

ARTIST PROFILE

TIMON SLOANE

Left-Brain Skills to Express Right-Brain Passions

Like many who first pursued careers that relied on their analytical skills, Timon Sloane has an exceptionally well-developed understanding of the technical and professional aspects of being an artist. He now uses those left-brain skills to inform a passionate response to nature with pastels and oils.

There are many ways to identify the balance we all strike between our rational understanding of the painting process and our emotional responses to the subjects we paint. Some artists compare that balance to the personality traits associated with the mythological figures of Apollo and Dionysus, who represent behavior motivated by either reason and discipline or unbridled emotion. Others pick up on the dual aspects of the brain identified in Betty Edwards' classic book *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, which includes exercises to help use the two distinct hemispheres of the brain in creating drawings.

However one labels these two aspects of painting, there are practical ways to strike a balance between technique and expression. For example, some artists do a great deal of preparatory work — pre-mixing colors, making compositional sketches, making color notations — so they can put those technical issues aside and become absorbed in the painting process. Others ignore the details of what they observe in nature, get into a disconnected “zone,” and use bold strokes of color to suggest both the physical and the emotional aspects of their chosen location. And still other artists return to locations to paint where they have already resolved the rational design, color, and value issues.

A Harmony Of Forces

Californian Timon Sloane is particularly good at achieving that harmony of forces in his painting. “I grew up in a home and a community of creative people,” he says, “so I understood the passion that artists bring to their work, but I gravitated toward the technical when I started working for Internet companies after graduating



White Shadows
2012, oil, 9 x 12 in.
Private collection
Plein air

ARTIST DATA

NAME: Timon Sloane
BIRTHDATE: 1964
LOCATION: Los Altos, CA
INFLUENCES: “I’m inspired by a huge range of work, from Rembrandt to Rothko, but Edgar Payne, John Singer Sargent, and Joaquin Sorolla are among my current favorites.”
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from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1986. I always made art, even while working in Silicon Valley. Looking back, I realize that the creative right-brain expression was important for balancing all the left-brain work I was doing. Over time, art became a more important part of my life, and in 2008 I quit my job to pursue painting full-time.

“I made a trip to France when I was 16 years old, and in many ways my ideas about painting were fixed at the moment I stood directly in front of an Impressionist work and then backed away to see how the dabs of color coalesced into recognizable images. I loved seeing evidence of the artist’s hand when I viewed the paintings up close, as well as the convincing illusion that can be created from a distance with the right balance of shapes, colors, and values in a painting.”

At that moment, Sloane identified some of the greatest challenges in painting, things that can occupy an artist for a lifetime. Anyone can slavishly copy a photograph with paint, but the greater achievement is understanding the technical aspects of working with artists’ colors and managing value and shape relationships while also sharing a unique emotional response to a subject.

Sloane recalls, “Years later, I found myself in the studio, painting a huge canvas with a tiny brush, and I stepped back suddenly and thought of that trip when I was 16, and I asked myself what I was doing. That realization led me to plein air painting in an attempt to force myself to paint looser, bolder, and faster.”

Piano Or Violin

After Sloane shifted the balance of his activities from Internet jobs to painting, he became adept at working on location with either pastels or oils. For a time, he would alternate between the two media. “I would pick up whichever kit was ready and loaded in my van,” he says. “I’m perfectly comfortable working with either painting media, and sometimes it’s interesting to do a study in one and a studio painting in the other. That opens up all sorts of possibilities.

“Painting with pastels is like playing the distinct keys of a piano, whereas using oil is comparable to playing a violin and creating sounds that blend in seamless transitions. One can play the same piece of music on two instruments and the performance will be equally moving, yet markedly different. The same is



Fog's Soft Embrace
2011, pastel, 12 x 9 in.
Private collection
Plein air

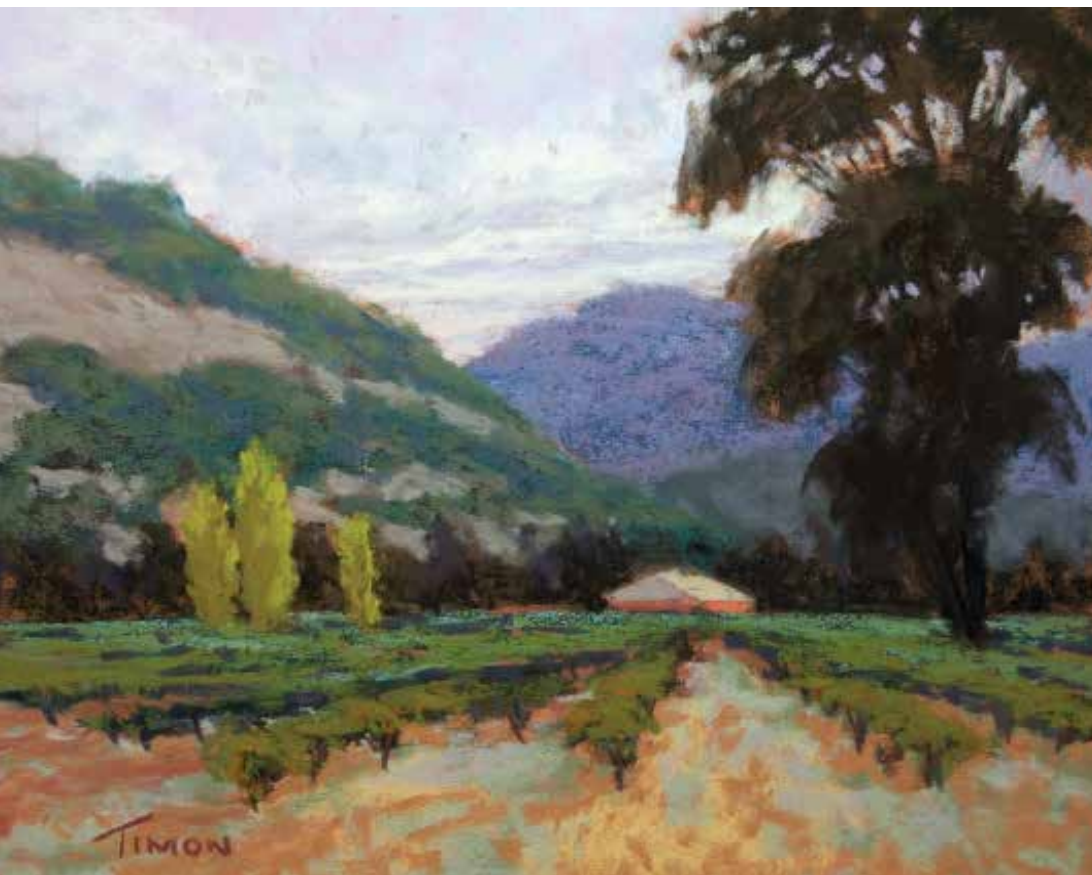
(Below) **Evening Warmth**
2012, oil, 8 x 12 in
Collection the artist
Plein air





Morning Contemplation
2013, oil, 12 x 12 in.
Collection the artist
Studio

(Below) **Autumn in Wine Country**
2012, pastel, 8 x 10 in.
Courtesy Gump's of San Francisco
Studio



true in painting. Each medium offers unique benefits for interpreting a subject. When my paintings are viewed from a distance, people often comment that they can't tell the difference between my pastels and my oils. Yet when one gets up close, the two media have distinctly different mark-making qualities."

Sloane goes on, "For the past year, I've been taking oils on location more often than pastels. Pastel is more immediate, and one has to determine the exact hue and value one needs. One of the big differences between working with the two media on location is the amount of supplies I need to carry with me. I may have as many as 400 sticks of pastel, but I can use as few as four tubes of oil colors.

"Whichever medium I was working with, for years I religiously did thumbnail sketches as a first step to determine a composition, and I still do that for larger studio works to avoid making costly mistakes. I now have enough experience working outdoors to envision the layout, composition, and the organization of elements. I start painting by making a few marks with a thin, dark-valued color that establishes the basic composition, and then I start building up the layers of colors.

"While the end result of painting in pastel or oil can look very similar from a distance, the palette of colors I use across the two media couldn't be more different. I carry about 300 to 400 pastels in my Heilmann box. For the oils, I work with a limited palette of ultramarine blue, a warm medium yellow, pyrrole red, cadmium yellow medium, and transparent red oxide. Lately, I've been experimenting with some alternatives. I usually add Liquin to the oil colors when I'm painting outdoors to control the viscosity of the paint, and thin the paints and clean up with Gamsol."

Records & References

"I take hundreds of photographs of potential painting subjects and archive those on my computer in categories by location," Sloane says, "but I only use the photographs to jog my memory, and not as the primary source material for studio paintings. Photos can help by recording shapes that might have been simplified or eliminated when painting a small plein air piece, but even the best DSLR camera is a poor substitute for direct observation with one's eyes. It takes some experience to understand how much the camera alters things and fails to capture the full range of a scene's value and color.



Low Tide Thrill
2012, oil, 9 x 12 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air



Evening Approaches
2012, pastel, 9 x 12 in.
Private collection
Plein air



Pebble Beach Daybreak

2013, oil, 12 x 18 in.

Private collection


Studio

“The primary sources for my studio paintings are the pieces I do on location, and those are great springboards to an entirely new approach to each subject. I move things around, often adjusting the composition of shapes while using the studies for color and value reference. If one compared a location photograph, the plein air painting, and the studio piece, one might think they were each done at completely different locations. As I work on the studio paintings, I try to get closer to the emotion or experience of being at the place, and the paintings wind up getting further away from a literal replica of the location.”

Sloane also archives photographs of paintings by historical and contemporary artists, including pictures of portraits and figurative compositions as well as landscapes. He says, “I’m constantly trying

to learn from other artists, and I study those pictures to be reminded of the range of possibilities and to better understand how they were painted — the colors and values, the brushwork, or the compositions — not to find solutions to specific challenges I am facing in my work.

“My current goal is to continue to straddle a line between realistic luminosity and loose impressionistic mark-making. My paintings are ready for frame only when they have a realistic sense of light from across the room, yet they de-compose once viewers work their way up to within inches of the surface. I’ve learned to enhance the impression of a painting’s inner glow by controlling the value relationships within a painting. The key is to create subtle shifts in value and color temperature.”

Surveying his recent work, Sloane concludes, “My work is growing, and I continue to set higher goals for myself. Growth gives me great satisfaction. I work ridiculous hours, doing over 300 paintings a year and pushing myself as hard as I can. I am most rewarded when another person treasures my work enough to buy it. I’m not motivated by ribbons and awards in competitions so much as by the unique connection that develops with a collector who responds to what I have painted.” 

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

ARTIST PROFILE



Coastal Break
2012, oil, 12 x 12 in.
Private collection
Studio



Evening Surf
2013, oil, 9 x 12 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air



View From the Shade
2011, pastel, 8 x 10 in.
Private collection
Plein air

Pink Mountain Glow
2012, oil, 18 x 24 in.
Courtesy Gump's of San Francisco
Studio

VIDEO

