

RICHARD OVERSMITH

Landscape or Still Life: Similar Process, Different Concentration

Whether painting still lifes from live materials organized near a north-facing window in his studio or recording landscapes outdoors in the changing light, this North Carolina artist brings different levels of planning and concentration to the same creative procedures

Like many determined individuals, Richard Oversmith doesn't allow himself to become complacent about his career. As a full-time painter, he works outdoors in all seasons of the year, standing at his easel because he wants to remain physically engaged in the process, and he never paints still lifes from photographs because that might lull him into creating paintings that lack freshness and vitality. And when his wife suggested they spend six months living in France so she and their daughter could become fluent in French, he quit his part-time job and moved with them to Dinan, France, near the Brittany coast.

"It was great being able to spend six months painting in Europe and depending on our ability



Richard Oversmith painting in Bordeaux, France, as his daughters watch



Peonies and Peaches

2011, oil, 20 x 16 in.

J.M. Stringer Gallery of Fine Art, Vero Beach, FL
Plein air



Tropical Sunrise

2011, oil, 11 x 14 in.

Private collection, New Jersey

Plein air

to walk or ride public transportation," Oversmith remembers. "I came home with about 65 or 70 landscapes and still lifes and subsequently exhibited and sold many of them, and we returned to Europe last summer for another three weeks of traveling and painting."

Oversmith first became interested in plein air painting in 1994, when he spent the year studying in London. He says, "While I was a student in the illustration program at Kendall College of

Art & Design in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I took advantage of a program to study at the Royal College of Art, where I was introduced to the idea of painting outdoors from nature. I fell in love with it immediately, and when I returned to Michigan I got pointers from Kenneth Cadwallader, who had studied with Richard Schmid. I also took a workshop with T. Allen Lawson and did about 1,000 plein air paintings, until I really felt I knew what I was doing. Some of those early paintings were unsuccessful, but the benefit of doing a lot of paintings and constantly trying to get better is that eventually you will."

"After my wife and I married, we traveled around the country for about three and a half

months, looking at places where we might want to settle down. We considered Portland and Charlottesville, but eventually we decided that Asheville, North Carolina, offered the best combination of climate, natural beauty, interest in the arts, and quality of life. We bought a house and added a 600-square-foot studio above the garage, with a north-facing window. That's now where I do most of my still life paintings and the large landscapes I develop from my plein air sketches and reference photographs."

Oversmith paints outdoors most of the year, except when the temperature drops below 20 degrees. "I actually prefer painting in North Carolina when it's not so overwhelmingly lush as

Demonstration: Flowers on a Silver Tray



STEP 1: After toning the surface of a canvas with a thin coffee-colored mixture of burnt sienna and ultramarine blue, Oversmith wipes the surface, leaving only a thin veil of the warm color.



STEP 2: Using the same two oil colors, the artist draws the outlines of the major shapes of the objects resting on a table near the north-facing window in his North Carolina studio.



STEP 3: After blocking in the mid-tones and dark accents in the composition, Oversmith begins washing in the local color of the roses.



STEP 4: Continuing to use filbert-shaped bristle brushes, the artist fills in the gray tones in the window and the shadow area of the tablecloth and models the shape of the white flowers.



STEP 5: During the final stages of an *alla prima*, wet-in-wet painting procedure, Oversmith uses a softer sable brush to sharpen the edges, suggest the details of the silver tray, and soften the transitions between the red rose shapes.

COMPLETED PAINTING:

Flowers on a Silver Tray

2011, oil, 24 x 30 in.

Courtesy M. Gallery of Fine Art, Charleston, SC
Studio



Silver and Irises

2012, oil, 24 x 20 in.

Studio

it is in the summer," he says. "I work quickly and complete an 8 x 10-inch painting in about 45 minutes or an hour, but I have painted on canvases up to 36 x 48 on location, returning to the same spot at the same time on several days. I made my own pochade box for developing the smaller paintings, and I use a French easel when setting up to paint larger canvases. I work with about 10 colors on location, including titanium white, cadmium yellow, cadmium yellow lemon, yellow ochre, cadmium red light, burnt sienna, alizarin crimson or quinacridone red, ultramarine blue, and viridian. I sometimes add cerulean blue for painting sky color. The only medium I use is turpentine, and that's mostly during the initial stages of drawing the outlines of the major shapes."

Although Oversmith makes small compositional sketches before starting a plein air painting, most of what happens is in response to changing conditions, rather than a well developed plan.

"When I'm rushing to capture the light and dark pattern, the atmosphere, and the specific markings in the landscape, there isn't a lot of time for carefully considering each stage of the painting process," he says. "That's part of the reason I make adjustments in the studio after I finish working on location."

When he's in his studio working on a still life, the materials Oversmith uses are much the same, but he isn't pressured to paint as quickly. "I use an *alla prima*, wet-into-wet painting technique in both situations," he says, "but that could extend



Poetic Bounty

2012, oil, 30 x 30 in.

Studio

ARTIST DATA

NAME: Richard Oversmith

BIRTHDATE: 1971

LOCATION: Asheville, NC

INFLUENCES: Emile Carlsen, Frans Mortelmans, Fernand Toussaint, William Merritt Chase, Isaac Levitan, William Lathrop, John Singer Sargent, Anders Zorn, Joaquin Sorolla, Nicolai Fechin, Willard Leroy Metcalf, Arthur Streeton
WEBSITE: www.richardoversmith.com



Boats and Water Lilies

2011, oil, 12 x 12 in.

Courtesy J. M. Stringer Gallery of Fine Art, Bernardsville, NJ
Plein air

it across the divisions in value, or I will sharpen the edges around the center of interest in the composition."

Oversmith teaches still life painting workshops in his studio, and he is an active member of the Oil Painters of America, the Plein Air Painters of the Southeast (he currently serves as president), and the American Impressionist Society. He has been accepted into a number of important plein air events, including *Plein Air Easton* in Maryland, *Florida's Forgotten Coast Plein Air Invitational*, and the Toe River Arts Council's *Paint Out Competition* in North Carolina. Oversmith often paints outdoors with artists from his region. "One of the great things about this part of the state," he says, "is that there are lots of artists and craftspeople." ■

M. Stephen Doherty is Editor of *PleinAir* magazine.



See more of Richard Oversmith's work and a video featuring the artist in the expanded digital edition of *PleinAir*.

over an eight- or 10-hour day in the studio, whereas the plein air process has to be completed in less than two hours. I can take time to carefully consider the arrangement of positive and negative shapes with a studio still life. I draw the outlines of the shapes on a toned canvas using a thin mixture of burnt sienna and ultramarine blue. I can give more thought to the balance of warm and cool colors while I am working in the controlled environment, under a fairly constant light. The same elements come into play outdoors, but decisions have to be made more quickly and sometimes I just can't give careful attention to a landscape when the light changes or the fog moves in or the clouds disappear in the bright sunlight.

"It's important to keep a painting loose and fresh as long as possible, and devote the last part of the painting process to softening or sharpening edges. I only work with four brushes through most of the process — filbert-shaped bristle brushes in numbers 4, 6, and 8, and one sable-hair brush — because I like to keep things simple and scale down my supplies. I use the softer brush toward the end of the painting process to soften edges by stroking

Winter Waterfall

2012, oil, 12 x 12 in.

Plein air



**Palms on the Beach**

2011, oil, 14 x 14 in.

Courtesy J. M. Stringer Gallery
of Fine Art, Vero Beach, FL
Plein air**Flowers in the Window**

2011, oil, 16 x 20 in.

Courtesy the Art Cellar Gallery, Banner Elk, NC
Plein air**Dreams of Sailing**

2011, oil, 16 x 16 in.

J.M. Stringer Gallery of Fine Art, Vero Beach, FL
Plein air

OIL PAINTING DEMONSTRATION**Sun Up**

2011, 12 x 12 in.

Courtesy J.M. Stringer Gallery of Fine Art, Vero Beach, FL
Studio

VIDEO

Click for video of a time-lapse painting demonstration by Richard Oversmith

