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Chrysanthemums
(detail, reversed)
by Patricia Watwood

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"GREEN" PRODUCTS FOR ARTISTS

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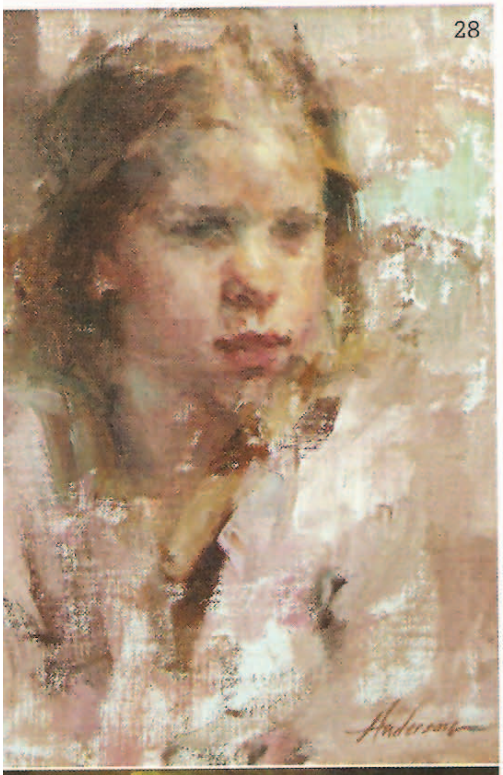

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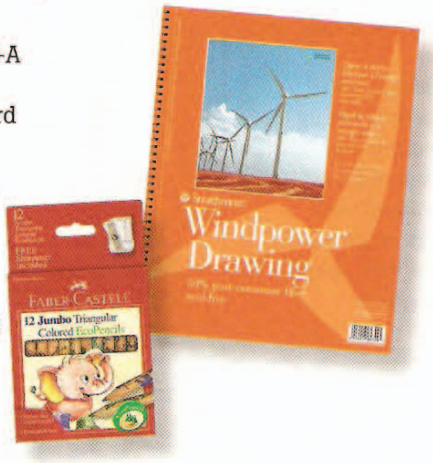
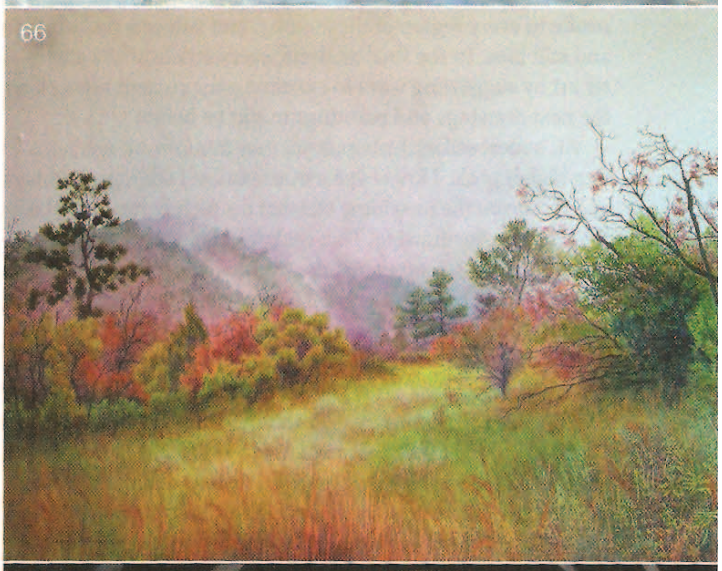




Portrait by
Everett Raymond Kinstler

EDITOR'S NOTE

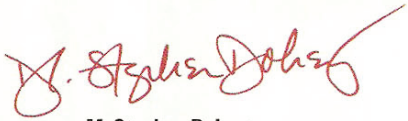
Make Better Art

We strive to present variety in the articles included in each issue of *American Artist* so that you will learn something about the medium you use most often, connect with the personal and professional experiences of featured artists, and be inspired by the outstanding quality of the artwork reproduced. The articles explore ways of using a wide range of drawing and painting media, the artists reside in every region of the country, and subjects include figures, landscapes, and still lifes. In the final analysis, every article offers advice about making better art by suggesting ways to examine your current artwork and determine how the next drawings and paintings might be better.

An honest self-evaluation is not easy to confront; neither is the process of setting higher goals. I know that's true because I often get halfway through a painting and recognize the unsettling fact that the picture has failed because I didn't adjust the errors in the drawing. That cold, frustrating reality is most glaring when I've spent hours on a portrait that doesn't look like the person who is posing. I've learned that there is just no substitute for stepping back, looking critically, and being willing to redraw the face over and over until I get it right.

The same is true when I paint a still life or a landscape, although it is easier to slip a bad painting of a tree past viewers who aren't familiar with the maple or oak that I painted. If I am honest, however, I must admit when I have lost control of the landscape or the representation of the pear. Does that really matter? Well, only if I am sincere about making better drawings and paintings.

The artists featured in this issue can help us meet those challenges because they have already dealt with them successfully, and they are still setting higher standards for themselves. **Joshua Been** explains how the discipline he acquired while serving in the army helps him make the best use of his time and talent (page 50), **E. Gordon West** reveals what he has learned over more than 50 years of painting watercolors (page 44), and **Carolyn Anderson** reviews the advice she offers artists who participate in her popular workshops (page 28). The remaining articles explain other ways of addressing your shortcomings and moving closer to your goals.



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Using Right Practices to Paint Better

Colorado oil painter **Joshua Been** simplifies aspects of his painting process so that he can spend more time working at the crucial parts of making a picture: value, shape, edges, and texture.

by Bob Bahr

One probably doesn't picture a colorful street fair, a cozy coffeehouse scene, or a sun-drenched clump of aspens when the words "military background" are uttered. But such views are beautifully depicted in Joshua Been's oil paintings, and the Colorado artist attributes his highly effective work habits and affinity for "right practices" to his service in the U.S. Army, where he served in active duty for three years. The result is an ability to exercise self-discipline in his art making, which to the artist means "getting up and showing up with a present mind."

OPPOSITE PAGE
Autumn Grove
2010, oil, 16 x 12.
All artwork this article private collection unless otherwise indicated.

Consider Been's schedule: In the summer, he starts his day at 5 a.m. (7 a.m. in winter) and paints outdoors for several hours, weather permitting, five days a week. (If the weather does not permit it, he draws from life in a space that's protected from the elements, such as a coffeehouse.) Afternoons are spent in the gallery he owns with his wife, in Salida, Colorado. When the gallery is quiet, he tends to e-mails and maintains his website, diligently marketing his work via social-networking sites. At night, he paints in his studio, often from plein air studies. The output is about 10 studio or plein air paintings a week, the result of at least 25 hours of painting. An entire day of plein air painting may result in five paintings alone, and some days he paints for as much as 10 hours.

His schedule is intense and shows a tremendous work ethic, but Been's success—top prizes at Sedona Plein Air Festival, in Arizona; First Place at the Grand Canyon Association's inaugural Plein Air on the Rim competition; and selection to paint the Lifetime Achievement Award for Ted Turner by the Colorado Conservation Trust—is not just the result of logging hours in the studio. The artist puts a strong emphasis on two other concepts: simplicity and consistency. His palette is the perfect example. Inside the studio or out, Been usually paints with just six colors: cadmium yellow lemon, cadmium orange, burnt sienna, alizarin crimson, ultramarine blue, and titanium white. The artist points out that all but the earth color—burnt sienna—have similar tinting strength and allow for relatively transparent painting. He saves the titanium white for advanced stages in his painting. "It's a very versatile palette—a cool yellow and a warm blue allow for greater latitude in mixing, and I like to keep it consistent so that I can come into the studio and work the same way without learning a new palette," says Been. "The way I use white is to keep it out of the painting until I'm absolutely ready for it. All the colors on my palette seem very

LEFT
In The Shadows
2007, oil, 16 x 12.

OPPOSITE PAGE, ABOVE
Way Back When
2010, oil, 8 x 12. Collection the artist.

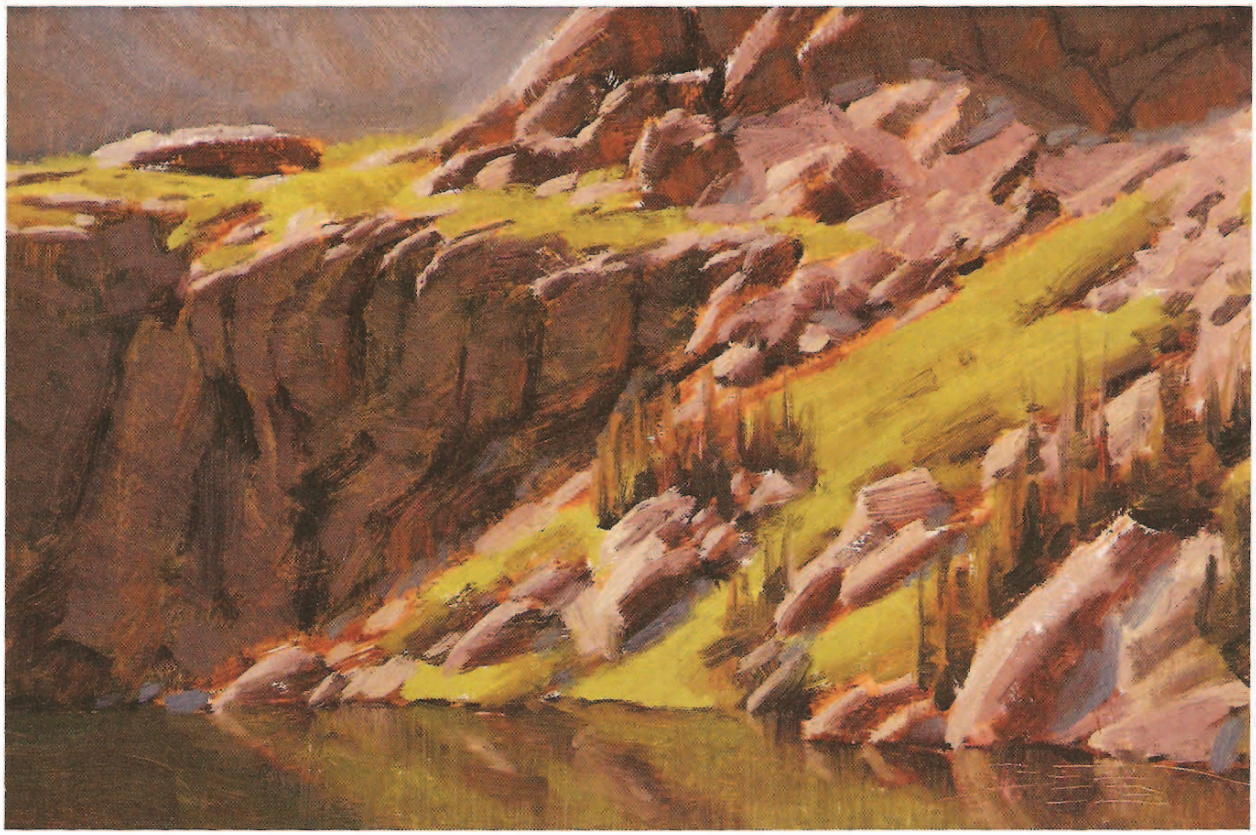
OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW
Willow Lake Shadows
2009, oil, 8 x 12.

intuitive—quinacridones and phthalocyanines, for example, are like landmines in people's palettes. One touch of them and, boom." Been doesn't need many colors to make a strong statement. A look at *In the Shadows* shows how much he can accomplish in an almost monochrome painting.

Been conducts workshops and offers similarly simple and focused advice to participants, centering on four concepts: value, shape, edges, and texture. "Value is the most important area—color is a subset of value, with temperature and saturation falling under color," comments Been. His discussion of shape includes the importance of overlap, which can suggest depth in a painting. "Line can be part of the shape discussion," he says. "Lines offer a dynamic trail for viewers to follow through the painting. The painting lines should take the viewer on a journey through the painting, but they shouldn't be too blatant or predictable. One line in a rock might point the viewer to another place in the painting, or maybe an unseen line somewhere could connect two distinct parts of the painting.

"The edge relationships are paramount to the success of selling the illusion," the artist continues. "An edge describes the material of the object. For instance, you can't paint every leaf of a deciduous tree, but if you handle the edges of the masses with a leafy sort of feel, you will create the illusion of the canopy." This does not amount to a gimmick or a simple matter of having a specialty brush. Been points out that just one or two edges that mimic the texture of the object will normally do the job. "Even on a man-made object, where every edge may be exactly alike, I like to vary the edges," he explains. "For example, I'll squint at the fender of a car, find the sharpest edges, render that accurately, and then I can vary the rest of the edges and it will still look convincing." This approach is on view in the painting *Way Back When*, where certain lines pop and other edges seem almost lost.

Been finds that both the variety of strokes and the use of a palette knife enhance edges and constitute intriguing texture, as evidenced in *Colorado Native*. "I love the juxtaposition of a palette knife and brushes," he enthuses. "When



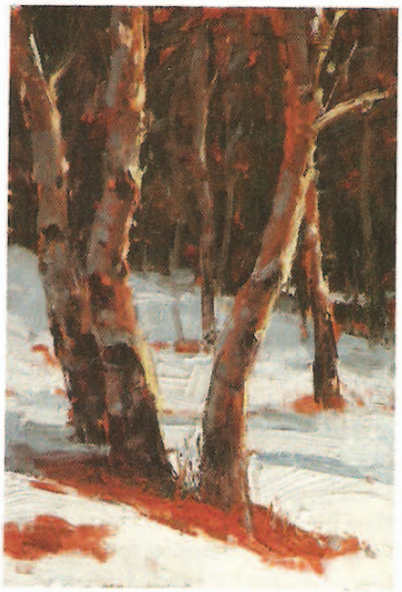
"The edge relationships are paramount to the success of selling the illusion. An edge describes the material of the object. For instance, you can't paint every leaf of a deciduous tree, but if you handle the edges of the masses with a leafy sort of feel, you will create the illusion of the canopy."

done successfully, there's no end to what it can do for a canvas. The palette knife is like a whole new language. It can bring a completely different look and feel to a work. But it takes some experimentation—you can very easily overdo it." Been's preferred knife is the Utrecht 1011 or the Richeson 828, which is medium-size, round at the bottom, and ends in a blunt point. The artist tells students that no tool is out of bounds, however, and advocates spattering paint or dabbing it with a (gloved) finger if the situation warrants it. A close look at a Been painting will often show a thin, flat underpainting next to pigment applied by palette knife, next to a thick application of paint from a brush.

Been works on stretched, oil-primed linen canvas in the studio and on Masonite with multiple coats of Utrecht Professional acrylic gesso when he works outdoors. "That particular gesso on Masonite acts just like oil-primed linen, and consistency is key for me," asserts the artist. "By keeping the surfaces consistent, I don't have to relearn anything going from the field to the studio; I don't have to think about it. I can concentrate on more important things, such as composition." Looking at a painting such as *Watch Your Step*, which seems warmed by a raw sienna undertone, it is surprising to learn that the artist doesn't tone his surfaces. "I like to use the white of the canvas the way a watercolorist uses the white of paper," says Been. "I let the white of the canvas lighten the washes of the block-in, which I paint with fairly pure, saturated color. The colors aren't as accurate as the drawing, but they express the feel of the subject matter and the lighting. I later go back over it with more subdued color. The advantage of using a white canvas and avoiding white paint as long as possible is that you can always wipe down to the canvas, whereas if you are painting with shaded mixtures that have white in them, you can never effectively take it back up again to achieve clean color."

Some of Been's paintings seem like meditations on certain colors—*Autumn Grove* is awash in oranges, and *Snowy Tree* is blue enough to turn many of its reds into purples. The artist says he lets the quality of light determine the color harmony. The aforementioned pieces were painted outdoors, implying truthfulness in the scene's color, but Been says the color family is one aspect of a painting he is willing to adjust in the studio. "I go for accuracy en plein air and a more harmonious look in studio paintings," he states. "Plein air is painting from truth, and it also teaches you what light can do ... and *that* is what makes a scene really magical."

Light effects can just about carry a painting, as can a



OPPOSITE PAGE
The Regulars
2007, oil, 8 x 24.

ABOVE
Almost Spring
2010, oil, 10 x 7.

TOP
Snowy Tree
2009, oil, 8 x 6.

ABOVE
Colorado Native
2009, oil, 6 x 9.

LEFT
Watch Your Step
2009, oil, 12 x 9.

BELOW
Endrenched
2008, oil, 21 x 12.

OPPOSITE PAGE, ABOVE
At Water's Edge
2009, oil, 24 x 24.
Collection the artist.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW
Below Fern Falls
2010, oil, 30 x 40.

strong design or composition, whereas subject matter can be almost secondary. Been works with a wide array of subjects, never hesitating to paint those that are favored by collectors, such as old barns and nostalgic cars or trucks—as long as he finds the scene interesting. "I love old things, things that are pleasantly dilapidated," the artist explains. "Painting a crisp, brand-new Ferrari could be fun, but there wouldn't be the variation in texture that you get in older objects. Also, if certain subject matter is reliably saleable, I say get it done, if it is pleasant to paint. Sell some paintings to keep your creative career going." On the other hand, some of Been's paintings, such as *Below Fern Falls* and *Watch Your Step*, seem like subjects painters would love more than collectors.

If there is one subject that seems to dominate Been's work, it would be water. Snow, streams, surf—the artist depicts water in its many forms. His grasp of the physics of reflection is impressive, as shown in *Endrenched* and *Willow Lake Shadows*. Few views in nature are this complicated, with sky color and brightness, particulates in the water, values and hues of underwater objects, surface refractions, and perspective all distorting the objects in view. Been's advice for water and reflections is simple: Observe carefully. There are many scientific rules at play in such a scene, but it isn't mandatory that an artist know them in order to accurately depict the view—as long as the artist doesn't use his or her head and insist that submerged branches are brown, or water is blue, or reflections are simply mirror images.

Been improves through practice and through interactions with other artists. He says he appreciates art websites and magazines such as *American Artist*, and he singles out his friendship with a neighbor who is also an artist as crucial in his development. "I highly recommend that you displace ego and find a kindred spirit to bounce ideas and paintings off of," says Been. "The growth can be exponential." In a different world, a person like Joshua Been would serve as spokesperson for a company like Nike. His determination, focus, and stamina—backed up with careful forethought and preparation—give new meaning to the sports cliché "just do it." ■

Bob Bahr is a former managing editor of American Artist *and is currently a freelance editor and writer based in New York City.*

About the Artist

Joshua Been is co-owner of Virtuosity Gallery, in Salida, Colorado, with his wife, Laura. His work is in numerous private collections, and he is the recipient of several show awards, including top prizes at the Sedona Plein Air Festival, in Arizona, and First Place in the Grand Canyon Association's Plein Air on the Rim competition. Been graduated from Fort Lewis College, in Durango, Colorado, and worked for eight years in the entertainment industry as a character animator and concept artist. For more information, visit www.joshuabeen.com.