



A SEASONED PALETTE

By Christina Levere | Photos by Christopher D'Addio

The background of Jerry Weiss's childhood was rich with drawings, paintings, comic strips and illustrations crafted by famous artists who worked during the Golden Age of American Illustration, a period from 1880-1920 known for excellence in book and magazine illustration. Norman Rockwell, J.C. Leyendecker, James Montgomery Flagg, Dean Cornwell, Harvey Dunn were celebrated artists of that time, as was Weiss's father, a cartoonist, and Weiss's mother, a talented painter.

It is no surprise that Jerry started drawing at a very young age. "An encouraging atmosphere" only helped him along.

He began painting in earnest by his early teens. His parents were strong influences but "I was looking higher, toward the museums, and settled early on Degas, Rembrandt and Michelangelo for inspiration."

As he tells it, he "couldn't wait to get out of school and attend art class, to draw from the live model. For a year I studied figure drawing where I grew up, in Miami, with a marvelous teacher named Roberto Martinez. Then I moved to New York City to study painting" at the Art Students League of New York.

Throughout his twenties, he painted his friends, family and other artists, mainly because he couldn't afford to hire models. He found he enjoyed the familiarity of the experience: "There's something more personal when you're painting people you know."



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An exhibit of Weiss's work, *People and Places*, is on display through October 15 at the John Lyman Center for the Performing Arts at Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven.

Of course, there were bills to pay and materials to buy, and so Weiss decided to turn his passion into something more lucrative, painting portrait commissions. He also began teaching and writing for publication.

"I'm fortunate that the imperative to earn a living opened these doors," he said. "Teaching and writing about art relate closely to what I enjoy, and I love each aspect. I've taught regularly at the Art Students League since 2012, and have written consistently for several venues since 2008." (He currently is Contributing Editor for *The Artist's Magazine*.)

By the mid-90s, Weiss was burnt out on the grittiness of New York. The rural environment of Connecticut, as well as the opportunity to teach, beckoned, pulling him toward plein air landscape painting.

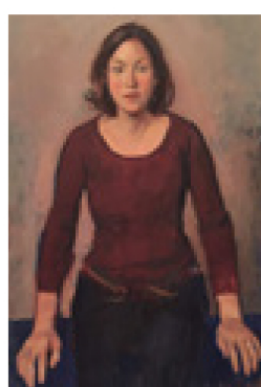
"I'd started painting outside earlier, during summer trips to upstate New York and on the streets in New Jersey, Brooklyn and Manhattan, but landscape became my primary subject."

In addition to teaching figure drawing and painting year-round at Art Students League, he maintains a studio in Chester, which affords him easy access to the landscapes that beckon him and his paintbrush. He often paints in the farms and fields of Lyme and Old Lyme, preferring the rural areas, open fields amid tree lines and forest, over more cultivated, manicured spots.

Asked whether he prefers the landscape of those lush, open fields to the landscape and contours of a model's face, he says "is beside the point."



"The genres have obviously distinct qualities, but as long as I'm working from life it makes little difference," he said. "That's the pleasure, always: constant observation of line, shape, mass, color, and light and shadow, in front of a living subject. Painting and life are two separate things, and using one to make the other calls for rivers of time spent looking and listening. You have to have immense interest in nature, and the solitude to appreciate it properly. Then a surplus of experience, knowledge and especially a sense of creative mischief, are necessary to make a painting."



Author's note: In 2009, I was lucky enough to sit for Weiss. I am proud to say the painting now hangs in my living room, tormenting my children with its ever-watchful eyes.