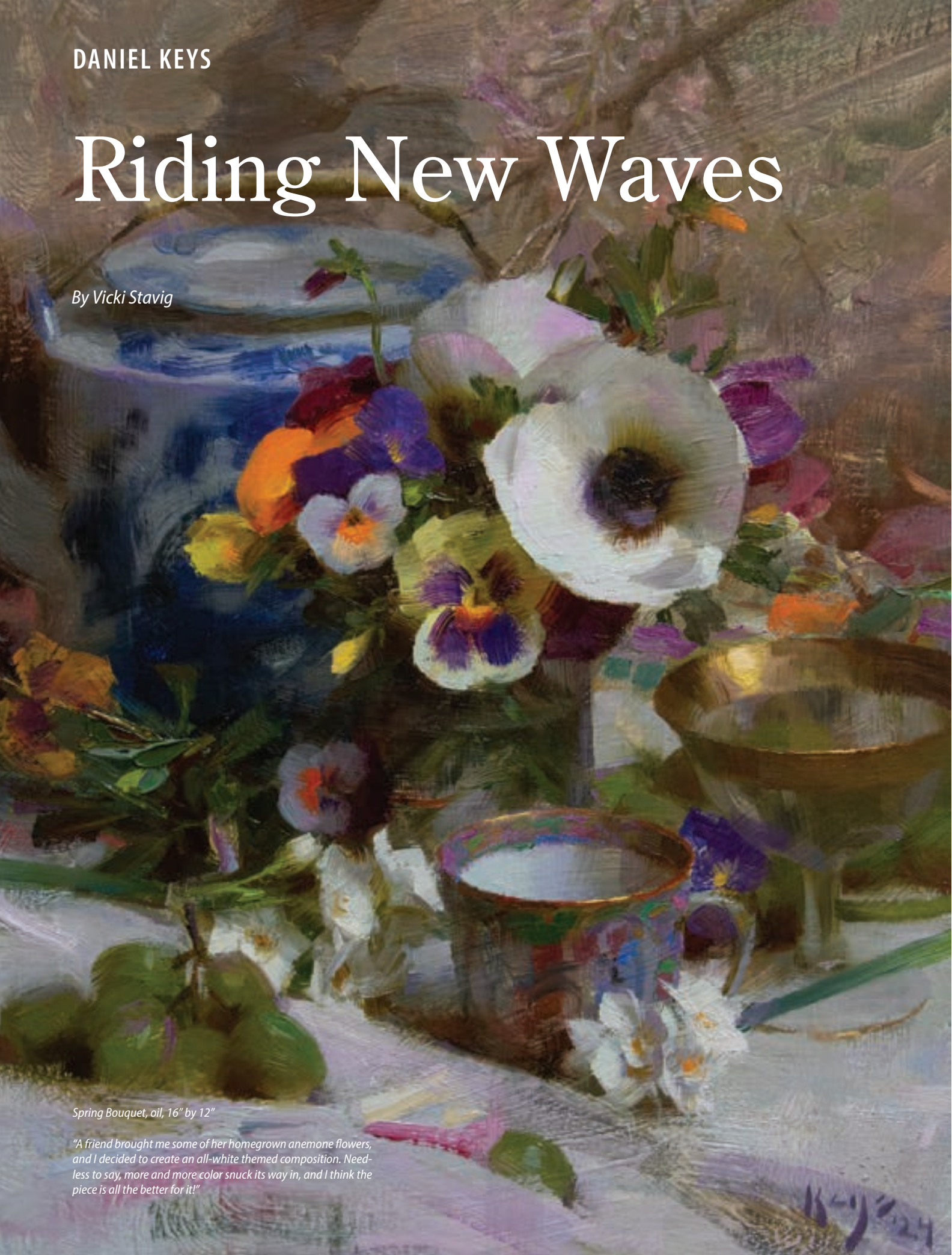


DANIEL KEYS

Riding New Waves

By Vicki Stavig



Spring Bouquet, oil, 16" by 12"

"A friend brought me some of her homegrown anemone flowers, and I decided to create an all-white themed composition. Needless to say, more and more color snuck its way in, and I think the piece is all the better for it!"



Morning On the Farm, oil, 20" by 30"

"A summer trip to Montana is the inspiration for this painting. This scene outside of Bozeman had it all: old structures with interesting architecture, big cottonwood trees, pasture, and a herd of Hereford cows! I painted here several times during that trip, segmenting parts of the scene and painting small studies for each element—some of just the house, or just the barn, and a study that focused solely on the cattle. Back in my studio, I combined all that I had painted in the studies to put together this larger version to fully realize the entire view and remind me of those glorious summer days!"

Daniel Keys is successful, inspired—and inspiring. He's earned prestigious awards for his paintings, which are included in collections throughout the world, and is inspired by the beauty around him. He's also generous, giving back through two programs he developed to encourage young artists: the Sierra Art Group and the Palette Project. He got the idea for both programs while painting with the late master artist Richard Schmid, who had formed the Putney Painters on the East Coast.

"I wanted to replicate that, so I started the Sierra Art Group," Keys says, adding that the group paints together at A Sense of Place, an art gallery near his home outside Fresno, California. "We get together every Saturday; it's my favorite day of the week. There are about 12 of us, artists of different skill levels. There's something special about being with other artists and working side by

side with them."

Keys is also in the twelfth year of teaching at the Scottsdale Artists' School in Scottsdale, Arizona, through the Palette Project. "I've been teaching at the Scottsdale Artists' School a couple times a year since about 2010," he says. "Workshops are expensive and require time, so I talked to the director of the school and said I would like to do something for young artists who can't afford to take workshops. I wanted this program to be completely free, and the school helped to make it happen."

The Palette Project targets young artists from high school to college and attracts them from throughout the country. The workshops—as well as the paints, canvases, travel, and lodging—are free, thanks to several businesses that contribute to the program. Keys also has enlisted the help of several artists who also donate their time to

work with the students.

While he is encouraging young artists, Keys recalls that it was his parents—particularly his father—who encouraged him to paint, even though he didn't want to do so. "Before that," he says, "I had been doodling and drawing. I really wasn't interested in painting but I did it to make him happy."





Evening Roses, pastel, 12" by 12"

"This piece is the result of many studies and larger works (both in oil and pastel) exploring the fleeting light at the very beginning and very end of the day. Twilight—or 'golden hour'—is an ephemeral moment and, as the backdrop for roses, becomes all the more magical to behold."



Summer Treasures, oil, 40" by 40"

"Large paintings such as this require a tremendous amount of preparation. I arrange the composition entirely from life and begin blocking in piece by piece until the entire canvas is covered. Then hours turn into days and days into weeks until the painting reflects what I first envisioned before I began."

Keys, who was homeschooled, was 11 at the time and soon discovered that painting also made him happy. When he was 14, some of his paintings were included in an exhibition at a local bank, and one of them sold for \$150. His parents were—and still are—pastors and, at the time, couldn't afford to help pay for college for their son. So he set out on a course of self-study, using Schmid's book, "Alla Prima: Everything I Know About Painting," as his textbook and visiting Schmid's website on a regular basis.

Then, in 2009, something wonderful happened; Keys met Schmid at Weekend With the Masters, an art conference in Colorado. "When he met artists whose work he thought was good, he would invite them to paint with him when they were in his area," he says. "He invited me, and I went home, bought my plane ticket, and went to paint with him the next month. We clicked, and I painted with him at least twice a year for about 10 years."

Keys approached his first gallery when he was 19 and painting in his parents' garage. "They weren't in a rush to get me out of the house," he says with a laugh. "I was sort of painting out of my head. I approached a gallery, and they declined to show my work, which was one of the best things to happen because the owner sat down and visited with me and gave me a lot of good advice. One of the things she said was, 'Paint from life and find artists whose work you like.' That took me back to when I was 15 and first saw Richard's work. I thought, 'I have to get serious now.'"

The following year, Keys got his paintings into a local gallery. Today, his work is represented by galleries in Arizona, Colorado, Montana, New Jersey, and California, and is featured in collections throughout the country and the world, including Europe and Russia. He has also earned a myriad of awards, including the Portrait Society of America's Draper Grand Prize in 2018. "It's one of the top portrait prizes in the world and the top in the United States—and it's an international competition," he says with justifiable pride.



Teacup Roses and Hypericum, oil, 9" by 12"

"I love doing simple little paintings like this—no pretense or deeper message. Just some everyday things in beautiful natural light."

Best known for his still life paintings that include flowers and antiques, Keys now is including people in some of his paintings. "I've had no changes in my subjects or style, but they've evolved," he says. "I was fascinated with whatever was blooming. I love flowers and plants, and that translated to setting up things to paint. I have added to that. After winning the Draper award, I wanted to explore larger compositions and include

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more people in them. I incorporate figures into larger compositions, larger narratives."

Keys also earned the grand prize in the International Association of Pastel Societies' competition in 2022. Although he painted exclusively in oils for many years, he now also paints with pastels. "It's stimulating to use another medium," he says. "I picked up pastels because some artists in my local group were using them. It's

like having a new toy."

Keys describes his style as realism with impressionism. He then laughs and says, "My Dad would say, 'It's a mess up close, but it looks real from a distance.' I'm not trying to hide the fact that this is paint. The first impression is that it looks so convincing but, up close, you see how I mix things."

Time, he adds, is also a factor. When painting from life, his time is limited because of atmospheric changes so he leans more to impressionism. When painting in his studio, he has more time, so those works



Pears and Paperwhites, oil, 8" by 10"

"Every autumn I put up paperwhite bulbs to bring indoors over winter and, in addition to their cheery blooms and intoxicating fragrance, they're darn fun to paint!"



Heirloom Tomatoes, pastel, 12" by 24"

"Nothing proves the power of scent to invoke memory for me quite like tomato plants. The smell of the leaves in particular transport me to childhood, when my father would grow them in his garden, and I would spend my summer days watching them grow and, eventually, produce the most delicious fruit that was far superior to anything found commercially. A humble subject matter for painting, but for me it's one that's full of nostalgia and sensory pleasure, and the process of this one was pure joy from start to finish."



Afternoon Light In the Tuileries Gardens, Paris, pastel, 17.5" by 27"

"Nearly every day of each trip I take to Paris includes time spent in the Tuileries. No matter the season, the gardens hold an appeal for me like nowhere else, and I love to sit, coffee and paint brushes in hand, and take it all in, documenting what I see, stroke by stroke."

are more realistic. "I've learned to ride whatever wave I'm on," Keys says. The one wave he has consistently ridden is still life paintings composed of the things he loves and that inspire him.

"I think, of all the things I do paint, or should paint, I love nothing more than being in my garden, growing things and cultivating things," Keys says. "Everything I plant has to qualify as something I want to paint. I also collect French antique furniture and have cabinets of antique dishes and things. I've surrounded myself with things that, when I look at them, I want to paint them.

"A quote that resonated with me is this: Surround yourself with things that bring you peace, because tranquility inspires creativity. I have found that to be true. My home is appealing and inspires creativity. I just bought an 1800s, hand-carved cabinet and filled it with things I


want to paint. I don't have anything that isn't beautiful. The garden and every room in the house invites that creative spirit."

Keys takes great care when composing his still life paintings, saying that, for him, design is almost second nature. "My setups are determined by what's blooming in the garden and what I think will look good together," he says. "It's the most involved part of the painting process. I spend a lot of time arranging things, putting things together that I respond to. I don't get tired of it."

Keys' goal, he says, is to call attention to the beauty found in everyday life. "Richard always used to say, 'There's enough ugliness in the world; I don't see any need to call more attention to it.' I rather agree. Adding more beauty to the world and leaving behind images that strike a chord with people to provoke happiness and appreciation for all that God has graciously given seems like

a far better use of my abilities."

A few months ago, Keys was putting the finishing touches on several paintings and getting started on paintings that will be included in this year's Prix de West at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, this summer. He was also getting excited about a trip he will be taking to Europe with painters Scott Burdick and Susan Lyon and was planning a side trip to England where he will paint thatched-roofed cottages for a show in the fall at his gallery in Fresno.

And, of course, Keys is always looking forward to painting with other artists every Saturday, when he leaves the solitude of his studio and enjoys the camaraderie of working with like-minded souls. 

Vicki Stavig is editor of Art of the West.