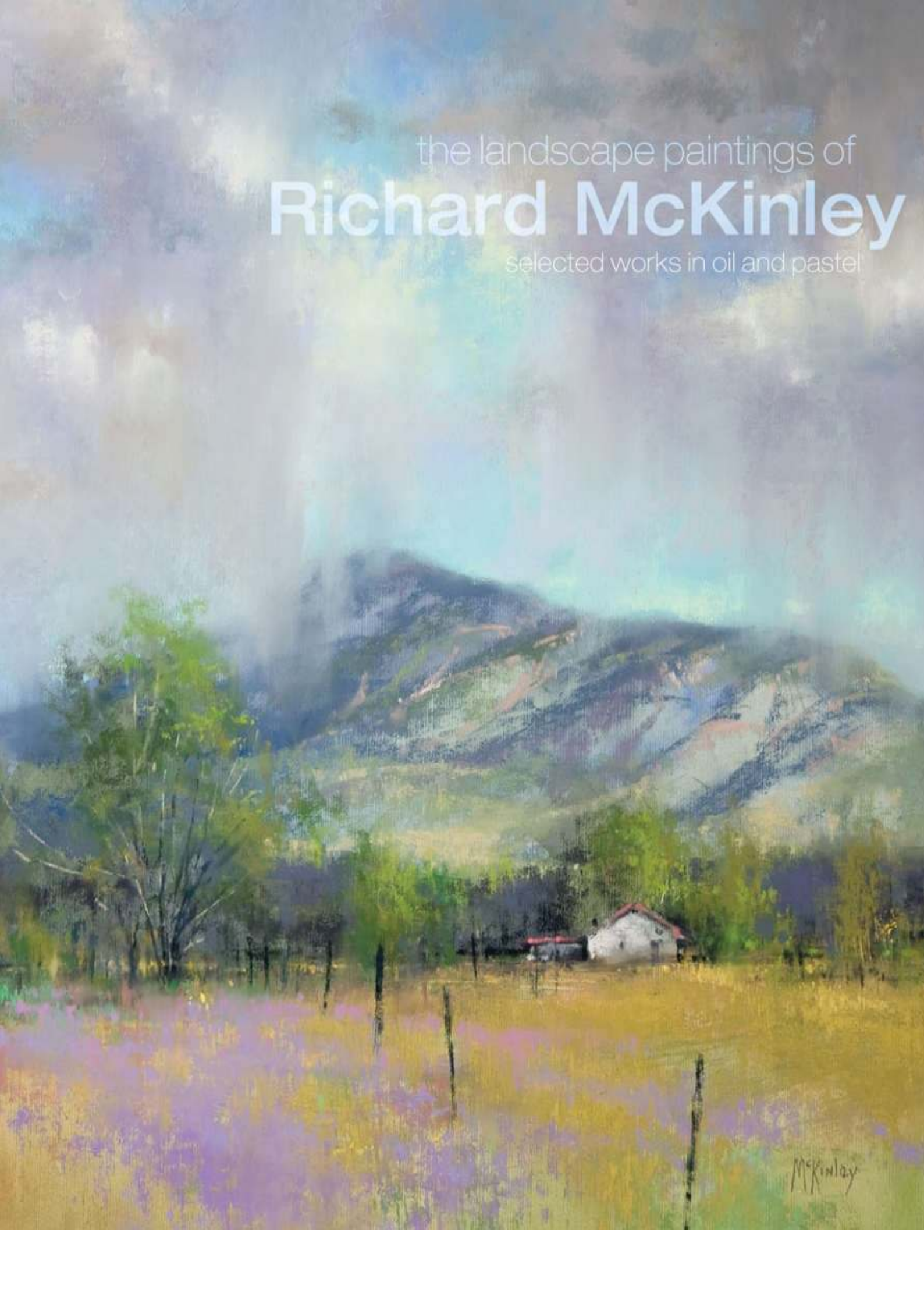


the landscape paintings of  
**Richard McKinley**  
selected works in oil and pastel



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Pages 2–3: **Journey** | Carpinteria, California | Studio pastel on museum Wallis paper | 12" × 16" (30cm × 41cm) | Collection of the  
Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio

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# Dedication

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This book is dedicated to all of the students I have been so fortunate to interact with over the many years. Far more has been learned by me from you than any other source.

Others have explained the artistic spirit and motivation to create far better than I can. What is important is not perfection, but how much you enjoy the journey. Keep looking ahead and never lose the excitement of the child within that is thrilled with every new artistic adventure. Personally, I will always be a student of the craft of painting and an awestruck observer of the world around me. My goal is to capture in pigment a piece of the spontaneous dance of light across the palette of nature. Even if this eludes me, I plan to enjoy and share the journey along the way. Remember: Painting is a journey, not a destination.



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INTRODUCTION



PART 1

## Connection to the Landscape

The landscape is the stage upon which we perform our lives. Certain venues have specific appeal to me, which lead to greater inspiration. The why and what of the allure can be traced to personal experiences and the influence that different seasons and times of day can have upon the landscape. Pastel and oil paint are my mediums of choice, and the artistic tools associated with compositional design are the means for orchestration.



## PART 2

### **The Importance of Working En Plein Air**

Having a tactile relationship with the landscape, whether working with pastel or oil paint, is paramount to portraying it well. The insights gained from working en plein air using preparatory outlines, value maps and notan sketches lay the foundation for the economical field sketch or elaborate plein air paintings. Ultimately, any work done on location has a profound effect on landscape paintings done back in the studio.



## PART 3

### **The Role Technique Plays**

The manner in which product is applied to surface plays a big part in my painting process. It provides

the means for my personality to be expressed beyond the portrayal of subject matter. These techniques are based on experimentation with various methods of underpainting and impasto applications. When combined with universal painting concepts that apply to all representational painting, they form the nucleus of my painting style.



## PART 4

### Old Friends

Over many years, I have continually revisited certain landscape locations that have become old friends. The familiarity garnered from these frequent visits has allowed for a heightened sense of creative possibility. An intimacy has been formed, and while every visit brings a new experience, the history we share has added to the depth of the exchange. There are four old-friend painting locations that stand out, and together we have grown old and shared many an adventure.

**DEDICATION**

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



# Introduction

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I was born in the Rogue River Valley of Oregon and spent my youth growing up with the rivers and mountains that encompass the area. It is from those subjects that my love of the landscape was formed. At a very early age, I was introduced to the importance of painting. My mother was a hobbyist oil painter, and my brother and I knew that whenever the magic paint box came down from the top shelf of the closet that something special was about to happen. She was the one who instilled a sense of artistic wonder in me that still continues.

Since prehistoric times, humans have manifested the desire to express emotion and thought through artistic forms. Often this is done solely for personal enjoyment, but frequently it serves a bigger purpose by communicating personal feelings to other human beings. This desire to be heard, and hopefully understood, has led to the formation of language, the invention of a written alphabet, the arrangement of sound into music and the placement of pigment upon a painting surface.

When our artistic efforts are to be publicly displayed, craftsmanship and technical mastery of the individual medium is required. Otherwise, gibberish and nonsense will be the outcome, resulting in a failure to communicate. Since all of us are the sum total of our experiences and no two of us see and hear things in quite the same way, our artistic expressions will either be cheered or jeered, depending on the audience. This leads most artists to pursue study and practice throughout their artistic lifetime. I was fortunate to have a high school art instructor, James Snook, who saw potential in me and challenged me to use it. I also had the mentorship of professional artist Margaret Stahl-Moyer during my teenage years. As important as this educational focus was, they both reminded me to focus on *why* as well as *what*, I wanted to paint.

Many years ago, I was part of a professional group of artists who, after a long day of en plein air painting, were having a discussion on why we painted. One comment had a profound effect on my own personal perspective. The artist said, "One day I realized that no matter if I never sold another painting, never got into another exhibition or never won another prize, I would still paint. It is the day I really started painting." This simple statement pointed out that as much as the physical body requires certain nutrients to survive, so does the human soul.

The Western Renaissance period trend of depicting biblical and social allegory, where humans were always at the forefront, began to change with the advent of Western Industrialization when scientific breakthroughs provided a better understanding of color theory and introduced pigments better suited to representing the sunlit landscape. The British pastoral painter John Constable then influenced a young generation of French artists, who became known as the Barbizon School, to paint the landscape directly from nature. Subsequent generations continued to reflect the personal, cultural and historic influences of their time, bringing us Impressionism, Expressionism and the abstract movement.

No matter with which genre you more closely associate, one thing is clear: We all have to find our inspiration, the driving force behind why we paint. The better understood, the easier it is to develop the skills required to communicate intent, whether our goal is to reflect the way we see the world or to portray the way we wish it to be, how it makes us feel or the way we want others to feel. Knowing “why” will provide the answers as to “what” to put in, “how” to do it and “when” we are done.

I was recently reminded of why I paint what I do during a workshop I was giving on the beautiful Minnesota shore of Lake Superior. Janice Olson, an artist friend of mine, was the sole remaining student to stand strong against a thunderstorm that had driven the rest of the group back to the classroom. As she steadfastly held her ground against the wind and approaching rain, I silently stood next to her, witnessing the beauty of the light play across the sky and water. After a few minutes, she quietly said, “How special it is to be witnessing this. This is why I paint the landscape.” As I nodded in agreement, a bolt of lightning flashed. Mother Nature had let us know it was time to pack up, but Janice had captured the moment!



**Summer Grasses** | Fir Island, Washington | Plein air pastel on UART paper | 8" × 12" (20cm × 30cm) | Private collection

*Richard McKinley*

# 1 Connection to the Landscape

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From my first visit to the high desert of Oregon, I knew it held a special attraction. Most people associate Oregon with the lush forested mountain ranges and fertile river valleys that dominate the western third of the state, but once you cross the majestic Cascade mountain range, a whole world opens up more akin to northern New Mexico. Various species of brush thrive in this arid land, and the mountains are either mounds of movement that create interesting patterns or rim rock plateaus that rise straight from flat, dry lakebeds. Having been raised among the forested lands of the Rogue River Valley, I was surprised how obsessed I became with this high desert.

I have pursued and analyzed this attraction for well over three decades and found that the sterility and openness of the spaces are what draw me. I find myself at peace while painting this subject matter, and it is easy to be left totally alone, as often there is not another living soul for miles. The play of textures found among the vegetation, rocks, sand and sky is intriguing.

This high desert fascination led to a series of paintings where I challenged myself to find beauty in the mundane. In *Looking East*, the horizon is purposely placed at a slight angle to counterpoint the directional movement of the clouds. When painting the sky, I choose analogous hues of blue (blue/violet, blue, blue/green). This fragmentation of blue heightens the appearance of light by subtly indicating a full spectrum of color. Since light consists of all colors, it is useful to represent it whenever possible, especially in highly illuminated areas like the sky.



**Looking East** | Summer Lake, Oregon

Plein air pastel on UART paper | 12" × 16" (30cm × 41cm) | Collection of the artist





**A Place of Reflection** | Albuquerque, New Mexico  
Plein air pastel on Ampersand Pastelbord | 16" × 12" (41cm × 30cm) | Private collection

There is a special allure about canals and bodies of water that I can overlook

The day that *A Place of Reflection* was painted, a group of artist friends and I decided to visit a legendary location on the outskirts of Albuquerque, New Mexico. The location is known for its amazing ponds that are covered with various water plants—a bit of Monet's Giverny in the southwest of America. As we entered the property, we crossed over a small plank bridge that covered a canal. I

was seated in the backseat of the automobile, and with just a glance from my window, I knew it was something I wanted to explore. As everyone disbursed to find painting inspiration, I wandered back up the road to a tiny irrigation canal. While the ponds were indeed beautiful, everything I needed was right in front of me.

To begin, I chose a warm gray-toned Ampersand Pastelbord panel and lightly applied pastel to indicate value mass and color temperature. I then wetted this with a brush and water to create an underpainting using secondary colors of violet, green and orange to keep the color palette harmonious. To magnify the impression of being thrust into the distance, I purposely softened the focus of the outside areas, creating a vignette of sorts. I clarified the edges and placed the greatest value contrast where the canal and the old wooden fence unite.

One of the reoccurring themes throughout my work is a somewhat obscure foreground that is still solid in appearance and an area of visual fascination that resides in the midground while hinting at more mystery in the background.

As a gallery owner once told me, “You are my middle-distance painter. You make the viewer feel grounded, then thrust them back to something of interest, and conclude by mysteriously hinting at more somewhere in the background. It is your personality.”

High desert rim rocks always make for interesting plays of shadow and light as well as color effects.

This is especially true when intermittent clouds allow for shafts of sunlight to dance through illuminating sections of the earth below. My familiarity with this location helped me know just where I wanted to be and at the right time of day. As landscape painters, it is imperative that we familiarize ourselves with the terrain, the seasons of the year and the climatic conditions. We are hunters, and our prey is the illuminated landscape.

Modern devices like the smartphone have made it easier than ever to track the position of the sun, know the phase of the moon, get up-to-date weather forecasts and find north. Not to mention the ability to locate a gas station or lodging. But no matter how well informed we may be about what lies ahead, it ultimately comes down to a blank surface and us.

Having done a few field sketch paintings from this vantage point, I felt familiar enough with this location to work in the studio. I chose oil as the medium partly due to its ability to facilitate thin transparent undertones and the bravura of thick impasto application, which is the way I often perceive the high desert. The brush that caps the earth is very textured with dashes and dollops of colored notes.

that appear to dance across its planes. Thin washes of oil paint can be applied and allowed to run and drip one into the other to create a backdrop for these thicker notations. I frequently use a metal painting knife or even the wooden end of a brush handle to apply the impasto impressions.

It is a dance of slipping and sliding that makes oil a pleasure to paint with



McKinley painting an oil field sketch at Summer Lake in Oregon.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF PAMELA CLAFLIN



**Distant Gold** | Summer Lake, Oregon | Studio oil on oil-primed linen | 16" × 24" (41cm × 61cm) | Collection of the artist

One of the joys of teaching plein air workshops is the chance to visit

locations that I probably would not have visited otherwise.

Having heard from several artist friends about how spectacular the northwest corner of Minnesota is, I was overjoyed to receive an invitation to teach in the quaint town of Grand Marais. Arriving in



Duluth, a historic shipping city on the shores of Lake Superior, I was instantly taken with the architecture and vistas across a lake that is every bit as grand as most oceans. Little did I realize what I was in store for once the trek up the shoreline to Grand Marais began. To my left: pristine forests, waterfalls and gorges too numerous to count; the majesty of a lake aptly named Superior with its pristine shoreline to my right.

Wonderful painting locations were arranged for the workshop, but the one that lingers most in my mind is the one we found after the workshop ended. After completing a painting that I liked (not always the case), I was content to just relax and explore what the area had to offer. As we traveled up the shore toward the backwaters region, Canada visible on the horizon, we arrived at an empty beach with a beautiful view of the rock façades that skirt the shoreline just as the sun was beginning its descent for the day. There was the scene. The adrenaline kicked in and the race with light began.

Having no time for frivolous detail, I chose to concentrate on the composition and color tonality of the scene. The angular shape of the rocks made for a challenging design, and I found the resolve in the positioning of the trees. I made the choice to alleviate some trees and to emphasize others to counterbalance the rocks. Exaggerating the color perceptions made for a wonderful harmony of pink and blue with only the faintest hints of green. I like to concentrate on the color casts of the lighting versus the inherent color of objects whenever possible.

It adds feeling



**Azure Evening** | Grand Marais, Minnesota | Plein air pastel on museum Wallis paper | 12" × 16" (30cm × 41cm) | Private collection





**An Evening Rain** | White City, Oregon | Studio pastel on museum Wallis paper | 12" × 24" (30cm × 61cm) | Private collection

One of my favorite painting exercises is to open up to the possibilities of a location that might otherwise provide little inspiration.

White City, Oregon, a small desert situated in the middle of the fertile Rogue River Valley, is not known for its beauty. Once used as a military training base during the first and second world wars, it has since been transformed into an industrial park filled with timber mills and charcoal plants. Back the day, it was not a desirable location to live. During my high school years, my family found it necessary to move from the upper Rogue River Valley down to White City. This temporary relocation ended up lasting nearly twelve years.

My memories of the area have always been clouded by economic hard times and visual brutality. To remedy this, I challenged myself several years ago to return and paint something that would transcend those adolescent memories. As I drove up and down the lane where my home had been, the early evening sunlight began to break through the shower-laden atmosphere of the sky. While the structures and terrain were nothing of intrinsic value, the quality of the light and textural play of the power poles receding into the distance were sublime. After doing a few thumbnail sketches, taking a couple of reference photographs and making notes on how I felt about the scene, I journeyed back to my studio and began *An Evening Rain* in earnest. I smeared large areas of the blank paper with pastel by drifting it with a sturdy paper towel. This created an ethereal pastel underpainting upon which to indicate impressions of the light and structures. At one point, the field had become overstated with too much textural grass, and it competed with the overall mood of the painting. I ultimately smeared it with a paper towel for effect. It is never easy to let go of something I have devoted time to, but in the case of the field, it made all the difference.

Just as finding something beautiful in an area that harbored so many

negating feelings allowed me to let go of the past and reclaim White

City as a potential for future painting



**As the Night Music Began** | Jacksonville, Oregon

Studio pastel on homemade surface | 14" × 16" (36cm × 41cm) | Private collection

Twilight is an interesting time of day to paint

It lasts for only a short amount of time, and when not finessed properly, can become cliché, looking more like a postcard than a fine art painting. I've never been drawn to painting this specific time of day and find it especially challenging.

The Britt Music Festival was the impetus for this painting, the second in a series from a vantage point overlooking the Rogue Valley of southern Oregon. Peter Britt had been a pioneer photographer of the gold rush town of Jacksonville. He was a Renaissance man who photographed Crater Lake for the first time, which eventually became a national park, and ultimately built a Victorian home surrounded by elaborate gardens on a hillside overlooking the town of Jacksonville. After a devastating fire claimed the house, the land remained unused until it was converted into an open-air music festival. First as a venue for a month-long community-based classical music festival, it has subsequently developed into a world-class music and performing arts venue that draws performers and audiences from around the world with performances throughout the summer.

In 2005, when I was commissioned by the Britt festival board of directors to do a painting for a music poster, I instantly knew what I wanted to do. I was granted access to the grounds for several evenings to do a plein air painting depicting the view from the hillside just as the performances commenced. That plein air painting led to this studio rendition as well as a slightly larger painting of the same view with hints of structures peaking through the foreground trees. I presented all three options to the board, and they chose the one with the buildings because they felt everyone would recognize the structures, thus making it the most suitable for a poster.

While I liked all three of the paintings, I felt this one best captured the lighting and mood of twilight as it fell across the valley and over the volcanic Mount McLoughlin to the east. The lesson I departed with is one to remember: The majority of the public buys artwork for subject matter content. Most artists, on the other hand, look beyond the objects portrayed to that elusive something that makes it art.

Reflections in all genres of painting are fascinating. They provide a means of uniting a composition by echoing surroundings and, in the case of the landscape, can add a sense of mystery. A reflection can allude to what is not portrayed in the painting. We may not see the sky or the tops of trees, but when represented in a reflection, we know they are there.

Understanding the physics of reflections is a class in itself. Legendary American artist Thomas Eakins spent considerable time analyzing the optics of reflections and in the late 1800s compiled a small booklet on the science behind what we see. For example, imagine you are standing on a shore looking across a body of water at the reflections of the opposite shoreline. Then imagine you are submerged underwater to the depth of your height (6 feet deep if you are 6 feet tall) and looking up. What you see is not a perfect mirror; there are angles involved. After learning this, I became better able to see the variations within reflections, which inspired many reflective renditions.

For *Quiet Reflections*, I was able to find an entrance into a cool riverbank location across from a stunning red barn. Pennsylvania is filled with them. Working on a white-sanded pastel surface, I started with a wet watercolor underpainting as a setup for the application of pastel. I left edges deliberately obscure to allow the eye to travel from object to object, ultimately landing on the textural play of rocks, leaves and shimmers. I heightened the appearance of atmospheric perspective by making the foreground darker and warmer than it really was. I also exaggerated the intense blue of the background for effect.

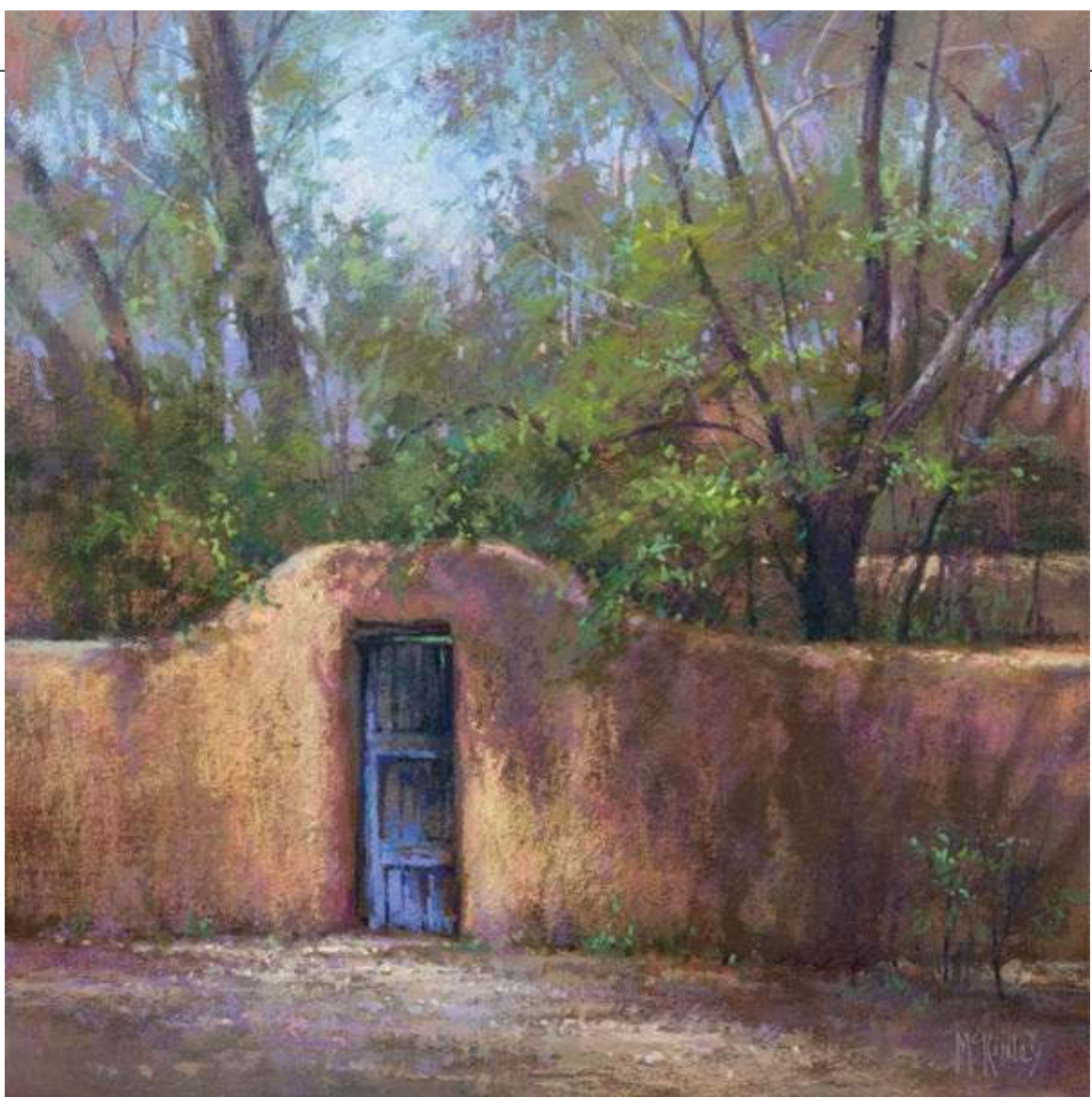
At the end of the day, no one gets a prize for simply getting it accurate.

A bit of artistic theatrics can go a long way in making a painting a piece of artwork instead of just another picture.



**Quiet Reflections** | Bucks County, Pennsylvania | Studio pastel on museum Wallis paper | 12" × 16" (30cm × 41cm) | Private collection





**Colors of New Mexico** | Santa Fe, New Mexico

Studio pastel on homemade surface | 20" × 20" (51cm × 51cm) | Private collection

## New Mexico is known as the land of enchantment

Its northern regions have become legendary for the artists who found inspiration among its peoples and vistas. A melting pot of cultures that predates the Revolutionary War, it truly is a visual kaleidoscope of inspiration. One of its outstanding characteristics is the modern adobe structures that are closely associated with the region. Influenced by the native people's pueblo structures and melded into the Spanish Colonial design aesthetic, adobe structures are the official architecture of Santa Fe and the surrounding areas. Since I came from the land of wood, my first experience with painting adobes was not an easy one.

Most architecture has hard edges and follows the basic perspective guidelines of one- and two-point perspective. Adobes are another matter. They are as if the earth stood up. Everything about them is free flowing and they have a soft, curved fluidity that makes them challenging to paint. Their color represents the tones of the earth that are found within close proximity, ranging from a soft yellow ochre to a brick red tone, with terra cotta orange as the most prevalent. This was once due to the tone

of the mud that made up the walls but now relies on dyes since most modern abode structures' outer coating is done with concrete slurry. Some builders opt to leave the gray tones of the concrete to be true to the materials used. The doors and window frames are most often painted in bright hues of blue to represent the sky. These architectural and color challenges require orchestration when painting. It is imperative that highlights and shadows not be set absolutely on an edge. If they are, it will flatten the structure. When it comes to the color issues involved, I find it useful to let either the warm or cool tones in the painting dominate. Backing off of the chromatic saturation of one versus the other allows for a more harmonious interaction. In *Colors of New Mexico*, the green of the tree foliage is minimized to allow the warm tones of the adobe to shine. Painting the door an intense blue created the necessary contrast to assert it as the painting's main area of interest.

Roads and pathways are another reoccurring theme in my work closely related to my attraction to canals and waterways. There is something about being led back into an unforeseeable distance that I find appealing. Add to this a visual obsession with negative space, and you can see the allure of this simple scene outside of La Conner, Washington, along the dike that keeps the Pacific Ocean from reclaiming the lowlands.

Negative space is the space behind things. The sky can be the negative space to the mountains and trees, the mountains can be the negative space to the trees and fields, and so on. Once we identify something, it can be easy to ignore the importance of the spaces behind and surrounding it. This can lead to too much positive work, which has the potential of making a painting appear cartoonish. In reality, it is the contrasting shapes that form the negative spaces around objects that make them come forward and stand out. Having spent much of my early art training working in watercolor and oil, I have formed an affinity for the bits and pieces that make up negative space. In fact, it is often the inspiring factor for choosing a landscape scene.

The underpainting, whether working in pastel or oil, can set the stage for the application of abstract negative shapes. The juxtaposition of these negative shapes adds to the appearance of depth in a painting. Look closely at the bushes and shoreline in the painting *Dike Road*. You'll see that the water defines both. There is very little pastel applied to the bushes. This also holds true for the grasses and road interplay. Lighter shapes of dirt in the roadway define the grasses more than individual blades of grass. A few positive marks indicating grasses, wildflowers and pebbles in the road help to finalize the painting.

The more we can communicate with negative space, the more involved the viewer will be. It communicates to them visually in a manner more closely associated to what they really see. They just don't know it.





**Dike Road** | La Conner, Washington | Plein air pastel on museum Wallis paper | 12" × 18" (30cm × 46cm) | Private collection



**Canyon's Edge** | Scottsdale, Arizona | Plein air pastel on museum Wallis paper | 9" × 12" (23cm × 30cm) | Private collection

Having formed an intimacy with the high desert regions of eastern Oregon and northern New Mexico, I initially found the arid deserts of southern

Whenever this occurs on a painting trip, I am reminded to pull back from attempting to paint the scene and analyze what truly makes it different. In the case of this particular visit to Arizona, it took the better part of a week of painting failures to realize it was the color tonality and luminosity. The colors were vastly higher key and at times much richer than other desert situations I had experienced. This was due mostly to the intensity of the light and the lightness of the sand and rocks.

My experience painting *Canyon's Edge* in the Arizona desert reminded me of a time many years ago when I was painting very poorly in Palm Springs, California. The winters in Oregon can get a little damp and gray, so I decided to splurge and travel to sunny and warm Palm Springs to paint. Upon arriving, I was instantly enthralled with the desert surroundings and eager to paint. Day after day, I struggled. Nothing seemed to work and I felt I had wasted my time and money by coming south. Toward the end of my week in the area, I found myself lying awake in my motel evaluating what had gone wrong. After hours analyzing the technical aspects of my compositions, value structures and color harmonies, I finally arrived at a conclusion. What I was missing was the essence of the location. How did it feel? Instantly I knew what had to be done. I needed to repeat the way it felt to be standing there in front of the scene in my head as I painted. As I set up to paint the next day in the Coachella Valley desert, the phrase "white blinding heat" came to mind. This is an area where you can fry an egg on your car hood in the summer and the whitish sands are intense and reflective. As I went through the mechanics of painting, I kept repeating the phrase over and over.

When finished, I had a good painting, but best of all, it represented the  
essence of the location



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