

## The Art of David Sorg

“My intent is to take people somewhere they’d like to be.”

In a realm where academy credentials often help define an artist, landscape/still life painter David Sorg is completely self-taught. Born in Chicago in 1956, Sorg was artistic as a child, and has gradually progressed from those earliest works in crayon to the elegant and moody oil paintings with which he is now identified. What he’s learned over the years has come from trial-and-error explorations of the materials; from books about artistic masters like John Singer Sargent, Thomas W. Dewing and James Whistler; and from his own first-hand observations of nature.

The moodiness frequently found in David Sorg’s paintings isn’t due simply to their often deep-toned palette. By patiently building up glazes of translucent color over color, Sorg creates a hazy depth-of-field that establishes a vivid sense of a place’s atmosphere. Distant clouds may have the downward gray blur that announces distant rain, but Sorg brings this message closer, to the front of the picture plane, carrying the suggestion of moisture directly to the viewer. Often there’s a slight but nearly palpable mist. To our sense of smell these paintings may carry the aroma of linseed oil, but to our most powerful sense—the imagination—they smell like rain.

In the high plains terrain of Denver, where Sorg has lived since 1977, any hint of rain is magical. Precipitation is literally a gift from the heavens in what would otherwise be a desert. Plants “green up” in seasons with rain and stay sere-brown otherwise. Water means life.

An avid enthusiast of hiking, backpacking and mountain biking, Sorg experiences the high plains, front range and mountain terrains first-hand, often photographing as he moves through the landscape, occasionally painting outside as well. The paintings that evolve afterwards, however, are rarely drawn from any specific site. Instead, the artist works to capture a sense of mood, the atmosphere of a place rather than an accurate record of it. Photographs and on-site paintings are useful, but only as references, drawn upon to observe shades of green and brown in the plants or shadows under a tree, rather than for the precise angle of a renowned peak.

Perhaps due to the quiet found in his outdoors pursuits, Sorg’s rarely brings a human presence to his landscapes. These tend to be places where the viewer is alone in the landscape, able to enjoy the solitude. A path may suggest the eventual company of other people—or simply a well-worn personal trail. A rowboat might hint that others are nearby—or this may be the boat that brought the viewer to this still and private place. To view these landscapes is to have a sense of inhabiting them, of sharing their quiet mood, of feeling their damp breezes.

“My intent is to take people somewhere they’d like to be,” says the artist. Though Sorg then laughs at his own sense of “escapism,” the results are timeless, quiet and evocative. Many of us *would* like to be there.

Technically, Sorg’s paintings often begin with a classical treatment: the canvas is tinted with a raw umber base coat. Over this mid-value color, the painter roughs in a sketch lightly with charcoal and then begins adding light and dark tones to further define the scene. With this range of values in place, Sorg then moves in with a full palette of color to slowly, layer by layer, complete the painting.

The viewer sees the results, not the slow details of the artist’s labors. What we ultimately see are muscular clouds trailing a fringe of rain, the beginnings of greenery brought by the life-giving moisture, the deeply secretive shadows of twilight enveloping a pathway between trees, the promise of rain in the air. We view places we can travel in our minds’ eye.

Credit for text and biography to Stephen Savageau, Savageau Gallery, 137 W. 10th Avenue., Denver, Colorado 80204