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Street Paintings: Oil Paintings of Found Moments, by Fred Gibbons

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by Frank Priscaro

Fred Gibbons takes a minimalist approach to the act of painting. He'd just as soon set up his easel on a street corner with a handful of paints and work at capturing what he's seeing, without a lot of fanfare or preparation. (He keeps some painting supplies in his car, for just such an occasion, and uses relatively few colors, a holdover from the early influence of one of his teachers, Hope Stevenson.) His subjects aren't grand, either. Rather than expansive landscapes or large scale abstracts, he just paints what happens to be right in front of him. Early morning sunlight on the hood of an old car. A homeless man next to a display of oranges in front of a supermarket. A woman hanging her laundry in the afternoon sun. Things we've all seen but probably didn't notice. And he doesn't take a lot of time about it, either. Counting Kim English and his "fast painting" philosophy as another of his influences, he works quickly, because as he says, the shadows change too quickly. All in all, he approaches his work with a common man's sensibility for his craft and its importance, refreshingly devoid of the pseudo-sophistication that seems to plague so many artists in explaining what it is, exactly, they do.



Bay Bridge

But the resulting paintings are a different story all together: They are anything but minimalist. They are full of the depth of shadow, the play of sunlight, the vibrancy of color, the definition and elevation of form, the ordinary made extraordinary. They're full of light and life.



Fly Fishing Boots Hung in the Garage

Gibbons talks about his work in characteristically modest terms. “I’m a street painter,” he says, “I just paint what I see walking around.” And while that may be true, it does not capture everything he strives to put into his work. The patterns of light and shadow, how the light falls across things, how everyday objects take on a particular glow. That magic, he maintains, is in “simplifying what I see, finding what to leave in, what to leave out, and leaving some room for interpretation.

In his body of work, you can see influences of some of the Masters: Hopper and Van Gogh, and early on in his study of painting, when the weather was bad, he would copy their works. That, as he found, was not as easy as one would think. “You can copy these great works, make the same kinds of brush strokes, use the same colors, and yet, when all is said and done, it’s not the same. It’s like solving a math problem by just copying the proof. It may be a good copy, but there’s something missing. That quality is what I strive to put into my paintings.”



Menhaunt Yacht Club in Snow



Bee Truck

“The same goes for painting a scene from life,” he continues. “You can’t just paint what’s there. I mean, you can, but it’s not very interesting. You have to paint what you see, your interpretation of what’s in

front of you, and even your feelings about it. All the different colors in the sunlight on a white sheet, for instance.” In this way, Fred Gibbons uses what he sees as reference, not as the final product. And it’s this transformation that gives his paintings their presence and their appeal. That transformation is going on in the Gibbons himself, he maintains. “A lot of this is about what I can learn by doing this. It’s a process, a kind of sport, to see if I can pull off this or that particular painting. It’s a constant learning process for me.”

Gibbon, in his typically understated way, doesn’t make too much of his paintings. “I enjoy it when someone likes one of my paintings enough to buy it. But I’m not in this for the money. I much rather create something people can look at find some pleasure in, something that they can put a little of themselves into.” That’s just the way he is. A minimalist. With paintings that are anything but.



Sears Tool Box



Mailboxes on Moody Road

See more of Fred Gibbon's work [here...](#)



Mendo Market

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