



KIAWAH AS SEEN THROUGH AN ARTIST'S EYE
PAINTINGS AND ESSAY BY JULYAN DAVIS

Along the Kiawah River, Detail, 2010, Oil on Linen, 18" x 32".



Kiawah, 2010, Oil on Canvas, 8" x 16".

In the fall of 2010, British-born painter Julyan Davis was invited to paint the wilderness areas of Kiawah Island. As a landscape painter, he has traveled the world—from Russia to Alaska. He is best known for his paintings of the South, where he has lived for over 20 years, and Deer Isle, Maine, where he spends his summers.

Capturing Kiawah’s marshes and dunes in a new way presents a challenge to any painter. Julyan admitted that he returned to the subject with some trepidation. He has experience painting the Lowcountry and his style constantly evolves—from traditional realism to painterly expressionism. Yet, he wondered how he could find something of the scenery to surprise him—a goal he seeks to achieve in every work.

ARTIST’S NOTES: The marshes of the Lowcountry seem emphatically tranquil. Long horizons. Undulating grasses. Elegant tidal creeks. No jagged cliffs or crashing breakers.

My first visit to Cougar Island remains with me. The landscape opened up but remained wild: a brassy sky buzzing with wildlife, the ground spiky with intolerant flora. It all had great beauty. I saw the marshes in a new, terrific way.

It is important to find tension in a painting. There is a quote by French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal* that can be applied to painting. He states, in effect, that to achieve greatness, one must find the middle point between the extremes in oneself. In other words, a unique

voice is to be found from all our influences that seem most personal, and most in juxtaposition. It helps to find a seemingly insurmountable problem. In my case, I suppose I’m trying to marry Turner and Cézanne. I can’t give up the luminosity and mystery of the 19th century landscapists, but I love the flatness and sculptural solidity of Modernism. I want my cake and to eat it too.

French painter Pierre Bonnard is a big influence on my work. His color, of course, but also the very playful way he can direct your eye around a canvas. If he doesn’t want you to see the cat in the corner of the room for a while, then you won’t see it for a while.

* “*We do not display greatness by going to one extreme, but in touching both at once, and filling all the intervening space.*”
– BLAISE PASCAL (1623-1662)



Captain Sam's Inlet, 2010, Oil on Canvas, 38" x 36".



Captain Sam's Inlet Study, 2010, Oil on Canvas, 12" x 12".



Sand Bank, Cougar Island, 2010, Oil on Canvas, 20" x 20".



Kiawah Study, 2010, Oil on Canvas, 9" x 12".

ARTIST'S NOTES: There's a difference between the bravura brushstroke and the 'ugly' brushstroke. The latter is a more modern invention. It is the untidied, working brushstroke used to quickly denote an area rather than be pretty from the start.

Like a lot of artists, I have a tendency to look too closely, going in at the end to tidy things up. But if a thing works, it should be left alone.

The same is true with size. Some paintings are so simple in handling and composition that they work on a tiny scale, but would fail as larger paintings.

A commonly painted subject, on a traditional format, might need a lot of expressionistic color and drawing to say something new. But sometimes, a scene is so strong and so simple, it's foolish to play around too much. I love the English painter Sir William Nicholson*. He would have jumped at the chance to paint scenes like these—scenes that require so little to say so much.

I took these two things away from my tour. Firstly, the gentleness of the marshes is only one perspective. Secondly, there may indeed be a way to convey the mysterious beauty that anyone stumbling upon this place might feel.

* SIR WILLIAM NEWZAM PRIOR NICHOLSON (1872-1949) – *British painter and author. Perhaps best known for illustrating the popular children's book The Velveteen Rabbit (1922). Nicholson was knighted in 1936 by King George VI.*



Road, Cougar Island, 2010, Oil on Linen, 32" x 30".



Sunrise, Detail, 2010, Oil on Linen, 8" x 16".

ABOUT THE ART: Easter show of Julyan Davis paintings Friday/Saturday/Sunday at Cassique April 22, 23, 24. His works are also on display at Carolina Galleries at 106 Church Street. Julyan Davis is an English-born artist who received his art training at the Byam Shaw School of Art in London. Julyan's home is now in Asheville, NC. His work is exhibited across the US and Europe in many public and private collections. Recent acquisitions include the Greenville Museum of Art, Greenville, SC, the Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, GA, and The Gibbes Museum of Art in Charleston.