

Spirit of Place

LAURIE CELINE BALLIETT

SOLO EXHIBITION

August 1 - 31, 2026

Blumenschein Home and Museum

222 Ledoux Street

Taos, NM 87571



Every landscape holds more than what we see. The paintings in Spirit of Place are an invitation to experience Northern New Mexico not simply as scenery, but as a living presence, where light, weather, memory, and emotion converge to reveal the enduring spirit of place.



Spirit of Place

Laurie Celine Balliett

A landscape is never just what we see. It is the feeling of standing beneath a vast sky, the movement of light across a mountain, the memory of a storm, the changing colors of a season, and the quiet connection we form with the places that shape our lives. *Spirit of Place* reflects the belief that every place carries its own character, history, and presence.

Rooted in a lifelong connection to the natural world, Balliett's paintings grow from decades of curiosity, attention, and engagement with the living world around her. Her journey began long before the canvas, from her early work on a whale watch boat to her studies in environmental ethics, her roles as an environmental educator, and her reporting on environmental issues and the communities affected by them. These paths have always been intertwined, each deepening her understanding of place, the relationship between humans and nature, and the stories held within the landscapes we inhabit.

After visiting many times to Taos starting in 2002, in 2009, Balliett stayed for five months, painting daily with local plein air artists before eventually making Taos her home. Her work carries forward the long tradition of American landscape painting, from the Hudson River School's reverence for nature and exploration of the West to the Taos Society of Artists' enduring connection with Northern New Mexico, while bringing her own contemporary perspective and expressive style to the landscape.

Often working directly from nature, Balliett preserves the immediacy of a moment—the particular light, atmosphere, and emotion of being present in a place. These studies become the foundation for paintings of varying scales, from large plein air works created in the landscape to studio paintings where memory and experience continue to shape the work.

Through bold color, movement, and expressive palette knife and brushwork, *Spirit of Place* invites viewers to experience Northern New Mexico not merely as a view, but as a living presence filled with memory, emotion, and belonging.



Laurie Balliett paints the Super-bloom

Photo by Bill Miles

Spirit of Place

Laurie Celine Balliett

1. Taos Tempest, Laurie Celine Balliett

24" x 48" oil on birch

July 2026



One evening in September 2017, I was out for a run when a powerful storm swept across the mountains. As the sun set, its light ignited the peaks and rain clouds while a brilliant spectrum pierced the storm. I stopped to capture the moment to take a video of it on my phone.

For nearly a decade, that image stayed with me until this exhibition finally gave me a reason to paint it. The luminous band of color reminded me of *Rainbow at Niagara* by my third-great-grandfather, Jasper Francis Cropsey, a painting I return to whenever I visit the American galleries at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. I have always admired the way he painted light, and that memory gave me the confidence to embrace the rainbow, not as something delicate, but as a force within the storm.

Working from the video, I approached the painting as though I were standing before the landscape itself. I painted quickly, not to reproduce a single frame, but to capture the movement, light, and energy of the storm as it unfolded. Many people remember that evening because it was unlike any other. Looking back, I see it as a reminder that even in life's most turbulent moments, beauty can arrive with astonishing power.

2. Gorge Glow

Laurie Celine Balliett

24" x 36", oil on canvas

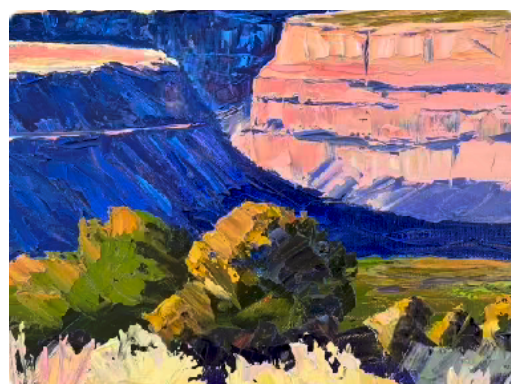
June 2026



As you travel from Santa Fe to Taos along the “low road” beside the Rio Grande, the road climbs through a series of horseshoe switchbacks before opening to one of the most spectacular views of the gorge. The valley stretches toward the mountains, and nearly everyone who enters Taos this way pauses to take in the view.

I return to this overlook again and again to paint it from life. For this piece, I planned my arrival in the late afternoon, giving myself time to establish the composition before the light began to change. As the sun moved toward the horizon, the entire valley transformed, glowing with color before fading into twilight.

I painted quickly to capture that fleeting transition of light. The original plein-air study was a 10" x 20" canvas. Following the tradition of plein-air painters throughout history, from the Taos Society of Artists to the Hudson River School, I used the study to preserve the immediacy of the moment and created this larger studio painting from it.

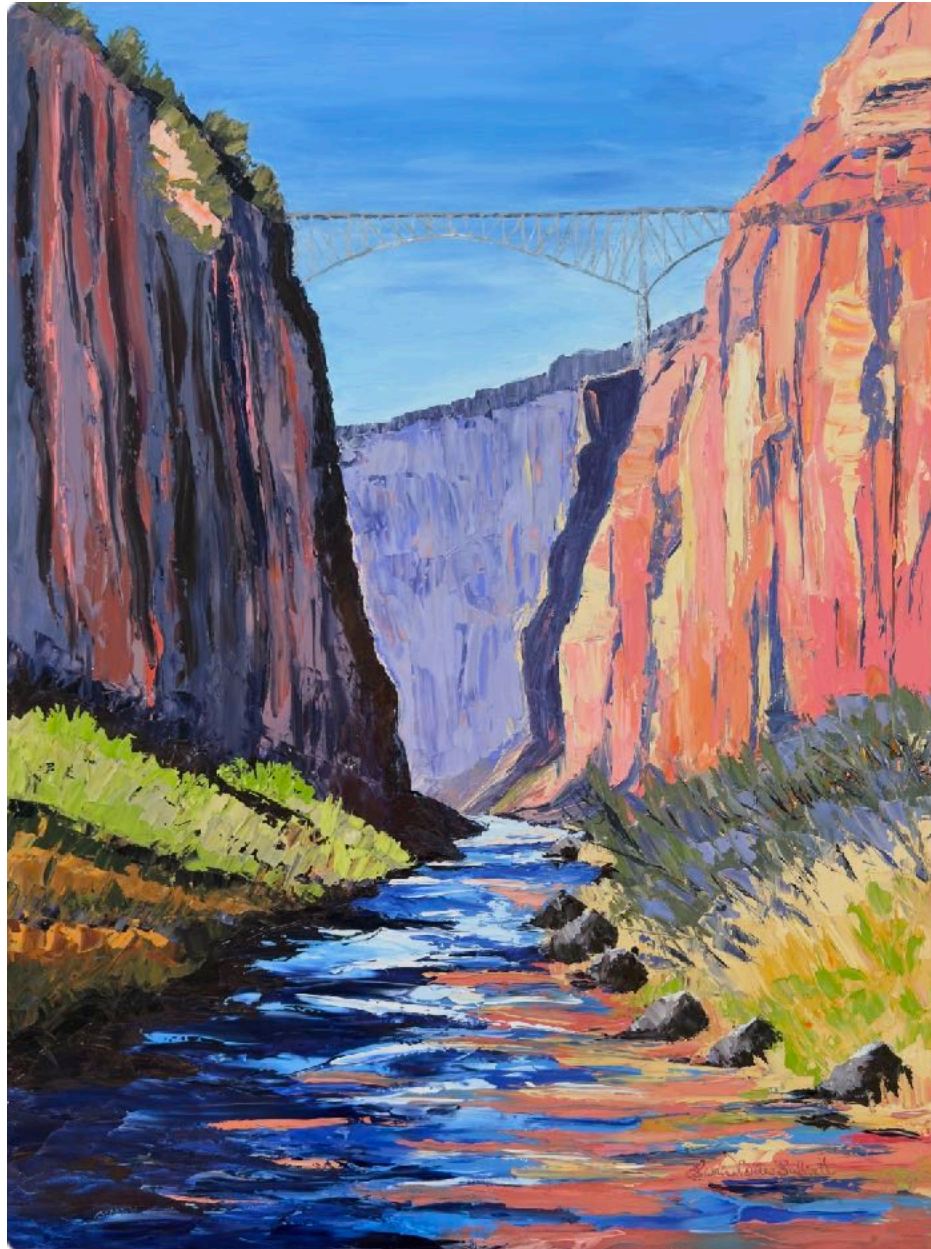


3. Beneath the Bridge: Rio Grande Gorge from Raft

Laurie Celine Balliett

40" x 30" oil on board

June 2026 (from a series started in 2022)



In 2022, I rafted the Taos Box to gather reference photographs for a series of paintings inspired by the Rio Grande Gorge. It was a low-water year, and only my photographer friend, our guide, and another guide scouting ahead were on the river. Just before passing beneath the bridge, we drifted through a calm stretch where my friend captured the reference images that became this painting.

My first attempt at the scene was too cool in color. The canyon's depth and shadow had muted the light more than I intended, so I set the painting aside for a year. Painting the Rio Grande of Big Bend, Texas, helped me discover the warmer, more reflective palette I needed for this series.

I painted this composition in several horizontal and vertical formats. The first vertical version was created for the 2024 Taos Lamppost Banner program and hung along Paseo del Pueblo Sur near the Rio Pueblo. This 40" x 30" painting is the final work in the series. I lightened the oranges to a pink in this piece.

4. Mystical Eve in Taos with Pedernal (Sunset)

Laurie Celine Balliett

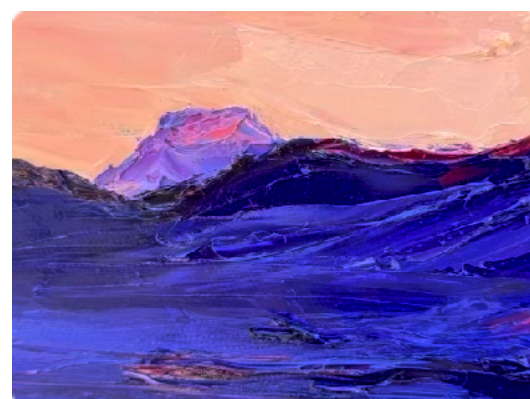
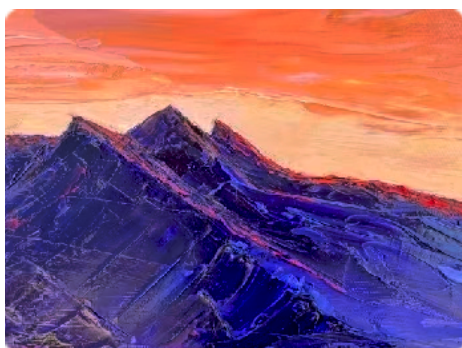
30" x 40" oil on canvas

May 2026



This is one of my favorite views to paint en plein air. From my backyard, I look across Pueblo grazing land to these mountains, with Pedernal rising in the distance. I often paint Pedernal from Abiquiu, so I enjoy seeing it from home as well.

Every evening brings a different sunset, but on this night, virga descended from unusually high clouds, shifting as I painted. This larger studio painting is based on an 11" x 14" plein-air study. The original was completed before the virga appeared, so I included that fleeting moment in this studio interpretation.



5. Winding Rio Pueblo at Mid Day

Laurie Celine Balliett

30" x 40" oil on canvas

May 2026

A friend introduced me to this spot just north of the Taos Valley Overlook, and I've returned to paint it several times in different seasons. I painted the plein-air study for this piece at midday, when the light is more even and the shadows are less pronounced than they are at dawn or dusk. I'm drawn to the fresh greens of early summer as they follow the winding Rio Grande through the gorge, leading the eye toward the mountains beyond. The landscape changes with the seasons, but its quiet pull remains the same.

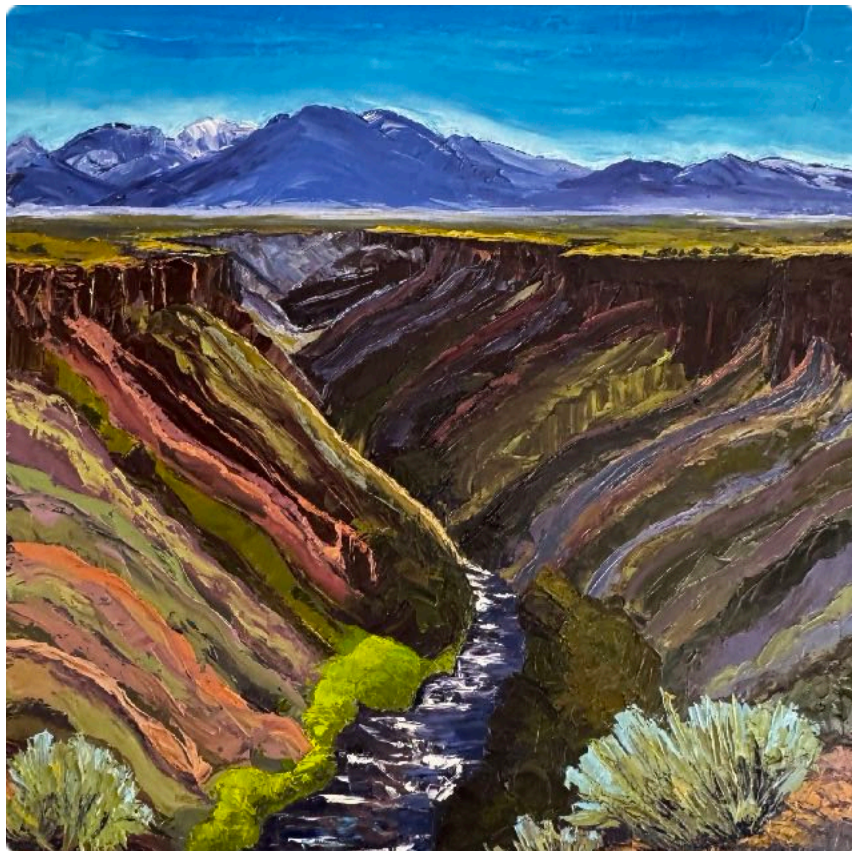


6. Rio Pueblo, Mid Day

Laurie Celine Balliett

Taos 30" x 30" oil on canvas

May 2026



forward the feeling of the place and my memory of standing there. I hope to return to this spot in every season and at different times of day for as long as I am able, continuing to discover what it has to reveal.

My friend and fellow artist, the late Clarence Medina, first brought me to this location to paint during one of my return trips from Cape Cod in 2011. I have returned to this place ever since, drawn back by its beauty and the way the landscape continues to reveal itself.

For several years, I was unable to paint there after the land changed hands and the new owners closed access to my favorite painting spot. Recently, I discovered a path back to the location. Now I hike out to paint, but I can no longer carry my larger canvases with me, so I use my plein-air studies as the foundation for larger studio interpretations.

The original 20" x 20" study was painted at midday and sold while still wet. This larger painting grew from that moment, carrying

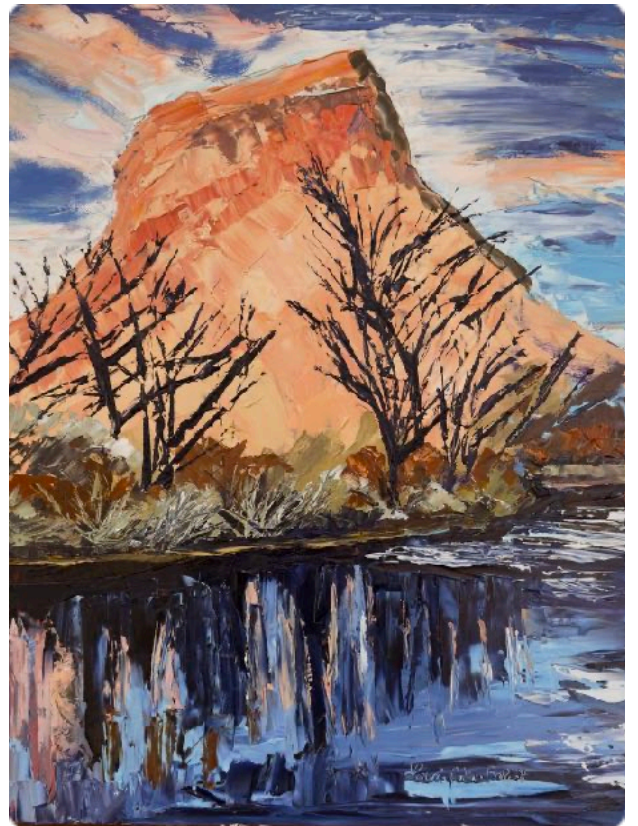
7. Dusk on the Rio Chama

Laurie Celine Balliett

20" x 16" oil on board

November 2025

Last November (2025), we spent a few days in Abiquiu to celebrate my birthday. On the evening we arrived, I set up along the Rio Chama to paint a spot I had discovered on an earlier trip. The light changed quickly. Behind me, the river reflected the deep reds of sunset while the small mountain before me glowed soft pink. As I painted, a full moon rose over the mesa to my right. It was one of those rare evenings when every direction held something beautiful. I was especially drawn to the reflections on the water and the quiet elegance of the bare November trees.



8. Afterglow, Taos Sunset

Laurie Celine Balliett

20" x 40" oil on canvas

2025

I painted this sunset plein air from my rooftop. The sunset views from our backyard and rooftop are nothing less than stunning. We border Pueblo grazing land, which gives us an unobstructed view. I usually find myself painting the southern portion of the horizon, with the three peaks and Pedernal to the left of them (as in *Mystical Eve in Taos with Pedernal*, also in this show).



But the first time I saw the views from our backyard, I said, "It looks like it's a different planet!" What struck me most was the multidimensional quality of the distant northwestern mountains, which is what I painted in this piece.

The composition changes depending on whether you look southwest or northwest. Throughout the year, the sunset shifts along the horizon, reaching its farthest point north in summer before gradually moving south again, setting due west at the autumn equinox before continuing to its farthest point south in winter.

This observation is one way our home connects us to the greater spirit of nature. Painting the sunset from my yard, and from other areas in Taos, never disappoints. Each evening is unique, and I hope to paint this view for as long as I can.

9. My Taos Garden
Laurie Celine Balliett
26" x 24", oil on board
July 2026

This painting is of my front yard garden. For the past few summers, our wild, uncultivated garden has burst into bloom with hollyhocks, sunflowers, and other beautiful perennials. When I wake up and look out the window, it feels as though I am living inside a bouquet. The mountain in the distance and the pollinators visiting each flower delight me. How could I not paint it?

I have painted my garden many times from life, and I continue to paint it from life, as well as create larger studio renditions.



10. Secret Orchard, Dixon
Laurie Celine Balliett
18" x 24" oil on board
Spring 2024

When I unexpectedly extended my trip to Taos in 2009, I house-sat for the latter half of my stay in an ancient territorial-style house on the edge of an apple orchard. Every day the other plein air painters and I waited for the blossoms to appear. But I had to leave for Denver. When I returned a week later, the blossoms had come and gone. I had missed the bloom. It was a great disappointment.

Ever since then, and since making Taos my home in 2013, I drive down to Dixon each spring to paint the blossoms. A painting buddy shared this spot with me. It's on private property, and she had permission from the owner. While we were painting, one of the neighbors came over and asked us to keep the location secret because they "didn't want all of the painters to start coming there." Hence the title, *Secret Orchard, Dixon*.



11. "Magpie," My Cat with Irises

Laurie Celine Balliett

30" x 30" oil on canvas

March 2025

NFS Collection of the Artist

Ah, what would life be without cats? I don't understand how anyone can live without a cat, or two, or three, or four.

Like most cats, my cat Magpie loved the flowers I'd put in vases. On this particular day, I snapped a photo of her. The reference photo bears little resemblance to the finished painting. I amplified the color and the light to capture her beautiful spirit, a calm, curious cat nestled among the irises and my favorite antique dressing table.

I took the photograph in 2018, but didn't paint it until March 2025, when the quiet winter months provided the time and space to venture beyond my landscapes and explore something different on a 30" x 30" canvas. Some images stay with us for years before they're ready to become paintings.



12. "Jack," My Blue-Eyed Cat

Laurie Celine Balliett

12" x 12" oil on board

2024

NFS Collection of the Artist



I nearly called this painting *The Philosopher*. The depth of Django's eyes, though I call him "Jack," is what I first fell in love with when I found him as a kitten, kept in a cage on a hot August day in an outdoor hay barn with maggots in his food and a urine-soaked sheet to hide under. He did have water and a pillow, but he was terrified. His howls called me to him as I walked through the property. With permission from his owner, I brought him home with me.

Now he is the light of our daily life, always looking after our three other cats. He lets us know if someone wants in from the patio or if the food dish is running low, and every morning at dawn he rings the bell so he can watch the early morning wildlife.

He often sits in this regal position, legs crossed as if he understands our conversations and wishes he could chime in. He is a spirit, a bright light in our world.

13. Lavender Field
Laurie Celine Balliett
Abiquiu
24" x 18" oil on board
Summer 2024



The scent of lavender in bloom is a sweet elixir, a fragrance that lingers in memory long after you've left the field. We went to Abiquiu for a day of paddle boarding and painting. On the way, we stopped at the Lavender Farm in Abiquiu. The plants were just beginning to blossom, so I blocked in the composition in my underpainting. Back in my studio, I painted from memory, recalling the rich tapestry of purples and violets that bloom there. I placed my favorite deep lavender color in the foreground, with the more traditional lighter blooms stretching into the background.

Now we have six large lavender plants in our own garden, and I can't wait to paint them this year.

14. Magenta Sky over R.C. Gorman House
Laurie Celine Balliett
18" x 24" oil on board
September 2023



The jaw-dropping magenta sky illuminated the entire horizon, 360 degrees, on the evening of September 30, 2023. Since this is the view from my front yard, I quickly grabbed my easel and painted a small plein-air study. I later created this medium-sized painting from memory and experience of that extraordinary evening, along with my plein-air study (now in a private collection).

For the composition, I painted out the newer addition that crowded the rear of the original R.C. Gorman House, allowing its historic character to breathe again. Living with this view has deepened my connection to this place.

Moments like this remind me that the spirit of a place is not only found in its mountains and mesas, but also in the fleeting light that transforms the familiar into something unforgettable.

15. Powder Day at the Bavarian

Laurie Celine Balliett

30" x 40" oil on canvas

March 2026 (from a series started in 2024)

This painting is the last in a series inspired by a powder day at Taos Ski Valley during the second year of COVID. The Bavarian was open, but there were no long lift lines. The umbrellas were closed, and the tables lay blanketed in snow. I snapped a few reference photos, hoping to capture the joy this place brings me. It's one of my favorite winter places. After painting several smaller versions of this scene, beginning in 2024, I completed this larger painting in March 2026.



16. New Love under Perseid Showers

Laurie Celine Balliett

30" x 40" oil on canvas

August 2022

Ever since my years as an environmental educator at Mass Audubon, the peak of the Perseid Meteor Shower each August has drawn me out of bed around 3 a.m. to step outside and tilt my head to the night sky. Living in Taos makes this annual event even more spectacular because of our dark sky ordinance.

The year I met my spouse, he joined me for this 3 a.m. meteor shower ritual. We saw so many shooting stars that we couldn't count them. It was spectacular. There were no clouds in the sky, and the full moon was about to rise behind Pueblo Peak, illuminating the mountain. We walked and watched until the moon's increasing light slowly dimmed the meteor shower's "light show."

The next morning, I painted the experience from memory. The only reason I was able to paint the mountain without it disappearing into the darkness was because of the moonrise, which illuminated the sky and outlined the deep blue silhouette of the mountain.



17. A Taos Summer Day

Laurie Celine Balliett

18" x 24" oil on board

2022

One thing about Taos is that everywhere you go, you are surrounded by extraordinary views. While out on a morning run, this scene caught my eye. The wild primroses and cornflowers in the foreground, with a summer-green field leading up to the striking blue of the mountain, stopped me in my tracks.

I returned with my easel. I painted this mostly from life. The blue of the cornflowers are little bursts of joy in summertime. Of course, distant magpies foraged, so they flew into this image, too.



18. Summer Flight,

Arroyo Seco

Laurie Celine Balliett

20" x 40" oil on canvas

2023

In 2023, I called this view “My Obsession View” because it kept pulling me back, not unlike the way the main character in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* was drawn to Devil’s

Tower. Every few weeks, I found myself returning to Des Montes, the area in Arroyo Seco where you can see what I call “The Notch,” the canyon leading up to Taos Ski Valley.

I explored different locations in Des Montes to capture slightly different angles of this view, but my favorite is from a fellow plein air painter’s house. She generously offered me an invitation to paint from her yard, and this painting came easily. The fence line and the vibrant greens of high summer were a dramatic contrast to the ominous cloudy days of winter and spring when I had painted this scene before.

After spending so much time with this view, I decided to include the magpies in flight, a familiar sight from painting this landscape again and again.



19. Our Lady of Guadalupe

Laurie Celine Balliett

20" x 24" Oil on Canvas

NFS Collection of the Artist

September 2015



This painting is deeply sacred to me. I created it during a time when my life had been completely uprooted as I cared for someone I loved. Earlier that year, I had given up my cherished Taos home and studio, so I could go help in North Carolina, with a plan that he and I would return to his home on the Cape for the summer. Instead, I found myself traveling constantly between Taos, North Carolina, and Cape Cod while my partner at that time underwent treatment during what would become the final two years of his life.

One evening, after returning from the Albuquerque airport, I stopped only long enough to feed my cats and change clothes before heading to the Fall Arts Festival, where I was exhibiting in what would become the final year of the prestigious Taos Select. As I stepped outside the Guadalupe Gymnasium, I was stunned by the scene before me. Beneath a darkened sky, a beam of light illuminated the mountain, and the church seemed to glow. I rushed home and painted the view from memory, my easel set up in the kitchen.

Not long afterward, while reading about the legend of Our Lady of Guadalupe, I came across a story I have never been able to find again. A traveler had left his home because of hardship and had grown weary of searching for the place where he was meant to build his house. He prayed to Our Lady of Guadalupe, "How will I know where my home is?" The reply came: "You will know your home when you see the light shining on the mountain. That is where your home will be."

I was astonished. I knew, in that moment, that this was the meaning of my painting. I resolved to keep it in my personal collection forever. Although I still had a few more moves ahead of me, including a return to Cape Cod and other places, I knew Taos would ultimately be my long-term home. It took a few years before I was finally able to settle here for good. And I haven't been happier.

20. Magpies with Moonrise

Laurie Celine Balliett

20" x 72" Oil on canvas

Fall, 2013



When I arrived in Taos in September 2013, I rented a house outside of town with an amazing view and a detached studio. This painting captures my excitement and the newness of living here. This triptych is made up of three 20" x 24" panels. I set up three easels outside my studio and painted this scene over five consecutive evenings. The sky looked different each night. In plein air painting, we say, "Don't chase the light," but here in Taos, while painting sunsets, I quickly realized I also had to not "chase the color."

This view is of Pueblo Peak and the southern Sangre de Cristo Range. Rather than watching the western sunset, many people prefer the eastern glow on the mountains as the sun sets. It illuminates the peaks with a red glow for only a few minutes. For this painting, I worked after the glow had faded, when the sky filled with amazing pinks and deep indigos.

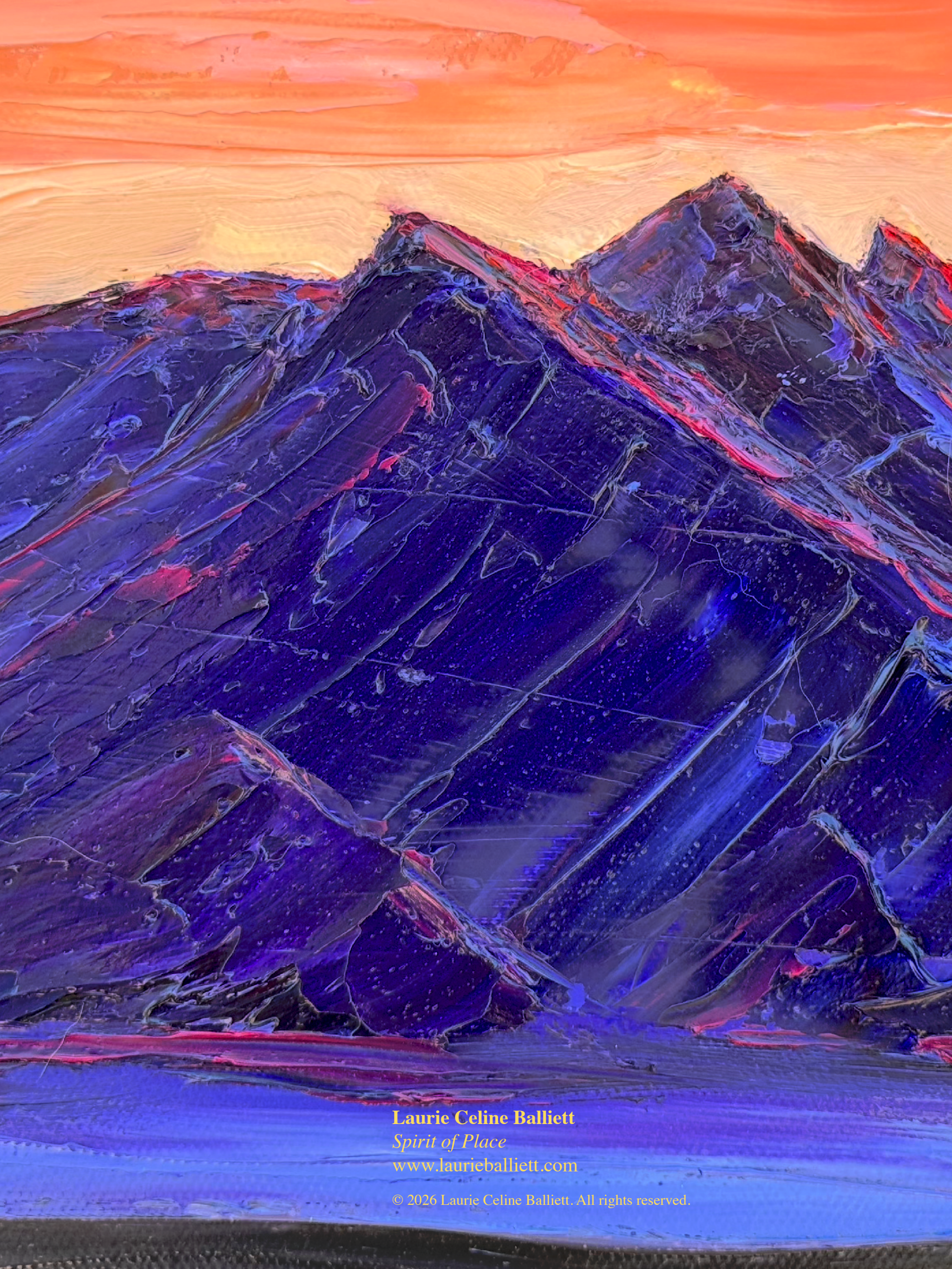
Each evening, I noticed a pattern of light. Where the sagebrush field meets the base of the mountain, a bright green strip appeared in the last rays of sunlight. Each night as I painted, the magpies crossed the field to roost in the trees across the way, so I had to include them.

Three years later, when I bought a home of my own, I realized I was living on the road in this painting. And the most remarkable thing of all?

The magpies built a nest in the pine tree outside my bedroom window. I had the joy of watching their fledglings land on my back deck, where they stayed for about a week until they could fly. The realization that I had somehow painted my way into my next home, or perhaps moved into the scene of my first major plein air painting after arriving in Taos, still bewilders me.

I still live in that neighborhood. A new generation of magpies occupies my yard, becoming part of our daily lives, alongside the bursting blooms of the garden and the scaled quails orioles, finches, sparrows, jays, flickers and hummingbirds that live among us.





Laurie Celine Balliett
Spirit of Place
www.laurieballiett.com

© 2026 Laurie Celine Balliett. All rights reserved.