

On the Cover

Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist on November 13, 2014.

Born in Portland, Oregon, in 1947, Randall Stauss knew at age 5 that he wanted to be an artist. There was nothing he enjoyed as much as drawing and coloring. As a child he entered “coloring contests” sponsored by the Russets Flakes breakfast cereal, popular when he was growing up. His coloring won him a transistor radio when that was a big deal, as well as other prizes, which provided positive reinforcement for his artistic talent. He received a great deal of support from his family too—especially his mother, who did needlepoint. He marveled at her great patience as she worked on a single piece for months. He finds that he is not nearly so patient and likes to finish his paintings quickly. He has learned to be “efficient within the parameters of satisfaction.”

Two things happened when Stauss was about 10 years old. His parents enrolled him in a Saturday art class at the Portland Art Museum. The family was living in rural Hillsboro, Oregon, at the time, and just entering the magnificent building opened his world to art. The second event that made a large impression was a traveling exhibition of 84 paintings by Vincent van Gogh. This exhibit caught the attention of people in Portland, and even those with marginal interest in art made a trip to see it. Stauss remembers walking right up to van Gogh’s *Bedroom in Arles*, a viewing experience that would not be possible today, given the ropes and restrictions in museums.

Stauss began painting all the time. His grandparents had homesteaded nearby farmland, and he would visit the farm to paint animals, though the ones he painted were not the kind one usually finds on a farm. His creative response to the dairy farm was to paint elephants and other wild creatures. He calls himself a reality-based painter who paints what he knows but one who can appreciate imaginative perspectives. As an adult, he still likes to include some whimsy where it works with his images.

Stauss came to realize that it was not just the end result—the image on canvas—but the process that was important. Painting made him feel more alive and increased his sense of well-being. He believes that many students focus on the final brush stroke and the finished product, but he knows they must earn their way to the end result—step by step—and enjoy the experience for what it is. Even seasoned artists can lose the joy in the process. For Stauss, that is when painting stops being creative and fun.

Early in his career, Stauss picked up a sideline. He said, “If you don’t teach, you need to do something.” His

something was to become a sign painter. He apprenticed at a large union shop in San Francisco and learned the craft, making a living at it for 15 years, by which time his paintings were able to support him. A summer job in 1980 creating caricatures in a Virginia City, Nevada saloon brought him to the Tahoe area. He found a niche hand-lettering the names of boats on Lake Tahoe with gold leaf, just as he had learned in making signs. He got hooked on painting in the mountains and now splits his time between homes at Carnelian Bay on the lake and Marin County near San Francisco. However, he remains active in marina life when occasionally called on to paint the name on the stern of a beautiful boat.

Living in Tahoe at an elevation of 6,200 feet, Stauss experiences winters of copious snowfall. He describes snow paintings as big abstract shapes with bluish shadows that create light and dark patterns. He enjoys painting snow, finding that it has a simplicity that summer scenes do not have. He especially likes painting creeks with snow on top of rocks, the cold water with patterns hidden until one looks closely. He will take his painting equipment and follow a creek away from the road, spread a tarp on the snow to protect his supplies, and paint for 2 to 3 hours until he is cold and the light has changed.

In winter, he often starts four or five paintings, but the first layers of watercolor do not dry quickly and tend to warp the paper. So on subsequent days, he repeats his route upstream to add further layers to the watercolor paper that has dried and flattened. *Squaw Valley Meadow* (featured on the cover of this issue’s *American Psychologist*) was painted just this way. The beautiful diagonals (left to right and up and down) take the viewer’s eye to a spot in the middle right of the scene. Stauss, looking west, captured the streaks of clouds that formed over the mountains.

The artist’s capacity to work with reality and imagination are captured in his admiration of two iconic American painters who embodied different styles:

Painting is largely a matter of inspiration and seeing things clearly. Two of my favorite painters are Winslow Homer and Childe Hassam. Hassam’s work looks like it was sheer joy to paint, and Homer was always looking for the truth of the matter. I try for both. (R. Stauss, 2014, quoted in “Everyday Life by Randall Stauss,” *Tahoe Arts and Mountain Culture*. Retrieved from <http://www.tahoeeculture.com/art/featured-artists/everyday-life-by-randall-stauss/>)

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