

• Artists' Essays on Creativity •

Southwest Art

THE MAGAZINE FOR TODAY'S COLLECTOR

DECEMBER 2000

Scenes of Winter

Five artists celebrate
the season

Introducing
rising star
Dix Baines

In the studio
with **Bill Worrell**





Leap of Faith

Colorado artist Dix Baines throws his heart and soul into a life of painting the natural world | *By Norman Kolpas*



ABOVE: AUTUMN SUMMER,
OIL, 24 x 32.

ABOVE RIGHT: RAINBOWS OF
COLOR,
OIL, 10 x 14.

AUTUMN COLORS BLAZE ALONG THE BANKS OF THE South Platte River just west of Denver. Hip-deep in the cool, flowing waters, Dix Baines scans them, ever alert for the submerged, fleeting glimmers that betray his waiting prey.

Baines casts his line. Suddenly, it goes tight. Playing it ever so gently, he reels in a shimmering trout. With the camera hung around his neck he takes a photograph of the fish, the water and riverbed serving as its backdrop. Then, ever so carefully, he removes the hook and eases the trout back into the water, smiling as it swims away.

Baines' activities as a fisherman provide a perfect metaphor for the choices he has made in his career. At the age of 39, he has waded waist-deep into his dream profession of being a full-time painter and—just three and a half years after taking that plunge—has begun to reel in the rewards.

In February, he'll be represented in the *American Miniatures* show at Settlers West Galleries in Tucson, AZ. six more galleries—in Denver, Taos, Santa Fe, Scottsdale, Seattle and Livingston—also show his luminous oil paintings of landscapes, waterscapes, village scenes, and, yes, trout.

Yet, like the devoted catch-and-release fly fisherman he has been almost his entire life, Baines doesn't sit back on the banks and idly watch his new career as it flows along. He keeps entering the water and casting his line, always searching for something new, elusive, and



exciting that may wait just beneath the surface. "I'm at the point," he says, "where I've still got a lot to accomplish."

Not that he hadn't already accomplished a great deal in his previous career as an architectural interior designer with a top Denver hospitality design firm. "I was really where I wanted to be creatively, taking the lead on new and exciting hotel and restaurant projects across the country," he recalls. Among his accomplishments he lists such elite properties as the Broadmoor Resort in Colorado Springs, the Don Cesar in St. Petersburg, and the Laguna Cliffs Marriott in Southern California. Around the mid-1990s, however, Baines "started waking up in the morning feeling I wasn't charged up to work and feeling the compromises that dampen your artistic passions."

Ironically, his artistic passions were what first channeled him into the design world. The son of a Denver physician, Baines was always expected to become a professional himself. But he was happier doodling and drawing in his grade-school notebooks than he was buckling down and studying. After high school he entered Brigham Young University and tried his hand at painting classes. "I really loved them," he says, "but I had an instructor who told me

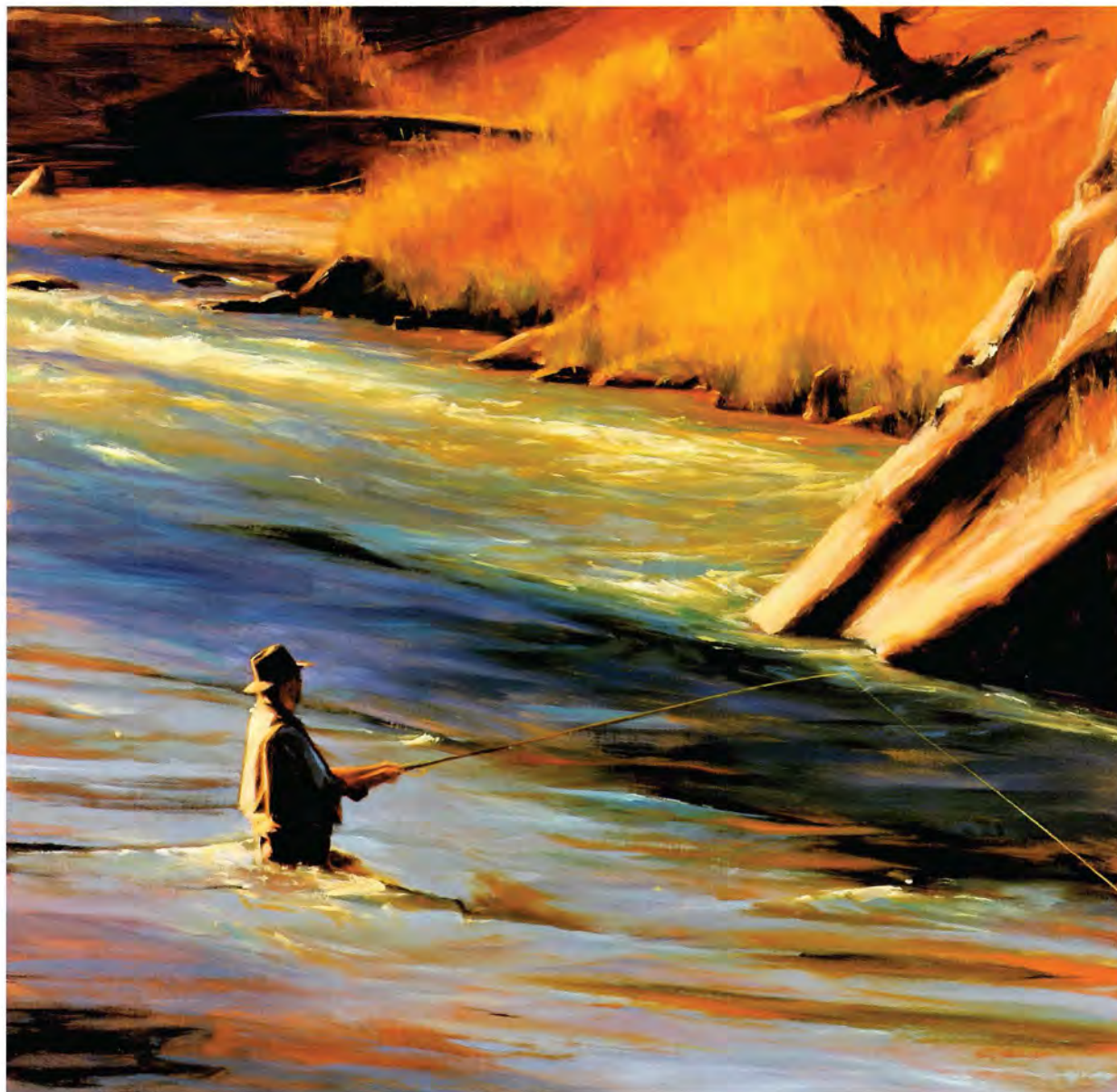
that I depicted things so well, I ought to go over to the interior design department."

Baines graduated from BYU with expertise in producing quick, accurate, beautiful design sketches. He swiftly rose in that field, spending the next 10 years doing renderings in gouache, an opaque watercolor, for four to six hours every day.

When that relentless pace and all the creative compromises he'd made began to take their toll, Baines sought solace by

returning to pure painting. In 1994, encouraged by his wife, Kathlyn Gogarty-Baines, he enrolled in evening classes at the respected Art Students League of Denver, where instructors Quang Ho and Kim English became his mentors.

At first his renewed involvement in serious art only increased Baines' exhaustion and frustration. "I was working 40 hours a week and painting 30 hours a week," he says. He recalls cynically regarding one



canvas with which he was struggling and thinking to himself, “Some-thing’s got to change, because whoever painted this must be really tired.” Echoing in his mind was a piece of advice English had offered: “You’re going to have to pay the price to become recognized.”

His fortunes finally began to shift in 1996. Baines decided to submit a work to the national *Arts for the Parks* competition and show held in Grand Teton National Park that September. Disregarding conventional wisdom, which held that the judges would favor panoramic landscapes, Baines instead sent in a vivid, impressionistic image of a native Yellowstone cutthroat trout, a fish that had become endangered by the introduction of lake trout into the area. The painting won a \$7,000 prize and became part of Yellowstone National Park’s permanent art collection.

“The whole way home,” Baines remembers of the drive from the Tetons back to the Denver suburb where they live, “Kathlyn kept saying, ‘Dix, you’ve got to go for it! You’ve got to quit your job!’”

Independence became their mutual goal. Baines began sending his paintings to more and more galleries, soon finding sufficient acceptance and sales to “take the leap of faith” in 1997. He set up his studio in the home he and Kathlyn share with their three children—daughters Victoria, 14, and Rachel, 7, and 11-year-old son Colton. With Kathlyn also working from home, running a



ABOVE: LOS PINOS RIVER,
OIL, 24 x 22.

LEFT: AUTUMN RUN,
OIL, 24 x 24.



custom floral-design business as well as managing her husband’s new career, Baines says that “she and I feel like this tag-team existence fulfills our desire that someone always has to be there for our kids.” And, he adds, “I

knew that if sales didn’t come around, I could always go back to interior design.”

That has not been necessary. The leap of faith paid off, not just in growing sales but also—even more satisfying to Baines—in the growing self-assurance of his work and the ever-greater breadth of his subject matter.

He has broadened his scope from the close-ups of fish that once tended to define him as an artist to the river environment as a whole. Consider, for example, *AUTUMN RUN*, a scene inspired by a recent afternoon fishing on the South Platte. “I love just coming around a bend in a river and finding a guy fishing,” he recounts. “He was working the water with his line,

and the light going through the line was incredible. So was the way the light traced around his hat and back, becoming part of the cascading water. And there's something so intriguing about a solitary figure in nature."

Baines found similar intrigue in a scene he happened upon last year in the village of Boca, near Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. "A couple of young girls were doing their wash in the river, and there was something noble about it that made me want to make it the subject of a painting," he says. Called WASH DAY, the study of "dappled light on the wall, sunlight passing through the wash, and reflections on the water" possesses a

timeless serenity that captures the very nobility that initially attracted him.

In painting after painting, light in all its many manifestations is what most intrigues him. It might be the way dying sunlight sets a gentle stream afire in WETLANDS SUNSET; or, in MCPOLLIN FARM, how melting snow "takes on all the colors of the rainbow" while late-afternoon light "edges the buildings and makes the mountains take on a mesmerizing blue."

Even his trout paintings have changed as he has come to see them in a new light. "I stopped painting them in a pose," says Baines, "and realized that it's as much about the environment and the water and what the light is doing to the

stones as it is the fish itself."

Baines attributes such artistic progress to a simple maxim that his mother taught him when he was no more than 7 or 8 years old. "She sat me down once and said, 'If you're ever going to accomplish anything, you need to know this.' And she made me memorize it." Attributing the words to Thoreau, he recites them as if they were etched into his very soul: "That which you persist in doing becomes easier, not that the nature of the thing has changed but that your power to do has increased."

The powers Dix Baines possesses as a painter definitely have increased. And his recent works only hint at the extent of his accomplishments yet to come. □



CHURCH OF PILAR, OIL, 9 x 12.

Scenes of Winter

On a crisp February day in Colorado, plein-air painter Henry Isaacs drives his rented Jeep west of Crested Butte on Route 133, his intended destination a place called Oh Be Joyful Creek and Falls. “From the viewpoint of the driver’s seat I fall in love again and again: a trailhead that invites, a creek foaming and tumbling, a snowfield glistening too yellow for me to avoid stopping to paint,” he writes in a personal reflection on his years of painting in the area. Isaac’s essay is one of three firsthand accounts of the creative process that make up the final segment of this year’s Millennium Series. In January 2001 we launch a new series, Realism Today, which will examine a different component of the realist art market each month.

Like Henry Isaacs on his way to Oh Be Joyful, Colorado painter Dix Baines is also inspired by the winter landscape. Baines is intrigued by the effects of light, such as how melting snow “takes on all the colors of the rainbow” in *McPOLLIN FARM*. For cover artist



Len Chmiel—one of five artists who celebrate the season with snowscape paintings in our Scenes of Winter portfolio—painting snow is an opportunity to experiment with shapes and shadows. “The forms are



McPOLLIN FARM BY DIX BAINES

so beautiful,” he says, “and you can move things around to get the composition you want.”

In addition to winter scenes, this issue includes a profile of artist Bill Worrell, who interprets ancient petroglyphs in his paintings, sculpture, and jewelry; an examination of John Singer Sargent’s figurative paintings in conjunction with an exhibit at the Seattle Art Museum; and an introduction to a Santa Fe couple whose collection ranges from paintings by historic women artists to contemporary glass art.

In this holiday season, may you find yourself on the road to somewhere joyful.

—Margaret L. Brown, Editor
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GOLDEN ADOBE, OIL, 30" x 40".