

K A N S A S

John Hulsey

Passion And Mystery

ALTHOUGH HE WORKS IN SEVERAL MEDIA, John Hulsey uses watercolor as his primary medium for visual expression. It is the way he “thinks out loud” in his sketchbooks and small studies in preparation for larger studio works, regardless of which medium he chooses for the final creative expression.

ILLUSTRATOR TO ARTIST

By the time Hulsey had finished his formal art-school education, he had taught himself to handle the exquisitely difficult medium of watercolor. Over time, his watercolor technique improved dramatically, and as it did so, he began to make larger finished paintings. He resolved to make watercolors that could rival the best oil paintings while developing a technique uniquely his own. He says, “Everything about watercolor appealed to me, but perhaps above all, the peculiarities of the medium tended to challenge my efforts to control it at every step. Painting became more like a performance or a dance than simple picture-making.”

At 27, Hulsey moved with his artist-wife, Ann Trusty, to New York, where he worked as a freelance illustrator. The upside of that high-pressure, deadline-driven occupation was that he became very accomplished in painting and design in short order. He points out that “one learns very quickly to focus one’s efforts on the strongest ideas and compositional possibilities when there is only a week to produce a large, finished piece that will be seen by millions.” He found that watercolor, properly handled, was perfect for this job.

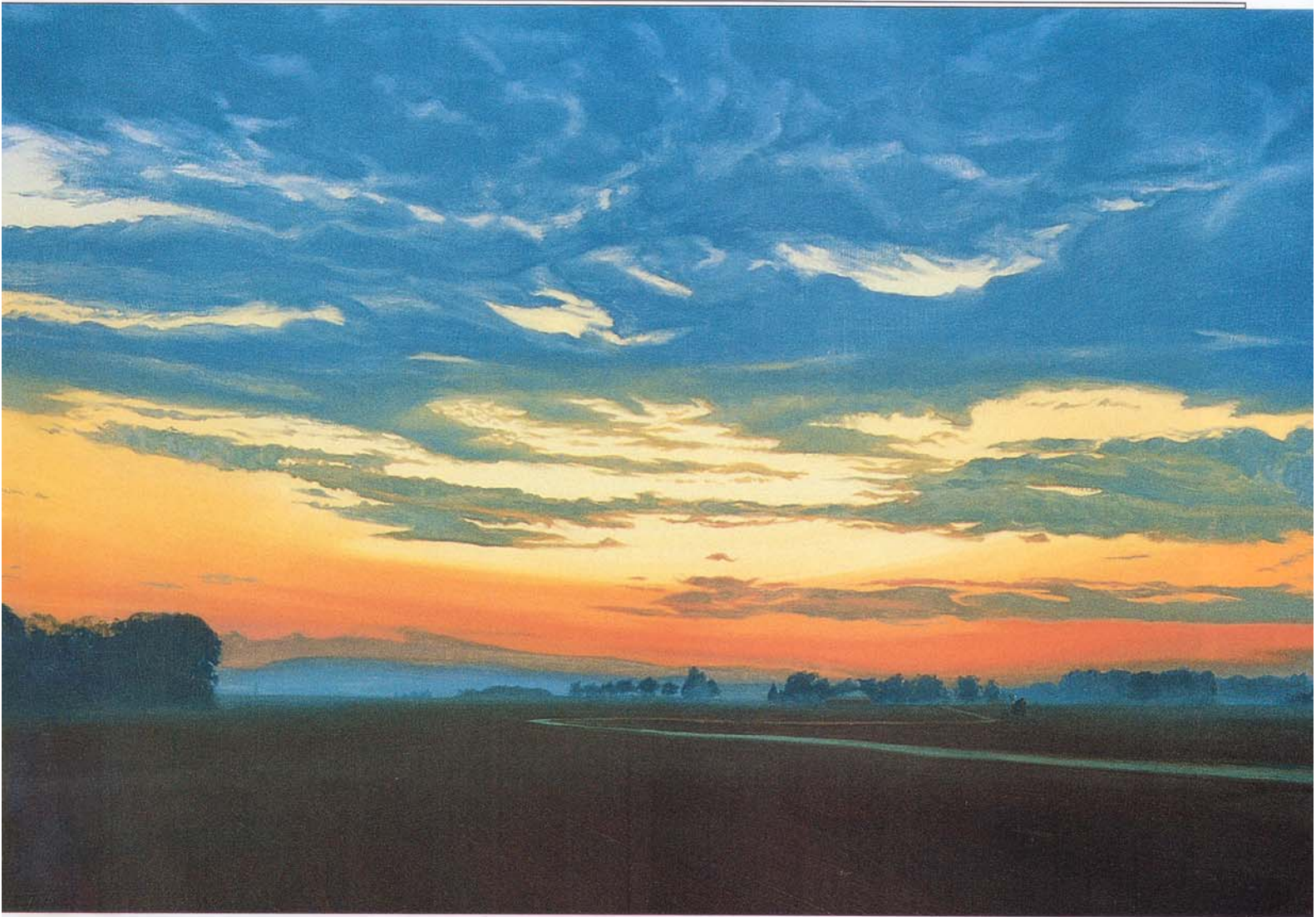
However, he soon discovered that he was drawn to painting the landscape. Serendipitously, he and Ann had rented a studio in an old New York Central train station on the eastern shore of the Hudson River, in the little hamlet of Garrison, New York. The spectacular river views outside their studio windows gradually drew him more and more to paint outdoors, in turn, leading more and more to the exhibition and sale of his plein-air watercolors and pastels. Ultimately, he made the permanent transition to full-time landscape painter, abandoning his commercial work for good.

SEEKING NATURE

“In 1980, plein-air painting wasn’t yet an art movement of which I was aware,” recalls the artist. “I rarely saw any other artists painting outside, even though I lived in the heart of one of the most scenic places on the East Coast. This puzzled me, because I had come to understand that the experience of painting in nature was powerfully moving and transformative for my art and should be so for other artists.” Hulsey decided to share his painting experiences and techniques with other artists by writing articles for national magazines. He also began teaching workshops on the subject throughout the United States and in Provence, France.

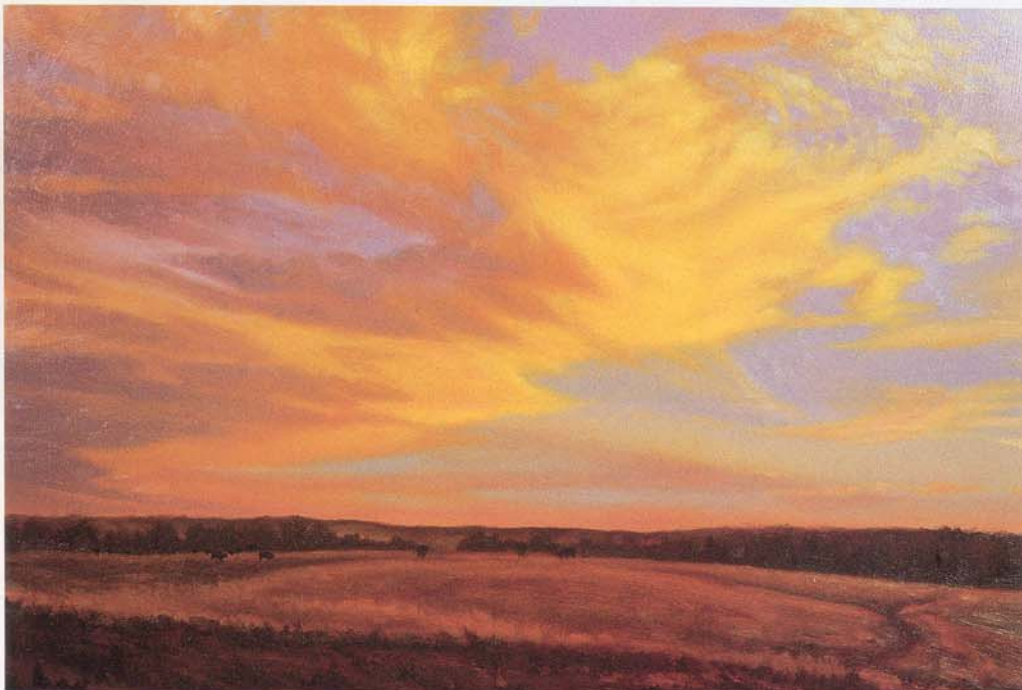


SUNRISE FIELD V
OIL ON BOARD, 39³/₄ X 48 IN.



DEEP BLUE II

OIL ON BOARD, 24 X 31 1/4 IN.

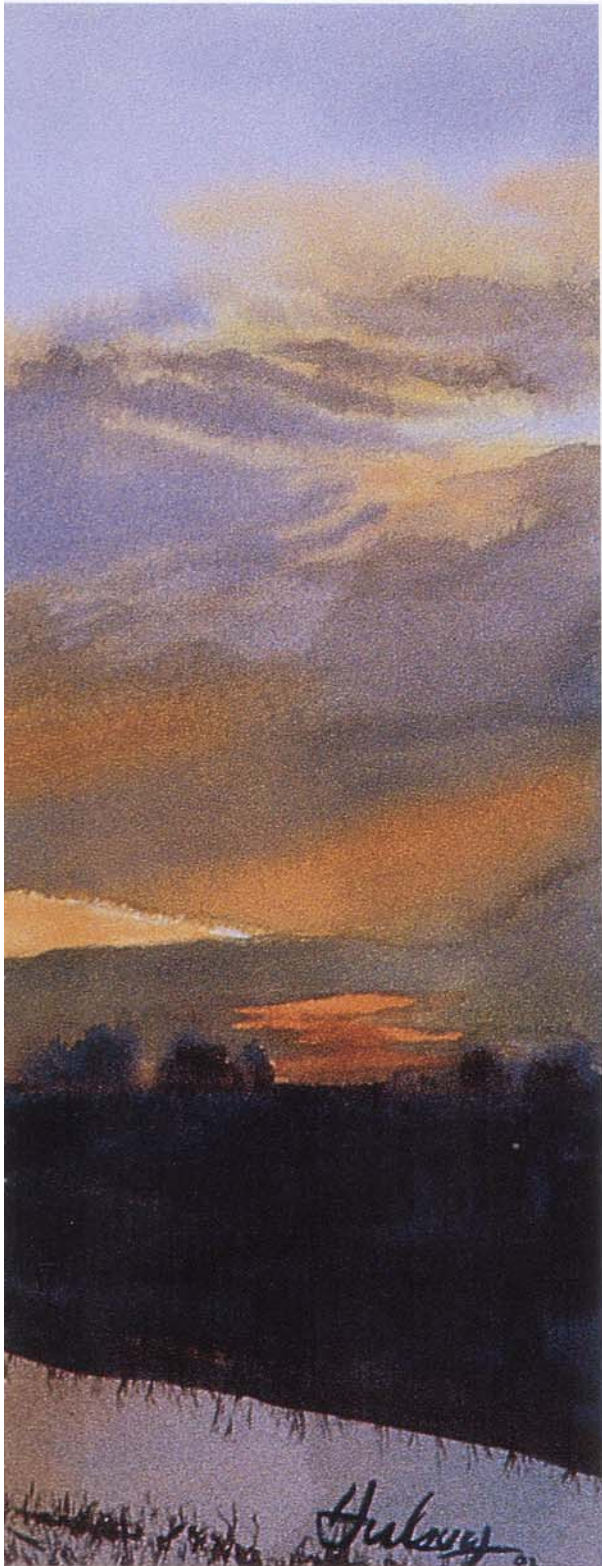


BIG PRAIRIE

OIL ON BOARD, 18 X 24 IN.



FIELD DAY
WATERCOLOR, 12 x 16 IN.



THE GOOD LIGHT
WATERCOLOR, 12 X 16 IN.

After 10 productive years of painting East Coast landscapes, he and Ann craved their own studio and home base. This desire eventually precipitated a move to the Midwest, where they bought 14 acres of rural property and built a custom-designed studio/house. “We had an innate need to own our studio space, where we could be secure and able to limit the distractions to our work,” he says. “The move to Kansas accomplished all that and much more.”

Of his current favorite subject, Hulsey says, “The landscape of the prairie does not give up its mysteries and beauties at first glance. There is a depth of beauty and a richness that requires many encounters and hours of contemplation in order to begin to understand it. The scale of the sky and earth is so huge, it inspires awe and so reminds us how small we all are, yet a necessary part of the whole. Painting has become my religion, and nature, my church.”

SELF-IMPOSED CHALLENGES

Over the last 15 years, Hulsey has expanded his painting oeuvre to include oils. This gives him the opportunity to rest his watercolors and work in a slower medium, where he can make alterations and evolutionary changes as he works. The oil work, in turn, invigorates his watercolor paintings. As he returns to them, he must become re-acquainted with the medium, and this, he says, stimulates his painting.

Always he works to put more passion and mystery into his painting through the experience of painting outdoors. He says that this physical connection with nature informs and transforms his work, and he hopes that it endows his landscapes with a feeling of intimacy and freshness. He strives to create a work of art so sublime that it instantly draws viewers into it and allows their imaginations to participate in completing the experience of place and time.

“I believe that it takes discipline and an objectively self-critical attitude about one’s own work to reach a high level of achievement, and I know that I frequently fall short of the mark,” he says, adding, “This is the thrill in the work — the constant searching to discover and express something universal about the human condition through the simple act of painting. That I may fail or succeed at each stroke of the brush is what keeps my art alive and interesting.” ■