

PleinAir

MAGAZINE™

INSIDE
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WATERCOLORS & PASTELS

SPECIAL SECTIONS ON PAINTING
BUILDINGS & FIGURES IN THE LANDSCAPE

DOUG BRAITHWAITE, DEBRA HUSE,
TIM KELLY, ALEXANDRA TYNG



NOVEMBER 2015
\$6.95 U.S. 8.95 CAN.

DOUG BRAITHWAITE

Paint Rhythms, Not Just Locations

After carefully studying a scene and determining how to compose it in a painting, this Utah artist will spend most of his time judging what works for the picture. "At that point," he explains, "decisions are based on my feeling about being at a location and the rhythmic patterns that express my emotional response."

By M. Stephen Doherty



Morning at the Bay

2014, oil, 11 x 14 in.

Private collection

Plein air

paintings on smooth MDF panels sealed with three or four layers of acrylic gesso and then brought to a polished finish with 10 additional layers of gesso applied with a window squeegee. "I want the surface to be so smooth that I can apply paint and then wipe it off without any of it sticking to the gesso," Braithwaite says. "For larger paintings, I create the same smooth finish on stretched canvas by applying thin layers of acrylic gesso. I want the brushstroke to become obvious, but not the weave of the canvas."

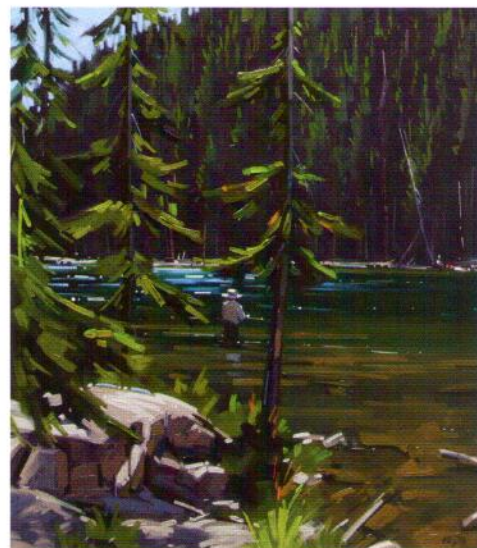
Braithwaite uses soft, synthetic hair watercolor brushes with shorter handles than oil painting brushes, and he often adds Liquin alkyd medium to his paints so they flow more smoothly and dry a bit faster. His palette includes titanium white, yellow ochre, cadmium

There are several distinctive aspects to Doug Braithwaite's paintings that immediately catch viewers' attention. One is the strong contrast of values anchored by a deep purple background; another is the rhythmic pattern of brushstrokes, particularly the "dots and dashes" added toward the end of the creative process. Both these things capture the artist's unique vision and his passion for being in nature.

The purple underpainting is an especially intriguing aspect of Braithwaite's painting; it is a darker and more influential color than most artists would choose to tone a painting surface. "It's a shadow color I make by combining aliza-

rin crimson and ultramarine blue," he explains. "I apply it over the entire painting surface and then, while referring to a value sketch and the scene, I lift off some of the purple to quickly establish lighter values that begin to define the composition. I might lift paint off with a brush, a Q-tip, my fingers, or a cloth, and that leaves me with a general indication of the arrangement of values that has the look of a monotype."

Braithwaite creates most of his plein air

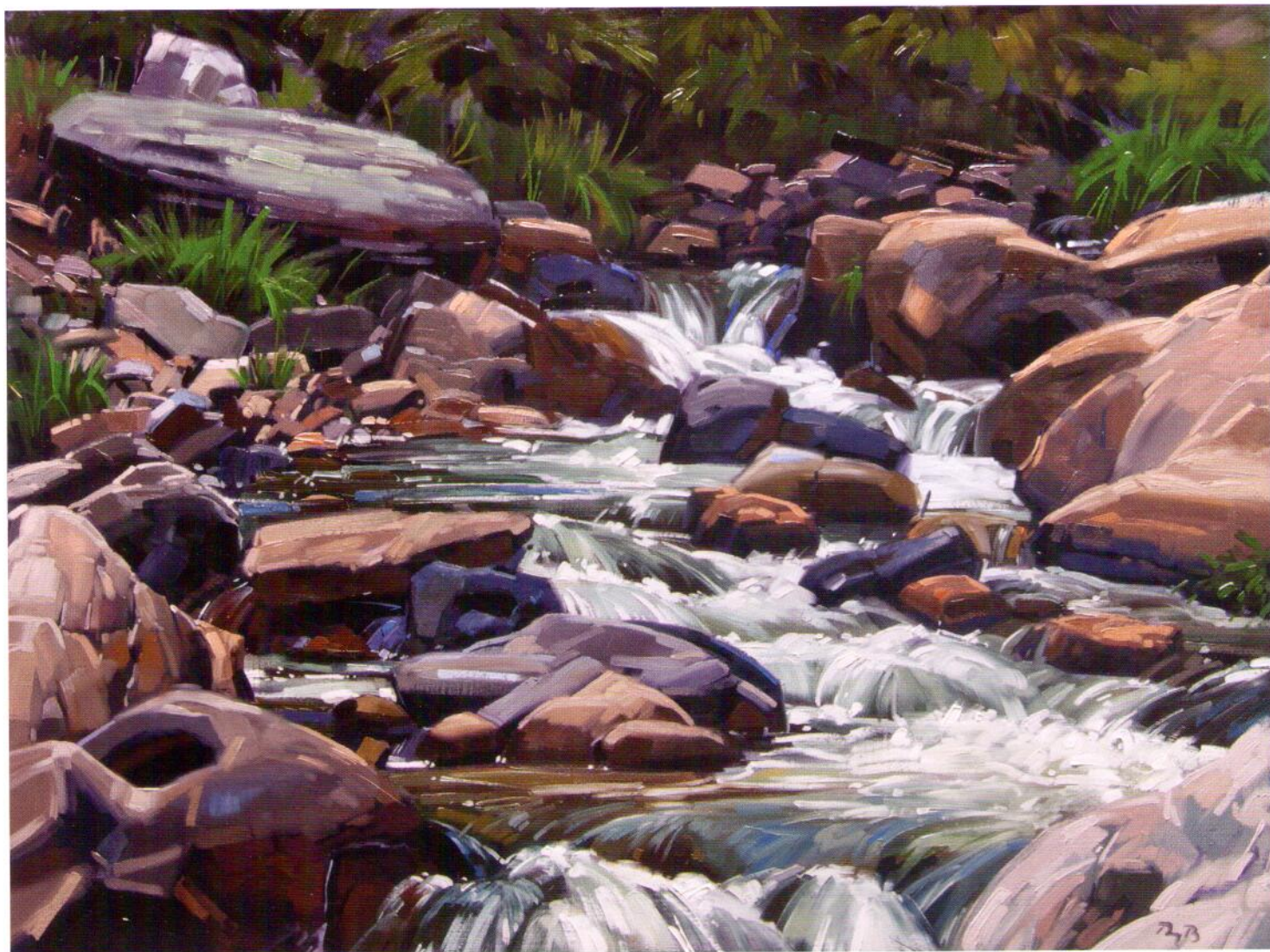


Passing Time

2011, oil, 8 x 10 in.

Private collection

Plein air

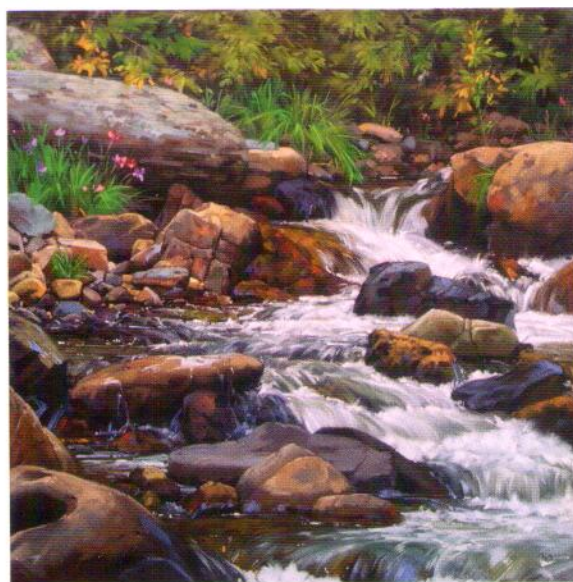


Emergence

2012, oil, 12 x 16 in.

Private collection

Plein air



Dancing

2013, oil, 28 x 28 in.

Private collection

Studio



Optimism

2008, oil, 16 x 18 in.

Private collection

Studio painting, from life

yellow, cadmium orange, cadmium red, alizarin crimson, ultramarine blue, phthalocyanine blue, phthalocyanine green, and burnt umber.

Braithwaite's initial painting procedure is the same whether he is working in his studio or outdoors, with the key difference being that while indoors he can let that "monotype" image dry before adding layers of additional colors. "When painting on location, there isn't enough time to let the initial layer of paint dry, so I continue with that process of painting thick shadow areas and lifting the light- and medium-valued shapes out of the purple," says the artist. "Then I immediately paint local colors into the lighter areas, using a flat brush in much the way I might use a palette knife. The paint is relatively thick, and the brushstrokes remain quite apparent. I am guided by the desire to paint the planes of space, not the details. It's as if I start the painting in reverse by wiping out the light areas and then getting back into the thick-over-thin mode of building from the darks to the thick mid-range and light values. Throughout that process, one of my big concerns is getting accurate color mixtures to convey what I see and feel at a location.

"I also give consideration to the spatial relationship between the foreground and background. In the sketches I did during a rafting trip through the Grand Canyon, I reduced the amount of contrast and kept the colors within a limited range of warm yellows and greens to convey the sense of deep space and massive rock formations. My still life paintings also have a distinct separation between the colors and values in the foreground and those in the background."



The Final Quarter

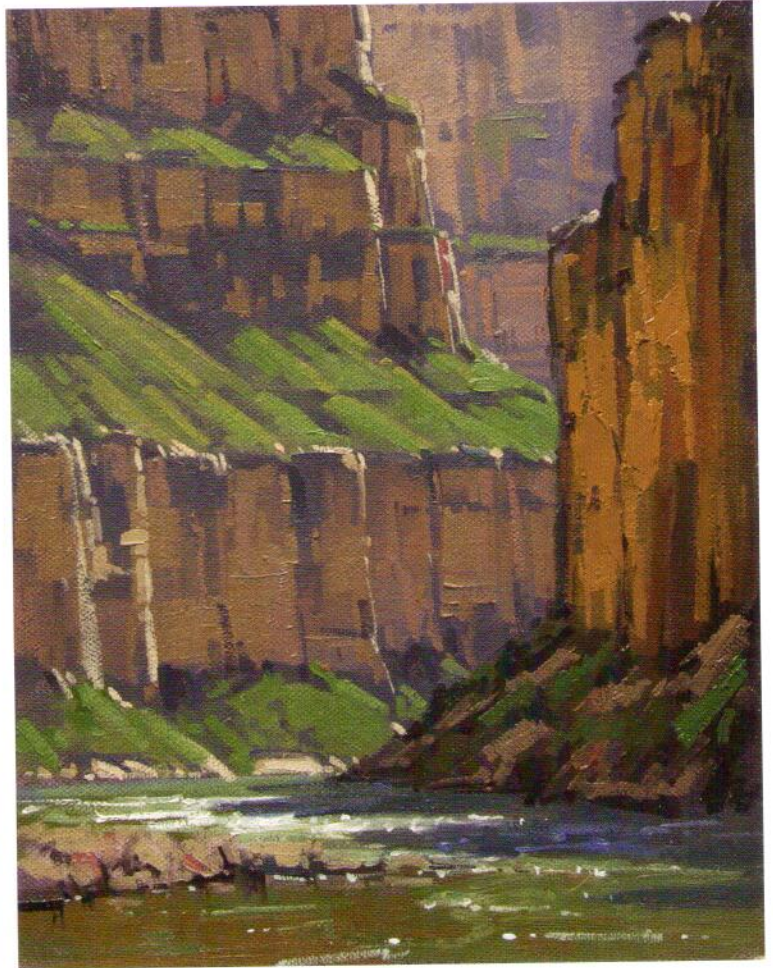
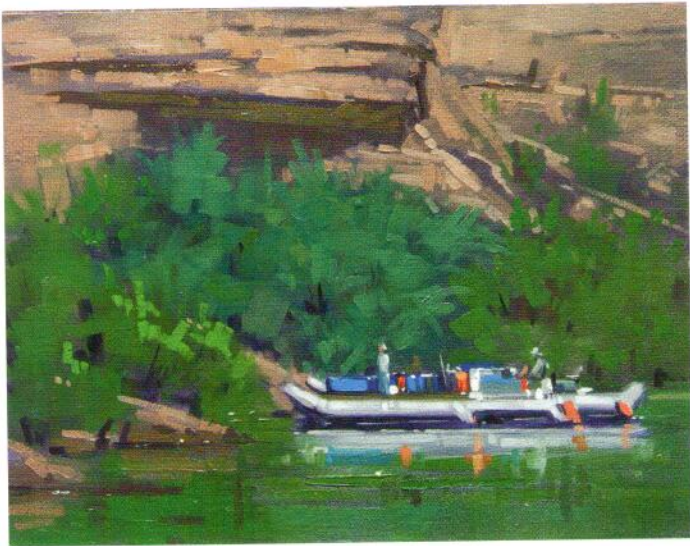
"I add the 'dots and dashes,' as you call them, during the last phase of the painting process," Braithwaite says, responding to a question from this writer. "I often say that three-fourths of my time is spent preparing for the last quarter, during which I refine a painting and add elements that make it uniquely mine. At that point I am less concerned for the subject beyond my easel than for what the painting needs for it to express my feelings about a place and the conditions under which I

A Grand View

2015, oil, 30 x 40 in.

Courtesy Mission Gallery, St. George, UT

Studio

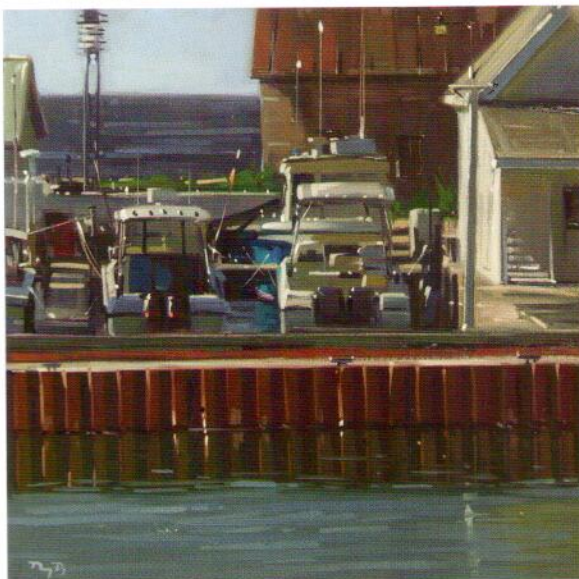


A group of 6 x 8-inch oil studies Braithwaite created on a 2015 rafting trip through the Grand Canyon



Alley Parking
 2009, oil, 36 x 32 in.
 Private collection
 Studio

Gill's Rock Geometry
 2014, oil, 10 x 10 in.
 Courtesy Terzian Gallery, Park City, UT
 Plein air



experience it. The specific mixtures of colors I use for those accents are important, and I may use either analogous colors or complementary colors, depending on the kind of vibration I want between big shapes and the small ones.

"I do my best work when I feel something specific about a subject and I see it under conditions that convey a sense of atmosphere and light. The challenge of creating a good painting can force me to become more creative and to think outside the normal box. I do about half my work in the studio these days, relying on my plein air sketches and 10 or 15 photographs I take while painting on location. The sketches are jumping-off points for a new exploration of a subject, not enlargements of what I've already painted."

Many of those studio paintings are commissioned by people who like Braithwaite's style of painting or who want him to expand on a subject captured in a plein air sketch. He makes it clear to the collector that he has to paint what excites him and he can't be expected to match their expectations about a commissioned painting. His collectors aren't complaining.

M. STEPHEN DOHERTY is editor-in-chief of *PleinAir*.



See more of Doug Braithwaite's plein air and studio paintings in the expanded digital edition of *PleinAir*.