

BRIAN SINDLER

Interpret Nature. Don't Copy It

This Illinois artist makes dozens of small compositional drawings and then selects the best to guide him while painting on location. Those studies of lines and shapes become more important than the real landscape he observes.

By M. Stephen Doherty

When he participated in the 2012 Door County (WI) Plein Air Invitational, Brian Sindler made 120 rectangular and square drawings in a 6 x 6-inch sketchbook before ever picking up a paintbrush. Those simple drawings, created in two to three minutes with a pen brush, were made as the artist drove around along the beaches, through the small villages, and past farm communities on the peninsula. He eventually narrowed down the sketches to the 12 he thought had the greatest potential, and he created 12 paintings based on those sketches.

“When I go back to the site where I made sketches, I start painting from the studies, and not from the scenes in front of me,” Sindler explains. “The drawings give me an armature on which to build the paintings. They only indicate a composition of positive and negative shapes, not value relationships, but they direct me toward a design that will capture the essence of the places.”

“The values and colors marked by the oil colors are dependent on those compositions, and not on their exact relationships in nature. I do look at nature for value cues, color cues, mood, and other visual information, but the objective is to interpret nature, not to record nature.”

He goes on, “Sometimes I even turn away from the scene I am painting, in part to get out of the direct sunlight and in part because I want to consider what the painting needs and not what would make it a more accurate representation of the specific location. When you think about it, all plein air painters base their decisions on memory or compositional analysis because the actual pattern of light and shadow changes so dramatically over two or three hours. Of necessity, artists paint what they remember and what they believe will improve their pictures. That’s what I do, but I separate myself from the exact appearance of the landscape.”

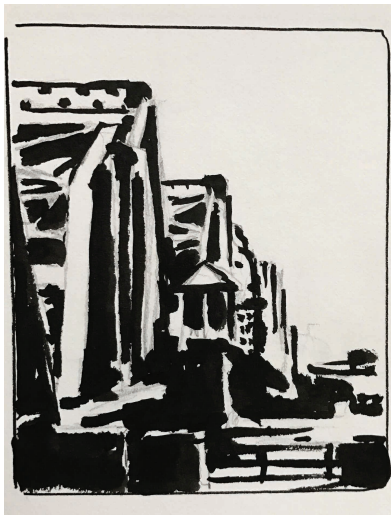


Forest Way
2014, acrylic, 48 x 48 in.
Courtesy Primitive Chicago Studio

Brian Sindler



ARTIST PROFILE



Steel Bridge Study
2015, ink, 5 x 4 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air



Steel Bridge
2015, acrylic on canvas, 10 x 8 in.
Courtesy Primitive Chicago
Plein air

ARTIST DATA

NAME: Brian Sindler
BIRTH YEAR: 1957
LOCATION: Northbrook, IL
INFLUENCES: "James McNeill Whistler,
Mark Rothko, Russell Chatham."
WEBSITE: www.briansindler.com



Golden Gate Bridge
2016, acrylic on Arches paper, 8 x 10 in.
Private collection
Plein air



Hazy Day Tuscany
2011, gouache, 6 x 6 in.
Collection the artist
Studio



Sand Bay Fog
2011, gouache, 6 x 6 in.
Collection the artist
Studio



Study for Miles River
2015, ink, 5 x 4 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air



Brentwood Road Nocturne
 2017, acrylic, 12 x 18 in.
 Courtesy Water Street Gallery, Douglas, MI
 Studio

Of the 12 paintings Sindler completed during the 2012 Door County, he selected seven to hang in the competitive exhibition at the end of the week. The responses from collectors and the awards judge were strong, and the artist established a loyal group of buyers who first saw his work in 2011, when he won the Best of Show award.

Painting Materials

Until recently, Sindler worked with a minimal four-color palette (plus white) that included phthalocyanine blue, cadmium lemon yellow, naphthol red, permanent crimson, and titanium white. He was able to make that limited selection work well, mixing the full range of colors he needed.

“I watched a Scott Christensen DVD and was intrigued by his idea of ‘bending’ mixtures of color toward different hues and values,” says the artist. “That is, he could use a few tube colors to make a base color and then adjust that base color by adding pigment that would shift the values and colors.” In recent years, Sindler has expanded his palette to include ultramarine blue, transparent earth red, yellow ochre, raw sienna, sap green, and cadmium orange.

In addition to creating oil paintings on canvas, Sindler often makes small gouache or acrylic paintings on paper, including the painting reproduced on the cover of this issue of *PleinAir*. These paintings measure 6 x 6 inches and often have a greater sense of depth than Sindler’s larger oil-on-canvas paintings. “When

I paint large paintings,” he says, “I usually present big objects in a relatively shallow space, but the small paintings include deeper space and distant atmosphere.”

In his studio, Sindler prefers to work with acrylics, to avoid using oil solvents. “I had a strong negative reaction to using oils in a confined space, so I only paint with oils outdoors on location. I tried using the acrylics outdoors but was frustrated by the quick drying time, even when I used slower-drying formulations.”

Sindler didn’t start painting until he was in his 30s, and initially he mimicked the work of artists like Picasso and Matisse. “I had a good-paying job at the Mercantile Exchange in Chicago, and I rented a studio where I could experiment with different approaches

ARTIST PROFILE



Dell Ave Nocturne
2017, acrylic, 8 x 14 in.
Courtesy Water Street Gallery, Douglas, MI
Studio



Winter. Anetsberger
2009, acrylic, 36 x 36 in.
Private collection
Studio



to painting,” he recalls. “I would describe the work I did then as bad impressionist paintings based on photographs. They lacked a real sense of light and were based on the dashes of color I saw in Monet’s work. Then I tried to emulate the work of the Russian Impressionists with thick, intense colors, and then I responded to the subtle, Whistler-like landscape paintings created by Russell Chatham.”

Sindler eventually enrolled in the academic educational program offered by the School of Representational Art, a French-style atelier in downtown Chicago. “Mornings were devoted to life drawing and afternoons to drawing from plaster casts of classical sculptures, and we had to spend about a year completing two cast drawings that would be approved by the faculty,” the artist says. “Only then could we paint from life. We spent 70 to 90 hours painting

one pose in black and white from models who would resume the same position during each session. In the third or fourth year of study, we were able to paint figures in color.

“The disciplined, rigorous approach to drawing and painting was a blessing and a curse. It took me years after leaving the school to synthesize what I learned and use that to establish my own voice as an artist. For example, when I accepted a friend’s invitation to paint outdoors, I struggled to paint what I observed because I had been trained to match exactly what I saw in terms of shapes, values, and colors. That’s impossible when the light and atmosphere keep changing.”

Musical Roots

“I was able to establish my own approach by referring back to my years as a musician,”

says Sindler. “I thought a lot about musical terms and experiences and ways the sounds emanating from instruments convey feelings without words or pictures. Those thoughts got me to stop trying to copy a scene. Instead, I turned my attention to recording the temperature and relative value of the light, the emotional impact of a composition, and the importance of editing visual information. I saw the value of eliminating non-essential elements of a painting in order to strengthen and focus the expression.”

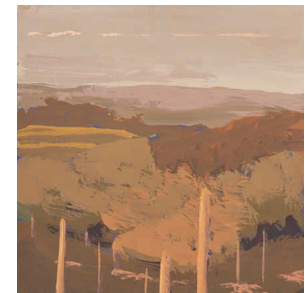
M. STEPHEN DOHERTY is editor-in-chief of *PleinAir*.
dition of *PleinAir*.



See more of Brian Sindler’s plein air and studio paintings in the expanded digital edition of *PleinAir*.



Italian Series — 10
2011, gouache, 6 x 6 in.
Collection the artist
Studio



Tuscany
2011, gouache, 6 x 6 in.
Collection the artist
Studio

Ephraim Yacht
2013, acrylic, 6 x 6 in.
Private collection
Studio