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LANDSCAPES



Grand Prize Winner US\$2000 and an Official Award Certificate

RAY WARD, British Columbia, Canada, *Low Tide, Schooner Cove*, oil, 12 x 16" (30 x 40cm)

MY INSPIRATION

For the last couple of years I have been painting landscapes and seascapes almost exclusively of Vancouver Island, where I live - many favorite spots are just minutes from my home. For Low Tide, Schooner Cove, I traveled a couple of hours to the west coast, a trip that I make two or three times a year to collect information for future paintings and to enjoy time with my family. I planned to visit Schooner Cove and checked the tide tables prior to leaving, as access is difficult or impossible at higher tides. There are several islands that lie just a few hundred meters from the beach, and I was drawn to this particular one. With mountains, mist and trees in the distance, it presented a classic west coast scene to paint.

Ray Ward has been spending most of his time lately painting landscapes and seascapes inspired by visits to the west and north coasts of Vancouver Island. To him, these spaces are important because they give us the land untouched and unaffected by any human concerns.

"I paint the unspoiled natural beauty found in the parks and the remaining crown land that hasn't been stripped of its resources," says Ward. "Most of my paintings are devoid of any human presence. I think this may have started as a subconscious reaction to all of the development in my neighborhood recently, where I've seen large tracts of land cleared and flattened to make way for more houses and retail spaces."

When painting these places, Ward enjoys working in unusual weather conditions as well as very particular moments of light.

"I prefer the low light of winter sun and dawn and dusk," says Ward. "I also like atmospheric effects of air thick with moisture and changing weather patterns, such as a storm passing through. My approach is quite often centered on creating a mood through light and atmosphere."

And, in doing this, Ward is not just duplicating what he sees in nature, but, rather is focusing on these minute mood and atmospheric changes to interpret these scenes for greater emotional effect.

"I don't just recreate what I see," says Ward. "To make a good painting there are always changes to make. Quite often there are distracting elements to be removed, things to add, to exaggerate or lessen. Even when a near perfect scene is presented, there are always things to play with to put your stamp on it."

It is also important for Ward to find beauty in the everyday world that surrounds him and to show this side of the natural environment to people who may not so easily recognize it.

"I'm always trying to look at things differently," says Ward. "Or, at least in a new light so to speak, to enable me to broaden my work and offer a unique view of something. There is natural beauty abound where I live, and in addition to painting that I try to find beauty in the simple, somewhat mundane subjects that I might be tempted to overlook."

MY CONTACT DETAILS

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MY DESIGN STRATEGY

I did several small sketches for design ideas and settled on a rectangular format. The decision to paint a smaller panel was because I intended to treat this as somewhat of a study, with thoughts of completing a larger painting of a similar motif in the future. As the painting developed, I felt it looked more like a finished work rather than a study. I designed it with the horizon just above center and the island breaking above it with trees near the top, but not cropped, as I wanted the entire island visible due to scale. The tidal pool acted as a lead in, with a pause at the boulder, and then continuing to the rock cluster at the far right, then back into the picture at the shoreline to the island focal area. There was a pile of logs on the upper right that I omitted as they were distracting; in their place I added some more rocks. I exaggerated the mist in the tree line for added depth and atmosphere. I used a limited palette of Ultramarine Blue, Iron Oxide, Yellow Ochre Light, and Black and White, keeping the chroma subdued.

MY WORKING PROCESS

I am primarily a studio painter and although I occasionally paint on location, my painting style of layering is suited to the studio approach that I have developed, using digital photos, sketches, notes and memory. On a gessoed birch panel I applied a wash of an earth tone mix of Iron Oxide and Ultramarine Blue. Using a small brush and rags, I removed paint until I had the basic shapes revealed. This provided me with an imprimatura to add subsequent layers of paint to. Once this was dry, I continued to work on the entire area in layers, starting from the sky to the foreground, paying attention to edges, shapes, and values until I was satisfied. This is a technique I have used for 20 plus years, experimenting and adjusting it over time. I used to start with a drawing done in graphite on the panel or canvas, but in the last few years I eliminated this step to prevent stiffness in my work, as I found a detailed drawing can lead to painting within the lines too much, diminishing spontaneity and a freer use of brushwork. Sometimes, I will do a very simple drawing on the canvas or board for a larger work with more complexity.