

November 5, 2023, through January 7, 2024

Kansas in the Key of Life

paintings by
Zak Barnes
of Lawrence, Kansas

Artist Statement

Born and raised in Kansas, I feel a deep connection to the prairie landscape and to the people of this land. These are the base and anchor of my work and set the emotional tone for any narrative that plays itself out in some of my oil paintings. My strongest influences are my immediate environment, life experiences, and the way my mind interprets this information.

I find fulfillment in the rhythm of my days out in the open, loading and unloading the truck with equipment, paints and dog, setting up, and working with the elements. There is a physical as well as mental work in the process, so that it becomes a meditation and a practice. I create most of my landscape work on site, with no preparatory drawing or reworking in the studio. I attempt to capture the fleeting moment in paint texture and color, in mood and measure. The scene changes with each passing moment, demanding a concentration of attention and quickness of hand. I paint with brush and pallet knife, often limiting the palette, using earth tones to accentuate moments of color.

In the studio, the landscape becomes secondary, drawn from memory, a setting and backdrop for human interaction. Narratives in a loose sense, I reference folk art, surrealism and contemporary compositional practices to create ambiguity in both period and environment. Natural and manmade elements are placed in concert, creating a space of pleasant sharing.

The emotional quality of the work builds with the composition. The elements are arranged and rearranged many times in the course of the painting. Working from nonspecific to specific, colors and shapes eventually settle into threads that connect and integrate. Figures and objects interact within their environment with a certain disregard for physical laws. It is the movement and emotional space created that is important.

I have reached a point in my painting where I feel comfortable with my working methods, in control of the paint and able to “play” with compositional



Big Watusi by Zak Barnes

elements. In my landscape work, I attempt to remain true to the prairie, manipulating the materials in ways that will express the movement of light and shadow, with the clouds blossoming across the sky. In the studio, I look for new ways to combine stylistic qualities, pushing the composition in new directions in order to express ideas. I work for personal growth as an artist, and for anyone who finds something in what I do.

Biography

Zak Barnes is a versatile artist based out of Lawrence, Kansas. Born and raised in Kansas, he has strong ties to the Flint Hills where his parents grew up. Zak attended the Columbus School of Art and Design in Ohio for several years and then settled in Chase County, Kansas, where he built houses and spent his leisure time painting impressionistic landscapes *en plein air* in the heart of the Flint Hills. During this time, he developed studio work consisting of unique figurative paintings featuring scenes of strong Kansas women in rural Americana settings with a twist of surrealism and a dream-like combination of subject matter and narrative. It wasn't long before Zak had his work featured in several Kansas galleries. In 2004, he moved to Lawrence to live and create art full time adding abstract paintings and sculpture to his range of work.

Zak Barnes works primarily in oil paint, but he has incorporated many non-traditional techniques over the years. His distinct style combines elements of impressionism, surrealism, regionalism, and folk art coupled with a dynamic painting process and handling of his medium. Zak Barnes is often regarded as an "artist's artist" because of the playful way he manipulates the elements of art and principles of design. Each piece takes on a life of its own as he interacts with it throughout the painting process. This causes the final product to be a record of the evolution of the work, no matter what subject matter or medium he chooses.

Zak has won numerous awards in plein air competitions, taught several plein air workshops, and has served as a judge in many competitions. His work has been featured in a variety of publications and he has donated his artwork and talents to many charitable organizations and events. Zak Barnes has been represented in galleries across Kansas and his work is included in permanent public and private art collections.



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Gallery Hours: Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday, 1 to 5 p.m.