

Paintings by Bryn Craig

- Casey McCabe

What inspires Bryn Craig to commit a scene to canvas has remained a bit of a mystery, the artist freely admits. Craig is invariably struck by the poetry of a place a conventional beauty or harder to define character that reveals itself in an unusual light or unexpected angle. It appears to come as naturally out of a real landscape as it does a movie theater marquee. Craig simply doesn't claim any thematic thread to his work.

Yet the body of evidence suggests an ongoing attraction to seemingly ordinary subjects, inviting comparisons to Edward Hopper, an artist Craig admires. They are scenes you want to walk into and Craig paints in a way that encourages you to linger and appreciate.

They are often places you can have to yourself. Comforting and lived in, Craig's subjects remain mostly unpopulated. Even the Marin Streets and apartment buildings are caught in a moment when their human inhabitants are tucked away.

Whether discovered in very early morning, late night, or perhaps a parallel un-peopled world, they are deceptively simple places, welcoming, open and inviting, often without the distraction of another person inhabiting the scene.

Different subjects invite a subtle change in Craig's attention to detail. The more inherently beautiful the subject - a vineyard or sunset perhaps - the thicker, more impressionistic the brushstrokes. For something as mundane as a green garden house hanging on a wall, Craig's technique becomes exacting, bordering on photo-realism. That rare level of expertise has occasionally branded Craig a photo realist, yet it's a title he'd rather avoid. Craig typically photographs his subjects from multiple angles at various times of day, but he doesn't work for the camera, the camera works for him.

"I don't make paintings of photographs. I take from the photo whatever I feel works toward the mood I'm trying to convey," he explains. "I leave out whatever doesn't help. And I sometimes add things that were never there at all. I want the painting to have a life of its own. The painting becomes a sort of fantasy of my own invention."

Bryn Craig has found inspiration all over the world, capturing places and moments in Italy, Greece, France, Ireland, Mexico and across the United States. His eye has been drawn to the soft early morning light enveloping a small town at dawn, the brutal mid-day sun and shadow of a picnic spot in New Mexico, and the subtle quietude of a moonlit night at a country inn.

Most importantly, Craig has forged a relationship with his adopted homeland of Marin County, California, a profound melding of artist and environment that has made much of his portfolio iconic. Countless artists have set up easels to record the folds and dappled trees of Marin's pastoral hillsides. Craig is among them. But he has also pursued the roads less traveled, the viewpoints less obvious, the objects less scrutinized and the time of day that casts even familiar sights in a different light. It is hard to imagine another county in America that has been so explored and catalogued for all its unique texture by a single artist.

None of Which suggests Craig lacks for further inspiration. His most recent works are among his best.

"My first grade teacher told my parents that I was going to be an artist." he says. "I've been working on it ever since."