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EXPLORING NEBRASKA THROUGH ART



Todd Williams, an internationally known artist and native of Central City, shows two of his paintings. The larger one was painted in Italy and the smaller is of his grandparents' farm in Hamilton County.

Independent/Amy Schweitzer

Central City native seeks to do a painting in every county

By Amy Schweitzer
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CENTRAL CITY — Internationally-known painter Todd Williams has painted from such exotic locations as Vienna, Prague and Venice, but his latest project is a little closer to home.

Born and raised in Central City, Williams, who now lives in Arkansas, wants to paint a picture in each of Nebraska's 93 counties.

"I've always been inspired by the awesome sunsets of my childhood," Williams said when he was back in his hometown last week.

In 2005 he went to Vienna, Austria, and Prague, Czech Republic, to do a series of paintings. He also was asked to teach a class on his art specialty, "en plein air," which means painting on location from real life as opposed to in a studio. He also painted some from photographs he took in those cities.

Based on the success of those paintings, he said, he used the same template in Italy in 2007. Examples of those paintings can be seen on his website, <http://toddwilliamsfineart.com>.

Then last May, he was watching Larry the Cable Guy's TV show, "Only in



Courtesy photo by Chuck Griffiths

Todd Williams paints the Wright Morris house on location in Central City. Williams, an internationally known artist and native of Central City, plans to paint a painting from every county in Nebraska.

America," at the state's smallest town, Monowi, with a population of one.

"I started to think about Nebraska," Williams said, adding that he is proud to be from Nebraska. "It kind of inspired me and I thought, 'What I did in Europe, why couldn't I do that here?'"

Once the paintings are completed, he hopes they can be taken around the state in a traveling exhibit, displayed at museums and schools.

He said he presented the idea first to the Merrick County Foundation and Chuck Griffith encouraged him to pursue the idea and the foundation is one of the first to financially sponsor Williams on his project.

"As he started talking about it to others, it just seems like it has gotten a really positive response," Williams said, adding that the project is in the beginning stages.

He started by painting the Wright Morris house in Central City, just blocks away from the home of his parents, Don and Joyce Williams. He painted it on location last week.

Williams also painted the farm in Hamilton County where his grandparents lived.

"That place has a lot of special, fond memories for me," he said, adding that he took pictures of Stuhr Museum and the Hall County Courthouse to paint once he gets back to his studio in Siloam Springs, Ark.

Williams plans to return to Nebraska in the spring to do more paintings and take more photos. He said he envisions painting bluffs in western Nebraska and the Sandhills.

"What is exciting for me as an artist is the diversity that the state of Nebraska offers," he said. "It's not just flat with cornfields. There is just a lot of really neat areas in Nebraska. That's what I'm looking forward to exploring, because I myself haven't really had the chance to visit these areas."

He said he has been researching the history of each county and is excited because Stuhr Museum

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officials said they would help him find historic sites in nearly every county.

"I love history," Williams said, adding he wasn't sure how much history would play into his paintings. "But history inspires me artistically."

When the paintings are hung and as they travel the state, Williams wants to not only put a title and place plate on the frame for each piece, but also have a description card of what the significance of the subject is to history or the area.

Williams said he appreciates the Merrick Foundation for helping provide the "seed money" to get him started on the project. He is looking for more sponsors who appreciate art and the project with whom to partner.

"It's a big time commitment on my part," he said, adding that it will probably take three to five years to complete the series. He believes he will end up with nearly 150 paintings by the time he gets around to all the counties.

Williams also hopes to reproduce the paintings into a coffee table-type art book.

He said the project could not only educate people about the state of Nebraska, but also increase Midwesterners' appreciation of art.

"With the arts, it all starts with education," Williams said, adding that the art market is much less in the center of the country. "Once people are educated, then the appreciation quickly follows."

Williams graduated from Central City High School in 1985 and earned an associate's degree from Central Community College in Columbus before attending Kansas City Art Institute. He went on to be an in-house senior artist/designer for Hallmark Cards and DaySpring Cards for the next 10 years.

“Painting The Legacy Of Nebraska - The Good Life”

A Series of Paintings From All 93 Counties

by Fine Artist - Todd A. Williams

Having been born and raised in the great State of Nebraska, I've always been inspired by the awesome sunsets of my childhood. After receiving my education in Central City, Nebraska from grade school to high school, I knew God had gifted me to become a fine artist.

It is my vision to give recognition and awareness of my great State and bring it's beauty to life on canvas. My goal is to paint one or more Masterful Paintings of each county in Nebraska. I desire to show not only the historical legacy but also the diversity and simplicity of the landscape and landmarks.

Under the influence of the great turn of the century American Impressionists, some of the paintings will be created “en plein air” and others in the studio. The finished collection of paintings will be displayed and on exhibition throughout the State of Nebraska. For example: The Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, The Great Plains Art Museum in Lincoln, The Museum Of Nebraska Art in Kearney, Bone Creek Museum in David City, Norfolk Art Center in Norfolk, and many others.

With the support of the State of Nebraska, Counties, Private Corporations and Individuals, I plan to create a Classical Art Book compiled of the entire collection. In conjunction with the book a short documentary DVD will also be produced showcasing my journey throughout each county and the creative process. The DVD will not only show me painting on location but also

display the rich mixture of scenes and worthy complexity of the State and it's people that I meet along the way.

Although the book and the DVD is not intended as an instructional tool, it will in fact help to educate and inspire the Arts in Nebraska.

My hearts desire for this project is to reawaken an appreciation for the Arts and preserving the unique beauty and heritage that Nebraska has to offer.

It is with great joy that I embark on this journey to capture the legacy of my birth place. To reveal Nebraska through the eyes of an Artist. I invite you to stand in pride, alongside me, as we take this journey together.