

Is Daniel Sprick Colorado's greatest living painter?

A retrospective at Greenwood Village's Madden Museum of Art makes the case



Daniel Sprick's *Through My Fingers* from 2011. Photo by Ray Mark Rinaldi, Special to The Denver Post

By **RAY MARK RINALDI** | [The Denver Post](#)

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The Madden Museum of Art is a unique site on Colorado's cultural landscape. The place has been around since 2008, but it is safe to say that many people, even serious art fans, have never been there.

Part of that is because of its location, on the first floor of an office tower called Palazzo Verdi, in Greenwood Village, far from the center of the region's visual arts scene in downtown Denver.

But it also remains under the radar because of the way it produces exhibitions. There is no regular schedule for shows and limited promotion when a new one opens. And the museum's mission is highly specialized: It was founded as a showcase for the unique collection of art accumulated by the family of entrepreneur John Madden, who also developed the surrounding corporate campus.

The Madden Museum is technically operated by the University of Denver but it adheres generally to its original purpose. It exhibits work associated with the collection or by artists whom the Maddens — serious and valued patrons of art — have supported with a taste that leans toward traditional.

Daniel Sprick, whose work is currently on view, is among the Maddens' favorites, and a good example of why their collection has great value to the region.



Requiem by Daniel Sprick from 2020.

Sprick is a rare and prolific talent who is also described, in some circles at least, as the state's greatest living painter. Of course, everyone has his own idea of what makes art "great," but the exhibition, a broad survey of the artist's work curated by DU art history students, makes a nice case for Daniel Sprick's abilities.

The show is sprawling, with 54 works spanning four decades, and it is neatly organized so that viewers get a real sense of Sprick's style and his dedication to the sort of representational painting he does, heavily influenced by 17th-century European painting but with a contemporary viewpoint and a regional sensibility.



Photos by the University of Denver.

The experience of seeing his work at the Madden is something special. The Palazzo Verdi building is contemporary, for sure, but it takes its design sensibilities, as its name suggests, from old Italy. The gallery is vast, with high ceilings and expansive square footage, and there is something welcomingly pompous about it. It is not exactly a palace, but it is grander than most spaces you might find in a south-of-Denver development hub.

The student curators have made the most of it, using the expanse to separate Sprick's work into four categories; together, they illustrate the painter's greater aims.

There is a section of still-life paintings, which is probably the work that Sprick is best-known for: arrangements of fruits, flowers, bowls and archaeological specimens, like skeletons and skulls.



Orange in the Studio Kitchen by Daniel Sprick from 2020.

The student curators describe this body of work as “melancholy,” and it is. Sprick knows how to distribute light and shadow on a canvas, and he sets these paintings in a sort of netherworld that is neither day nor night. He also keeps his scenes sparse — there are objects on his tables, but also a lot of empty space.

That gives the works a hollow feeling, instilling them with a sort of sadness or longing. Sprick is a master with oil paint, but also with moodiness. There is a bit of Vermeer precision in his output, but also Tim Burton’s eerie playfulness; they’re edgy.

Two other sections, “Interiors” and “Landscapes,” overlap. This is because Sprick’s paintings of inside spaces, often his home or studio, tend to feature windows that offer views to the outside, making nature a critical element in both categories.



Three self-portraits by Daniel Sprick, on the wall at the Madden Museum. Photo by Ray Mark Rinaldi, Special to The Denver Post.

Finally, there is a section of portraits. Denverites will recognize some of the works from a solo exhibition of portraits Sprick had at the Denver Art Museum back in 2014. He brings the same sort of wistfulness to these works that he paints into his still lifes. His subjects exist somewhere between happy and sad. Sprick seems to capture them with some determination. He finds contentment in their faces, and that is a nice window into their real souls.



Daniel Sprick's painting of his father during a long illness. Image provided by Madden Museum.

The exhibition also contains a lot of self-portraits that Sprick has painted over the years, and they are a nice touch. They humanize the show in a way that is legitimate. Because of Sprick's dedication to realism, they document the artist with extreme accuracy at various ages.

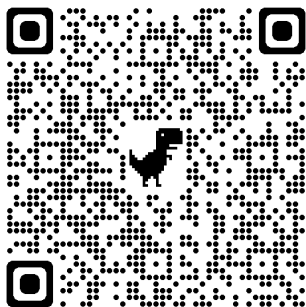
The self-portraits let us see the man behind the brush. They personalize the exhibition and give it a rhythm and a way to follow along with his progress over time.

Both Sprick and the Maddens are crucial parts of this region's art history, and so is the University of Denver, with its efforts to exhibit art and train the next generations of artists and curators. This exhibition brings all three entities together in a way that feels definitive.

IF YOU GO

"Fleeting Presence: The Liminal Art of Daniel Sprick" continues through April 28 at the Madden Museum of Art, 6363 S. Fiddlers Green Circle, Greenwood Village. It's free. Info: maddenmuseum.com.

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