



INTERVIEW FROM POETS AND ARTISTS MAGAZINE
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THE REBIRTH OF REALISM

FRANCOIS CHARTIER

Francois Chartier



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Francois Chartier is a self taught artist from Montreal, Canada. In 2000, after 30 years of evolving in the advertising world as an art director and illustrator, Francois felt the need to pursue in greater depth his own artistic journey through painting. His work, in private and corporate collection in United State, Canada, Mexico, and Europe, can also be seen in Mexico at the Withfield Gallery. He was invited to participate in the 15th Annual Realism Invitational at the Klaudia Marr Gallery in Santa Fe and won second place in the SouthWest magazine competition, 21 over 31. Francois is now working on a new series of painting for early 2011.



Art For Artsake oil on canvas 36" x 36"

Q&A Francois Chartier

Explain your process.

I have a book in which I doodle, just a few lines and a few words to ensure that I keep my inspiration alive. From there I gather the needed objects to fulfill the idea, staging them and taking photographs 'til I get the right composition and the correct lighting. I then decide on the cropping and size of the painting and order the stretch canvas.

As I like to work on a smooth surface I coat the canvas with gesso (3 to 4 coats wet sanded in between them). I print the image full size and start tracing. At this stage, if everything goes well, I am already 1 or 2 weeks into the process. It's also at this stage that I realize how much work is involved to bring the piece to completion, and I start to panic, wondering if I can do that, if it is too much for me, etc. The adrenaline then kicks in ... I derive great pleasure from this process as the image becomes a test for me and I give it my undivided attention. As I will live with this image for 2 to 3 months, it is important that the image moves me and provides me the challenge I crave and need in order to complete it.

My painting process can be divided in 3 steps. The first

step is a little like "paint by numbers" and is as simple as it sounds as it is about just filling in all the area delimited by my elaborate and precise tracing, as I concentrate on a small section at a time, to then blend them together.

When the canvas is completely covered, I start step 2 which I describe as "the mood." I will go back over everything with a second coat of more or less transparent paint to give the image its atmosphere. I stop concentrating on the small areas and look at the entire image, adding more glow, light, shadows, and intensify color, at this point going beyond the photograph.

As it has been close to 3 months if not more since I first took the photo for this piece I am now saturated with it and it is time to put it away and forget about it for a while. I go back to my doodle book and start preparing another piece, working on another image. When that is ready and I'm waiting for the stretch canvas to arrive for it, I begin step 3: I get the last painting out and look at it with fresh eyes, usually within a span of two weeks since I last worked on it. If any corrections need to be done this is the time for me to address those concerns. It is also a wonderful feeling as I remember the earlier moments of panic and doubts. The challenge has been taken up and I feel a great sense of accomplishment about being able to realize my vision. I will let the painting sit for 3 months and then varnish it.

Primary Colors oil on canvas 36" x 60"





Liza 2 oil on canvas 34" x 60"

Why photorealism?

In the mid 70s, I spent a lot of time in New York, a city I found so exciting I would visit it as often as I could. During one of these visits I saw one of Charles Bell's Gumball Machine in the window of a gallery and it blew my mind. I knew instantly, that one day I would do paintings like that, as the ultimate artistic challenge for me. At that time I was as a commercial illustrator making a modest living. With no formal art training using photographs instead of drawing was already a way of working for me as I was eager to get the drawing part out of the way and play with my main areas of interest, which are color and mood. When I quit advertising to start painting, it never crossed my mind that I would do anything else than photorealism. Don Eddy, David

Parish, Charles Bell, Audry Flack have all been strong influence for me.

If you are the photographer what equipment do you use?

For each painting I make I first take hundreds of photos of my subject matter with a digital Canon EOS Rebel XT1. I also use a Canon PowerShot G7 with an underwater case for underwater photos. The photos are my template and I build from there on through painting. This is an important part of my painting process.

How has technology influenced your work?

I have always felt very comfortable with technology and was one of the first commercial illustrators to use a computer in the early 90's. Technology has been a great help for me in

my artistic endeavor as well, more specifically in the preparation of an image for painting. With the aid of digital cameras I take as many photos as needed until I get the right image. I then use a computer to correct the image, assuring the right mood by playing with level, and contrast. In some cases I might go as far as mixing 2 or 3 photos together to get it perfect.

When I have the final image, I divide it in 8"X10" sections and print it full size, using that print for final tracing. My painting is still done the traditional way but technology gives me more control over the preparation of my images.

How do you feel about formal training?

I have never had formal training but rather a lot of informal

"Photorealism is tailor made for me as it requires hours of work, an undertaking which I see as a quest, almost an obsession, requiring constant focus and control. As it take months for me to finish a painting I can't allow my moods, good or bad to affect the way I work and this becomes a Zen challenge in itself. In the end when the painting is finished I experience both disbelief at what I accomplished and great pride in my work: this feeling is the fuel necessary to start begin again on a new piece."

experience. Through looking, mimicking, reading about others and asking questions I have found my own method of practice. In my opinion the best training one can get is to work with someone they respect and apprentice with them. While I did not choose an informal training over a formal one I feel that learning is a continuous process and there are many ways to get to an end goal. The key is not to be afraid of trying different ways of doing things.

Do you find yourself visualizing everything as someday becoming a painting?

There are a lot of potential subjects out there but so little time ... I do my paintings by series of 10, with a common theme. When the 10 paintings are done, which is every 2 or



Julie 1 oil on canvas 48" x 48"

3 years, I like to switch to a different subject matter and I pick one that I am close to.

Pop Culture Icons were collectibles I had been accumulating over time. Each object related to a specific moment in time and therefore brings good memories. The *Simply Flowers* series came from my interest in (and my relative success with) gardening as I grew myself most of the flowers used in the series. It's also the series in which I switched from airbrush and acrylic to paintbrush and oil. Since I scuba dive and have always had a big interest in water *WaterWorld* came as a natural subject. Because I like to stage my image, and control every aspect of it — a constant in all of my series— this has been my most demanding work. It's also the series that marks a definite break with my early influence by personalizing even more my images.

These days I'm experimenting even more, exploring the possibility my camera can offer and taking more time to stage my composition to create a powerful inner world. I also feel I am at a cross point in my evolution as an artist: while photorealism is still very much what I like to do I am endeavoring to create more personal subject matters, attempting to cross the boundaries of pure photorealism into contemporary art.

How do you know when a work is done?

I don't think a painting is ever done; there is always something that could be touched up, that could have been done better but at one point I just have to let it go and the painting itself lets me know. Every painting is a step toward the next one. My headspace drifts toward the next painting and this time I will do better...

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How long does one of your paintings usually take to finish in this style?

I like big format paintings, I feel they have a greater impact. Although I understand that they limit my production they are more rewarding and challenging for me. In my 9 years as a painter I have produced 36 paintings, each taking about 3 months to realize. Most of that time is spent actually painting; the rest is divided between thinking of new subject matter, photographing, organizing promotion, and simply taking care of the studio. I work 8 hours a day, 5 days a week and enjoy the days off in between paintings.

What has been your biggest challenge?

I never was comfortable painting the human body. In my days as a commercial artist I specialized in realistic products and always rejected jobs involving the human body. When I did the first painting of the *Waterworld* series I was really scared because of the body involved. I remember painting all of the background till I had no choice but to do the actual body.

I felt tremendous satisfaction when the painting was done, a feeling that has been amplified every time one more painting in that series was completed. When I am ready for my next ultimate challenge I plan to do a self portrait.

Liza 3
oil on canvas
60" x 34"

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