

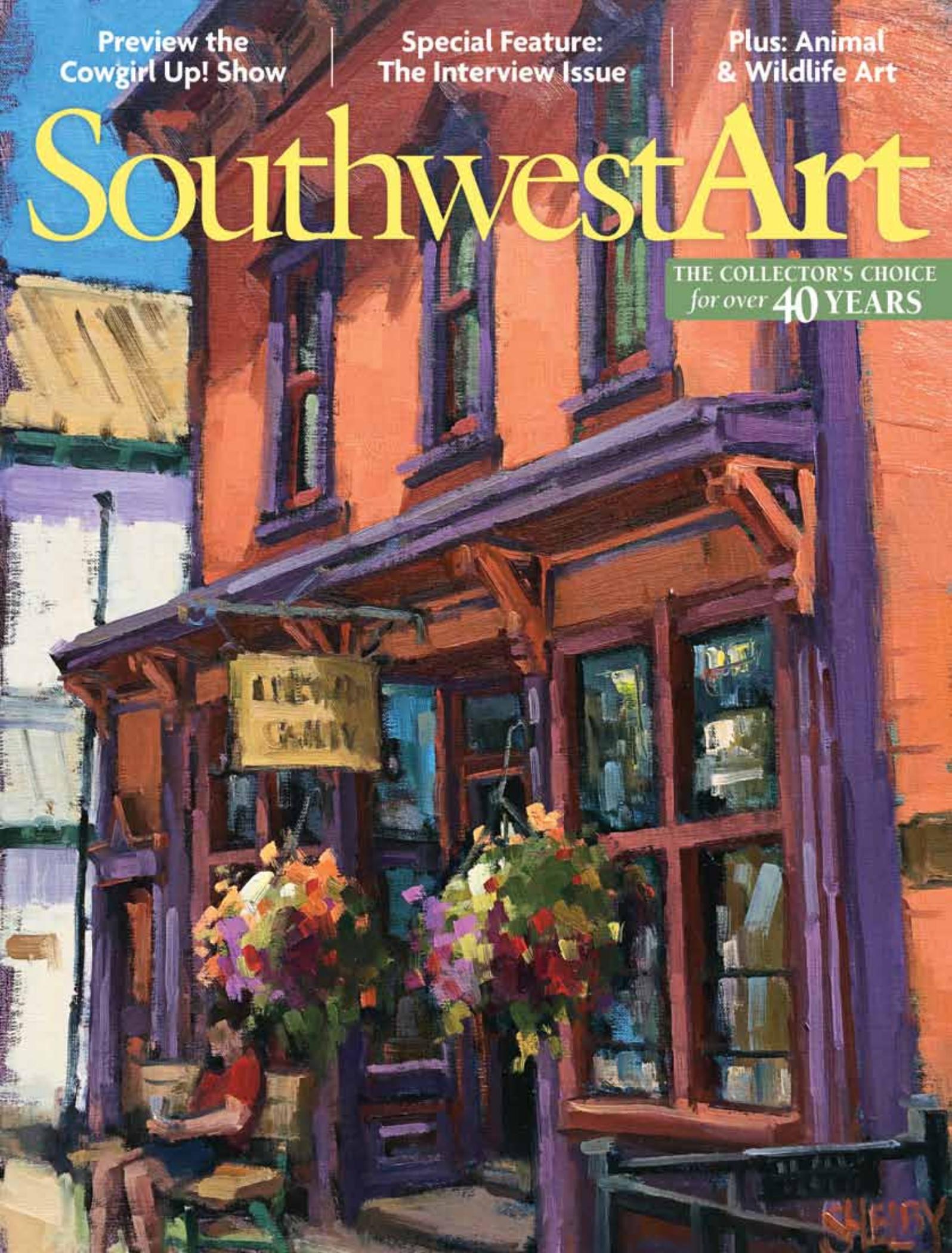
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▲ Morning Light, Point Lobos, oil, 24 x 36.

◀ Late Afternoon on Filbert St., San Francisco, oil, 11 x 14.

THE ESSENCE OF PLACE

Brian Blood explores the flavors and textures of the landscape

BY ELIZABETH L. DELANEY

“I PAINT IMAGERY that captures my attention and inspires me.” It’s as simple as that for California painter Brian Blood, whose landscapes, seascapes, and urban vignettes present an exploration and exhibition of the picturesque. And after three decades of working as a fine artist, he has the process down to near science. His meticulously constructed methodology consists of reconnaissance, observation, contemplation, and application. All of this serves him well in conducting informed and astutely conceived studies in beauty.

However, Blood doesn’t stop at simply painting a beautiful scene—he continues to mine its elements and experiment with technique, always striving to elicit the extraordinary from the everyday. “I like the challenge of making average scenes compelling,” says the artist. Indeed, his pictures present familiar subject matter made dynamic, even flirtatious, as it passes through his artistic lens. Blood’s canvases are at once placid and stimulating, consisting of loosely painted forms

within a formal composition. He mingles these seemingly disparate pieces until they work in concert to produce a distinct aura, or mood, indicative of their environment.

A self-described “modern impressionist,” Blood focuses on the “shorthand” of what he observes. He paints intuitively, not seeking to reproduce but to refocus the elements in a balance of shape, color, and perspective. And though his work conveys that intangible essence of place, it also remains grounded in strong lines and tight spatial relationships. Each painting is deliberately composed, each color palette “squeezed” into just the right range. Formerly a graphic artist, Blood employs a strong sense of design across his compositions, anchoring the structural facets inside an otherwise visually malleable setting. Thus his compositions merge the thoughtful organization of a designer with the spontaneous brush strokes of an impressionist, deftly squaring the cerebral with the intuitive.

LATE AFTERNOON ON FILBERT ST.,



representation

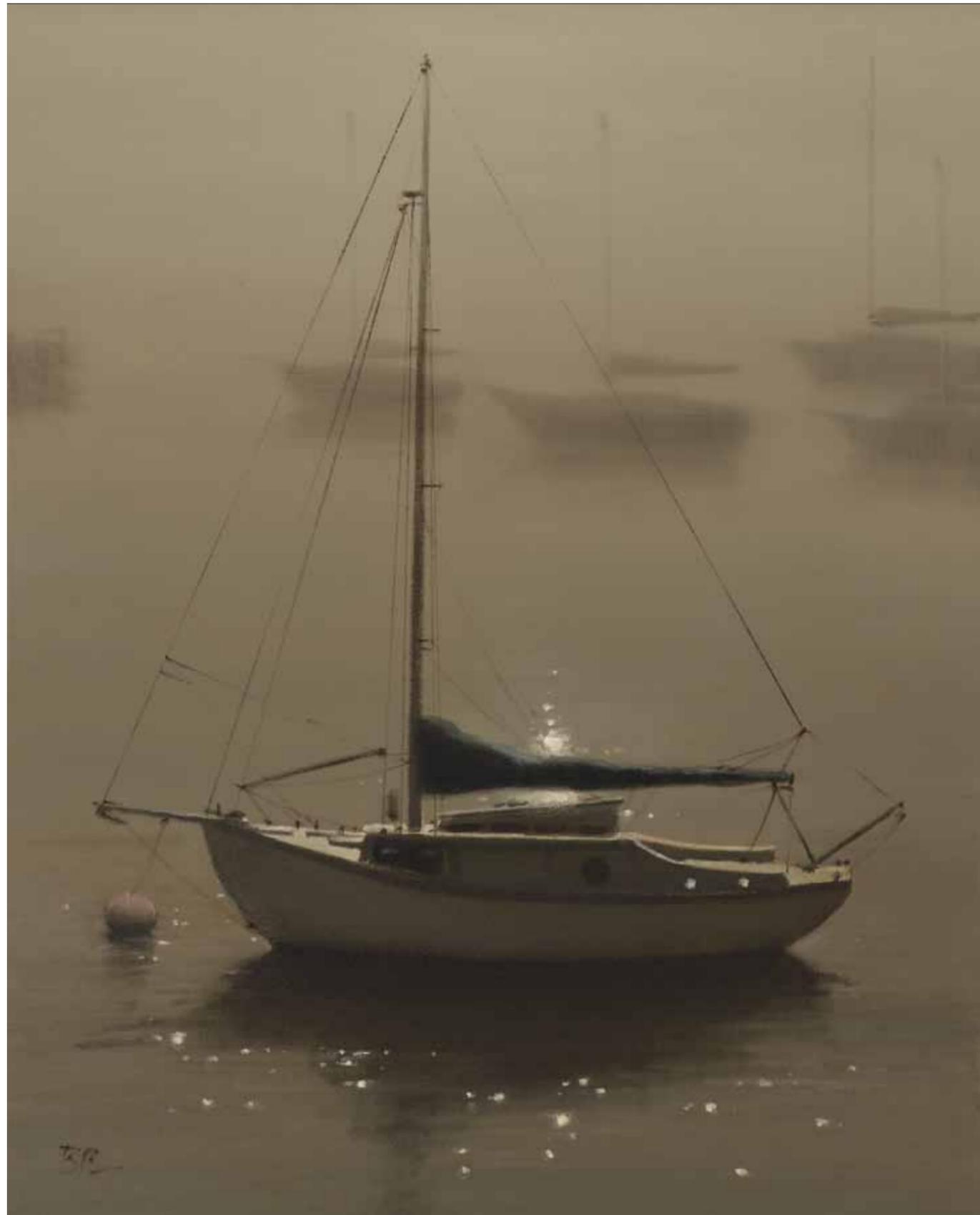
ArtHaus, San Francisco, CA; **Illume Gallery of Fine Art**, Salt Lake City, UT; **Jones & Terwilliger Galleries**, Carmel, CA; **K. Nathan Gallery**, La Jolla, CA; **Roger’s Gardens Fine Art Gallery**, Corona del Mar, CA; **The Garden Gallery**, Half Moon Bay, CA.

upcoming shows

California Art Club Gold Medal Juried Exhibition, Los Angeles, March 29-April 19.

Plein Air Convention & Expo, Monterey, CA, April 14-17.

Local Legends group show, **Jones & Terwilliger Galleries**, October 10.



Morning Glare, Monterey, oil, 30 x 24.

SAN FRANCISCO exemplifies this type of mood-based scene construction. Geographically specific, but universally appealing in its limited detail, the bustling urban vista has been transformed into a collection of soft, organic narratives. Architectural forms further quiet the composition, lending an air of stability and restraint. And, as in all of Blood's work, natural light defines the individuality of place, even as it unites the diverse visual components.

In fact, light in all its iterations acts as perhaps the most significant and stirring element in Blood's artwork. It serves not only to unify each scene's parts, but also to provide illumination and drama, and to define the mood that the artist seeks to convey. In his Point Lobos series, cypress trees glow under a radiant sun as they zigzag through the space, negotiating the soaring sky, undulant ocean, and steady earth. Here, the light enlivens the space. Conversely, the nocturne MOONLIGHT ON SIGNAL HILL portrays the cool, heady radiance of the moon's aura. The ethereal luminescence creates quiet tension between the lit path and surrounding darkness. Here, the light reveals and subdues.

BLOOD'S FINE-ART career began in the late 1980s, after he had established himself as an illustrator and graphic designer. Though he had loved drawing and painting since childhood, fine art as a career path simply wasn't "on the radar" when he was growing up. To that end, after graduating from high school, Blood entered Boston's now-shuttered Vesper George School of Art on a commercial track, studying illustration and graphic design. After working for a number of years in the production departments of advertising agencies and newspapers, Blood found that line of work too restrictive and void of the opportunities for creative expression that he craved. So he made the life-altering decision to leave his native East Coast.

At the behest of a friend and colleague in San Francisco, Blood left his job and traveled out west to help launch a small newspaper. Of such a drastic move, he coolly remarks, "You just have to take chances." His daring move worked in his favor, and after the newspaper project ended, Blood decided to put down roots in California. He eventually enrolled in



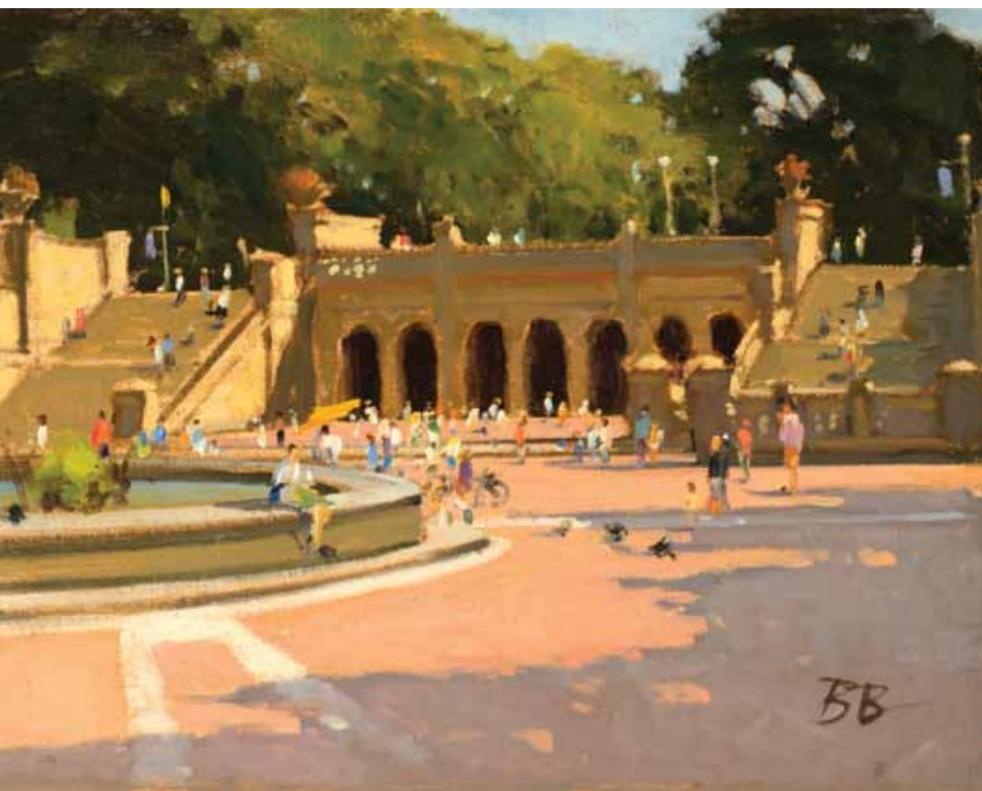
Dunes Atop Signal Hill, oil, 18 x 24.



Moonlight on Signal Hill, oil, 20 x 24.



The Lady Alice, Moss Landing, oil, 11 x 14.



Bethesda Terrace, Central Park, oil, 11 x 14.

the Academy of Art University, first in the illustration program and later as a fine-art major. After earning his degree there, he went on to teach at the Academy for more than 10 years.

At home and creatively fulfilled in California, Blood finally began to realize his destiny as a full-time painter. “Being the captain of my own ship was something I enjoyed, and still enjoy,” he says. Today, he maintains two studios and is represented by four galleries across California and one in Salt Lake City.

When chronicling his career, Blood speaks often of tenacity—the trait has served him well as he has become a nationally acclaimed, award-winning oil painter. “Persistence and commitment will definitely benefit you,” he says of his artistic path, which has been marked by disappointments as well as successes. He has, however, gained insight from both, learning to accept the losses for the lessons they can teach. The artist is quick to share his hard-earned knowledge, offering words of wisdom to up-and-coming artists. “Paint what you like, explore new ways of expression.... Don’t be afraid to try new things,” he says. “Put as much time and effort as you can into your work. Put in the mileage it takes for the transformation to happen.

“You have to paint bad paintings before you paint good paintings,” he continues. “You learn from your failures as long as you are honest with yourself.” And in Blood’s estimation, learning to accept criticism, from oneself and others, is the key to growth. He credits his time in the commercial-art arena for the ability to look at his own work with a critical, objective eye and, in effect, to “art direct” himself.

Blood finds inspiration for his paintings in his natural surroundings, both locally and abroad, and he travels regularly with his wife and fellow painter, Laurie Kersey, in search of captivating subject matter. When he settles on potential material, Blood relies on traditional plein-air studies as well as digital photography to initially capture its essence. He maintains, however, that there is no substitute for actual observation, and he has dozens of plein-air sketches on hand at all times. “Witnessing subject matter firsthand is possibly the most important element within the collaboration



Coastal Cypress, Point Lobos, oil, 30 x 40.

of reference materials,” says Blood, “because that energy is nearly impossible to re-create in the studio.” And like the Impressionists before him, it is on location, in those trenches, that he gleans the true spirit and intensity of the imagery that called him to it.

Once Blood discovers a place or a scene he connects with, he performs an exhaustive exploration of it. He often paints his most cherished compositions again and again, examining the elements from various perspectives of light, color, and even his own mindset. Rendering the same setting at several times of day is a favorite challenge, as seen in MOONLIGHT ON SIGNAL HILL, which Blood originally painted in daylight. As he explains it, approaching subjects in this manner always yields something new for him to consider, while also allowing him to expand his mode of expression. He equates his numerous

takes on one composition with reworking a recipe in the kitchen to obtain different textures and flavors: “Like a cook, I like to experiment with the ingredients. Each painting tastes different.” Ultimately, Blood sees his work not as a finished product, but as an ongoing process—a visual and creative journey.

AS A PAINTER, Blood eschews realism; as a businessman, he embraces it. Experience has taught him that sustenance from the world of fine art depends as much on marketing and visibility as on talent, and to that end, he works daily to make sure his art reaches as many viewers as possible. Preferring to dedicate the lion’s share of his time to working in the studio, the artist has recently pared down his participation in exhibitions and workshops. In turn, he has the time and flexibility to keep his galleries stocked with inventory

in a wide array of subject matter.

“I wake up every morning thinking about how I can perpetuate the business side of my art,” he explains, underlining his entrepreneurial spirit. But Blood is by no means a strict pragmatist—he is an inventive mind following his dreams while simultaneously fostering a sense of security. Building his business so vigorously allows him to relax and focus on making the work he loves. And when business flourishes, so, too, does creativity. ❖

Elizabeth L. Delaney is a freelance arts writer and publications editor based in Charlotte, NC.

See more of Blood’s work at www.southwestart.com/featured/blood-b-mar2015.