

THROUGH TIME... OVER DISTANCE INTO LIGHT

*The paintings of Dix Baines reflect
the many passages through life.*

By Gussie Fauntleroy



"Prairie Light," oil, 8" × 10"

When painter Dix Baines made the shift, some years ago, from architectural interior design to his current fine art career, he knew success would require no easing of self-discipline or his strongly ingrained work ethic. He'd previously risen quickly to the role of designing entire, theme-oriented interior spaces for four- and five-star hotels and restaurants, spending hours each day

at the illustration board. Finally on his own in fine art, he knew he'd have to stand before his easel just as many hours a day—for years.

He's done just that, and it's been far from a chore. No longer constrained by the budget or imagination of clients, all artistic decisions became his own. With a combination of natural talent, the training and

experience gained from commercial design, and the freedom to follow his passion, Baines has seen his art blossom into its present expressive, light-infused style, depicting landscapes, villages, fishing scenes, and a longtime favorite, trout.

One perk: As a self-described "sporting life nut," the Colorado-based painter gladly engages in "research" for his art: casting



"Into the Light," oil, 12" × 24"



"Winter Meadow," oil, 12" × 16"



"Glacier Light," oil, 30" × 30"



"Trophy Catch," oil, 20" × 20"

fly-fishing lines into magnificent mountain streams, driving back roads, and traveling overseas in his quest for photos, oil sketches, impressions, and experiences to be translated onto canvas. Smaller works are painted on location, while other images become reference material for larger pieces back in the studio.

In describing his current body of work, the artist notes that lately he's been playing with and exploring the theme of "passages," with all its multi-layered meanings. For one thing, while encompassing a range of subjects, many of his paintings fall into a type he refers to as "passages of light:" intense, often late afternoon or early morning scenes of radiance. These may include the rich glow of sunlight on an adobe wall or the shimmering of brilliantly back-lit aspen leaves.



"It's those spectacular, brief, golden moments of light that make us all stop and wonder," he explains. This luminous touch, along with a strong compositional quality and the freshness of his brushstroke, is among the distinguishing traits of his art.

At the same time, much of Baines' work reflects the "passage of time" as well. Everywhere he goes he looks for those venerable yet often humble homes and churches that "anchor the landscape" in a spiritual and visual sense. In places like northern New Mexico and Spain, for example, he finds himself inevitably drawn to architectural landmarks that have weathered the elements of time, offering glimpses of the hands that created them and the lives that have been enriched by them.



"Remembrance," oil, 22" × 38"

Another passage, the "passage of travel," not only provides the chance to encounter the kinds of imagery he loves, but offers fresh artistic challenges as well. In Hawaii, for instance, a long-held conception of green was instantly rearranged. "The greens there have lots of purples in them, which actually makes them very gray," he observes. "Traveling abroad really *makes* you develop a new sense of color."

And finally, in what Baines sees as symbolic of safe passage through troubles or dangers in life, are the paintings that feature "passages through and between things," such as village scenes glimpsed between buildings, or the view through a grove of trees.

The artist's own major passage in life has been met with enthusiasm and critical acclaim, as evidenced by his first submission to the annual national Arts for the Parks

competition in 1996. His painting of a native Yellowstone cutthroat trout not only earned a cash award, but also became part of the permanent art collection at Yellowstone National Park. This year as well, his art has gained a place among the top 100 works at Arts for the Parks, and was accepted into the prestigious invitational Colorado Governor's Show.

Yet beginning to reach his stride has only increased Baines' desire to revisit the works of earlier masters—although now with a greater appreciation for their methods and results. In particular, he resonates strongly these days with the approach of the Hudson River School, as he observes his own emotional engagement with the subjects he paints.

He is drawn to the dramatic visual sense of the sublime in the Hudson River style, with its expression—in a single painting—

of the spectrum of human emotion, from terror to joy. For his own part, Baines believes in absorbing as fully as possible the places he depicts, in order to paint from a rich reserve of feeling and understanding.

"The greater the emotional connection I have," he reflects, "the greater the sense of place, the more drama, and more of the sense of the passages of life I'm able to convey."

Dix Baines is represented by McLarry Fine Art, 225 Canyon Road, where a solo show of his paintings opens October 24, with an artist's reception from 5-7 p.m., and runs through October 31. Hours: 10:00-5:00 Monday-Saturday and 11:00-4:00 Sunday. (505) 988-1161 or 1-877-983-2123. www.mclarryfineart.com.