

Artist
to
Artist:

Timothy J. Clark

Dedicating himself to his art, this artist has explored many genres and approaches to find his own style.

Watercolor: Which experiences early on in your artistic development had the most impact?

Timothy J. Clark: There were several. First, I recognized at a young age that I loved the arts. By early grammar school, I didn't care if the teachers liked my work or not. I knew I had a healthy love for the act of creating. It was freeing, even at that age. Second, my school library was tiny, but there was one shelf of art books and I knew every book. That was my first exposure to the masters without ever having gone to a museum. The main city public library had a much better selection of art books, and I thought it was heaven until I got to art school and saw great art libraries. In lieu of a local museum, libraries have the possibility of exposing us to art. Third, when I was 16, an adult who became a lifelong friend

guided me toward the finest art schools in the Los Angeles area. Having studied at both Art Center College of Design and Chouinard Art Institute [now California Institute of the Arts] at an early age may have been the single biggest help to my learning and assimilating the language of painting.

WC: Over the years, what kinds of experiences, activities, and associations have continued your development?

TJC: Much of my training involved raising and reraising standards. Having learned that art is about art, not money or fame, I stayed focused on the solitary experience of painting. A few important mentors and friendships have been a tremendous help. Will Barnet recognized that I worked on multiple levels and has helped me to enhance my painting. I love how my wife looks and am often inspired by





LEFT
Black Bicycle
2008, watercolor, 30 x 21.
Courtesy Hammer Galleries,
New York, New York.

BELOW
Family Reunion
2006, watercolor, 22 x 15.
Courtesy Hammer Galleries,
New York, New York.

BOTTOM LEFT
Timothy J. Clark.

BOTTOM RIGHT
**9th Avenue,
Studio View**
2001, watercolor, 15 x 22.
Collection Library of
Congress, Washington, DC.





how she sits in our home and in environments to which we travel. I try to be a better artist on every painting.

WC: Describe your interest in watercolor as a painting medium.

TJC: I always loved watercolor, both the experience of using the paint and the enjoyment of viewing a masterfully painted finished work. Growing up in California, I saw there was a respect for the medium. Other parts of the country sometimes have regional prejudices. I believe it takes a great painter to control the sensibilities and possibilities of watercolor no more nor less than oil or any other medium.

I must admit there have been a few times when I've been in an environment where the weather is so dry that I have considered chucking the

TOP
The Mirror
 2003, watercolor,
 20 x 27. Courtesy
 Hammer Galleries,
 New York, New York.

ABOVE
Repose
 2004, watercolor,
 25½ x 40½. Private
 collection.

tools. When I come to my senses and adjust the techniques, I always learn something and keep my responsibility to my art. Watercolor is more organic than most other painting media. Weather, lighting conditions, and the immediacy of the execution are all part of the process. The more I paint, the more I understand the complexities of watercolor. The simple, fresh sketch is fun but comparatively easy. Comprehensive painting requires a real knowledge and commitment.

WC: Did your initial work in oil contribute to your understanding of watercolor? How so, or why not?

Table for Two

2006, watercolor, 22 x 30.
Private collection.



TJC: The best watercolor painters know how to paint in oil, tempera, encaustic, or for that matter, any medium. Turner, Homer, and Sargent prove the point on a high order. Painting is painting. Art is art.

The foundation that I acquired in oil let me work slowly enough to thoroughly understand the components of art. Watercolor usually happens fast and requires a different thought process in its development. The decisions one must make in creating sophisticated paintings require education and experience. A fluid wash and a few tricks in watercolor are appealing, but they're not enough. A complex composition requires painting knowledge. I've given a lot of thought to the fact that the language of painting in oil and watercolor are actually the same.

WC: What is the role of drawing in your work?

TJC: Drawing is so much more than proportions or rendering. I often draw first just to establish space and design. Sometimes I establish a careful, easy-to-read drawing, yet other times I start with a wash and no linear pencil drawing. The draw-

ing then is incorporated within the values and shapes. I often make paintinglike marks with my pencil and draw with my brush.

Within my own style and approach I have multiple ways of presenting the subject. Problem solving, composing, and above all, expression are integrated in this process. These are the most valuable tools an artist can have. I always carry a sketchbook, and I'm as comfortable with that as with an oversized canvas. Over the years my drawing has evolved, and I have drawings that stand on their own and drawings I use as a foundation for painting, and they are very different from each other. I love having part of my drawing require the viewer to engage and discover a passage of strong design and figurative beauty. My students who understand this when I teach it have a whole new world open to them.

WC: You've consistently been drawn primarily to traditional subject matter and techniques. How have you sustained your interest when art trends have pointed in another direction?



TJC: When I was a young painter studying and working at the end of the Abstract Expressionist and Cubist movements, I was compelled to experiment and painted within those genres. Although I ultimately rebelled against them, the knowledge and experience I acquired made me a better painter. By finding my true self, I realized that I do my best work in response to seeing subjects that are meaningful to me. I reflect my life, my times, and how I see them into my painting. An artist has to be connected with the contemporary world and develop an understanding of how to express it. At the same time, you have to be true to yourself, and it's often a struggle to do both, but that is what it takes to be an artist and have your work speak to a broad, diversified audience.

Years ago the late Roger Kuntz talked about the "middle ground," a place between abstract and figurative work. Rembrandt, Titian, and Franz

Spanish Dancers

2004, watercolor, 30 x 22. Private collection.

Klein all knew how to go there. In a polarized world, viewers might just see one side or the other, but the sophisticated viewer will understand more and have much to look at and think about, so it's important to explore a broad range of approaches.

WC: To what extent do you paint in the studio rather than on-site?

TJC: This has changed tremendously over the years. Forty years ago I was out on location much more, mostly because I didn't want my work to look like photos. It's easier to interpret from life. I love the sense of catching the color outside and still do. I don't know if I can put a percentage on it, but more of my work today is completed in the studio from sketches and field studies.

I keep well-equipped studios in California, New York, and Maine, and while traveling, I always have



ABOVE LEFT

Artist on Hill

1998, watercolor,
10% x 14%. Collection
the artist.

BELOW LEFT

Sunday Morning

1976, oil, 12% x 30.
Collection the artist.



painting equipment with me. I once had a strong preference for plein air painting. I believe now it just needs to be a good painting, and experience lets me be expressive, whether it is on-site or in the studio. Museums have acquired both my studio-based and my plein air paintings.

WC: What advice can you offer about incorporating figures into interiors and landscapes?

TJC: Painting figures is a theme I've returned to repeatedly throughout my career. When I clearly see a figure that has a meaningful relationship to his or her environment (I usually paint women), the genre reinvents itself in my personal language, and it takes a new turn. These pieces are rarely posed or set up. The most successful ones start with a drawing that catches a poignant moment. Whether these figures are a second read, a discovered part of the composition, or the central

focus, it's always much more than "inserting" them. Part of the ability to do this is a result of drawing from the figure for decades and from interest in and love of the figure. I look to other artists, such as John White Alexander, William Merritt Chase, and Winslow Homer. Every time I see a Canaletto in a museum I open my sketchbook and make a drawing, taking note of how he composed groups of figures. My drawing is a complex soup with many flavors from many sources.

My advice to students is to continue to learn composition. I pay particular attention to where the figure sits in relation to the picture plane. Often a sense of rhythm helps animate these paintings. There are many compositional devices, but no formulas, that can always be used.

WC: What do you emphasize in your painting workshops?

TJC: I don't have a set act that I take

on the road. I find that it's best to attend to the needs of an individual class, or more important, the individual students. Teaching is a combination of what I know best and watching the students for a while and seeing what they need most. I find this approach more fluid and honest. A plein air painting class in Italy, Hawaii, or Southern California is going to be much different than composing the figure in a New York studio. A north-light studio will have different color theory than a room with an electric spotlight. Different studios and climates have different lessons, and they're all important.

With that said, I talk about the special color of light in all of these locations and how to mix the colors to establish a sense of place. Within those lessons, I address color choices, which is pivotal to a successful and powerful painting. In essence, it's color composition, which as a phrase means little, but watching students who've come to understand it create with ease and power is a revelation.

I have developed lessons to give the big picture to students who need fundamentals while challenging advanced painters to take their work to a higher level. The relationships between shapes and values can carry many other lessons inherently. I also put a lot of energy into helping the students to see, understand, and build on their own strengths. In the end they will be their own best teacher.

WC: Critics have noted the animated quality of your subjects, even in landscapes and still lifes. What about your approach conveys this feeling?

TJC: I have often said if I could talk it, I wouldn't have to paint it, so there are many intangibles that are only expressed in paint. When painting inanimate objects, such as tools, I hold a deep respect for the objects, the people who made them, and the people who use them. These subjects are

also personal, such as my father-in-law's workshop.

The art historian Dr. Lisa Farrington wrote of my "almost uncanny ability to infuse rudimentary and inert objects ... with something akin to a human soul." Much of this comes from painting any part of the subject, whether it be a figure or an inanimate object, within the sense of its environment, painting object to field. Some of the Minimalists, such as John McLaughlin, Brice Marden, and Lorser Feitelson, inspired me to have some very quiet parts of my compositions. When those sensibilities are combined with well-placed compositional elements, you move the eye. If you can combine art from such disparate sources, the painting takes on life.

WC: What is your best advice to artists who want to advance their careers?

TJC: Paint and show. You learn a lot seeing your work in the context of other painters today. Don't worry about rejections. Early in my career I had a painting rejected in one show. I still had faith in it and entered it in an international exhibition that Millard Sheets and Edward Betts juried. They accepted and awarded it. It has a figure as a central element and was different

for that time. You need good jurors to accept work that is different.

The art of painting is complex, but the commerce of art is an entirely different business. The one to attend to is the relationship between the language of painting, your heart, and your paper or canvas. I'm often dismayed to see someone take one or two workshops and then have business cards printed. It's not about sales; it's all about *art*. The books on art marketing often have good information, but the ethics of the art market are the responsibility of each artist.

I only know how I built my career. I studied with the best artists I could find, and when class was over I drew and painted all night and all during the weekend. When most of my formal study was complete, I made some sacrifices. I gave up a lot of things that could be distractions. I didn't have a television set in my home for years. I avoided relationships that would distract, and I dedicated myself to being the best possible painter I could. The rewards of having a focused life on that order for decades have been much greater than any of the trappings of career. It takes some creativity to watch both career and the development of painting. A good artist will have it. ■

Teaching at Weekend With the Masters

Timothy J. Clark will teach two master watercolor workshops and give one presentation at *American Artist's Weekend With the Masters Workshop & Conference* this September at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. Space is still available in his full-day figure and portrait master workshop, his half-day still life master workshop, and his half-day lecture titled "Hidden Techniques of Sargent and Homer." Visit www.aamastersweekend.com for more information and to register.