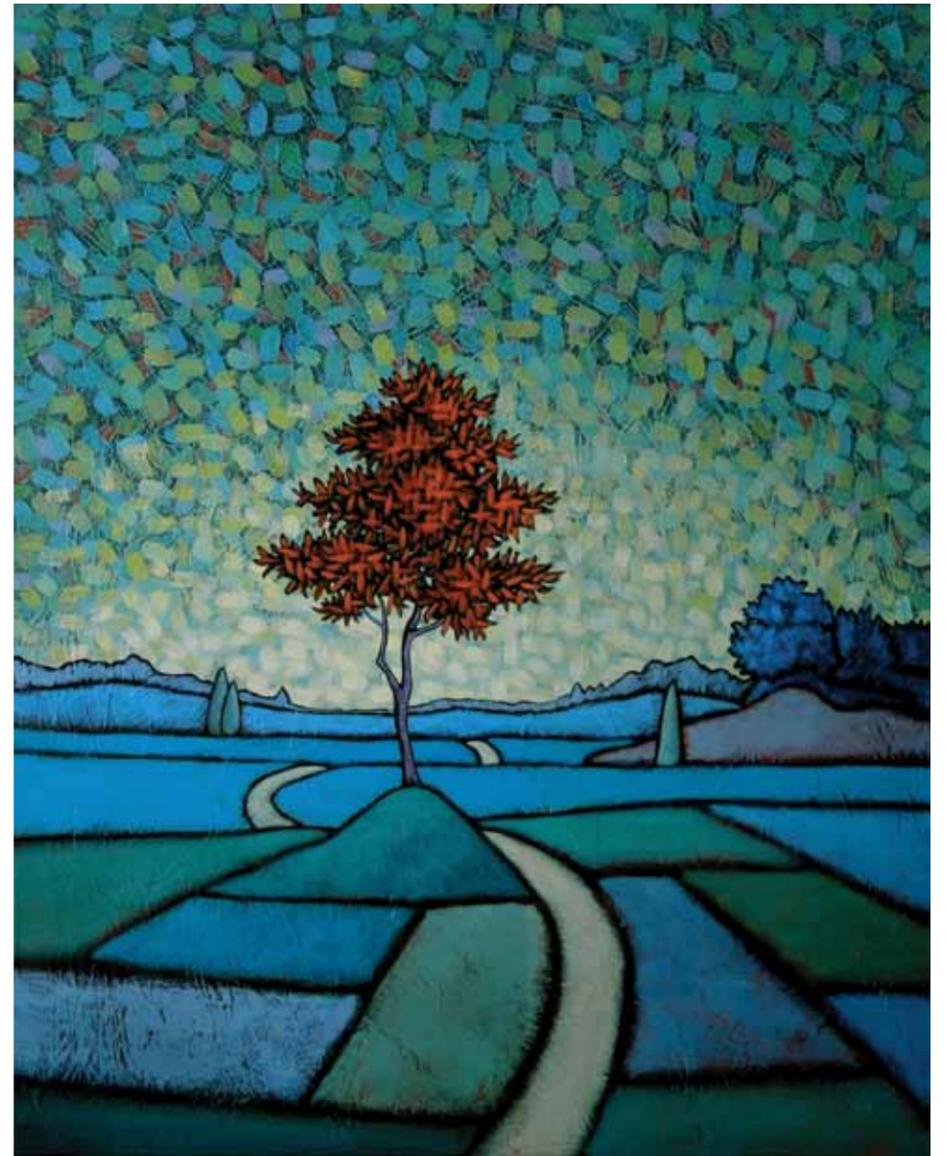




Becoming the Light

Through his boldly colored landscapes that are lit from within, **GC Myers** tells stories by employing his signature style.

By Zack Hatfield



Myers considers *Internal Landscape* (above; acrylic on canvas, 54x84) deeply musical and a kind of apotheosis, combining his trademark elements to form a strikingly luminescent presence.

The landscape in *Cast Your Shadow* (previous page; acrylic on canvas, 24x36) contains Myers's typical trademark symbols: a winding path, a red-roofed cottage and a solitary red tree. The painting has a sense of shadow to balance the radiant sun.

For GC Myers, becoming a painter was an accident. Or rather, it was because of one. Over the years Myers had tried his hand at a number of artistic ventures from airbrush painting to leather working. Most recently he was exploring woodcarving as a vehicle for creative expression, but nothing was solidifying, until the accident. In his early thirties, while building his house in upstate New York, he fell off a ladder, plummeting about 16 feet to the ground. He knocked his teeth out and fractured his wrist. "I was a mess for awhile," he admits. After the fall, he turned to painting as a way to aid the healing process. Using old airbrush paints, but applying them with a brush, Myers began painting. "I attached a brush to my cast and started painting; something clicked. The colors that had always looked muddy to me in the past were working," he recalls. "I was immediately

drawn in, spending every free moment painting. One step forward kept leading to the next one. I became obsessed."

A year passed, and Myers kept creating his art even as he continued to build the house he still lives in today. He launched his career when a local gallery owner offered to critique his work. Lugging in a crate of paintings, the owner of the gallery asked one question after seeing his paintings: Where the heck have you been? Myers was in a group show soon after that, and then had his first solo show.

Although he's never had any conventional art training and has only taken a single art class—a drawing course he describes as a disaster—Myers has made a life of doing what he loves. After more than 50,000 hours spent in the studio, Myers says his one goal is to make art that he finds exciting. If he excites others along the way, that's even better.

This Artist's Perspective

You won't mistake a GC Myers painting for someone else's. Over the years, he's shaped his style with a recognizably warm palette and recurring imagery. Many of his landscapes are rinsed with a sepia luminosity, as if he incorporated pieces of evening sunlight onto the canvas itself. Hallmarks of Myers's work include villages of white cottages with red roofs and a single red tree amidst sprawling pastures; symbols whose meaning he prefers to be interpreted by the viewers. Commentators frequently compare his paintings to stained glass, and rightly so; it takes a lot of skill to make it appear as if soft, medieval light is pouring through the canvas from the other side.

The modest artist says his sense of perspective derives from what he describes as a sense of rightness. "It's hard to explain, but it's simply my

innate ability to see something and just know the perspective is off. It can be a horizon line in a painting or a line in a three-dimensional piece of art," he shares. "How lines move, intersect and relate to each other and the entirety of a piece, be it a painting or an abstract sculpture, is either visually appealing and right or simply doesn't work."

This ability to understand when perspective is pleasing is important for an artist who makes landscapes that are emotionally based, not representationally accurate. He paints not from a photograph or looking out a window, but from his imagination. Still, he sees this sense of rightness as pivotal. "One stray line can ruin an entire painting," he says. As evidenced in a quick study of his work, lines are fundamental in his approach to perspective. Like many of Vincent van Gogh's landscapes, Myers employs lines to hold in his brilliant, Fauvist

The title *Clair de Lune* (acrylic on canvas, 30x24) is taken from the impressionistic Claude Debussy musical piece, and captures the painting's soft, nocturnal mood. Note how the unexpected colors in the sky—dark red, purple and lime—work toward a more textured, interesting depiction.



Toolkit

BRUSHES: Winsor & Newton Regency Gold, 1-inch Loew-Cornell ox bristle mop for wet work and Loew-Cornell hog bristle brushes for acrylic work

PAINTS: Daler-Rowney FW Artists inks and Liquitex Heavy Body acrylics

COLORS: Diarylide yellow, Indian yellow, indigo marine, flame red, pyrrole red and red oxide

SURFACES: Bainbridge Alphamat Artcare matboard, Crescent illustration board, Fredrix and Creative Mark pre-stretched canvases, hardboard panels, Igloo Vellum and Saunders Waterford Watercolor 300-lb. paper

EASEL: MABEF H-Frame Studio Easels and Hamilton 40x60 drafting tables

MARK-MAKING TOOLS: Conte Crayons and Derwent watercolor pencils

MEDIUMS: Golden GAC-100 and GAC-500 and Liquitex gesso

VARNISH: Golden Archival Varnish, MSA w/UVLS and Liquid gloss

PALETTE: bits of matboard, plastic plates and plastic lids

colors. This allows his trees, roads and suns to appear bolder and, simply, more there. Myers is influenced partly by 19th-century Japanese woodcuts, and perhaps the occasional bonsai-looking tree in a painting is a nod to this inspiration. Often, Myers will foreground a tree or a house and subtly vignette his canvases in darker colors to provide a sense of depth.

Crucial to orienting a specific perspective is Myers's choice to paint mainly with a single brush—"as big a brush as I can," he admits. This tactic, though it may seem limiting, actually enables him to create a more democratic focus. Everything is accorded, roughly, the same specificity. As a result, viewers aren't drawn to particular parts of a painting more than other areas. Rather, their attention is captured by the entirety of the landscape. This effect is easily understood when looking at *The Internal Landscape* (page xx), a massively scaled vista of golden valleys, sun-flecked water and corduroyed

plains. The eye wanders across the work—which measures 4½ feet x 7 feet—but isn't exactly drawn anywhere in particular. This is intentional and grants the entirety of the painting a splendid presence.

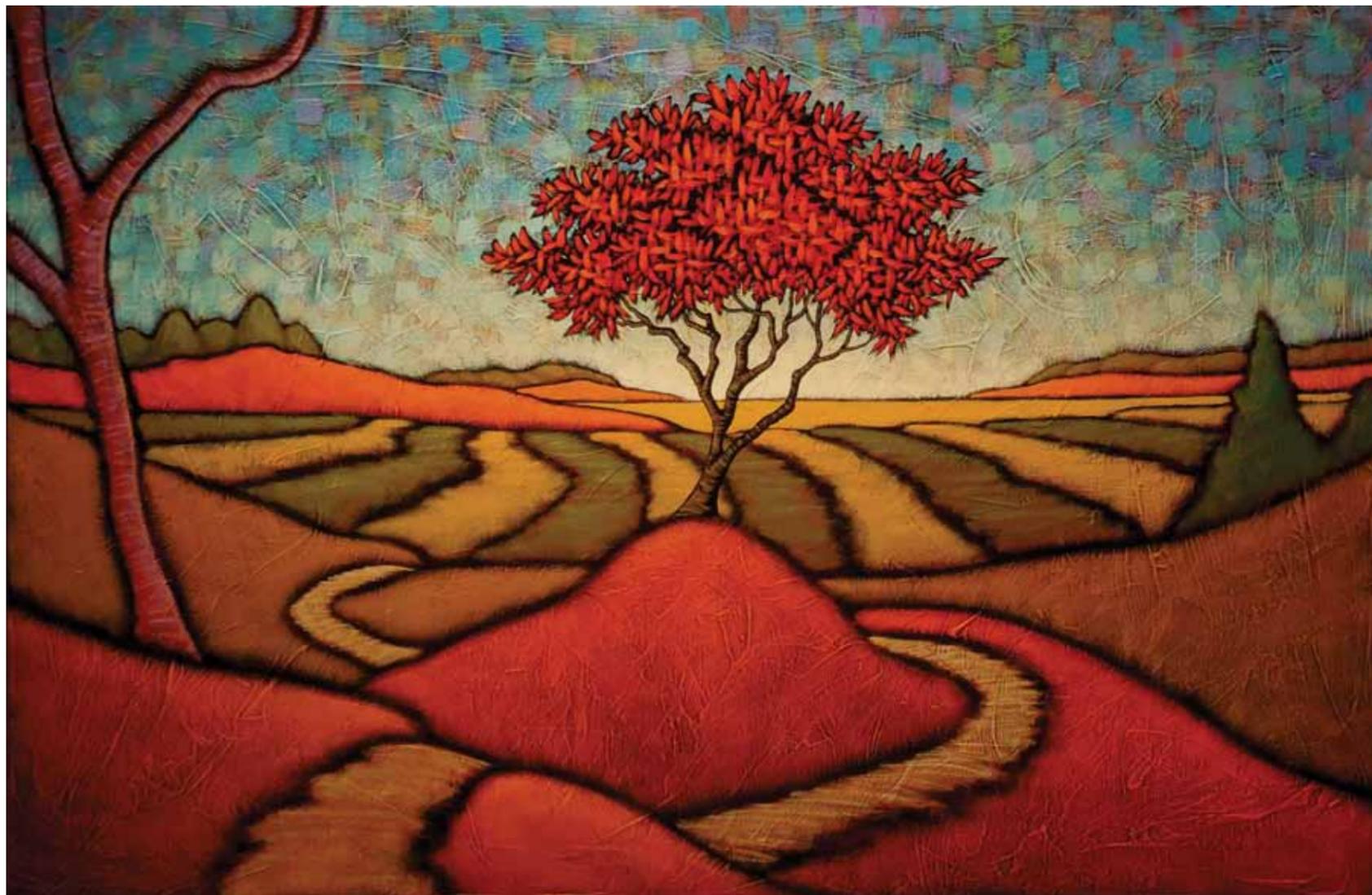
The Trick to Achieving Texture

Myers has a unique approach to texture. He explains that when he's giving advice to novice painters, they often think that by texturing his landscapes, he's shaping the gesso and paint to conform with the subjects he's depicting, like

Shambhala (above; acrylic on canvas, 24x36) refers to a Buddhist "pure land" of the same name. When overwhelmed by current headlines, Myers likes to immerse himself in visions of idyllic communities.

The warm, autumnal landscape in *Listener (The True Music)* (right; acrylic on canvas, 24x12) earns its powerful presence through the distinct lines that fence in everything depicted. Even the cloud floating overhead is held in by smeary black brushstrokes that make the painting more interesting.





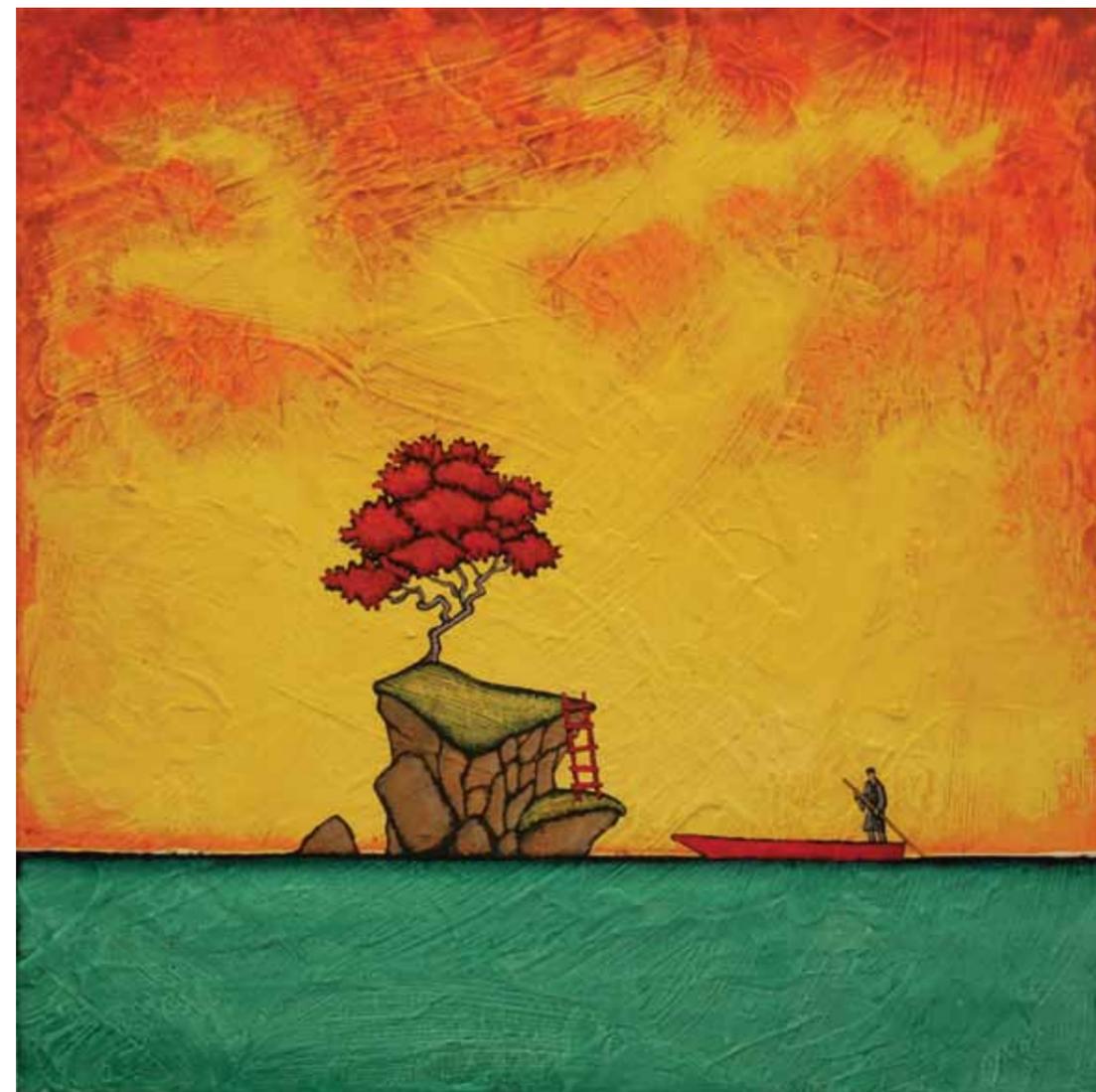
Myers often uses colors not found in nature to augment his natural landscapes. In *The Way of the Master* (above; acrylic on canvas, 24x36), a shimmering sky is evoked using implausibly simultaneous purples, greens, blues and reds.

texturing paint to go in the same direction a field slants on the canvas. But this rarely works, Myers cautions. “Texture has to be independent and chaotic. Once you try to overthink it or try to force it, it has no organic feel,” he says. “And that’s what I’m looking for.” Instead of focusing too much on treating his textured acrylic like the objects he’s painting (fields, leaves, houses), Myers lets his textures play against what he’s depicting in the work. The technique can be seen in paintings like *Shambhala* (page XX), in which scrapes and wrinkles on the canvas are uniform across the greenish sky, mountain range, sky-blue lake and rolling knolls.

Let There Be Light

When it comes to imbuing his canvases with light, Myers starts with darkness. For a work like *The Internal Landscape* (page XX), he begins by layering the entire canvas with gesso, then black paint, and then red oxide for the underpainting. He uses

Liquitex Heavy Body and Golden Fluid paints, and Loew-Cornell hog bristle brushes when working with acrylic paint, but he’ll sometimes trowel or run his fingers through the gesso. Because he starts with a darker base, the colors appear more vivid against the dark background when he begins to paint his landscapes. The technique occurred to him while visiting the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, where he became transfixed by the work of post-Impressionist painter Paul Gauguin. Upon close inspection, he noticed speckles of vermillion coming through the other hues. Myers notes that colors appearing in paintings of natural landscapes don’t have to actually appear in nature, and the paintings he studies at the museum reinforce that belief. By layering red oxide—a pigment that helps lend his canvases their rusty glow—over the black paint, Myers creates a red Rothkoesque, brick plane that activates the colors on the surface.



For paintings like *The Way of the Master* (above, left) and *Cast Your Shadow* (page xx), the sunny skies are rendered with shapes reminiscent of sequins of various pigments. Myers admits that many of the colors he used for these skies aren’t immediately visible, but that they contribute a great deal in creating the texture and atmosphere he needed. For pieces that involve water, such as *Linked* (page XX), a vision of two islands connected by a rope bridge, Myers works with FW Artists transparent inks, lifting color off of flat surfaces with an ox hair brush. “I’m working very wet, with a lot of color and treating the process, at times, like a watercolorist would,” he shares. “I call this process of applying a lot of color and then lifting it off the surface reductive painting.” The technique reveals a washed-out white canvas surface that gives the impression of a broken dawn’s light. When employing this watercolor-like painting process, he uses Saunders Waterford watercolor paper.

The Corning Museum of Glass, not too far from his studio, provides inspiration for Myers’s window-like canvases. Light is perhaps the defining element of his work. “And if there is no light,” he wrote in a recent blog post, “become the light.”

Found Color

The imagined landscapes appear to take on a stained glass look and are rich in intense, saturated colors, but they never cross the line into garish and vulgar. Myers has a deep respect for color. “The main reason I was drawn to painting was I wanted to see in my work the intensity of color I saw in nature, but which I wasn’t seeing in other work, anywhere.” Myers continues by saying, “I knew that I would have to address this lack of color myself; I needed to paint the pictures I wanted to see.”

To embrace color without becoming garish, the artist errs on the side of rightness. “Boldness in color works for me, so long as it involves keeping

In one of his rare peopled works, Myers combines potent symbolic imagery to illustrate a universal epic journey. A man in a canoe dips an oar into the turquoise water in *To the Vigil* (above; acrylic on canvas, 12x12), readying himself for a poignant arrival.



Connection is a theme Myers returns to again and again in his compositions. In *Linked* (above; acrylic on canvas, 10x30) the symbolic rope bridges lead to separate islands where bright red trees seem to explode against the blue sky.

“Taking a pause allows us to see other paths leading forward,” Myers shares. *The Pause* (opposite; acrylic on canvas, 16x16) encapsulates this observation with its winding path retreating to the horizon below a sunburst sky that deepens in hue toward the top of the canvas.

the colors within the harmony of the color palette of the painting. Again, I refer to my own sense of rightness.” He continues by stating, “I’ve never used a color wheel or spent time studying color theory. Rather, I look for the complexities within colors. For instance, I like my greens to skew blue or orange at different times.”

An example is the sky of *Cast Your Shadow* (page XX) in which dozens of layers of different colors were applied to the surface, so many that early layers in the process are almost completely covered by the layers that follow—with only tiny flecks of those early colors in the sky showing. Myers explains that, “those tiny bits of other colors add a certain depth that creates the richness and interest of the piece. They also help me determine the color direction that the painting will take.”

Storytelling

Myers’s blog, Red Tree Times, has grown to be crucial to fostering a sense of community for the painter, whose first studio was built in the far reaches of the woods. Myers has always been a remote artist, choosing to forego workshops and art collectives for the solitude of his own studio. Perhaps this is echoed in his acrylic paintings that are usually unpeopled. But the blog, which he’s been posting to daily for about eight years, allows him to address themes and connect with fans, and lets his mind wander to other things in

his life. “Making myself write on the blog every day gets me thinking about my work with a new perspective, and I often find myself thinking of my paintings in relation to current events,” he says. “It also puts me in a questioning state of mind, which I consider invaluable as an artist.” Often, Myers will include biographical anecdotes that shed insight on his creations. In the unpredictable art world, entering the blogosphere is also an opportunity to market and network.

There aren’t overt themes in his portrayals, but Myers insists that he’s a storyteller. “My goal is to tell stories through repetition, symbolism, mood and texture,” he says. “I let those who see my canvases project their own narratives onto my landscapes. That way, they’re more universally understood.” The recurring snaking paths, endless horizons, red ladders—which are perhaps a subtle reference to how he began painting after his revelatory fall—and of course, those crimson trees all seem like backdrops to fables. Myers says their beholders frequently see themselves in his work, and often ascribe notions of heroism, persistence and inner tranquility to them. It all goes back to what Myers says he hopes to accomplish with his art—to achieve that unmistakable sense of rightness. /aa

Zack Hatfield is a writer living in New York City.



Behind the Paint: GC Myers

LATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT: My 48th solo exhibit.

NEXT GOAL: Completing a book that’s a retrospective of my work from the last 20 years. I hope to have it available this summer.

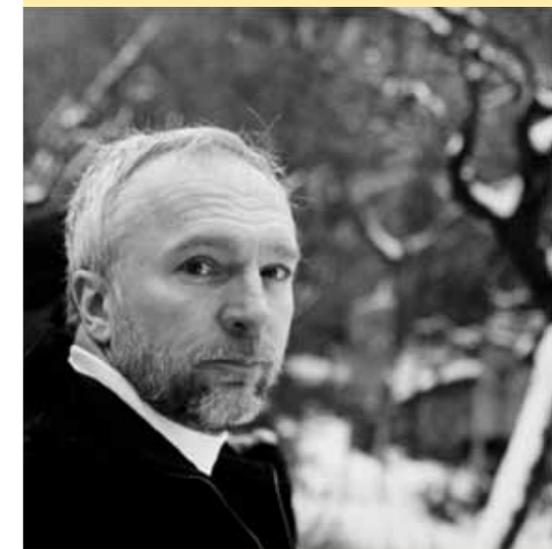
BEST ADVICE RECEIVED: There’s always someone with more talent or skill, yet nobody but you sees the world as you do. Paint the paintings you want to see.

BEST ADVICE TO GIVE: Develop a process that works with the way your mind operates and put in the time alone in your workspace. It should become second nature to you, and as distinct and easy as your signature.

FAVORITE QUOTE: Any great artwork revives and readapts time and space, and the measure of its success is the extent to which it makes you an inhabitant of that world—the extent to which it invites you in and lets you breathe its strange, special air.
—Leonard Bernstein

READING NOW: Various titles by Neil Gaiman

WEBSITE: gcmymers.com and redtreetimes.com



Paint the paintings that you want, no, that you *need* to see.—GCM