



*Plate #3: Hampson and Cherokee streets.*

## NEW ORLEANS EN PLEIN AIR

The primary purpose of this book is to explore the beauty of New Orleans as seen from out of doors using a selection of landscape paintings from my work painted over the last fifteen years. Most treatments of this subject tend to focus on the French Quarter and Garden District. This body of work is different in that it provides a comprehensive look at the whole city, spanning most of the residential neighborhoods, the Central Business District, the Riverfront, the Lakefront, the cemeteries, and both Audubon and City parks. We will begin by exploring uptown neighborhoods, work downtown, have a brief sojourn to the Riverfront, and then go out towards the Lakefront. The location of each painting will be included in the caption along with any other specific information.

Most art books presenting a portrait of a place through a series of paintings will use the accompanying text to provide interesting anecdotes and background information about the subject of each painting. While I will provide some information of this kind in the captions, this will not comprise the main text. I make this choice because these matters (the locale, its historical or cultural significance, etc.) play no part in my choice of a subject, nor in my execution of a painting. I am using the main text to share my knowledge about the experience of painting and about the complex process of human vision as it relates to the artist. In this way I hope to help readers better understand and appreciate my work and, more importantly, develop their own visual experience of this beautiful and unique city. At a time when the most revered commentators on art are usually not artists themselves, I hope that the strength of my work will give weight to my words.

All of these paintings were done on location from the live subject (*en plein air*). I carry all of my painting equipment, including



*Plate #4: Carrollton Flower Market, Dublin and Burthe streets.*

a portable easel, to location. Most contemporary artists underestimate the importance of working from life. Working from photos, as most artists do, removes the artist from the richness of the first-hand visual experience. The best among those artists who work from photos say they are predominantly working from memory, only using photos as references. The problem with this argument is that it is easy to be lured into the less inspired activity of merely copying the photos. I have found that working from life not only enables me to better capture what I see, but also its limitations and technical difficulties make me a stronger artist.

I work quickly. Each painting in this book was executed in three





*Plate #5: Maple and Burdette streets. This stretch of Maple Street, also shown in plate #6, is a beautiful little hidden-away business area with many shops and restaurants in old wood-frame buildings.*

hours or less, and in a single sitting. Some of the works were completed in as little as forty-five minutes. My process evolved over time into painting quickly because I build my paintings around the fleeting moment. The concept of the fleeting moment was first explored by the French Impressionists of the late nineteenth century to describe what we visually sense and perceive in an instant of time. Our overall visual experience of a subject can be conceived as a summation of a multitude of fleeting moments happening successively. Each fleeting moment is very simple visually, comprising a relatively small, finite number of apparent color patterns. I believe that when I truly understand what I see at any instant in time, it should be a simple and not very time-consuming job to put

the colored patterns onto the canvas that communicate what I have seen. When the fleeting moment is successfully captured on the canvas, your mind will fill in what might have come before and what is expected to come after. There are no unanswered questions. Thus, a very simple painting gives the illusion of being quite complex.

The fact that I work quickly does not mean that painting is effortless for me. Of every five paintings I do, four are rubbed off so that the canvas can be reused. It is hit and miss. There are times when I spend hours using the canvas as a blackboard, trying to figure out what I see and how to state it. This difficulty is compounded by the constantly changing atmospheric and lighting conditions out-of-doors. It can be like trying to hit a moving target. In South Louisiana in particular, there are few days when the sky is predominantly clear or overcast. Most days are partly cloudy, with the sun coming in and out from behind the clouds. Having to deal with this adversity has forced me to develop my visual memory and a good understanding of the subject as a whole, two essential qualities for artists to have regardless of their working conditions.

The working conditions here are not for the dilettante. Painting is an intellectual activity, and most intellectual activities are done indoors, in temperatures ranging from seventy-two to seventy-eight degrees. In New Orleans the average highs are above eighty-five degrees for at least six months of the year. During at least three of those months, the highs are in the nineties. This might not be so arduous if the relative humidity were low, as in the desert Southwest. But the relative humidity in New Orleans is very high, which not only makes it seem uncomfortably hot in the late spring, summer, and early fall, but also uncomfortably cold in the winter. Painting outdoors in New Orleans can be like trying to take a very difficult test in a damp, ninety-five-degree classroom. A Russian-born colleague of mine, who is an excellent plein-air painter, refuses to work outside in New Orleans. He says it is like

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*Plate #6: Maple Street between Burdette and Adams streets.*





*Plate #7: Pine Street between Pitt and Garfield streets.*





Plate #8: Hillary Street between St. Charles Avenue and Pearl Street, late winter. I'm no botanist, but I wonder how many other places in the world have some trees changing color and fixing to drop leaves while others are blooming.





*Plate #9: Millaudon and Dominican streets.*





*Plate #10: Pile of bricks. I passed these bricks several mornings in a row while walking my dogs. My appreciation of their beauty grew each time I walked by, until finally I had to paint them. While quickly painted, as is my style, each brick is exactly as it was. There is order in nature, even in the way a human being will stack bricks, and not to respect this would be a foolish mistake.*





*Plate #11: Azaleas. Audubon Street, between Pitt and Prytanis streets.*

trying to work under water. He makes trips to New Mexico to paint. When Degas, one of the most prolific of artists, visited family in New Orleans, he remarked that he found the climate so intemperate as to make it all but impossible to work here. Many have speculated that we have not had our share of great landscape painters in the Deep South because of the temperature and humidity.

All the paintings shown in this book are executed in oil paint on canvas. In general, I am opposed to making much over the medium in which an artist chooses to work. It results in artists being arbitrarily segregated, categorized, and compared according to their preferred medium. They are labeled as oil painters or watercolorists or pastelists, etc. There are separate periodicals and books focusing on each medium. While this is generally done to focus on the peculiar strengths and challenges of each medium, it is ultimately a misleading segregation. It is comparable to categorizing writers according to which implement they wrote with: pencil, pen, typewriter, or word processor. Shakespeare and Kipling would then be compared as two of the finest English pen-ists (of course, there would have to be subcategories here of quill and fountain pen), while Hemingway would be hailed as an extraordinary twentieth-century typewriterist. Writers communicate with words. What difference does it make how they put them onto the paper? Visual artists communicate with color patterns sitting next to and on top of each other in the picture plane. What difference does it make what tools and which medium they use to put these color patterns onto the canvas or paper (or computer monitor, for that matter)?

## SEEING

My main objective as a painter is to better understand what and how we see. I believe that every great ism in art was born from a monumental leap in our understanding of human vision (the discovery of the principles of perspective, for example). Each painting I do is an experiment in the form of a visual stimulus that I have





*Plate #12: Walnut Street, between Benjamin and Dominican streets. This was done on a warm summer afternoon from the vantage point of Audubon Park, with the houses backlit by the sun.*





*Plate #13: The guard post at Audubon Place, seen here in afternoon light from Audubon Park.*

designed to evoke a specific response in my test subjects (all those people who look at my paintings). Studying their response to my paintings is an essential part of my process. When one realizes that 60 percent of the human brain is devoted to vision, then the power of painting to affect human life should not be underestimated.

Now let us examine how the human visual experience develops over our lifetime. Young children take in a tremendous amount of visual information. This is because so much of what they see each day is new to them and must be examined and explored in order to be assimilated as useful information. As we get older and have assimilated more and more information, we take in less and less through our senses. Each new experience is filed away under one or two prior, similar experiences. As a result, eventually our eyes are used mainly to keep us from bumping into objects. It's no wonder that the days and years seem to go by quicker as one gets older. As adults, our minds and senses are running on autopilot. We live for those yearly vacations to faraway, exotic places. We feel so alive when we arrive there because we are alert, on edge, turned around, taking in many new sensations. We are experiencing the world, in some small way, like a child. A week in a new and different place seems like a happy lifetime.

We do not have to wait for our vacations to experience this feeling. You do not have to purchase airline tickets to be awakened from a state of visual coma. A walk through your own neighborhood can be a rich, new experience if you can learn to see it through different eyes. Even though the image of light hitting each person's eyes is the same, we all see something different. I will discuss the difference between the image and what we see in more depth later, but for now it will serve to say that each individual responds to a unique set of visual cues embedded within the image, which inform him of qualities and aspects of the subject most important to him. For example, one person may notice the sunlight illuminating the scene. For another person, the quality of age and dilapidation of architecture in the scene may be

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*Plate #14: Tulane University, Richardson Memorial Building.*