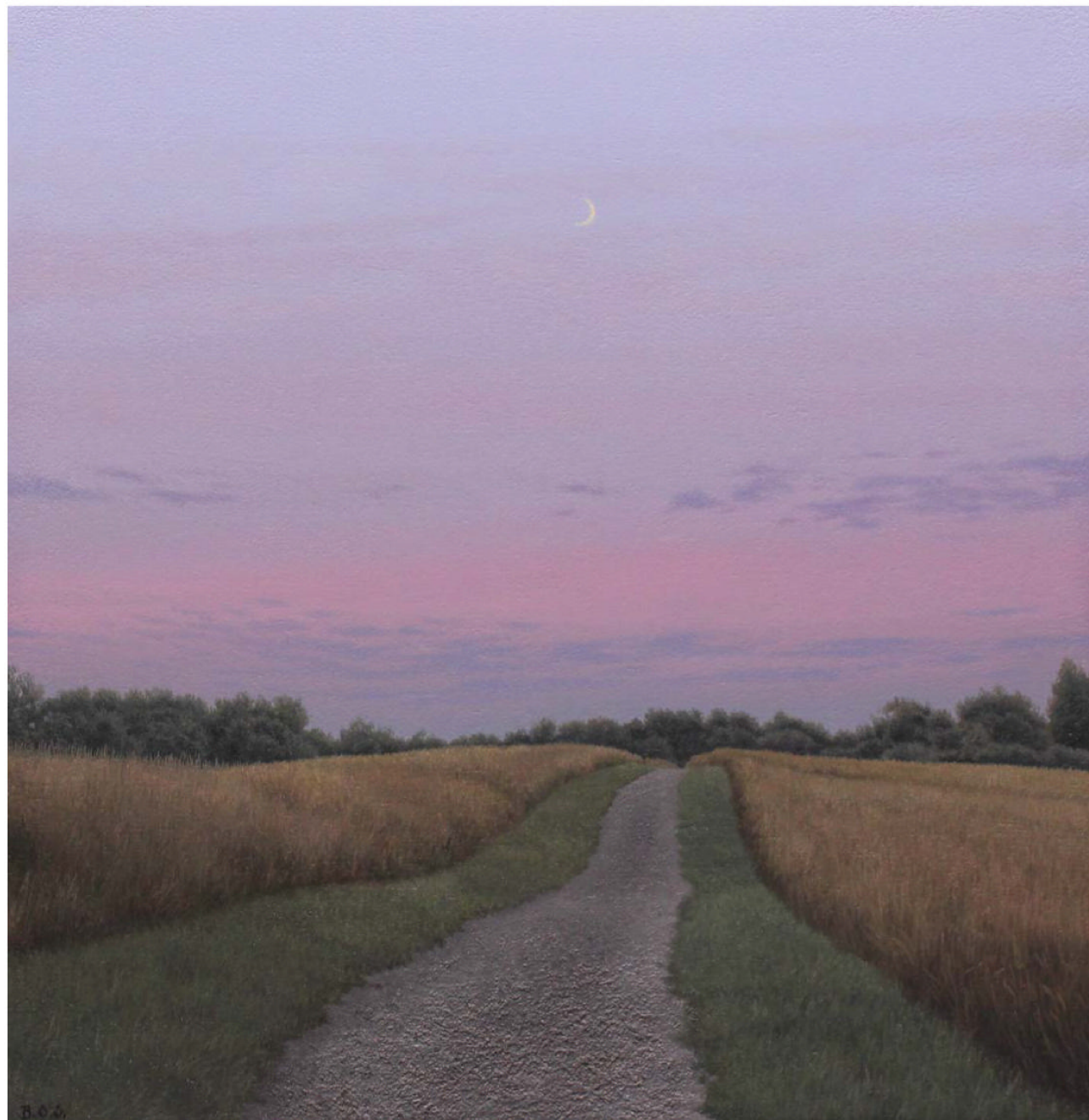
Memory Raft, oil on canvas, 24 x 24.

that obscures features in the distance. In *COALESCENCE*, a painting inspired by a marshland in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, the only thing that reaches the top of the picture plane is cloud formations. “The landscape is very flat and softer by comparison to the western high

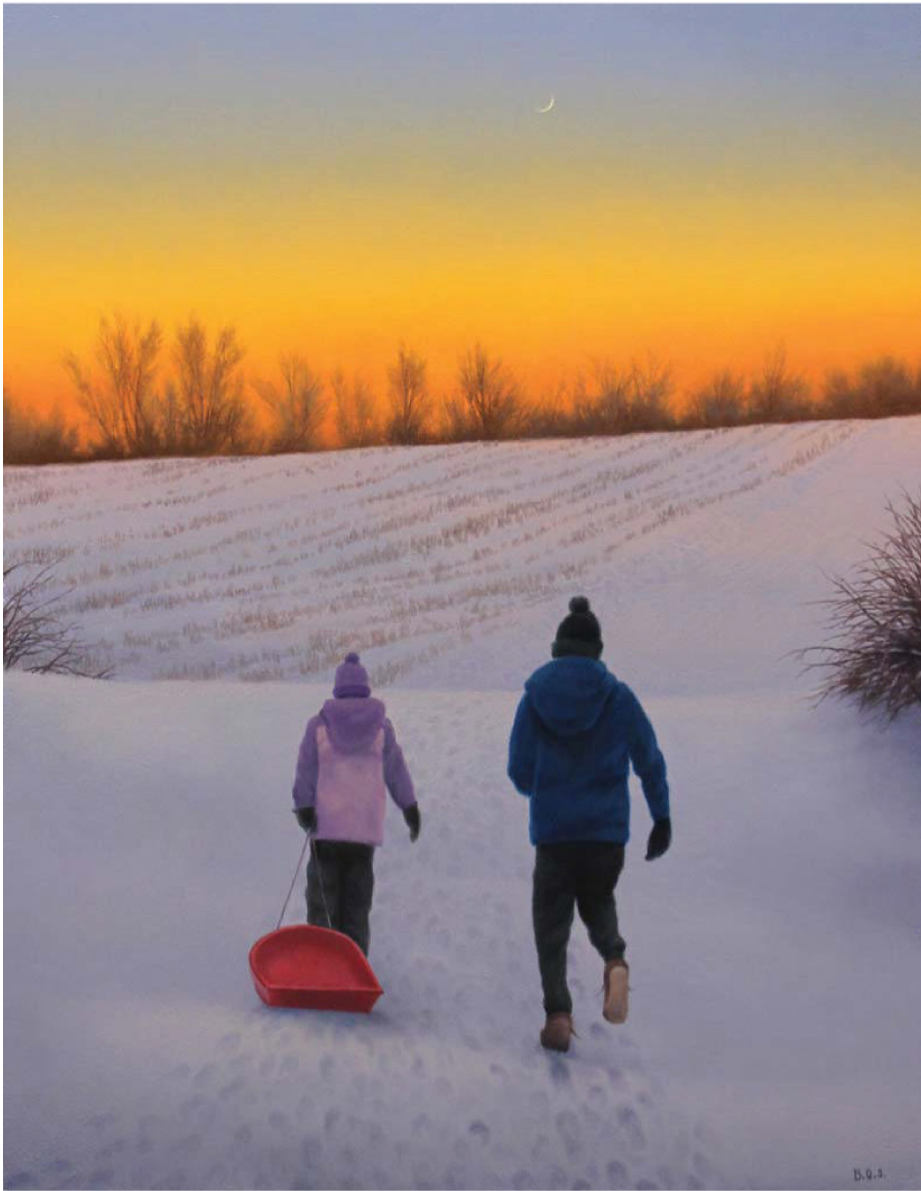
country,” Schefflee explains. “In the east the dynamic elements are all in the sky, not so much the land, where the perspective is simpler. Greens become more saturated near the front of the landscape and grassy planes turn into individual blades of color.”

For Schefflee, painting in the west

offers many more challenges because of the complicated rocky and arid terrain. If you compare *COLORADO RIVER* to any of his eastern pieces, it’s easy to see that the terrain dominates the composition. Also, the artist points out that the colors and detail come through more clearly.



Winding Down, oil on panel, 8 x 8.

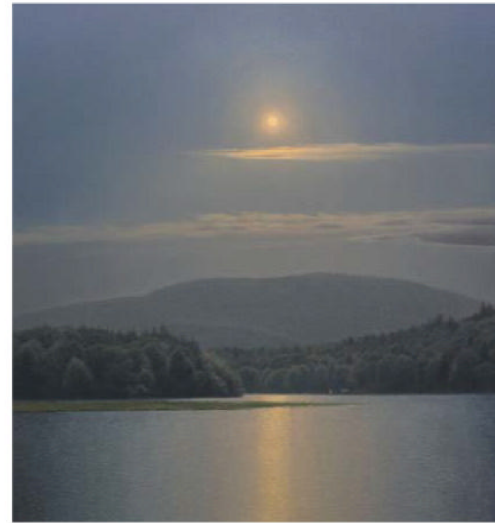


“The mountain sides reach the top of the painting and as features move forward, you can see the innumerable rocks, ridges and bushes that add complexity and realism to the scene,” Scheifflee explains. “In this piece, I exaggerated the effect the atmosphere had on the distant features and pushed them into softer focus so that the eye would be convincingly led back in space and so that the foreground details would pop into focus better.”

When this story was written, Scheifflee was creating small landscape works for

his galleries in the east and the west for their holiday season. His goals for the future haven’t changed much since he was interviewed as a *Southwest Art* emerging artist. “I never want to feel as if I’ve figured it out. There is always more to learn and there are many paintings that I have dreamed of making for over a decade—these need to get made. I want to squeeze a lot out of life in the next decade ahead.”

Bonnie Gangelhoff is a Colorado-based writer and former Senior Editor of *Southwest Art*.



FROM LEFT

After School, oil on panel, 10 x 8.

Into the Quiet, oil on canvas, 24 x 24.

contact information

brettscheiffleeart.com

representation

Robert Lange Studios, Charleston, SC, robertlangestudios.com. **Ann Korologos Gallery**, Basalt, CO, korologosgallery.com. **Rehs Contemporary**, New York, NY, rehs.com. **Stella Marris Gallery**, Beaufort, NC, stellamarisfineart.com.

upcoming shows

From the Pages, Robert Lange Studios, February 6-27. **Solo exhibition**, Robert Lange Studios, September 2026.

Group Show, Robert Lange Studios, November 2026.

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