

AMERICAN ARTIST

www.myAmericanArtist.com

JANUARY 2009

Storage Solutions in a Dream Studio

—PAGE 46—

How to Succeed with
**Romantic,
Illustrative
Painting**

**Stay
Motivated**
By Changing
Subjects & Sizes

**Get Unity
& Focus**
By Using
a Theme

**Imagine
Landscapes
Based on
Real Places**

\$5.99



COVER:
Seville in My Heart (detail)
by Phil...

RIGHT
**Porta Maggiore,
Rome**
2006, oil, 42 x 60. All
artwork this article
courtesy Fischbach
Gallery, New York, New
York, unless otherwise
indicated.

BELOW
Huddlestone Arch
2006, oil, 40 x 50.



Discovering the Motif:

The Paintings of Brad Marshall

This New York artist used the image of an arch to endow a recent set of paintings with a sense of unity and focus. | **by John A. Parks**



In his recent paintings of landscape and architecture, New York artist Brad Marshall has pursued a single geometric motif—the arch—in a wide variety of situations ranging from ancient Roman ruins to submerged reefs in the Florida Keys. Whether the arch is manmade or naturally formed, its appearance in each painting serves to point us to the sense of order and clarity that is the hallmark of Marshall's paintings. In *Porta Maggiore, Rome*, for instance, the arches are only an introduction to the wealth of measured intervals that make up the splendor of this architectural masterpiece. In a way, the painting is a dialogue about order and clarity conducted across the centuries, between the artist and the ancient architects. In

another painting, *Huddlestone Arch*, a somewhat uneven rustic archway is our entrée into a scene in which a kind of rhythmic, organic quality is elicited from all the other elements in the painting.

"My current work on arches came about quite serendipitously," says the artist. "I returned from a trip to Rome and did a painting of the Porta Maggiore arch. My next painting was *Baroque Arch*, also in Rome, and I began to realize that the arch shape was captivating me." The idea of using a single motif was something new for the artist. "Up until this time most of my work had been landscape paintings of nature, featuring mountains, rivers, trees, waterfalls, and so on," says Marshall. "Although I had done architectural images, they



LEFT
Baroque Arch, Rome
2006, oil, 54 x 36.

BELOW
The Copper Cornice
2007, oil, 50 x 36.

OPPOSITE PAGE
Skybridge Off Madison Avenue
2006, oil, 54 x 42.



only able to do a quick graphite study, I will do a "mental plein air," making note of colors and values. I also take a lot of reference photos, but I use them mostly for details." Even though he uses his own photographs for reference Marshall is wary of their contents. "There is a great deal of wrong information in photos," he says. "Values and colors are almost always off. Perspective is changed, with perspective lines exaggerated and objects in the background pushed back much farther than in reality."

Once he is back in his studio Marshall uses his sketches and photographs to create a preliminary composition. "I usually do this with Corel Photo-Paint on my computer," he says. "This allows me to move things around more and makes elements in the photos fit the composition of the plein air sketch." Once the composition has been organized to the artist's satisfaction he prints out a copy overlaid with a grid that he then uses to "grid up" the image to his canvas. "I do a fairly detailed drawing on the canvas since this is the best time to correct anything that is off in the picture and to make sure that everything works in the larger scale," he says. "It is much easier to correct a graphite drawing, even on a five-foot canvas, than to try to do it when the painting is half

were not a major part of my work. But as I was working toward a one-man show I decided that this would make an interesting theme." Marshall admits that, unlike many artists, he tends to explore a wide range of subjects. The theme of the arch would be a way of tying the work together while still involving himself in the variety of imagery that he enjoys.

All of Marshall's paintings begin with a real encounter with the subject. "A major change in my work occurred when I started working en plein air," says Marshall, who credits a birthday gift of a Jullian French easel from his wife for the transformation. "All my paintings start with a plein air sketch, unless it just isn't possible. Even if I am



BELOW

The Red Torii in the Garden

2007, oil, 48 x 72.



done.” Marshall then paints over his drawing with an underpainting, blocking in the main colors so that he can get a sense of whether the overall tone and color will work. “I don’t worry about losing any of the drawing,” he says. “It’s important to remember that if you draw something correctly once you can always draw it again. As long as I keep my basic composition I can paint in the details as I do the finish. This approach stops me from being timid and from being a slave to my drawing while I paint.”

Marshall says that he generally works back to front in a painting, starting with the sky and finishing with the foreground. Another hallmark of his technique is that he ‘palettes’ the colors. “I mix the color that I need with each brushful from the seven to 10 colors I put out on the palette,” he says. “I do this rather than mix a large amount of specific color to use as I paint.” Marshall traces this approach to the many years he spent working as a billboard painter in New York. “You could only logistically take up so much paint with you on a scaffold,” he recalls. “I would use the colors at hand and mix as I worked. Now, in the studio,

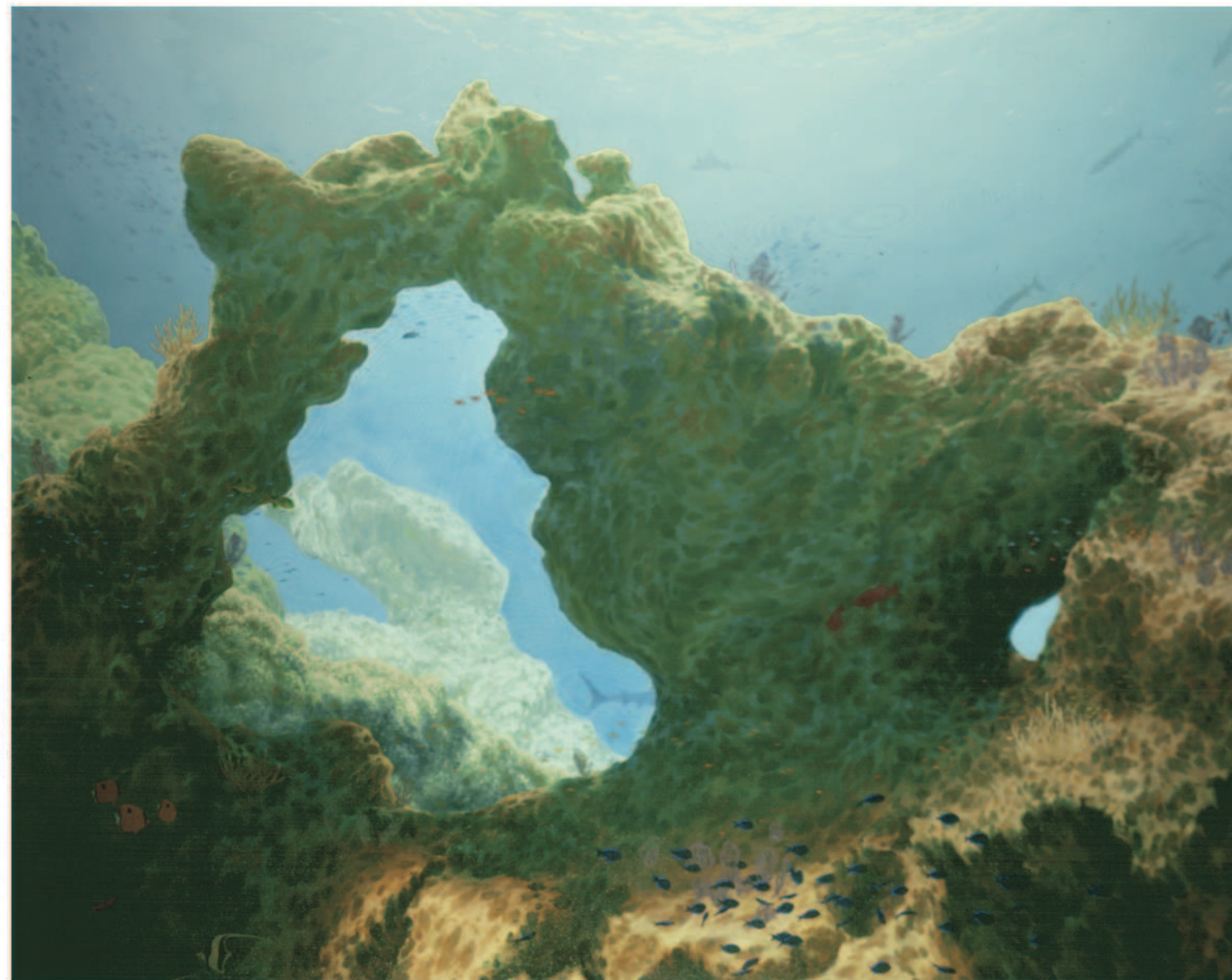
I find that this technique helps to keep the palette fresh and also allows for some variation within the color itself, which adds to the natural feeling of the painting.” A good example of this occurs in *Skybridge Off Madison Avenue*. Here the archway is clad with a greenish, corrugated material that casts a series of vertical shadows. By mixing anew for each of the shadows the artist creates a wealth of variety in the color, which gives an extra richness to the painting. Marshall is also willing to be somewhat variable in the materials he uses to paint. “I don’t have brand loyalty,” he says. “Most of my oils are Vasari Classic Artists’ Oil Colors, but a good sale on Rembrandt or Winsor & Newton is always welcome. I use natural white bristle brushes, mostly flats, and I stretch my own canvases using heavy duty stretcher bars—mostly Fredrix—and No. 12 cotton canvas.”

Marshall’s paintings are built to a finish that is realist but short of an eye-popping super-real spectacle. “There’s an old saying that it takes one artist to start a painting and two to finish it,” says the artist, “the first to paint and the second to tell him when to stop. I keep this in mind and try not to over-

BELOW

Coral Arch, Florida Keys

2007, oil, 44 x 56.



work my paintings. I’m not doing Sargent-inspired bravura-style work, but I do try to keep my work brushy. So rather than a smooth photo-realistic finish, I want a certain amount of looseness. Even in the small areas where I am using smaller brushes I want people to see the paint when they are up close. When they step back the whole painting should come together.” Marshall says that the actual level of finish is intuitive. “When my technique and eye are working together right, I don’t think about painting technique or brushstrokes,” he says. “I just let the image unfold. When a section really isn’t working, I find it better to wipe off what I’ve done and start over rather than keep reworking an area.”

BOTTOM

Twin Towers, Bannerman Island

2006, oil, 42 x 56.



RIGHT

Niagara

2008, oil, 24 x 36.

OPPOSITE PAGE BELOW

Along the Na Pali Coast

2001, oil, 48 x 72.

Collection Commerce Bancshares, Kansas City, Missouri.

About the Artist

Brad Marshall graduated with a degree in psychology from the University of Florida in the late 1970s. He intended to go on to graduate school but was overtaken by a desire to be an artist. "I was always drawing and actively creating," he says, "but I never seriously studied art." Marshall took a year off to attend art classes in California and see if he really had the talent and discipline for art. He never did pursue his graduate degree, and once out of art school he worked as a commercial illustrator in California and New York. In the late 1980s he took a job as a billboard painter. "That was a great learning experience," he says, "having to paint whatever subject they gave me, painting while hanging on the side of a building. Starting work at 7 a.m., five days a week, year-round instilled a lot of discipline in me and made me stretch as an artist." By the mid-1990s the billboard-painting business was beginning to decline as new technologies made the printing of large scale photo-images possible. Marshall began to turn his attention more and more to his easel painting and is now represented by Fischbach Gallery, in New York City, where he regularly exhibits. More of the artist's work can be seen at his website at www.bradmarshallart.com.



Talking of his influences as a painter, Marshall is quick to credit Everett Raymond Kinstler as a friend and mentor, and he counts himself lucky to have painted with Richard Schmid, whose book *Alla Prima: Everything I Know About Painting* (Stove Prairie Press, Walpole, New Hampshire) he found particularly helpful. He also found himself learning a great deal from the writings of Kevin Macpherson and Paul Strisik. The paintings he most admires, however, are those of the Hudson River School. "If you look at the evolution from the Claudian model to the Romantic and Sublime, you see this was at the core of the Hudson River painters," he says. "Their fundamental approach to landscapes has had a major impact on my work. By no means

do I compare myself in terms of talent or accomplishment to these great artists, but I see my work as being in direct line from theirs. I painted *Porta Maggiore, Rome* in response to Frederic Edwin Church's great painting of the Parthenon. In my painting of the Na Pali coast in Hawaii, I was trying to capture Albert Bierstadt's sense of awe in his grand mountain landscapes, such as *Sierra Nevada Morning* [not shown]. When I recently painted Niagara Falls, there was no way to avoid the inspiration of Church's masterpiece of that subject."

Talking of the future of his work, Marshall sees his involvement with the plein air experience growing. "My early work, coming out of my commercial art, relied much more

on photographic reference," he says. "I now find that plein air is the essential ingredient. There is so much information you get painting on location. My main emphasis when I do this is color and value. I try to pick up the subtle color tones, like warm shadows or variations of greens in trees, and accentuate that in my paintings. I see myself progressing in this way, bringing more of the vibrancy of plein air into my more complete and finely painted studio work." ■

John A. Parks is an artist who is represented by Allan Stone Gallery, in New York City. He is also a teacher at the School of Visual Arts, in New York City, and is a frequent contributor to American Artist, Drawing, Watercolor, and Workshop magazines.

