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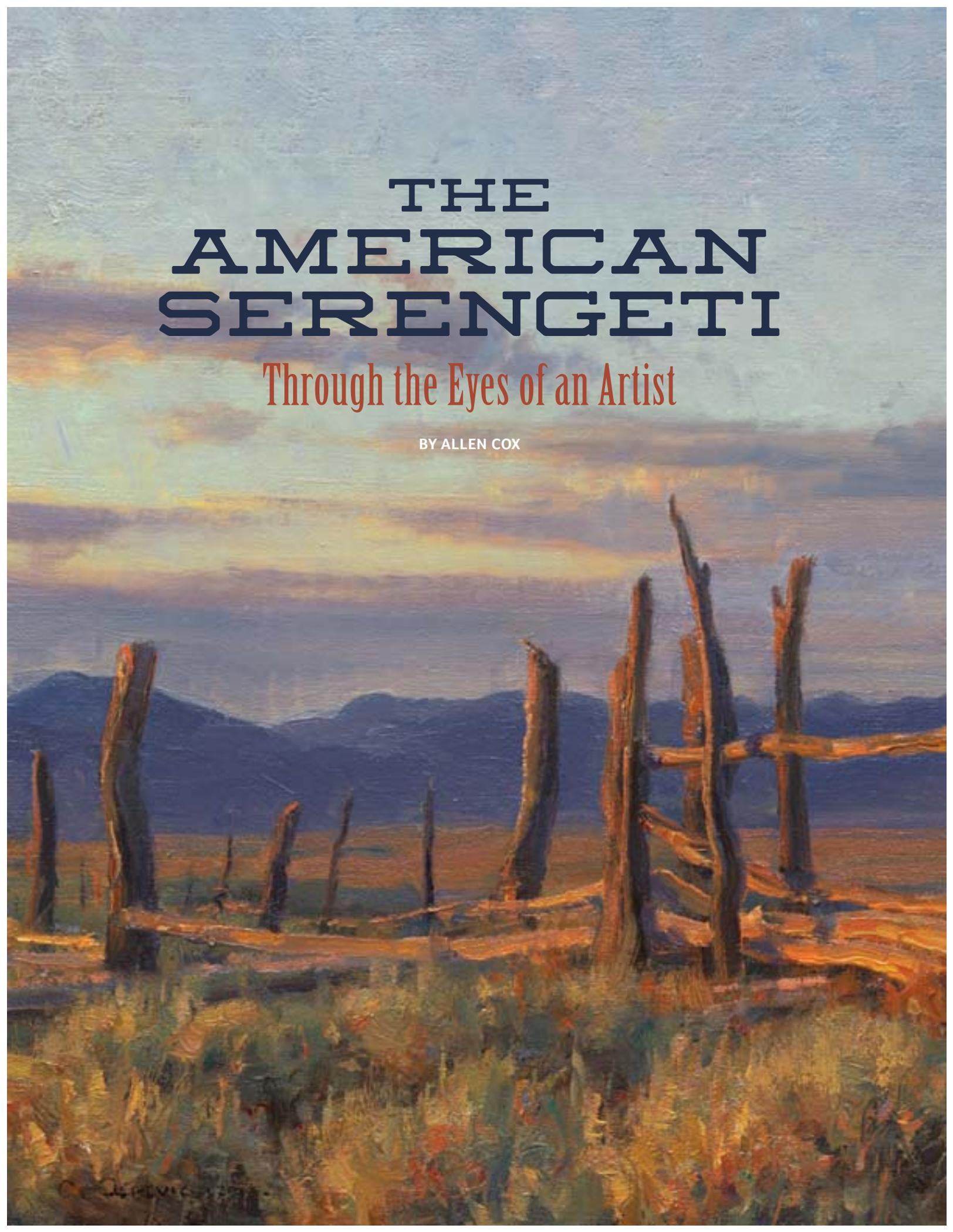
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ON OUR COVER
Montana's vast
American Prairie
Reserve, p.88

The background of the cover is a painting of a landscape. In the foreground, there is a rustic wooden fence made of weathered, vertical posts and horizontal rails. The ground is covered in dry, yellowish-brown grass. In the middle ground, there are rolling hills or low mountains. The sky is filled with soft, layered clouds in shades of blue, purple, and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall style is impressionistic with visible brushstrokes.

THE AMERICAN SERENGETI

Through the Eyes of an Artist

BY ALLEN COX



© William Campbell Photography

A persistent wind blows against island-like hills, making sweet grass dance in undulating waves on the slopes. Cloud shadows sail across the prairie below. A rail fence, in need of repair, disappears into a gully and up the other side, swallowed by a thicket of bare brambles. The angle of the fence leads the eye to a slate column of a brewing rainstorm on the plain a few miles away. From horizon to horizon, these unpopulated prairies and hills would one day be called “the American Serengeti.”

Sweet Grass Hills

Such is a scene Clyde Aspevig might have taken for granted every day growing up on a farm in the “golden triangle,” wheat country in north-central Montana. He possessed a keen eye for the natural world; even as a child, few details escaped him. At age 12, the budding artist captured on canvas the landscape of the Sweet Grass Hills region near his home. His father, ever encouraging of his son’s artistic interests, purchased the painting for ten dollars. That was young Clyde’s first sale. His father passed away two years later.

An artist uncle and an influential art teacher helped shape Aspevig’s skills in his early years, from adolescence to college, all within the borders of Montana. He is a home-grown artist, and, today, his work is acclaimed, collected and exhibited far beyond the borders of his state.

Old Fence with Little Rockies
painting by Clyde Aspevig

Aspevig's art is recognized as expressing a unique perspective on Western landscapes.

While he has painted iconic scenes, he tends to focus on the smaller, less majestic aspects of nature.

"I grew up in an isolated area," Aspevig says. "I was not around many people, and I was not exposed to art." This isolation contributed to his individual point of view that became so instrumental in his chosen subjects.

"I spent a lot of time wandering alone. It would be a mundane atmosphere for many, but I learned to appreciate the small nuances of nature."

In his work, Aspevig continually strives to understand the complexities of nature—the endless cycles, the repetitive patterns, the subtle effects of light. He found his rewards in what he refers to as "going against the grain" in the Western art world.

Land Snorkeling

Clyde Aspevig and his wife Carol like to spend time wandering with no destination in mind. On one of their wandering sojourns in Sedona, Arizona, Carol dubbed this pastime "land snorkeling."

This changed Aspevig's approach to landscape painting,

especially in the northern prairie lands back in Montana. According to Aspevig, allowing your feet to guide you lets the natural world right in front of you be the focus of your observations. When you pay attention, the small complexities of nature emerge. These are what he transfers so exquisitely to canvas.

While he has traveled widely and painted in many destinations, Aspevig always returns home to Montana. "The northern prairie landscape is overlooked as a subject matter," says Aspevig. He has set out to change that.

His preferred style is *plein air*—easel set up outdoors directly in front of the subject. He paints on large scale canvases, fitting for subjects as large in scale as a Montana landscape, whether a broad prairie scene or zoomed in on a small detail.

Montana has always been and still is his home—a fitting focus for his artistic expressions.

American Prairie Reserve

An ambitious effort is underway in north-central Montana to return prairie lands to their natural state, that is, to a time before the prairie was platted and fenced off. This



Lightening Dance
painting by Clyde Aspevig



© Gib Myers | APR



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[Aspevig] uses his paintings to raise awareness of and support for the three-million-acre project and to share, through his point of view, the experience of the reserve. ...he has worked in front of everyone from National Geographic staff to Brooklyn, New York, high school students who have never been out of the city.



massive effort depends on cooperation between land owners, government agencies and Native Americans. The area of focus and the organization spearheading the effort are known as American Prairie Reserve. For its sheer geographic scale, it has been dubbed “the American Serengeti.”

“The Reserve is my back yard,” Aspevig says. “It’s a place full of hidden discoveries.”

Indeed, it has become one of his chosen places for land snorkeling and for setting up his easel.

When Aspevig was a boy, he used to hunt in the Reserve. Today, he is a member of American Prairie Reserve’s board of directors. He uses his paintings to raise awareness of and as support for the three-million-acre project and to share, through his point of view, the experience of the Reserve. He is often at the Reserve, working, and visitors to the Reserve encounter him at work.

“I use my work at the Reserve to enhance the visual quality of the experience, to ignite the senses, so visitors will see it in a new way.”

At work at the Reserve, Aspevig explains to visitors why he has chosen the subject he’s working on and what drives him to settle on the decisions he makes on canvas. He hopes this inspires people to deepen their views and perceptions, to gain new insights and understandings and to see the natural world in new ways.

At the Reserve, he has worked in front of everyone from National Geographic staff to Brooklyn, New York, high school students who have never been out of the city. The experience can be life changing for anyone.

To learn more about Clyde Aspevig and his work, visit his website at clydeaspevig.com. To find out more about American Prairie Reserve, go to americanprairie.org. 🌍