

May 3 through July 19, 2026

The Big Pretty

paintings by
Sarah Winkler
of Morrison, Colorado

Statement

My paintings are a captivating fusion of art, geology, and environmental storytelling, deeply rooted in the rugged and dynamic landscapes of the Rocky Mountain West, the Southwest's high desert plateaus, and the Pacific coastal ranges. I layer the paintings to resemble the geological strata and embed minerals such as mica, obsidian, marble, and sandstone to bridge the tangible and the abstract nature of both the physical landscape and the artistic interpretation of it. Using a mirror effect to show the hidden subsurface geology with the visible world above—creating a dialogue between what's beneath and what's experienced—I focus on the ecosystem as a whole, from snow-capped peaks flowing into rivers and wetlands, tied together by seasonal and climatic events to paint a holistic picture. It's as if each scene becomes a microcosm of time and place. I decide which specific landscapes or moments to capture as a spontaneous connection made during my travels. My travels involve seeking out particular geological or ecological features that speak to me and allowing space and time to fully absorb the chance visual experiences of double rainbows over Flaming Gorge, solar eclipses in the path of totality, and a prismatic dust cloud rainbow sunset at Death Valley National Park. It's as if these spontaneous moments crystallize the region's mystique and continue to set the course for my creative exploration. I aim to channel the awe of the present moment with the vastness of geological time in each painting.

I first encountered a Birger Sandzén painting in the Denver Art Museum's Western Art Collection. It is titled *A Mountain Symphony (Longs Peak, Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado)*. What struck me about the work was the scale of the composition, its bold palette, and the muscular texture of the expressive brush strokes. I saw in his painted language depicting the landscapes of the West, the connection to European impressionist and Fauve painting styles. It didn't surprise me that he was dubbed the "Van Gogh of the West." Three years ago, I happened upon the Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery during a fateful snowstorm on the Great Plains that detoured my route through Lindsborg, Kansas. I was excited to discover his namesake gallery and take a look inside. A painting on display, titled *Moonrise Over the Colorado River*, inspired me to create a version of this scene in my own style. I instantly felt a kinship to his work's extraordinary vision and his immigration journey from Sweden to the American West which I could relate to my own from the United Kingdom to Colorado's Front Range.

Birger Sandzén visited Colorado regularly from Lindsborg and dubbed the Rocky Mountain landscapes as "The Big Pretty." His interest in geology, light and shadow contrast, vivid color, and texture echoes my own. I decided to title my show that exact phrase and have focused many of the paintings on Colorado's Front Range locations that he enjoyed visiting



Garden of the Gods by Sarah Winkler

and painting. Iconic stops such as Longs Peak, the Colorado River, and Garden of the Gods pay homage to the legacy and works of Birger Sandzén through my contemporary approach.

Biography

Sarah Winkler's work explores geological aspects of landscape formation. Combining studio art, earth science, and creative writing during her studies at William Paterson University, Winkler began her career as a collage artist and graphic designer. Her work draws inspiration from the diverse geological landscapes she has encountered throughout her life. Having lived in places ranging from the rugged terrains of Malawi, Africa, to the dramatic coastlines of Big Sur, California, and the majestic Rocky Mountains, Winkler now resides in Colorado, where her studio sits at an elevation of 9,000 feet. Currently, she sketches in a collage format using printed imagery that she creates either physically or digitally. Each layer is then hand painted to retain the cut-paper aesthetic and convey the strata of geological time in landscapes. Locations like Mount Rainier National Park and Pikes Peak are not depicted with identical exactness. Winkler instead positions her work in the abstract state between the physical world and the emotive experiences of place.

Winkler's art is represented in galleries in the US and Canada, and has been featured in museums and art fairs such as the Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Bakersfield Museum of Art in California, Art Aspen, and the LA Art Show. Her work has since been featured in over 100 prominent US and international collections, from Maker's Mark Whisky in Kentucky, to Vail Health in Colorado, and Mountain Shadows Resort in Paradise Valley, Arizona. Winkler is a participating artist in the US Department of State's Art in Embassies program, where she has recently been showcased at the American Embassy in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. She was named one of the top 'Women Painters on the Rise' by Artsy Inc. and was curated into their 2022 digital billboard campaign 'Scenes of Summer' exhibition in New York City. Her work has been featured in *Scientific American*, *Times UK*, *Vail Valley*, *Mountain Living*, *Cowboys & Indians Magazine*, *American Art Collector*, *New American Paintings*, and in the documentary, *Moment*, by Making Art Films.

This exhibition is sponsored in part by Radio Kansas



Birger Sandzén
- MEMORIAL GALLERY -

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