

PleinAir™

MAGAZINE

INSIDE
COVER: \$15K WINNER JIM MCVICKER

STEP-BY-STEP
WATERCOLORS, OILS, PASTELS

MICHAEL OBERMEYER
KATIE D. CUNDIFF,
JILL BASHEM, CURTIS JAUNSEN



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\$6.95 U.S. 8.95 CAN.

STREAMLINE

Secure Enough to Be Vulnerable

Californian Michael Obermeyer is confident in his abilities, but aware he can't always judge his paintings objectively. That's why he takes advantage of suggestions offered by trusted friends, family members, and dealers.



Carmel Dusk
2010, oil, 11 x 14 in.
Private collection
Plein air



Michael Obermeyer

Few plein air painters are as perceptive as Michael Obermeyer when it comes to understanding and recording the most captivating moments in a day. He has an uncanny ability to pick the perfect vantage point, organize the most intriguing pattern of value shapes, and respond to the fleeting effects of light. His skills and sensitivities are so exceptional that one might think he is far beyond the point of benefiting from criticism. But the truth is that he reached this superior level of artistic expression *because* he considers the reactions of others to his paintings. His confidence allows him to be vulnerable to comments that might result in significant changes in his work.

“Like most painters, I am so totally focused on my recent work and the challenges involved in creating those paintings that I can't see them with much objectivity,” says Obermeyer. “When my wife or one of my painting buddies makes an insightful comment, I may suddenly see what they are talking about and wonder why I wasn't able to see the glaring issues myself. For example, my wife once commented that my paintings were getting really dark, by which she meant I was deepening the values and shifting toward cooler colors. As soon as she said that, I could immediately see what she was pointing out. A simple adjustment in the value pattern and color temperature improved the paintings tremendously.”

Obermeyer is even willing to change in response to comments made by dealers who represent him. “I suspect that the most common request from art dealers is for more local landscapes, and I have no problem trying to meet that need, so long as I can paint what captivates me,” the artist says. “After all, a dealer is just doing his job when he tells me what clients are most likely to buy, and I am doing my job when I paint what he or she can sell. Perhaps

I'm more amenable to those sorts of requests because of my background as an illustrator and the years I spent painting to meet my clients' requirements. I enjoy painting everything — people in active poses, early California scenes, nude figures, coastline scenes, mountain vistas — so it's not a problem for me to help dealers sell my work."

Not Taking Orders

"That said," Obermeyer quickly adds, "I don't want to go back to having someone tell me what to paint and how to compose my pictures. I have to paint what moves me and share that with others, and if there is a 'message' or story line implied in my paintings, it will be a subtle comment on conservation, preservation, or natural beauty. Lately, for example, I have been painting expanses of open space to remind people of what might be lost. All of us in California have been made painfully aware that land and water usage are critical issues for the state's future."

Obermeyer's background in illustration serves him well in terms of his expert drawing and painting skills, as well as his ability to manage his business. "I grew up drawing all the time, and in addition to my regular art classes, I did a lot of extra work in after-school art programs," he says. "I was going to spend my college years studying fine art, but I was encouraged to follow the more practical path into graphic design and illustration."

"I then spent 20 years working as a full-time illustrator, but just as the field was being transformed by computers, I received commissions that helped me shift to creating original works of art. One assignment came from a real estate developer that wanted paintings of their property that would have the look of plein air paintings, and the other came from the Marriott



Forty Likes Basin
2007, oil, 54 x 54.
Private collection
Studio



Laguna Skylight
2015, oil, 24 x 24 in.
Private collection
Studio

corporation, which wanted paintings of the locations where they intended to build hotels and residences."

In 1997, Obermeyer presented his first exhibition of paintings at the Laguna Beach (CA) Festival of the Arts, an annual event he has been part of every year since, and in 1999 he was invited to participate in the Laguna Beach Invitational Plein Air Painting Competition, another art show he has been part of in subsequent years. "I started winning awards and getting invited to California events in Newport Beach, Laguna Niguel, San Luis Obispo, Santa Ana, and Laguna," he says. "Plein air painting was gaining momentum throughout the country, but especially in California, where I could take advantage of the events and the potential to learn more, develop my own style, and gain recognition."

Flexible Flyer

"I am an avid hiker and an airplane pilot, so it was natural for me to gravitate toward outdoor painting," Obermeyer says. "Having the ability to fly myself around the state has given me a great deal of flexibility and adventure. One of the highlights of my career was the chance to participate in flying an Air Force F-16 jet. I also flew with the Los Angeles County Sheriff when I was commissioned to do a painting for the county, and I did a painting of Tiger Woods and Jack Nicklaus playing golf, spending a day with them on the course. There are a lot of challenges to being an artist, but there are also great opportunities and rewards."

He continues, "I do about 70 percent of my work *en plein air*, and my studio paintings are based on those studies and photographs. I seldom work on the plein air pieces after I leave a location because I have a tendency to ruin them by adding too much detail. I'm most

ARTIST DATA

NAME: Michael Obermeyer
BIRTHDATE: 1959
LOCATION: Aliso Viejo, CA
INFLUENCES: "Sorolla, Zorn, Hanson Puthoff, Sam Hyde Harris, Neil Boyle, J.C. Leyendecker, James Montgomery Flagg, Howard Chandler Christy."
WEBSITE: www.michaelobermeyer.com

DEMO: BEFORE THE RAIN



STEP 1: Obermeyer tones a canvas panel with washes of warm and cool colors and immediately blocks in the masses using a sable brush. He keeps the paint thin during this initial stage.



STEP 2: The artist then blocks in the cool and warm colors in the sky, again using soft edges between the forms.



STEP 3: Obermeyer paints the mountains and the shadows in the trees a gray-blue that he later lightens and softens. One of the advantages of working in slow-drying oil is the ability to modify colors and values.



The Completed Painting
Before the Rain
Oil, 9 x 12 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air



Sunset on the Champ du Mars

2011, oil, 16 x 20 in.
Private collection
Studio

Grand View

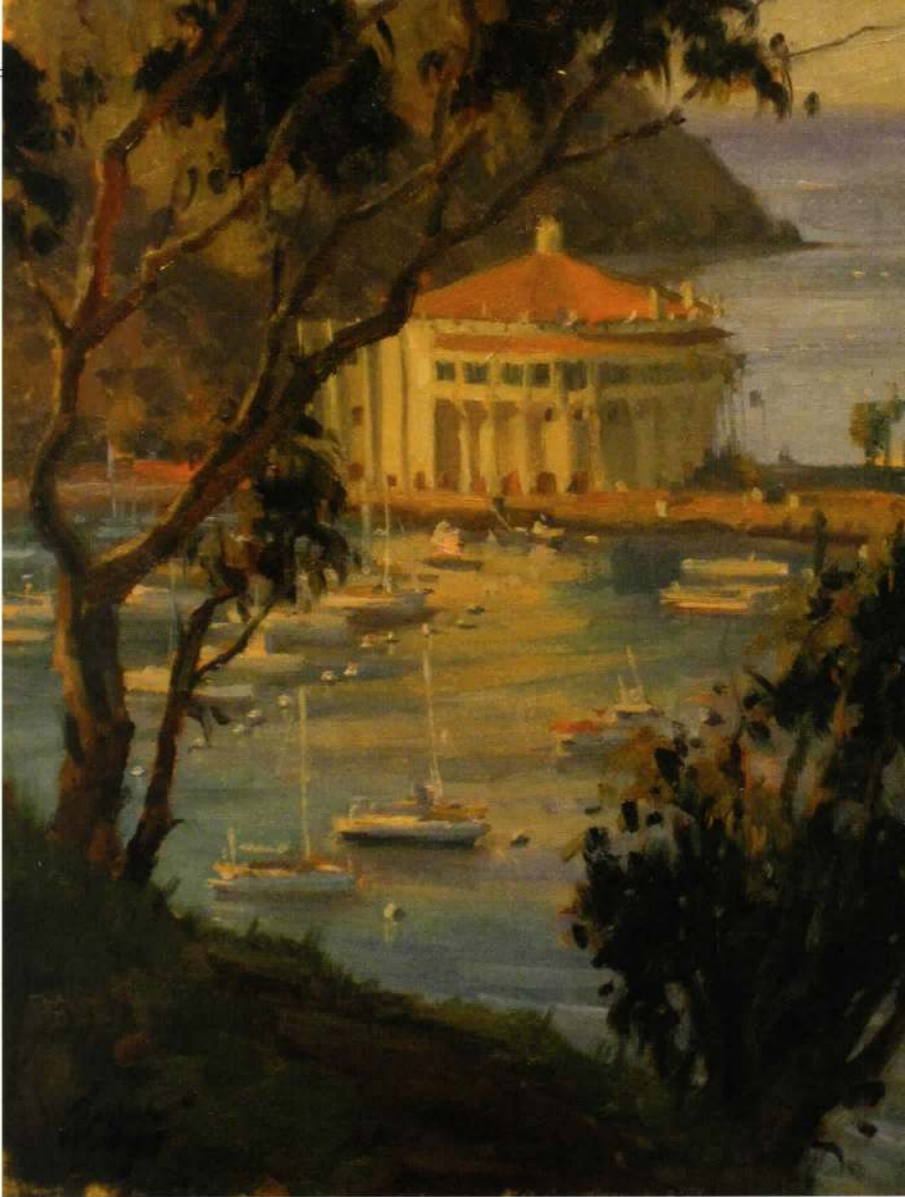
2014, oil, 12 x 16 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air



Sixth Street Bridge

2015, oil, 14 x 18 in.
Private collection
Studio






The Avalon Casino

2011, oil, 12 x 9 in.
Private collection
Plein air

satisfied with the paintings I complete in about two hours on location, because I feel like I am meeting a deadline and have to be totally focused on completing the painting successfully.

“I’ve been out painting with Jesse Powell and I’ve seen how he translates plein air pieces into studio paintings, but I have trouble doing that because I usually think my outdoor paintings are much better. Hopefully, by the end of my career I will have figured out how to do that to my satisfaction.”

Obermeyer uses a limited palette of seven tube colors and titanium white. Those tube colors include ultramarine blue, cerulean blue, alizarin crimson, cadmium red light, cadmium yellow light, phthalo green (or viridian), and burnt sienna. He will add a few colors like yellow ochre, raw umber, and sap green when painting figures, and he uses burnt sienna to tone his canvases. His preferred painting surface is one covered with oil primer.

Over the next few years, Obermeyer hopes to develop more of a national reputation as a painter, and he wants to help cultivate a younger group of art collectors. Toward that end, he is participating in the Door County Plein Air Festival in Wisconsin, and he will make efforts to foster a greater appreciation and understanding of representational art among younger collectors. 

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



See more of Michael Obermeyer’s plein air paintings in the expanded digital edition of *PleinAir*.



Coastal Paradise

2014, oil, 11 x 14 in.
Private collection
Plein air