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Professional Advice on Painting Portraits, Still Lifes, and Landscapes

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COVER:
Antique Green Glass
Board With Orchid (detail)
by Daniel E. Greene

Susan Goetz & Robert Schneider:

TWO INFORMED APPROACHES TO OIL PAINTING

These two artists, who are husband and wife, studied with some of the same instructors and developed techniques based on similar historical precedents; yet they focus on different subjects and use varied palettes and procedures. | **by M. Stephen Doherty**

Susan Goetz, who is a member of one of the most distinguished families of artists in the country, has a solid professional standing as a still-life and portrait artist who uses a broad palette of prismatic colors. Her husband, Robert Schneider, has established himself as a professional artist with landscape paintings that are as much about atmosphere and light as they are about specific locations.

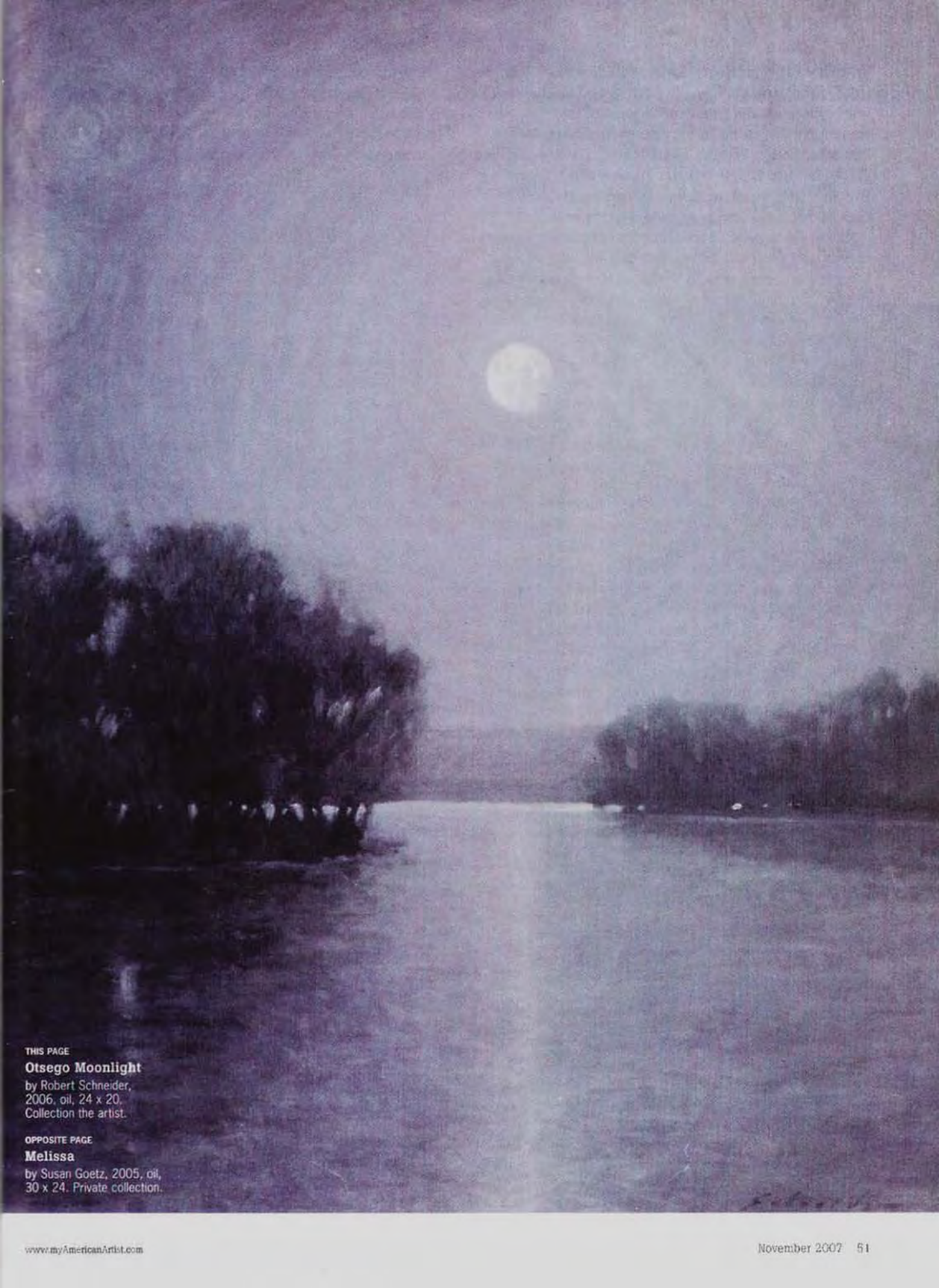
Together, these artists demonstrate a range of approaches to representational painting that cuts across a wide range of ideas, materials, and techniques. Their oil paintings have much in common with each other, and yet there is no question that they were created by two completely different artists. Goetz and Schneider start from a common point of view and yet express themselves in decidedly personal ways.

"My paintings are based on direct observation and memory," Schneider explains. "Even when I start a picture outdoors, I usually finish it in the studio so I can give more careful attention to the abstract relationships inherent in the composition as well as the total impact of the image." In contrast, Goetz says "I was trained by a number of artists whose approaches were sometimes at odds with one another. Ultimately, my paintings are about perception and experience. I use all my knowledge and understanding to represent what I see using the individual characteristics of the pigments and oil medium. For example, it's very important to me that my portraits capture the likeness of the subject, not the general representation of a model who happened to be posing."

As one might expect, there is much to learn from talking to these two artists; and this writer had several opportunities to listen to them reminisce about the notable artists they have known, the pointed lessons they were offered during their years as art students in New York, the professional experiences they have had over the past 25 years, and the advice they now offer students who are fortunate enough to study with them in their studios in Cooperstown, New York.

"I wasn't used to being in a household of people who talked about art all the time," Schneider says when recalling the years he and Goetz were newly married. "Almost everyone in her family was involved in the arts professionally, and so were all their friends." That family was headed





THIS PAGE

Otsego Moonlight

by Robert Schneider,
2006, oil, 24 x 20.
Collection the artist.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Melissa

by Susan Goetz, 2005, oil,
30 x 24. Private collection.

by Richard V. Goetz (1915–1991) and Edith Day Goetz (1918–1986), two distinguished artists and teachers who were colleagues and friends with some of the most outstanding realist artists in the country, including Henry Hensche, Nelson Shanks, Frank Mason, David A. Leffel, Clark Hulings, Robert Douglas Hunter, and Marjorie Ryerson. Not surprisingly, four of their six children and their partners became professional artists or dealers.

Susan Goetz grew up modeling for her parents and their friends, and she eventually studied painting with some of those artists as well as Lajos Markos, a Hungarian portrait painter who maintained a studio in Houston. “I could sit quietly for hours and hours, so I wound up posing for my father, Betty Warren, and students attending the art schools my parents ran in Oklahoma, New Mexico, and New York,” Goetz remembers. “I absorbed a tremendous amount of information while being exposed to numerous fine and diverse painters, and that helped me find my own direction. Markos helped me synthesize their varied approaches and also gain the ability to capture a likeness in a portrait. In the end, I became much less dogmatic than any one of my teachers because I could see the benefits and the limitations of each of their strongly held points of view. I feel fortunate to have an appreciation for good paintings in a wide variety of styles.”

Schneider met Goetz when the two of them were working at the same restaurant. “I thought about studying art but was discouraged by the fact that the schools I considered were not teaching representational painting, so I enrolled in the hotel school at the State University of New York College at Delhi,” Schneider remembers. “It wasn’t until I happened to meet Susan and the members of her family that I realized there was an entirely different art world I wasn’t familiar with, one in which I could really

learn something about painting.” Schneider signed up for classes at the Art Students League of New York, in Manhattan, where he studied with Frank Mason and other notable faculty members. He also participated in Mason’s summer landscape painting workshops in Vermont.

GOETZ’S STILL LIFES AND PORTRAITS

Because her father and several of her teachers specialized in painting still lifes, Susan Goetz has devoted much of her professional career to painting that subject matter directly from life. However, she is also a skilled portrait and figure painter, and she occasionally creates plein air landscapes when she and her husband are invited to participate in events throughout the northeastern United States. For example, both artists recently joined the outdoor painting event organized by the Rye Arts Center, in Rye, New York, to benefit the center’s exhibition and educational programs.

“I’ve concentrated on portraits for the past 18 years while our son, Philip was growing up and involved in lots of school and extracurricular activities,” Goetz explains. “Although I prefer to paint from life, our family situation made it advantageous for me to work from photographs, and I was fortunate to receive major commissions that needed to be completed from photographs. For example, I was commissioned by West Point’s class of 1931 to paint past and present recipients of the Sylvanus Thayer Award for permanent display in Lee Hall at the academy, and I eventually painted 46 portraits, including Presidents Eisenhower, Reagan, and Bush, as well as Chief Justice Warren Berger, General Colin Powell, and Dr. Henry Kissinger.

“The first 25 portraits I created of Thayer Award honorees had to be completed in one year and many of those individuals were deceased, so they all had to be done from



FAR LEFT

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor

by Susan Goetz, 2002, 24 x 20. Collection the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York.

LEFT

Portrait of the Artist's Son, Phillip Schneider

by Susan Goetz, 2003, oil, 40 x 30. Collection the artist.



LEFT
Japanese Incense Burner

by Susan Goetz, 2007,
oil, 30 x 24, Private
collection.

BELOW

Katy

by Susan Goetz, 2004,
oil, 28 x 24, Private
collection.



LEFT
Chocolate Set

by Susan Goetz, 2007,
oil, 24 x 30, Collection
the artist.

ABOVE

The still-life set up for
Goetz's painting,
Chocolate Set.

Schneider's Divided Panel Demonstration

One of the ways Schneider helps students learn to paint landscapes is by painting the left half of a panel and allowing the student to paint the right half using the same materials and techniques.



DEMONSTRATION LOCATION:
Brookwood Garden, Cooperstown, New York.



Schneider painted half of the scene on the left side of a Masonite panel that had been toned with raw umber.



THE COMPLETED DEMONSTRATION:
Schneider completed the other half of the scene on the panel. In a workshop, the student would have done so, learning to match colors, values, and detail.

photographs," Goetz explains. "The rest of the paintings were created of living men and women, some of whom were willing to pose for me. I had a wonderful time painting Justice Sandra Day O'Connor as well as Senator Barry Goldwater. Mr. Goldwater was an art collector and really liked my initial sketch of him, so I gave it to him and he then donated it to the Arizona Historical Foundation.

"My procedure for painting a portrait is to tone a stretched canvas with a light wash of raw umber and sketch in the major shapes with the same earth color," Goetz says. "I paint the shadow side first with a mixture of a warm cadmium combined with a cool color such as violet, blue, or green, depending on the complexion of the model and the light condition. If I see green in the shadow, I will probably combine that with its complement—cadmium red light. For violet, I would add cadmium yellow, and for blue it would be a complement of cadmium orange. The cadmiums temper the cool colors and give the shadows a vibration so that they don't appear muddy. I use a variety of greens, such as permanent green light, chrome, and viridian. I also mix different blues (ultramarine, cobalt, or cerulean) with the cadmium yellow for additional greens. For earthier greens, I mix raw or burnt umber with cadmium yellow. I make violet by combining alizarin crimson, ultramarine blue, and white.

"I block in the middle tones using a standard flesh color made from yellow ochre, cadmium red light, and Permalba white," Goetz continues. "When I am satisfied with the proportions, I concentrate on the light effect that is greatest on the chest, followed by the forehead.

"I paint the masses, not the details, during the initial stages of the painting process, and I always try to present the figure as if he or she were being viewed from across a room," Goetz explains. "Once an artist learns the academics of painting, the visual part becomes clear. The layman sees details first and the trained eye sees nature in a mass. I create detail by pulling out the highlights and plugging in the dark accents within the mass of shadow to create realism. When doing portraits or figurative work, I paint from memory for at least an hour after the model leaves. While the model poses, I usually talk and play music to keep him or her animated. That helps keep the model fresh. After he or she leaves, I can really concentrate without the distraction of another person in the studio.

"At this time of the day, the light is just beginning to fade—it's my favorite time to paint. This is when I pull together all my notes of color, soften edges, correct the drawing, and focus on the abstract illusion," Goetz adds. "To me, painting is all about creating an illusion in space, not trying to copy what I see. I don't fuss over details because that's really not what expresses the likeness of the individual characteristics of a person. When you think about the way we are able to recognize people who are walking toward us, for example, it's the size and proportional relationship of the shapes within their bodies that tell us who they are, not the length of their eyelashes or the brightness of their teeth.

"After blocking in those basic shapes, I work with an extensive palette of colors to develop the painting," the artist



explains. "I try to see and paint the affected color, or the color the light is making on my subject. If, for example, I am painting an area of flesh illuminated by natural light, there will likely be a cool effect. An incandescent light bulb would probably create a very warm light. The effect of either light would depend on whether the model has skin that is fair, olive, tan, or dark.

"Now that our son is in college in New York, I am able to spend time painting portraits and figures from life, subjects that have always interested me," Goetz continues. "I also want to paint more landscapes and do more teaching because I haven't had much time to share the information that I was fortunate to receive from my parents and their colleagues."

SCHNEIDER'S LANDSCAPES

"Atmosphere is the most important aspect of landscape painting," Schneider says without hesitation. "My teachers made that point, but it became even clearer to me when I spent time in museums examining the work of artists I admire, such as Frederic Edwin Church, George Inness, Thomas Cole, J. Alden Weir, and Chauncy Ryder. Over the course of my career, my interest has shifted from the Hudson River School to the American Impressionist School. No matter the artist's stylistic approach, the key to

Sunset Otsego

by Robert Schneider,
2007, oil, 12 x 16.
Collection the artist.

capturing the atmosphere is maintaining the appropriate relationships between colors, values, and shapes.

The background should be lighter in value and cooler in color temperature, while the foreground should generally be warmer in color temperature, higher in contrast, darker in value, and more detailed.

"That's a simplification of a process that gets more complicated when artists are actually trying to respond to the specific conditions that prevail," Schneider continues. "I remember when I was in Mason's class and he picked up a brush loaded with white paint, pushed it into the sky area of my picture, dragged it down the canvas, swirled it in a circle in the lower region, stepped back and said to me 'you need more light in the foreground.' I was a bit shocked at that moment, but I kept the painting and still look at it to remind myself to step back and review the total composition of values."

Schneider makes a point of working with a limited palette of colors both in his studio and on location. "Unlike Susie, I prefer to keep my palette simple and rely on a few colors that intermix to give me everything I need," he explains. "The tube colors include ultramarine blue, cadmium yellow medium, alizarin crimson, burnt umber, raw umber, cadmium scarlet, and Permalba white. Occasionally I add chromium green or



TOP

Valley Sunrise

by Robert Schneider,
2005, oil, 8 x 16.
Collection the artist.

ABOVE

Afterglow

by Robert Schneider,
2007, oil, 30 x 40.
Collection the artist.

LEFT

**Susquehanna
Autumn**

by Robert Schneider,
2006, oil, 26 x 26.
Collection the artist.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Sunset Sketch

by Robert Schneider,
2006, oil, 8 x 12.
Collection the artist.

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phthalocyanine green, but most of the time I prefer to mix the greens rather than use tube greens. Phthalocyanine green makes a nice morning- or evening-sky color. I always show students how I mix colors because that helps them see how much better that is than using premixed colors.

"Like most of Frank Mason's students, I used Maroger medium with my oil colors during the years I studied with him, but I now use Liquin alkyd medium because I like the way it thins the paint and speeds up the drying time," Schneider says. "Painting wet-in-wet is not a big issue with me, so I don't have a problem with areas of the painting becoming tacky as the Liquin causes the paint to dry faster. In fact, when I'm painting outdoors, I like the fact that the initial layers of paint become tacky and allow me to do some over-painting. I even apply a final layer of Liquin over the painting once it's dry to give the surface a unified finish."

Schneider indicates that he usually sketches out the basic composition of a landscape with a light wash of raw umber and blocks in the largest shapes with the local colors. After these steps, he paints smaller and smaller pieces of color, considering the relationship of color temperatures, edges, and values. That approach is the same whether Schneider is painting outdoors or in the studio.

Schneider does a fair amount of teaching in the summer months when artists are anxious to take advantage of the good weather and charming village atmosphere along Main Street, in Cooperstown, New York. "I take the students outside to paint as often as possible, so I can show them how to select elements directly from nature and compose them into paintings," he explains. "When we are in the studio, I have students finish those plein air pictures or use their small outdoor sketches as the basis of larger studio paintings."

One of the teaching methods Schneider finds particularly effective is painting on panels that are divided down the middle with one half remaining unfinished. "In one exercise, I paint the left half of the panel, and I ask the students to paint the right half using the same materials and techniques," he explains [see sidebar, page 54]. "They learn a lot when they have to copy what I've done because it becomes obvious when they haven't mixed the right value or color temperature, or when they've gotten too heavy-handed with the paint or the amount of detail. Sometimes words are much less effective in teaching someone to paint than the process of trying to match what someone else has done.

"Another exercise is starting a complete painting but only finishing the right half," Schneider explains. "The students can then study the split panel to see how the initial marks established the basis of the final picture. I keep these demonstration panels around in the studio, along with a collection of paintings by other artists, so students can study them to learn about the various approaches available for drawing and painting." ■

M. Stephen Doherty is the editor-in-chief and publisher of American Artist.



About the Artists

Susan Goetz grew up studying with her parents, Richard V. Goetz and Edith Day Goetz, and then studied at the Art Students League of New York, in Manhattan, with Frank Mason, David A. Leffel, and sculptor Sidney Simon. She also participated in summer classes with Henry Hensche at the Cape School of Art, in Provincetown, Massachusetts; with Frank Mason in Vermont; and in the Houston studio of the renowned Hungarian artist Lajos Markos. Her paintings have been exhibited and received awards in exhibitions organized by the Hudson Valley Artists Association, the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club, Audubon Artists, and the Orange County Arts Council. For more information on Goetz, visit www.robertschneiderfineart.com.

Robert Schneider studied with Frank Mason at the Art Students League of New York and in his summer workshops in Vermont as well as with his father-in-law, Richard V. Goetz. His paintings have been included in exhibitions and won awards in shows organized by the National Arts Club, in New York City, the Hudson Valley Artists Association, the Salmagundi Art Club, the Hudson River Museum, the Oklahoma City Museum of Art, and the Proctor Art Center at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. He exhibits his paintings in his own gallery, Robert Schneider Fine Art, in Cooperstown, New York, and he is represented by Cavalier Gallery, in Greenwich, Connecticut, and Mark Humphrey Gallery, in Southampton, New York. For more information on Schneider, visit www.robertschneiderfineart.com.