

Drew Sarka

▼ A PEEK INTO THE MINDS AND HEARTS OF COLORADO'S MOST-TALENTED PEOPLE

THE DOCTOR IS IN. In his studio, that is. Drew Sarka, M.D., is a physician practicing family medicine by vocation and an oil painter by more than avocation. On an unseasonably warm March day in

Denver, the large magnolia tree on the corner of his street stands thick with lush blooms, pale pink and milk white against Colorado's bluebird sky. The elegant buds and blossoms are not lost on the good doctor who counts flowers (and figures) among his favorite subject matter. "I shot photos of the magnolias. I watch it bloom every year," says Sarka, who intends to paint the magnolia. "With my art, I'm trying to remind people of that beauty out their own front door or down the street."

A RENAISSANCE MAN

In addition to doctoring and painting, Sarka gardens. In addition to paintings of his wife and their two children, his works depict the orange trumpets of amaryllis and blue-violet irises, paper white narcissus and black-eyed Susans. Sarka inherited his green thumb chromosome from his father, a landscape architect. His father also was an oil painter, as was his father's father: "My grandfather was a draughtsman by trade

PHYSICIAN AND
ARTIST DREW
SARKA BRINGS
HEALING TO THE
WORLD THROUGH
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THROUGH HIS ART

and did oil painting. I remember visiting my grandfather and looking at his paintings and being impressed," Sarka says. "My father did a lot of design and drawing and had painting as a hobby."

Sarka ranks as more than a hobbyist, having completed 1,000-plus canvases. He began painting in college, at age 19, when his father gave him a paint set. "He said, 'Go paint. It's good for you.' I think he knew that I was too committed to my studies and it would be a good thing to create balance in my life. It was a very smart move," says Sarka.

Like his grandfather and his father, Sarka works in oils. "With acrylics, it's easier clean up and acrylics can be more vibrant—some would argue more unnatural," he says. "Oils are

STORY: COLLEEN SMITH



PHOTO: RANDALL ERKELENS

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more true-to-life. The paints come from Earth: cadmium, cobalt, and things like that. And I can work at the oil paint, more like a sculpture.”

Sarkar’s training as a physician informs his painting: “It’s ironic because the tools I learned in med school help my art work tremendously. The ability to focus intensely, the power of observation: these are really important when examining patients and trying to figure out what’s going on,” he says. “It’s not too different from looking at an image or a figure, keenly observing what is there, seeing the subtle twists and turns



1 CATCHING GRASSHOPPERS 2 NEW YORK STREET CORNER 3 FIRST STEPS

and taking it in and then bringing it out and painting it and putting my special signature on it.”

PLANNING BRINGS FREEDOM

Sarka applies his analytic and methodic clinician’s skills to his art. He created an efficient painter’s checklist: “My checklist incorporates painting principles that I’ve read about and learned from my teachers. Before starting any painting, I go through my checklist and deliberate about important aspects: the compositional stem, the light source and how to demonstrate that, my intention for the painting, what sort of reaction I’m hoping to get from the viewer,” he says.

“The more deliberate I am in my planning, the more free I can be with my brushstroke. I can let myself go with

having a more playful or at least less tight painting.” Sarka believes art heals. “As a family doc, I see how much external stress and internal mental health can affect people physically and emotionally,” he says. “Art can be healing in some ways. Just having something beautiful to look at, intriguing or thought-provoking—that’s all wonderful. Anything to provide some relief in our world that is pretty hectic and can get negative,” he says. “In art, I find such pleasure. I love being a physician and taking care of patients, but sometimes, I come home from work with the weight of the world. If I go into my studio and start painting, all of those things completely melt away. Painting recharges me and brings me back to balance. Everybody needs to try to find something that therapeutic.”

Sarka’s appreciation of fine art carries over to his practice of the medical arts.



From a physician's perspective, he confidently prescribes frequent doses of art. "Wellness incorporates so many things: physical, mental and emotional health," he says. "A lot of people are under a lot of stress. Art can be restorative. At the very least, art can be a pleasant distraction, but I think it's more than that. Art can be healing." The healing capacity, the doctor hypothesizes, exists both for artists and those who appreciate the arts. "As humans, self-expression is so important. It's part of who we are and one of the things that makes us unique. The ability to create art, the need to



create art and the need to appreciate art are some of the defining aspects of the human condition and what makes humans special among animals or computers," Sarka says. "Computers can do amazing computations and run algorithms, but they don't create art for art's sake. And they don't need to create art," says Sarka. "As humans, we need art. You can live without art, but it's one of the things that makes life worth living." **CE**

Colleen Smith, a longtime contributor to the magazine, is the author of the novels Glass Halo and Laid-Back Skier.

