

An Instinctive Painter with Technical Chops and Creative Structure:

JIM MCVICKER

By Nicole Borgenicht

Artist Jim McVicker well known for his plein air and still-life paintings, expresses his early development had occurred mainly by working with other more experienced artists. A contemporary plein air artist, McVicker's works encapsulate patterns with shapes, and color-tinted shades of light through dark. While his still life paintings disclose background and object in modern placement, by layers formulated in a series of steps shown herein.

McVicker shares his experience, "I met three painters in 1978, Curtis Otto, James B Moore and George Van Hook, at a life drawing group in Eureka, Ca. Each of them were painting works that I really responded to, all worked from life and the landscape around the Eureka area. I was invited to go out to paint with them and jumped on the opportunity. We all became friends and George and I eventually shared a studio space. We worked along side each other for about a three-year period, which was a time of huge growth in my work. I often share that story and always encourage workshop students to work with painters that are more advanced. A lot is picked up from observing other's working methods. Also, visit a lot of museums to study firsthand the works of historical masters."

In comparing technique of how the artist paints from still life to plein air landscape, Jim McVicker points out similarities as well as a few, very distinct differences.

He says, "Still life painting and landscape feel like two different approaches, although I do both from life. The landscape is always a short time frame, about two hours, trying to catch the light before it changes too much. With still life in the studio, one has more consistent light and therefore it doesn't seem as frantic as painting outdoors. I will do

many of my landscapes over a period of several days to weeks working with the same time of day and lighting conditions. Also, with still life, you are composing from scratch. Still life, I can also work with colors not found easily in nature. In the landscape, I look for compositions and design that I find exciting and then respond to it."

In the many stages of Studio Still-Life, Jim McVicker describes his initial considerations and techniques in each of the first steps. In addition, he shares a few colors and brushes chosen to achieve necessary results. Therefore we receive insider notes on how the earlier images transition toward the final painting.

"My still life pictured started with a thin and simple drawing using a bristle brush and transparent oxide red. I also block in some of those shapes with the same warm color. At that point, I really focus on painting the flowers because of the short life span. So, I am working with the colors and shapes I see in a pretty direct manner, always working with bristle brushes number 4 to 10. At the same time, I work on the flowers, I am painting the background around them and hopefully keeping a sense of unity and connection, not separation. Once the flowers are painted, usually over a three-day period, I start to concentrate on all the other objects and slowly start blocking in the rug patterns and color. I am always working directly with the colors I see and do not do any glazing. I worked on this painting over a three-month period, building up the paint, paying close attention the light, values and a sense of space and air. At some point, the painting seems to not call out for any thing else and I set it aside, studying it now and then and sometimes making subtle additions or changes," says McVicker.





In Summer, at Hawks Hill, there is a vast landscape filled with detailed shapes and patterns, along with an expansive sky, put together into an orderly composition. McVicker describes a few artist tips in achieving richness of color, depth of field, and time of day from this painting.

"Summer, Hawks Hill has that warm afternoon glow of summer and the beautiful golden tones that say California. I painted it in the afternoons over a two to three week period. Some days I can't work on it as the fog has rolled in. When painting sunlight and the richness of the land, I always tell students in my workshops they need to push the color and light further than they think. We can't actually paint sunlight, so in order to achieve that effect I think one needs to be bold with it. To underplay it would not give one the sense of bright sunlight on the golden grass and road. The clouds are very important to the design of this painting. Again, I feel they say sunlight but also create depth and movement in the sky. I always pay close attention to the values in order to show that illusion of depth. The color and brushwork get stronger in the middle and foreground," Jim McVicker says.

In Spring, Hawks Hill, Jim McVicker has simulated the translucence of spring rain with shapes and colors in this plein air landscape painting.

McVicker says, "Spring, Hawks Hill was painted in the early morning over several days. The fields below still have some flooded patches that reflect the sky and I feel an important element to give it that sense of moisture and our Northern California spring. Everything is very green except the berry patches along the roadside that add a nice complement to the greens. I have painted from the view many times over the past 30 years: different seasons, weather and time of day."

His work is in many galleries all over California, and in Florida and Utah. Plus Jim McVicker paintings have been in many museum shows to include a recent exhibit at New Museum Los Gatos, where his still-life paintings were outstanding. Furthermore, he has won multifarious awards in plein air competitions.

"I show with a number of galleries throughout the U.S. and enjoy working with the owners I show with. I think it is best to have a good relationship, rapport and someone that is excited about your work. I have had numerous shows, group and solo, over the years and enjoy both. I think a



solo show is always important and a great way to see a body of one's work out of the studio, framed and hanging on well lit and beautiful gallery walls. I always, in that setting, feel I am seeing my work with a fresh and new eye. I have also been included in a few museum shows with other painters and that is always an honor," says McVicker.

In McVicker's own workshops he makes it a point to share his awareness of nature to paint in an intuitive way. After all, he paints with reflection of the inherent shapes, color and light patterns that prevail in nature, yet maintains a modern flair for ingenuity.

He says, "From my workshops I have learned a lot just by talking and expressing oneself about painting and how I go about painting a landscape or still life. I like both but I think I am always most happy outdoors. I am a very intuitive painter and do not like formulas as a way to make a painting. I try to always stay open to what is in front of me and like to pass that along to students. With that said, I do approach the painting as I think most painters do. Looking for big shapes, the darks and lights and what I see as the color and tones happening throughout the painting. I stress the importance of sound drawing, correct values and paying attention to what the subject before you is revealing. I speak out loud in my workshops expressing what I am saying to myself in my head while I paint. Except for when I beat myself up for all the wrong things I might do as I paint. It's not something one learns and then it's smooth sailing to making a good painting. Those would not be very interesting paintings without all the work,



frustration and the constant pushing to make a better painting than the last one. I see Nature as king and the great instructor. I am in awe!"

An artist lifestyle he shares with his wife and camaraderie with other painters, McVicker revels in limitless communication.

"My favorite thing about being an artist is having everyday give me something new to see and the opportunity to use whatever talent, creativity and passion I have to do something with it on a canvas. My wife, Theresa Oats, is an artist also. Both of us feel very blessed to follow our passion and to make a living doing what we love. It's not all roses and has its highs and lows like anything in life. It takes focus and love to stay committed to what one believes in. Today, like no other time in history, we have had the opportunity to meet in person and online so many fellow artists out there, following their passion to create something that is life affirming and gives one a strong sense of purpose. It's always nice to know you're not alone," says Jim McVicker.

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