

Latest Nationwide Spring Show Line-up

art & antiques

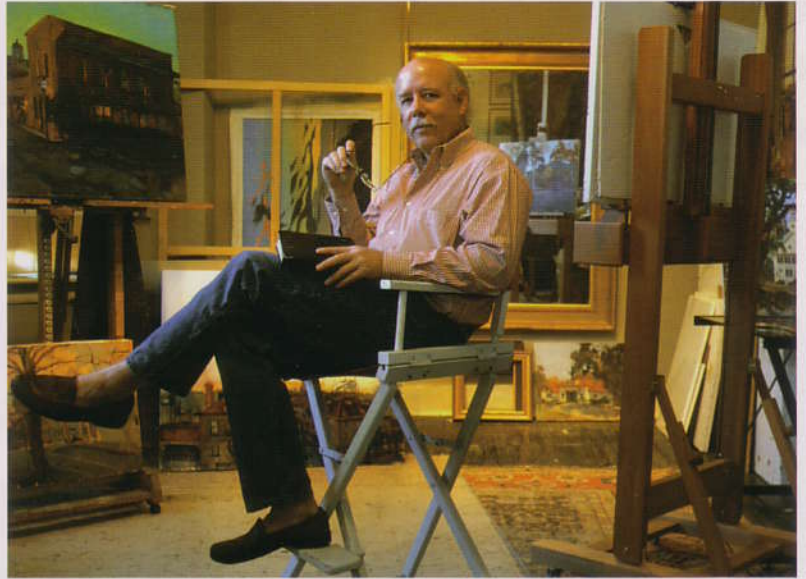
www.ArtandAntiques.net
May 2005



Abstract Sculpture

Chicago's
Top Fairs

Exotic
Orientalist
Painters



Points of View

West Fraser tells scenic stories en plein air.

By Susan Sully
Portrait by Paula Illingworth

The bright noonday light cuts through an aquamarine pool. Its dawn warmth settles softly on the gnarled branches of a live oak tree. Afternoon rays weave through the thicket of swamp grass and palmetto scrub. West Fraser is a master at depicting this evanescent quality.

Established as Charleston, South Carolina's best-known, most widely collected contemporary artist, Fraser is an impressionist who captures the magic of place. From the Lowcountry vistas he loves to exotic scenes in faraway lands, his paintings exude the very atmosphere of their setting. "Light

is really what my paintings are about," the artist explains. "I use compositions from life to produce paintings about light."

Fraser began his study of light at an early age. By the time he was 12, the young artist was toting paint and paper into the maritime forests and marshes of Hilton Head, South Carolina. For the last three years, Fraser has worked on 20 paintings of scenes found in the unspoiled landscape of Palmetto Bluff in Bluffton, an area just south of his childhood stomping grounds. Now, at the age of 50, he is exploring the barrier islands of South Carolina, as well as other locales. "What I'm doing right now is what I've always said was my goal, even years ago when I was a child," he says. "In a sense, I'm painting the joys of my youth."

Although Fraser received formal art training with a focus on illustration and

graphic arts at the University of Georgia, he considers himself a self-taught artist. As a young man, he traveled the New England coastline for three years, painting maritime scenes before settling in Charleston in 1984. He continued to explore marine compositions several years more, working in a realistic, detailed watercolor technique that won him recognition in gallery and museum exhibitions nationwide. But the artist considers the oil painting he began practicing in 1989 as the root of his mature work.

During this time, Fraser discovered plein-air oil painting's potential to capture the atmospheric effects of light as well as the immediacy of his own experience as an artist perceiving and translating the world around him. He also discovered the places and times of day that intrigued him most as a painter—particularly nocturnes depicting street scenes

West Fraser (top) in his studio.

FACING: "Manarola," 2001, oil on linen, 20" x 24".