

Myles Cavanaugh

A Peaceful Painter

He is drawn to depicting the roles of human beings in their relationships with nature.

by Carla Merolla Odell / Photo Glenn Race



When the lights on city streets and inside homes start glowing, many are calling it a day. But unlike Tom Sawyer, slamming through the screen door at dawn when he knows the fish are jumpin', Myles Cavanaugh finds his delight at dusk. "I could be sitting at the dinner table, but if I see the right light coming through the window, I'll book out with my camera and sometimes with my paints." Once outdoors, he waits to be captured by the waning light. "I say to myself, 'That's a painting.' I breathe a little deeper. I calm down and loosen up a little." The process begins.

For him it's a time when landscapes turn "dramatic and mysterious, and when the lights are brighter than the sky," he says. "It's also a peaceful time. To know that people are coming back together, that there's life going on, even though we can't see it." The paintings Myles contributed to the recent show at Silverman Gallery in Buckingham, PA, were good examples of the magical low lighting of the day's descent into darkness. Of course, he also paints traditional daytime scenes.

Nurturing Nature

Myles's parents were both trained as artists, and the Hunterdon County, NJ, native followed in their path. He focused on photorealism in high school, proving to himself first that he could render detail. Then his college professors at Pratt Institute in New York, who were products of the 1960s, turned him on to abstract art. It didn't quite take. "My paintings were always representational, but my style got looser."

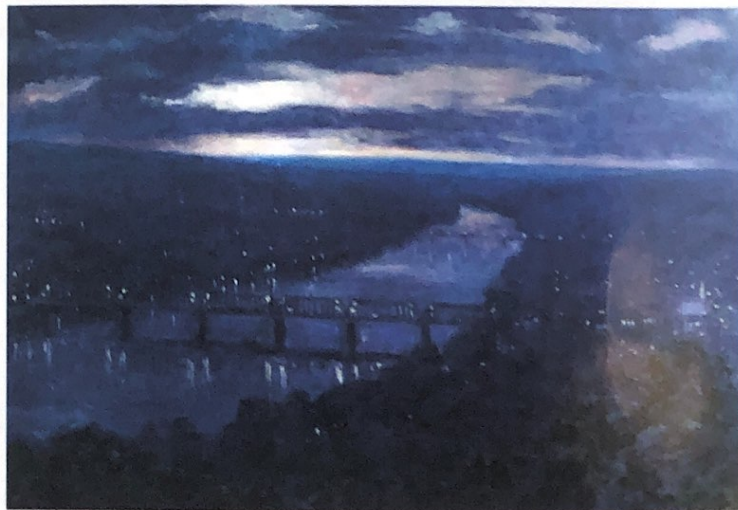
It's a way of painting that has been informed by the California style, the Ashcan school, John Singer Sargent and early 1900s Impressionism. "Not only French Impressionism," Myles says, "but the move-

ment at large and everything that came out of it." His travels to Greece, Ireland, Spain and Portugal contributed to his evolution as a painter as he took in the charm of towns where cars and pedestrians yielded to goats and cows, and he grew increasingly drawn to the intersection of people and nature.

The aspect that sets Myles apart from other landscape artists is the human element. For example, in *Solstice*, a woman in white beckons toward a house as night falls. But even when people are not seen in his paintings, Myles makes sure we know they are there, as he does in *Twilight*, in which an illuminated porch with a splash of red flowers is clearly ready to greet a visitor or a family member returning at the end of the day. In *Falling Embers*, which captures the Friday-night fireworks above the Delaware River, we know someone is setting them off and thousands are watching, although they are unseen. His locations of choice are the simple and bucolic scenes he finds along the Delaware Canal, many of them only blocks away from his home.

Fast Lane, Slow Lane

In painting the twilight scenes he's so fond of, Myles uses darker, moodier colors—blue and slate and mauve. It's interesting that similar colors are found in the rooms of the 1820 wood-frame home he shares with his wife, Jill, and his one-year-old daughter, Charlotte. Fortunately, the house also has a studio out in back that had been built by the previous owner.



Twilight, 24" x 36" oil on canvas



Full Moon Rising, 22" x 28" oil on canvas

"My days are insane," he says. "There's a lot of juggling and fighting for time. I may paint for a couple of hours or for a whole day. But I steal away when I can." For Myles, an avid cyclist, stealing away means peddling away.

But even though his life has sped up, his painting has slowed down. "I take more time now, and I use less paint." He'd started with a heavier, more impressionistic style, but these days he's thinned out his paint and is switching from Liquin to walnut oil as a painting medium.



Farm Road, 22" x 28" oil on canvas

Family means a lot to Myles, not only his own but also the families from whom he occasionally accepts commissions. "It's a pretty small percentage of my work," he says. "I like to choose my clients carefully, people I know and people who are comfortable with my work." He's currently working on a pencil sketch of a family.

He has also found a new kind of family at Silverman Gallery, which Herman Silverman founded earlier this year to, as Myles explains it, "collect living artists." Four artists are represented by the gallery, and Myles feels fortunate to be among that assemblage of talent. His next show is scheduled for December, when he'll exhibit evening scenes of the New Jersey shore.

And when December comes, Myles might be found at the winter spot he calls all his own, a place on the Wickecheoke Creek in Stockton, NJ, where he doesn't paint. "Something else speaks to me there," he says. "It's my place to relax." ♥

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