

## **Your paintings are typically based on found photographs. Why do you begin with photography?**

Some artists work from imagination, some from life, some from film stills, but these days I find that the use of photography by painters is universal. One thing that distinguishes my work from others is that I include photography as a subject of my inquiry. I view the photographic image as raw data that I am translating from one medium (photography) to another (painting.) I marshal many available techniques and media, but fundamentally I am making oil paintings. The contrast between the ubiquity of photography and the rarity of painting fascinates me.

## **What makes a photograph ripe for you?**

Choosing an image is a very rapid process for me. I paint from photographs that speak more about the history of art than they do the specifics of their subject or medium. For me painting uses certain conventions over and over again throughout its history. I take my inspiration from things as disparate as an 18th century Japanese woodblock prints, a 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch portrait, and a 21<sup>st</sup> century collage. I can see all of these references in amateur slides as I sift through them. I am partial to peopled landscapes. What strikes me can often be only a small part of the image. I respond to certain poses, quality of light, and images in series. When I find an image that I want to work with, I see it as a potential painting rather than as a photograph.

## **Can you describe your process? How do arrive at the final result?**

When you stand in front of one of my paintings, you are looking at an oil painting painted atop a clear acrylic ground. That acrylic layer acts as a seal, securing beneath it a rice paper print. The tiled rice paper print is an enlargement of a 7 x 7 inch watercolor and color pencil study. That study is painted directly on a print on rice paper of a digitally manipulated 35mm slide. My work incorporates photography, watercolor and oil paint into a single canvas.

## **In what ways do you modify or manipulate the found images?**

The palette of my paintings is entirely imagined. The original color of

the photograph cedes to the watercolor and ultimately to the oil paint. The final color of the painting is informed both by the watercolor and by the oil paint.

My painting technique is an update of a very traditional way of making a painting. My modifications include scanning, computer manipulation, and printing; however, the bones of my technique essentially follow a Renaissance model. A Renaissance artist began with a drawing and then used a grid system to manually enlarge it—this enlargement is known as a cartoon. The cartoon was then used as a tool for transferring the image from paper onto the canvas with raw pigment outlines (pouncing). The outlines were traced. A burnt umber ground was painted onto the canvas and an image was made using a cloth or a brush to pull out highlights and make a high contrast underpainting called a grisaille. Large areas of opaque and graphic oil paint would be applied next, with the “last touch” glazing layers and details painted at the end.

### **How does your process affect the way the viewer experiences your work?**

Because my work is photographically based, the viewer has immediate access to my paintings. I find the layering of mediums and the physical layering of paints, glue, paper and prints pull apart the notion of what is understood. Typically the longer you look at a painting the more you notice and the more you understand and are comforted by that knowledge. However, with my work, the more you look, the more you question.

### **Why do all of your works depend on a grid? What about that structuring device is so attractive or useful? Is it a formal choice or a conceptual one?**

I borrowed the idea of using a grid from Renaissance painters. I purposefully allow this vestige of the process to remain visible. The grid is important to me because I view the overall painting as being comprised of many small complete abstract paintings. I pay close attention to these little paintings within the larger representational canvas because they fascinate me as handmade works of art in themselves. For example, with the “Light Leak” series, I made a set of oil paintings – the film edge paintings – without a grid for the first time. To me, these paintings *are* the small abstract paintings in the film flaw continuum.

### **Would you comment on repetition in your work?**

I often repeat images in my work, typically changing the scale or the palette or both. In this series I chose to paint "Focus Blur (Soccer)" in two colors (green and blue) to highlight the different visual clues that color provides. The blue painting feels dislocated as compared to the green which, although highly saturated, remains earthbound. When I enlarge an image 900 percent, as I do from the watercolor study to the oil painting, there is information that needs to be made up in paint that is lost in the digital rendering. I am examining that edge between a fidelity to what is seen and the threshold below which the digital information makes no sense.

### **Tell me about why you use the family snapshot.**

To date most of the source images I have used have been vintage amateur slides from the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The events pictured in my paintings were sufficiently special to warrant a photograph at a time when photography was used in a much more limited way than it is today. Film was expensive, as was processing. Cameras were not "point and shoot" and they required some level of understanding.

The fact that many people have similar images of themselves from their own childhood speaks to the collective memory that we build as a society through our attachment to the photographic image.

### **By using iconic American imagery you have said your works tap into a collective memory. Occasionally commentators identify this as something like "nostalgia". What is the difference?**

I paint images that are familiar to the viewer, images that I have deliberately made anonymous and that represent an idealized version of life. Disguised beneath this aspirational façade are larger themes of darkness, fear, loneliness, fleeting youth, and alienation. My palette is often the clue to my larger narrative.

### **Tell me about the "Light Leak" paintings.**

The "Light Leak" paintings memorialize the aesthetic of mistakes. They focus on the inaccuracies specific to film photography that have

been eliminated by the use of digital media. The new series includes paintings with double exposures, lens flares, light leaks, color banding, and edge frame distortions...all lost in the new digital age.

**So, the real subject of this series is the medium of photography?**

Film flaws were the subject of my "Light Leak" series before I found the soccer slides. These particular images caught my eye because they reminded me of Degas' "Day at the Races" paintings. Some of the found soccer slides already had existing film problems; in others I created the flaws in the computer and in watercolor.

In addition to the soccer images and the "Old Faithful" diptych, I chose to include the film edge paintings, to further emphasize that this body of work is as much about the almost extinct medium of film as it is about the peopled landscapes.

**The "Light Leak" paintings waded into abstraction much more than your earlier work – can you describe the challenge of this transition and how you worked through it?**

The challenge in painting these images was treating the film flaws with the same touch that I used to render the rest of the painting. While there are many shortcuts for abstractly rendering landscapes and figures in painting, abstracting film flaws is much more difficult because they're less familiar to the viewer. There is no way to signal a lens refraction in an obvious or easily recognizable way because there is no such type of painting convention. I wanted the film flaws to be recognized as such, rather than recognized as areas of abstract painting.

**How much of your final work is planned in advance? Or, is it a surprise to you?**

I see my finished painting almost immediately. All the work then goes into making my hand capable of what my mind has imagined.