10 ARTISTS TO COLLECT NOW: The Emerging Plein Air Painters You Need to Know

Meet the rising plein air stars who have caught the attention of today's gallery owners, event organizers, and competition jurors. Find out what inspires them, the breakthroughs that have taken them to the next level, and why you should add their work to your collection now.

BY KELLY KANE -







Allen Brockbank



Tatyana Fogarty



Bhavani Krishnan



Eileen McCullough



Judd Mercer



Fernando Micheli



Tad Retz



Daniel K. Robbins



Melanie Thompson

MARC ANDERSON

Art education: I studied illustration at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie, Wisconsin. Although I had a few wonderful painting professors there, I wasn't exposed to plein air until later. My first workshop — and by far the biggest game-changer — was with Mark Boedges in Vermont. I learned a ton and went home champing at the bit to paint as much as I could. I'd go so far as to say that experience was the catalyst for my career as a fine artist.

Favorite subjects: Light is the thing that can make or break a subject for me. Beyond that, I'm looking for a subject that is representative of or unique to the place I'm painting — mountains in Colorado, boats in Annapolis, or cows and barns in Wisconsin. That being said, anything can make for a good painting, and it behooves one to look past the obvious.

Aha moment: When I first started plein air painting, it became apparent that if I couldn't draw something, I couldn't paint it. At the time I thought I was a decent draftsman, but with the extra complexities of painting added to the mix, I didn't have the mental bandwidth to

make it all work at once. To help, I started keeping a sketchbook. The more that observational drawing became muscle memory, the more I could think about things like color, value, and brushwork. Subsequently, my paintings improved.

What I would do for a living if I wasn't an artist: In high school, I enjoyed math and problem-solving, so I had considered going to school for engineering. Fortunately the siren call of the art world was too intoxicating.

Favorite artists: Caravaggio was one of the first painters I gravitated toward. His use of chiaroscuro helped me understand what happens when light hits a form. Then there's the obligatory nod to Joaquín Sorolla and John Singer Sargent for basically all aspects of their work. And of course Richard Schmid's work and his book *Alla Prima* have been hugely informative.

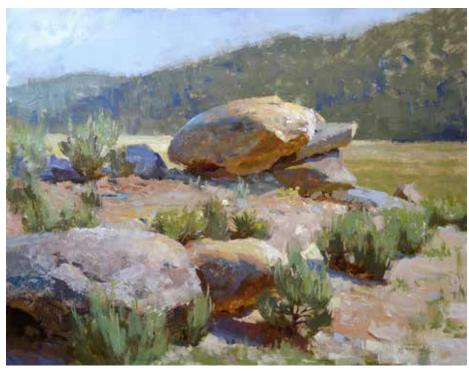
The advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career: Be a professional. And by that I mean present yourself and your work in the best light possible. That's going to have a different meaning to different people, and it took me a while to figure out what it means for me. Essentially it boils down to "take what you do seriously." It will reflect in your work and how you interact with collectors, students, and galleries.

What's next: During COVID, I've started teaching workshops online, which has been a surprisingly useful format. I'm getting back to inperson workshops as well, which I'm excited about, but because the online classes can achieve different things, I'll continue hosting those in the future.

Price range: \$700-\$6,000

<u>Representation:</u> LePrince Fine Art, Charleston, SC; LePrince Fine Art Naples, Naples, FL; Wantoot Gallery, Mineral Point, WI; M. Anderson Gallery, Wauwatosa, WI

Website: marcandersonillustration.com





(TOP) Colorado Stoners, 2021, oil, 14 x 18 in., available from artist, plein air • (ABOVE) Off the Rails, 2020, oil, 14 x 18 in., available from artist, plein air



ALLEN BROCKBANK

<u>Art education:</u> I studied illustration at Brigham Young University and have taken workshops with several artists — the most influential being those with David Dibble, Josh Clare, and Kimball Geisler.

<u>Painting style:</u> I like to think my work has a strong graphic quality. Shape and composition are key.

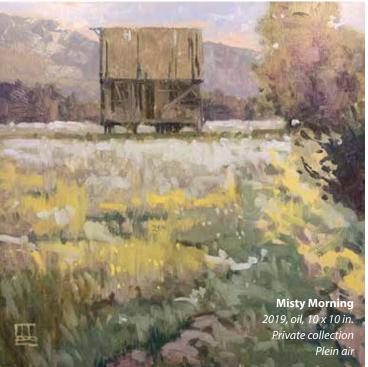
<u>Favorite subjects:</u> I love mountains and red rock. In fact, I tend to struggle when there are no mountains to help ground my scenes.

Aha moment: My aha moment came when I realized I wasn't seeing value as well as I thought I was, and launched my ongoing crusade for accuracy. My effort to improve is based on constant comparison: I lay down a dab of paint, put another one next to it, compare, then adjust. Then I place the next one, make sure it fits, and so on. I kinda ignore color, although not completely; I take into consideration if the color should be warmer or cooler, but I don't feel it needs to be an exact match.

What I would do for a living if I wasn't an artist: I come from a long line of dentists but would be absolutely miserable in that profession. Perhaps architecture would now be my second choice.

Favorite artists: I'm highly influenced by the many amazing painters in Utah. In addition to the instructors I mentioned above, I'd add Kathryn Stats. I love how these artists all apply paint differently, and try to borrow a little from each. As for classical influences, I've always loved the work of Toulouse-Lautrec. He's not exactly a plein air painter, but I love the graphic nature of his pieces. His compositions and use of shape and line were flawless. In general, I just love the immediacy of the work. His "painting from life" may have been different from plein air, but the energy is similar.

The advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career: You can do this the rest of your life, however long that will be. Just start and be patient.



<u>What's next:</u> I have a couple of big shows coming up at Sonoma Plein Air and En Plein Air Texas and then look forward to hunkering down in the studio and working big.

Price range: \$750-\$3,500

Representation: Brushworks Gallery, Salt Lake City, UT

Website: allenbbrockbank.com





(TOP) American River Parkway, 2019, oil, 12 x 16 in., available from artist, plein air • **(ABOVE) Waves and Rocks**, 2021, oil, 9 x 12 in., available from artist, plein air

TATYANA FOGARTY

Art education: As a child, I excelled in school art courses
— music appreciation, choir, pencil drawing, and beginner
watercolor — which were all compulsory in Russia. But my
art education has included a range of methods of study
— from books, lectures, plein air conferences, and DVDs
to workshops and masterclasses with acclaimed American
artists, including Scott Christensen, Kevin Macpherson, and
Kathleen Dunphy.

Painting style: I'd call it impressionistic optical realism: it's impressionistic representation without being photographic. I concentrate on rendering nature as it appears to the eyes, the way light shapes the landscape.

Favorite subjects: My favorite subjects include water, boats, bridges, and coastal scenes. My inspiration for painting water, with its rippling reflective surfaces, is partly born out of my longtime admiration of the dramatic marine scenes by 19th-century Russian artist Ivan Aivazovsky. I spent endless hours studying the large-scale paintings at his house-museum in Feodosia, Crimea, where I used to live.

Aha moment: There's been no "Eurekal" moment for me yet. It has been a slow, gradual progress over time, with almost daily painting and lots of studying of past and contemporary masters' works.

What I would do for a living if I wasn't an artist: My artistic journey started later in life. With a Master's degree in education, specializing in foreign languages, I earned my living in Ukraine teaching English and French to people of all ages. When I first came to the United States, I volunteered my time as an interpreter at UCLA Hospital in Los Angeles. Revisiting either of those pursuits would be interesting. Favorite artists: I'm inspired by a wide range of work, from Monet and Rembrandt to Marc Chagall, Isaac Levitan, and Nicolai Fechin, but my paintings are mostly influenced and inspired by Joaquín Sorolla. I was a young girl when a picture of his painting *The Horse's Bath* in my schoolbook caught my eye. It was much later, when I saw his masterpieces in person, that I understood his exceptional talent and brilliance. I was dazzled by his use of color, particularly his infusing of whites with a rainbow of colors, both in shadow and in light. The advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career: Simplify; eliminate what's not crucial to the main idea; "move" mountains, trees, and other natural elements to improve the composition.

What's next: After such a tumultuous year and a half, I want to take small steps to returning to plein air painting, and to participating in live plein air events, in-person paint-outs, painting retreats, and exhibitions.

Price range: \$300-\$3,500

Representation: New Masters Gallery, Carmel-by-the-

Sea, CA

Website: tatyanafogarty.com

BHAVANI KRISHNAN

Art education: Having quit my software job to pursue painting, I initially studied at an atelier but then realized I didn't want to paint in the style of classical realism. From there, I sought out a teacher who paints loose and abstract. Weekly classes with Yer Za Vue and a ton of self-study have shaped me into the painter that I am. I think of myself as a lifelong student of art, so the journey continues.

Painting style: I would call my style expressive and painterly. My process involves a lot of exploration — and intention. I seek to express a little bit of myself and my experience of the landscape in each painting.

Favorite subjects: I'm inspired by moments of light and shadow, evocative passages of color, and exciting shapes. I love to capture the mood of the landscape, especially the evening sky or the full moon rising. In 2020, I painted the full moon en plein air every month.

Aha moment: My breakthrough came when I finally understood how to simplify the landscape into three or four values. It wasn't one aha moment, but a clarity that slowly replaced confusion in my brain over a period of time. This concept is easy to understand on an intellectual level but took me a ton of practice to implement while plein air painting.

What I would do for a living if I wasn't an artist:

Maybe I would be a writer. I love to read, and I dabble with writing a blog occasionally.

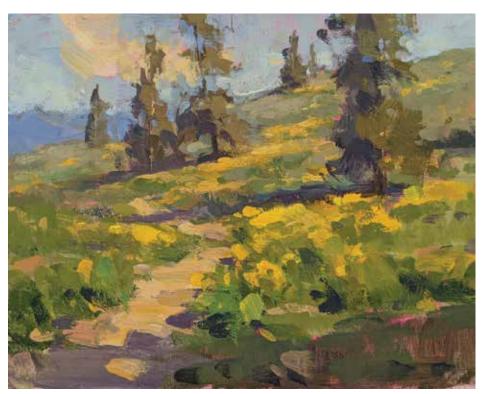
Favorite artists: I obsessively look at art while not painting. I go to Edgar Payne for composition, atmosphere, and color, and Tom Thompson and the Group of Seven for simplification and graphic shapes. I study the rhythm and expressive brushwork of Joan Mitchell and Carl Plansky. And I turn to Fred Cuming for mood and concept. And, of course, I love everything about Isaac Levitan, Nicolai Fechin, and Joaquín Sorolla. Helene Schjerfbeck and Joan Eardley also inspire me tremendously with their unique visions.

The advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career: Seek a teacher whose style really inspires you. It took me a while to break out of the practices I picked up at the atelier.

What's next: I would love to continue my explorations of color, design, and brushwork on larger

canvases. I'm planning a series of large paintings that I'll be releasing on my website later this year. I'm also planning an online workshop and video YouTube tutorials. They'll be announced on Instagram @bhayanikrishnanart.

<u>Price range:</u> \$150-\$1,000-plus <u>Website:</u> bhavanikrishnan.com





(TOP) Wildflower Meadow, 2021, oil, 8 x 10 in., private collection, plein air • **(ABOVE) Magic City**, 2021, oil, 16 x 20 in., private collection, plein air



Surfers Leaving Bird Rock 2021, watercolor, 14 x 21 in. Available from Bill Anderson Gallery Plein air

Coffee at Urth Caffe 2021, watercolor, 21 x 14 in. Available from Bill Anderson Gallery Plein air and studio

EILEEN MCCULLOUGH

Art education: I graduated with a fine art degree from the University of Long Beach, where the most influential watercolor instructor was Linda Stevens. She made an impact on me with her ability to convey complex art principles using simple step-by-step instructions for the students to follow — a method I've adopted in my own teaching process. Painting style: My loose painting style is influenced by the early California Scene painters and reflects an emotional response to my favorite subject matter — coastal living. I include in my paintings open areas of white paper, rich color, bold brushstrokes, and expressive calligraphy. Favorite subjects: Figures bring energy and joy to my paintings. I celebrate people doing ordinary activities such as walking a dog, skateboarding, or dining in outdoor cafes. The elements of the landscape that inspire me the most are those we see every day — banners on street posts, large outdoor umbrellas, palm trees, and the clutter of street signs. Aha moment: My aha moment came to me when I started sketching full size using water-soluble graphite pencils on student-grade Canson watercolor paper. I still use these materials and always make a full-size sketch (14 x 21 inches) as reference for my paintings, whether plein air or in the studio. Sketching is when my creativity kicks in. The more time I devote to sketching, the further I break away from a literal interpretation of the scene in front of me.

What I would do for a living if I wasn't an artist: If I wasn't an artist I would most likely be a landscaper or own a nursery. Before I even enter

my studio I rummage through my butterfly and hummingbird garden. I can spend hours removing weeds, watering, or repotting.

Favorite artists: Watching a Ratinda Das watercolor video made a big impact on me. He breaks away from conventional form, perspective, and

impact on me. He breaks away from conventional form, perspective, and local color. The freedom of his personal style inspired me to find my own. Plus, I love all the classics — Millard Sheets, Milford Zornes, Rex Bryant, and Phil Dyke.

The advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career:

The best advice I received early in my art career was from my favorite watercolor instructor, Tim Clark. At the same time I was taking his class, I was working as a freelance illustrator and cartoonist. He told me I needed to focus on one specialty. When I left my freelance jobs and started a watercolor career 12 years ago, "focus" was my mantra. I contribute my success to his wise advice: "watercolor and only watercolor."

What's next: My plan is to enter as many plein air events as possible. I thrive on the competition and love the challenge of producing under a tight timeline. My husband will be retiring soon and he's looking forward to being my chauffeur and Sherpa as we travel throughout the United

Price range: \$500-\$1,600

Representation: Bill Anderson Gallery, Sunset Beach, CA

Website: mccullwatercolors.blogspot.com

States as I conduct watercolor workshops.

JUDD MERCER

Art education: I formally studied industrial design, so didn't pick up painting until later, starting with watercolor workshops from the likes of Joseph Zbukvic and Alvaro Castagnet. After a few years, I moved on to opaque mediums — gouache with Mike Hernandez, then oil with Greg Manchess and Dave Santillanes. Painting style: My style is the opposite of delicate. I prefer deliberate strokes without a lot of blending. I think that's partly why I moved away from watercolor — applying the medium just didn't feel like I wanted it to. But carving out a negative shape with a rich dark in oil, man, that's the stuff. I like it when brushstrokes feel like sculpting.

Favorite subjects: There is a word in French, "frisson," which, as I understand it, refers to that sensation of excitement or awe that bubbles up spontaneously when you hear a moving crescendo or see a view that just floors you. I try to dig for that feeling wherever I am — not just in grand landscapes, but also in alleys, junkyards, factories, and my own backyard. Every subject has that magic in there somewhere.

Aha moment: The first time I nailed a snow scene outside was when I finally started to understand how light works. Somehow, seeing bright, cobalt, upward-facing shadows compared to the warmer shadows from under hanging rocks made the idea of bounce light click for me. Wait, this snow is all white, and yet none of it truly is? It's been a lot of those little realizations.

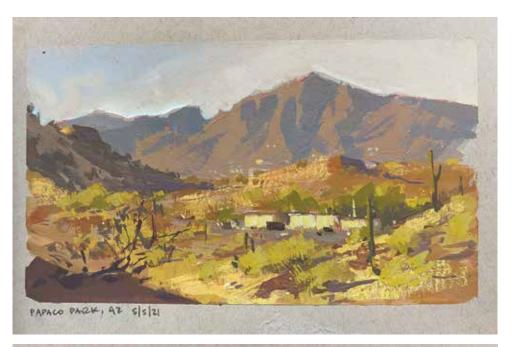
Favorite artists: I'm a big Edward Payne fan, and I'm pretty sure my brushwork shows it, as well as my exaggeration of atmosphere. I appreciate Richard Schmid as well, though I struggle to apply his strategy of appearing to paint wild and loose and instead just do it, for better or worse.

I can be too literal sometimes, and he had a way of viewing the world through a very specific "mood lens" that I admire. Aside from landscape painters, I've really taken to Costa Dvorezky's work. His boldness and command of anatomy make my head spin.

The advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career:
Let go of the outcome! For me, plein air is no longer about going out to
make a great painting, unless I'm at an event. The observation and learning
process is the point, and I wish I had embraced that sooner.

What's next: I'm heading to Scotland soon for a big reference-gathering

trip, so that will generate a lot of new, moody stuff. Also, now that lockdowns



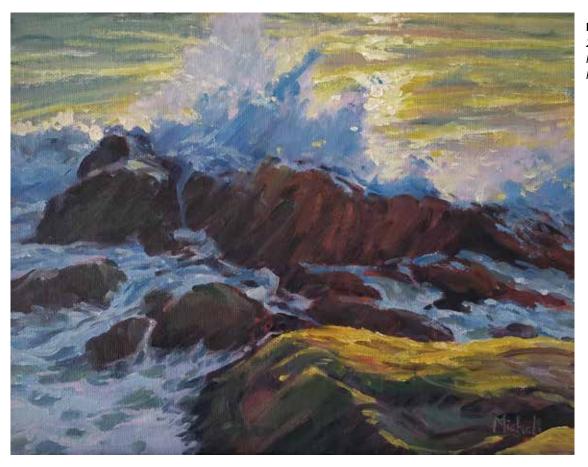


(TOP) Plein Air Study (Arizona), 2021, gouache, 4 x 7 in., collection the artist, plein air • **(ABOVE) Plein Air Study**, 2021, gouache, 4 x 7 in., collection the artist, plein air

are easing up, I want to get into figure study and apply what I've learned about observation from working outside.

Price range: \$400-\$500 for 5 x 7-inch plein air paintings and \$1,500-\$4,000-plus for larger studio pieces

Representation: Abend Gallery, Denver, CO Representation: www.juddmercer.art



Long Dark Blue 2020, oil, 8 x 10 in. Private collection Plein air and studio

Deja View 2021, oil, 9 x 12 in. Private collection Plein air

FERNANDO MICHELI

Art education: Rather than a formal education in fine art, I received a Bachelor's degree in Landscape Architecture at UC Berkeley. Only after a 38-year career did I dive deep into my art with the help of the Laguna Plein Air Painters Association (LPAPA). I owe my knowledge and interest in plein air painting to the many great artists at LPAPA, starting with Jeff Sewell and Jim McVicker.

<u>Painting style:</u> I'm an impressionist on the more realistic side of the spectrum, but I perceive style as fashion and fad, so I'd rather say that I follow in the painting tradition of the great California Impressionists, both living and deceased.

Favorite subjects: I'm most influenced by the light, movement, and feeling in a subject — whatever or wherever it is.

<u>Aha moment:</u> My art moved forward when I realized that the compositional design of a painting is what I should spend most of my time and attention on.

What I would do for a living if I wasn't an artist: As art is already my second career, I couldn't have chosen another one that has given me more joy and purpose. But, okay, if I had to choose another, it would be as a tour guide in Italy.

<u>Favorite artists:</u> This is a tough one, but I would have to say Joaquín Sorolla. He could not only throw paint onto a canvas with the utmost confidence and expression, but could represent humanism and feeling in his paintings like no other.



The advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career:

Don't try to paint a masterpiece when you're painting outdoors. Just have fun learning all the wonders of what nature has to teach.

What's next: I'm honored to have been invited to participate in this year's 23rd Laguna Beach Plein Air Invitational in early October.

Price range: \$350-\$4,000 Website: fernandomicheli.com



Acadia 2021, oil, 36 x 48 in. Available from Camden Falls Gallery Plein air and studio

Arctic Fox 2021, oil, 16 x 21in. Available from artist Plein air and studio

TAD RETZ

Art education: I studied art by taking workshops after high school — two by Mark Boedges in Vermont, and one in Los Angeles by Benjamin Bjorklund. Since then, I've reached out to meet and paint with a number of artists, many of whom I now consider good friends and mentors. I gather little bits of knowledge from everyone.

Painting style: I don't have a simple answer for this. To me, it's just realism, but that's too broad. And I don't think it's impressionism. With every piece I create I'm interested in the color and light of the subject matter. But I've also become increasingly interested in the abstract shapes that present themselves in everyday scenery. I like to push these shapes into caricatured silhouettes with intense outlining and abrupt edges. I've been experimenting with collaging and masking off areas to get these sharp, abstract shapes. When done well they just seem to fit naturally into the painted scene. Favorite subjects: I'm drawn to opportunities for capturing color temperatures that vibrate next to each other and are about the same value. It's exciting to be able to place brushstrokes down that are the same value yet read as completely different materials or planes in the scene for example, the cool sunlit surface of a green leaf next to the underside of a leaf that is saturated green from "subsurface scattering." Aha moment: It didn't happen like a turn of a switch, but after I went through a mentorship with John Burton, my work really started to take shape and become more refined — not in the technical sense but in terms of the paintings having more strength and life to them. Before that, I didn't really know how to show form without sacrificing the loose, energetic nature of the paint. I struggled for about a year to work this new way of painting into my process, but I now feel I have a strong sense of edges and know how to use them to guide the viewer around my paintings. Favorite artists: C.W. Mundy has been, is, and always will be a special influence. Seeing him once go three days in a row and have three huge,



museum-quality pieces at the end of it inspired me to go about creating in the same way. Instead of worrying about technique and following the "correct" order of things, I started using whatever method was necessary to get the right value and shape of color. If I got it wrong, and the shape was still wet, I would go over it with unthinned paint on my brush. If that didn't work, I'd scoop it on with a palette knife even thicker. If that didn't work, I would squeeze out half a tube of color and try again even thicker. In the process, I stopped worrying about leaving some underpainting showing through to indicate layers; it just happens naturally.

Representation: Camden Falls Gallery Camden, ME; Vining Gallery, Indianapolis, IN; Heirloom Art Co., Provo, UT; St. Laurent Framing and Ironstone Gallery, Manlius, NY

Website: tadretz.com

Price range: \$250-\$5,000

DANIEL K. ROBBINS

Art education: I studied illustration at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. George Pratt was my mentor, and he taught me about the Golden Age of Illustration (Howard Pyle, N.C. Wyeth, Norman Rockwell), which led to my transition into fine art.

<u>Painting style:</u> Neo-romantic? Realistic? Illustrative? The paintings change as I evolve as a person, so I feel like my work is a hodgepodge of influences.

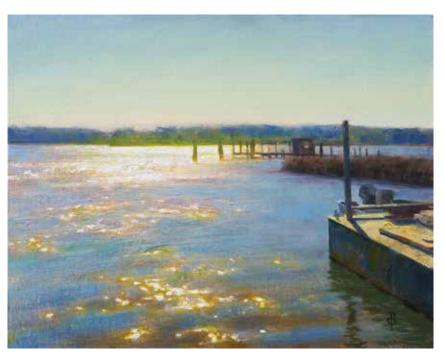
Aha moment: I had been making paintings of the ocean at various times of the day. One morning I woke up at 4 a.m. to watch the sun rise and was treated to a spectacular show. The wind was howling; the waves were crashing; the light was splitting the clouds and then hiding behind them. It was the embodiment of what I wanted to capture in my work: transcendence, spirituality, fear, violence, ephemerality. After the experience, I continued to look for that complex emotional response in my subjects and I realized the source of it—the light. Just like Rembrandt and Vermeer, for whom the light was as much the subject as the figure, I had discovered an element of my work that bound my seemingly disparate images together.

Favorite artists: I'm particularly fond of Rembrandt and his ability to marry technical skill and sensitivity to the human condition in his work. He used the physicality of paint to capture something much deeper than the likeness of his sitters. I'm also inspired by Antonio Lopez Garcia and his gigantic cityscapes that take years to complete. His work is truly about process over product. I admire the Hudson River School painters for their colossal representations of the spiritual and transcendent qualities of the landscape, and Vincent Desiderio for his paintings that are a wonderful combination of intellect, history, and emotional awareness. The advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career: Treat your art career like a business — make connections, enter juried shows, and maintain multiple gal-

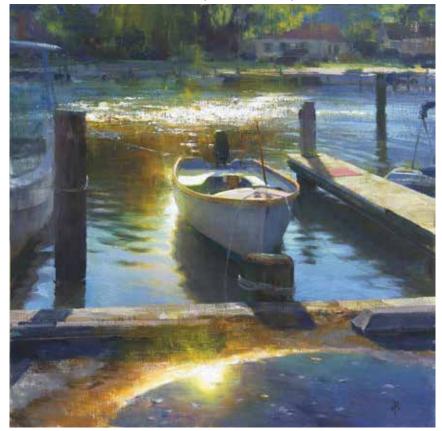
connections, enter juried shows, and maintain multiple galleries by producing a lot of work. In regard to the paintings themselves, don't let perfect be the enemy of good. Putting a tremendous amount of time into perfecting a painting takes time away from starting others, and can work against the energy of the painting.

What's next: I'm working on a series of landscapes (primarily of the ocean) and figures (mostly of my daughter) from videos I capture on location. The videos transport me back to that time and place far better than a photograph, but also imbue the work with a sense of loss and distance that isn't captured when working from life. There is a lot of technical information that gets lost in the video, which forces me to rely more on intuition and emotion than rendering. Working from a video and replaying those wonderful, yet fleeting,

moments helps me contemplate the nexus between archivability and ephemerality, something I've become increasingly enthralled by since the birth of my daughter.



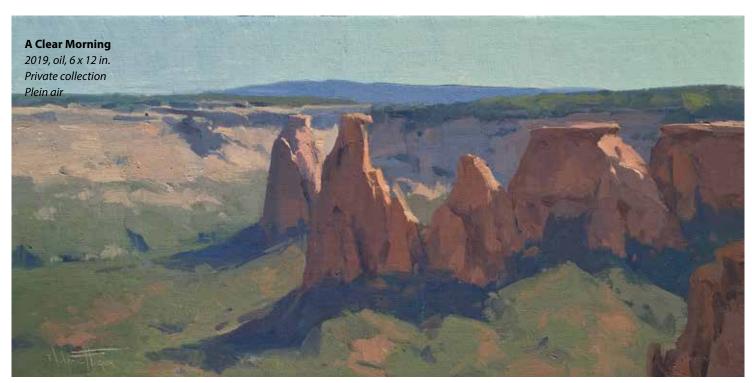
(ABOVE) At the Dock's End, 2021, oil, 11 x 14 in., private collection, plein air and studio
• (BELOW) Bound, 2021, oil, 20 x 20 in., private collection, plein air



Price range: \$800-\$12,000

Representation: Blue Spiral 1, Asheville, NC; Studio B, Easton, MD

Website: danielkrobbins.com



MELANIE THOMPSON

Art education: When I was a teen, my parents signed me up for a workshop with watercolorist Eric Wiegardt, whose emphasis on value and good design stuck with me. In college, I studied art as a minor, but the classes mostly emphasized modern and conceptual art with little hands-on traditional painting. After graduating, I picked up Kevin Macpherson's books to learn how to paint in oils. Along with a few DVDs, they were my only sources of instruction until several years later when I had the opportunity to take a workshop with Jill Carver, an outstanding teacher.

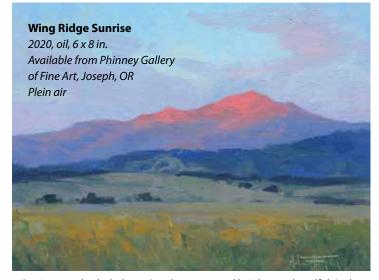
Favorite subjects: I'm most inspired by big, sweeping vistas. I love being in a landscape so big it reminds me what a small part of the universe we are.

Aha moment: There was an exercise in her workshop where Jill Carver challenged me to use color and temperature changes before resorting to a value shift. At the time it was exactly what I needed, and I feel like my work really grew after that.

What I would do for a living if I wasn't an artist: I would be a geologist. I love learning the story behind what I'm painting. Now, I doubt I could make it through the curriculum, but I'd love it.

Favorite artists: I finally was able to see Clyde Aspevig's work in person several years ago, and I could have spent weeks in front of each painting. I was mesmerized by how abstract his brushwork was, and how it all pulled together so perfectly when you stood back. I don't paint in the same way, but I love looking at the close-up photos I took when I start to get a bit too fussy. As an artist living in eastern Washington State, I also feel a strong connection to George Carlson's work. It reminds me that I don't need to travel the world to create worthwhile art.

The advice you wish you had received earlier in your painting career: Keep your standards high, and focus on getting better before you worry about selling.



What's next: I had a baby in October 2020, and he's been a handful. Right now, all my painting time is focused on keeping up with my galleries' needs; thankfully they're keeping me busy. I'm excited about a painting in the works that has been inspired by a recent trip to Yellowstone. I was driving to paint Old Faithful at sunrise, but as I passed Midway Geyser Basin, the cold morning air created huge billowing steam clouds lit by an almost full moon. I took a grainy, blurry photo, but am mostly painting it from memory. I hope it will have the same magical feeling as that cool, quiet morning.

Price range: \$350-\$5,000

<u>Representation:</u> American Art Company, Tacoma, WA; Phinney Gallery of Fine Art, Joseph, OR; Rimrock Gallery, Prineville, OR; Corwin Galleries, Hamilton, MT

Website: melaniethompsonart.com