

The Four Amigos

A four-artist retrospective with an emphasis on plein air painting opens December 4 in Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

United in their love of the outdoors, and capturing what they see in paint, four artists are coming together for a unique new retrospective exhibition December 4 at Steamboat Art Museum in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. The exhibition, titled *Four Directions – Common Paths*, will feature the work of Ralph Oberg, Matt Smith, Skip Whitcomb and Dan Young.

“The Steamboat Art Museum is honored to present *Four Directions – Common Paths*:

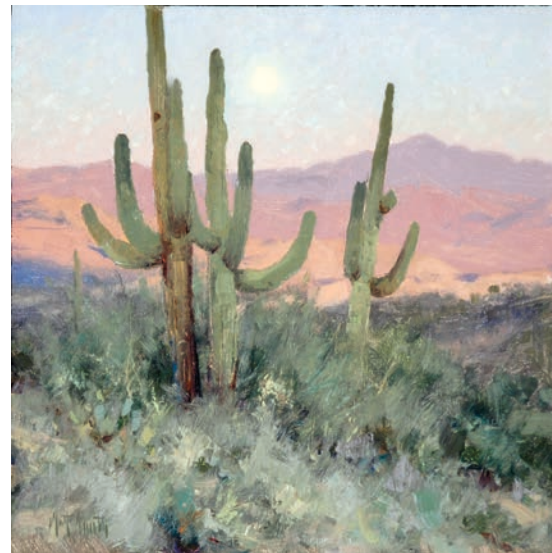
Oberg, Smith, Whitcomb, Young bringing together the work of these four preeminent plein air painters of the West,” says Betse Grassby, executive director at Steamboat Art Museum. “This exhibition demonstrates the wonderful synergistic impact of their 30-year relationships—a story of kinship, adventure and cross-pollination to become their best. We look forward to sharing this experience.”

The artists, dubbed the “Four Amigos” by Booth Western Art Museum executive director

Seth Hopkins, started intersecting in each other’s lives as far back as 30 years ago. Some would show in galleries together, others would take trips, but they would often reconvene out of a mutual admiration for each other’s works. “Above all, we have maintained a warm and enjoyable relationship over these years,” Whitcomb says. “I would like to think we all have grown as painters because of our friendship and deep love of what we do. Basically I consider these guys three of my best friends.”



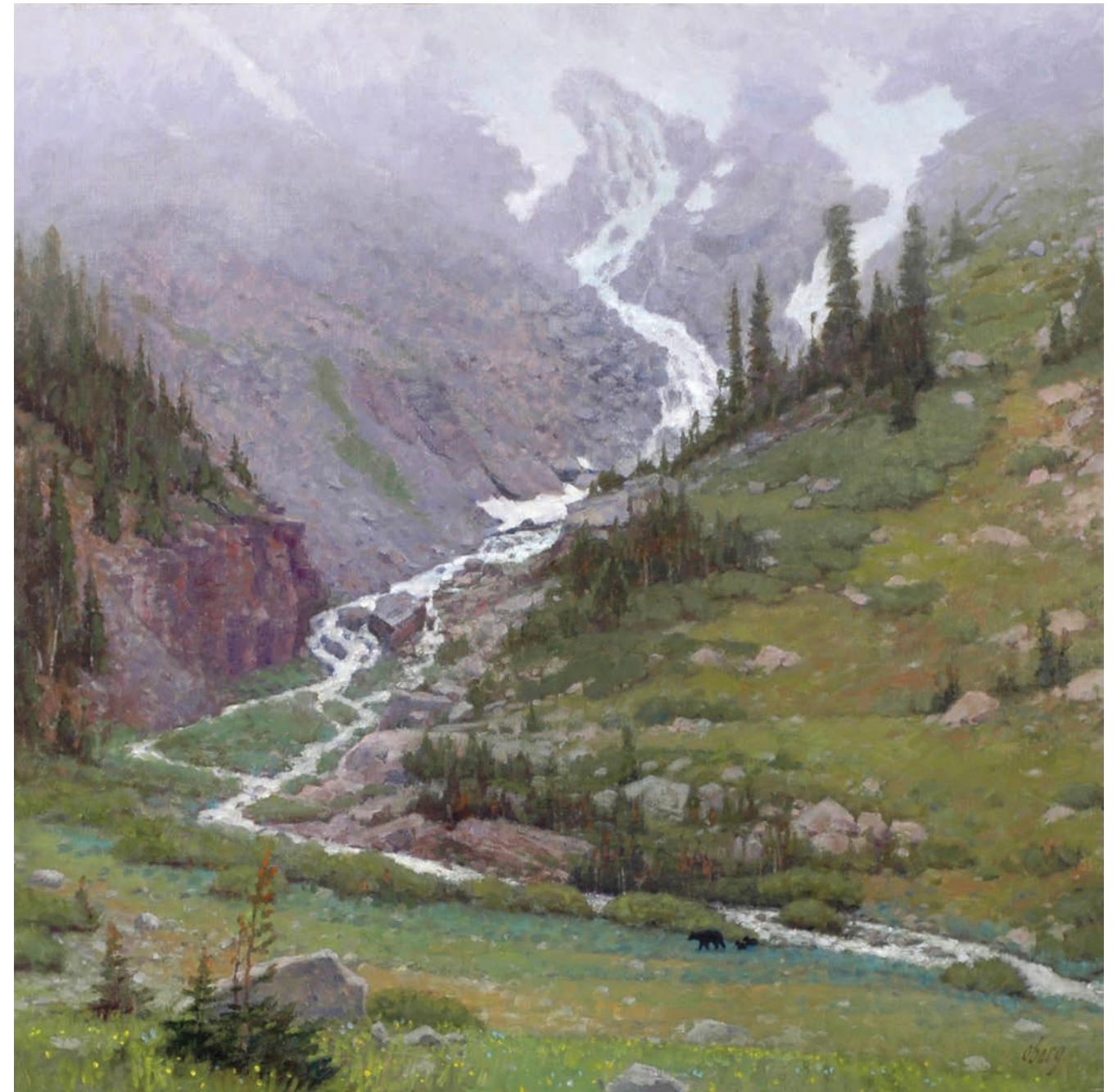
Matt Smith, *Sierra Jewel*, oil, 40 x 36"



Matt Smith, *Sonoran Moonrise*, oil 12 x 12"



Ralph Oberg, *Above Chamonix*, oil, 36 x 38"



Ralph Oberg, *The Many Faces of Water*, oil, 32 x 32"

Young adds, “We have traveled together on countless paint trips from the East Coast to the West Coast and from the northern border to the southern border,” he says. “Time spent with this group is not only important for the kindred spirit we share, but also the support in this crazy business. Yes, we are known to have a few laughs and possibly a glass of wine, but when the easels go up, we go to work. It’s so important to spend time with

people you really connect with. These guys are my people.”

The works in the show will include older pieces, as well as new works created specifically for Steamboat Art Museum. For Young, the retrospective works presented unique opportunities to thank his supporters. “...One of the pieces is from a collector that has been supporting me for years and started buying my work very early in my

career. I wanted to thank him by including one of the pieces he bought years ago that has always been special to him. Quite a few of the smaller field pieces are in my private collection. I was excited to be able to display them in public and the opportunity to do it in a museum setting was even better,” he says. “Many of these I have had for years and I feel are some of my best work. I hope this show allows people to get a peek into



Skip Whitcomb, *Ascension*, pastel, 24 x 24"

my world. Hopefully it will also show the connection the four of us have to the West and our different perspectives on it."

For Whitcomb, he wanted to choose works that would show his growth as an artist. "I have tried to select a cross section of work from approximately the last 30 to 35 years that will show a refinement of process and

thinking. And, of course, to represent some of our locations we have traveled to on our painting trips together so the viewers will have a sense of observing a common subject filtered through four sets of eyes," he says. "I'm a Western geographic painter—this country is in my DNA. In recent years, I find my focus is increasingly on the geology and weather of this

country I love. My hope is the visitors to our show will connect to the work in ways they maybe had not considered, [and] take away a new way of seeing and enjoying what we have here...even just a little bit."

The exhibition will also shine a bright spotlight on plein air painting of the highest quality. "I have found that painting from life is



Dan Young, *Just Up the Road*, oil, 10 x 12"



Skip Whitcomb, *Glimpse of Gadsby*, oil, 32 x 42"

critical if an artist is going to convey mood or any other element that is not visual, or tangible," Smith says. "If I want to convince others that a particular subject was say, cold or hot, it's important for me to experience those conditions firsthand. Doing so while painting on location can't help but to add visual credibility to a work."

Oberg, who recently won the Wilson Hurley Memorial Award at the *Prix de West*, agrees that plein air painting holds a special place within the art world. "My work has always been evolving over the 45 years I have been making pictures. I started with highly rendered watercolor portraits of birds and mammals. I then began using acrylics for full-frame wildlife, soon to be replaced by oils for the rest of my career. After years of strictly photo-aided wildlife subjects, I realized I needed to go outside to paint the landscape from life to learn about the true colors and values that the camera generally fails to record," he says. "So I began a long period of mixing my studio wildlife with numerous road trips to paint the landscape in plein air. I have since begun to mix my landscapes and wildlife subjects. I am now, at 70, in a place where I am working almost exclusively with mountain landscape subjects, sometimes from a mountaineer's point of view."

Four Directions-Common Paths: Oberg, Smith, Whitcomb, Young continues through April 10, 2021. 🍷

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December 4, 2020-April 10, 2021
Steamboat Art Museum
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