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As an artist, it goes without saying that Julyan is the premier landscape painter of the region. His landscapes, especially the more domesticated, forlorn landscapes are deeply moody and psychological. But it's Julyan's figurative, narrative work that I believe is what is greatest about him.

The figurative work has hitherto been greatly under-appreciated and under-represented, something that I hope will change after his show at the Greenville Museum. Piercingly wistful and relentlessly probing, these works are Julyan at his best. 'Banks of the Ohio' is among the few finest works of art I have seen come out of Asheville.

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- **Vision Gallery owner: 'Julyan's compositions give a sense of place - the South'—**

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From my desk at my gallery I can stare straight ahead at one his paintings - a laundromat interior, and frankly it's hanging where it is so I can see it whenever I look up. In a better world art-market-wise, it would probably go home with me, but in this sour economy I really need to sell, not buy. So I'm using how I feel about this painting in order to write about his work in general. It's written from the gut, and not academically, as you will see.

Julyan Davis has a way of taking an often overlooked and sometimes downright ugly scene, whether it's an interior or a landscape, and painting it using his rather somber palette, to render it absolutely riveting. His interiors, from laundromats to abandoned houses or commercial buildings, at first glance appear frozen in time. Yet before you know it, you have been pulled slowly into the painting, noticing an interior door, a shaft of light from a barely visible window, and you are dying to know what lurks in the areas beyond your view. It no longer feels frozen in the least. You half expect that you could turn away, then back, and maybe catch a glimpse of a fleeting figure. Or maybe a door that you remembered as being closed is now cracked open, maybe even enough to give you a hint of what used "be" in those spaces.

His landscape paintings are pretty empty for the most part yet don't convey a sense of loneliness at all. The compositions are just enough to give you a sense of place, of weather and perhaps time of

perhaps this gives them a somewhat raw feel emotionally, however once you relate to one of his paintings I daresay you wouldn't have it any other way. Once a fan of his work, you won't think to wonder *why* he paints "*what*" he does, but rather you will be thankful that such a gifted painter chose 'that particlar subject' to paint.

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When I was asked by author Jack Prather who I thought was an important local living artist, Julyan Davis immediately came to mind. Although the Asheville area has dozens of artists who have reached the upper levels of the art world, Julyan's work conveys a sense of place in a way that is unlike most. Like a memory, one can walk into his paintings, as they evoke feelings of the viewer that become part of the work.

My friend and colleague, Wendy Outland, who was manager of Blue Spiral 1 for many years, recalls her first meeting with Julyan at the gallery. "He was charming and professional, with a genuine modesty that, given the high quality of his work, was refreshing. The paintings he brought in were more subtle early on; but if you looked closely, you were likely to discover something unexpected in what had initially appeared to be a typical landscape. It's a skill Julyan has expertly honed over the years."

What I appreciate so much is that Julyan has made himself accessible to all levels of local artists. Be it his well-written blog, instruction, or an entertaining lecture, his generous spirit comes through loud and clear, yet in a way that makes others feel so comfortable. Those who know him, realize how fortunate Asheville is to have this true master in our mist. And now, readers will get to know him too.

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I had always wondered why other artists' paintings of Charleston did not move me. Having studied yours, I realized that a more poetic synthesis was needed, something which started with eyesight but went so much farther. In any case, I just wanted to tell you how thoroughly captivated I was with your hard-and-fast poetry. You own the South as much as any native.

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(P.S: Jack. you've inspired me to finish my novel about John Sloan and Robert Henri, and one about Memphis, as well. Brett.)

Julyan Davis came to this country from England where he was, as I understand, already established. But because the imagery and folklore of the South appealed to him he stayed, and has created a body of work that should be the envy of us all. Native New Yorkers ignore the local genius, as it were, because it's been there all the time. They don't notice it, but outsiders do. And it is from them that we get "our" New York City.

For Davis, the American South started off as myth, but has become, in his hands, the hard, but poetic, reality for which most painters strive, but few actually realize. He is a case-hardened realist - by which I mean that, no matter how many small liberties he takes with the evidence ("the fact", as Edward Hopper called it), the truth that emerges from his light-filled, but conceptually rooted,

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Over the years, however, his emphatic attention has drifted (if that's the word) to such physical realities as not only anchor a mailbox to the spur of a dusty road or the foundation of a house to its native soil, but to the mythologies that permeate man-made phenomena. And in the South, every physical reality is front-loaded with myth and story. That mailbox is not just a mailbox, but might bear some heartbreaking communication somebody's overlooked for years. That hill-clinging house may have been the scene of a grisly encounter that someone sitting on a porch years later will tell to some outsider who'll formalize it into a short story.

Yet, for Davis, the physical reality is often enough. His love of architecture translates into an almost supernatural sense of the significant detail (bad word, that), which expresses the heft of the place as well as its often-sorry condition. Like all great realists, Davis is attracted to character - the character time will stamp on things that are ultimately perishable. These things are here now, he seems to say, but we must acknowledge that they won't last forever. Davis' South is haunted by what is as well as what ain't. No landscape is merely empty, no house is without its baggage, and no street is actually safe. There is a kind of paradox - and disturbing harmony - between the strange fruit of a road-bend or mountaintop and its stunning realization. It's as if Davis knows something we don't and wishes to tell us the news.

He most certainly knows a lot about painting. From a purely formal standpoint, his work is irresistible. The marvelous compression of his imagery is not "real", but a result of "putting in and taking away". He never loses sight of the essentials and embellishes them as any good storyteller would. He understands optical color, but doesn't totally rely on it. Take a photograph of something and watch its intensity fade - assuming it's not a great photograph. Davis takes his subject in hand and wrestles it to the ground. I can feel the struggle, even if the result is serenely beautiful (another bad word, but I must use it). Painters who rely on tricks of observation and showy brushwork give us the sort of wall decoration that fades when the lights are turned out - or when dinner-party guests are in excellent form and upstage all the furniture.

Davis' work, while richly textured and sometimes "quirkily" painted, compels us to sit and stare. It makes us more observant than we actually are. And it introduces us to a dimension that is both familiar and hyper-real. I'm happily uncomfortable in Davis' world, which gives me something I have never seen inside of a presumably accessible slice of reality. Davis is clearly a student of realist painting, but he doesn't need for us to know it. That could also be said of Eakins, Hopper and Andrew Wyeth. Davis' genius consists of his ability to transform reality just enough for us to see both its surface textures and its underlying menace, melancholy, brute strength or what have you. His work is about familiar things, but in his hands these things shift a bit. A kind of dimensional crack appears and we are asked to slip inside of it. Those of us who do are exponentially rewarded; those who don't have their vacation pictures.

Section 2: Excerpts from Magazine Articles about His Art

- **From a May 2011 article in *Nashville Arts Magazine*—**

Following are excerpts from the article written by Deborah Walden titled *"Julyan Davis, Southern Art":*

British artist Julyan Davis has found his home in the American South. His history with the region reads like a romance. The American South took hold of his imagination . . . Davis was so captivated by Carl Carmer's book, Alabama, that he packed up his paints and moved there . . . Davis' art has continued to grow over his two decades stateside . . . He says, "I like exploring abstract shapes and flat qualities. I try to take two extremes of what influences me and bring them together. That's how each artist finds their own unique style." . . . A technical virtuoso as a painter, he is able to anchor large regions of strong line and shape into naturalistic images. His paintings at times have a photographic quality. And sometimes his landscapes are so simplified, so boiled down, that they are like whispers or suggestions of a place. They are always beautiful, and they always seem to hint at a human presence . . . "I like faded, slightly haunted-feeling spaces," he says . . . A delightful guide, Davis traveled hallway across the world to remind the American South of its own inherent beauty.

- **From the Holiday 2007 *Garden & Gun, 21st-Century Southern America*—**

Following are excerpts from the article by Randall Curb, *"Refined Oils--British expat Julyan Davis makes his home and his art in Asheville, North Carolina": Julyan quickly established his central artistic vision of the South – and hoopskirts and honeysuckle were no part in it . . . "I've always had empathy," he says, "with the constrained characters of old ballads, and in a way my empty landscapes are haunted by such ghosts . . . "It's about that pull created between the beauty I see in the color, light, and pattern of something, and the objective fact that it would be considered by many to be negligible or even ugly" . . . I was astonished by the range of styles in which he was proficient . . . Moving inexorably but never reflexively from classical realism in landscapes, still life, and the occasional portrait, to a freer, ore personally gratifying technique has been Julyan's real education as an artist . . . Julyan is an astute and imaginative colorist . . . "I want a painting to look like a painting," he says . . . Asheville seems a perfect fit for Julyan. It's surrounded by 'deep Southernness', with inherent old traditions and values. "But it's also," he says," an oasis from some of those past values. There are many 'refugees' from the rest of the South here – people who didn't fit back in Georgia or Tennessee, who bring much energy to a less judgmental future and yet have an attractive affection for the homes and life left behind" . . . Then the challenge in his words is "finding a new way to capture a familiar effect, a new kind of mark, say one that is both ugly and beautiful, or that conveys only paint at one moment and the world observed at the next. This is what keeps me going."*

- **From Volume 23 May 2011 *Legends Magazine*—**

Following are excerpts from the article in *Legends Magazine: 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*

juxtaposition. It helps to find a seemingly insurmountable problem. In my case, I suppose I'm trying to marry Turner and Cezanne. I can't give up the luminosity and mystery of the 19th-century landscapists, but I love the flatness and sculptural solidarity of Modernism. I want my cake and eat it too. French painter Pierre Bonard 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.

- **From the article 'Uncommon Ground' by Alli Marshall *Our State*, June 2009—**

Excerpts follow sub-head 'Asheville Painter Julyan Davis lends a fresh eye to the landscapes of the South':

At first glance, Julyan Davis's work could be described as photorealism. From across the room his Southern-themed canvases look more like sun-drenched photographs than paintings. But Davis believes his work defies that description. "Maybe from a distance it's very realistic, but as you get close up it falls into blocks of color and very definite lines," he says. Look closely at 'Washerteria' and the realistic effect gives way to a Cubist-inspired flattening of planes. The same is true for many of Davis's paintings: saturated slices of Americana - a motel sign, a Laundromat, a motor court pool in winter – reveal an eerie beauty. "It's not that I go around looking for Americana," he says. But in many ways, Americana found him.

- **A brief about Notable Julyan Davis—**

Julyan Davis is an English-born artist who moved to the United States more than two decades ago and now lives in the Montford District of Asheville, North Carolina.

He received his art training at the Byam shaw School of Art in London. After completing his B.A. in painting and printmaking, he traveled to the American South on a painting trip that was also fueled by an interest in the history of Demopolis, Alabama and its settling by Bonapartist exiles.

His work is exhibited from New York to Europe, and is in many public and private art collections. Recent acquisitions include from the Greenville County Museum of Art where his work was shown solo then exhibited along with work by Andrew Wyeth and Jasper Johns. Others include the Gibbes Museum in Charleston, South Carolina, the Morris Museum in Augusta, Georgia, and the North Carolina Governor's Museum and Western Residence.

Julyan's Greenville Museum show in May 2012 will feature work based on his interpretation of traditional American ballads throughout the contemporary South.

Notable—Davis

Section 3: Julyan's Life Journey, in His Own Words

I arrive in the Montford District of Asheville at the quaint historic home of artist Julyan Davis and meet a much younger British Southern art painter than expected. Julyan, who turned 46 last year, on September 11th of 2011, guides me into a dimly-lit dining room filled with many of his impressive paintings. We engage in friendly conversation before diving into his life and career for this book of Notable biographies. But first the Brit serves tea, of course.

Julyan, I'd like to start the interview by asking about your very first memory?

My first memory, gosh, that is a tricky question. I recall at age four or five being in a Spanish restaurant in London. Wherever we went, my parents took pen and paper for me, and I remember doing a drawing of a Flamenco guitarist who was performing.

- **Early Thoughts about an Art Career—**

When did the desire to become a professional artist begin to emerge?

I was definitely one of these artists who picked up a pen very early on, or a pencil, or whatever. I think it was sort of known from the get-go that I was going to be an artist.

I always thought of myself as being academically quite studious as a young boy, but I realize now that I was a bit more of a hellion than I originally thought.

I preferred art, but I was not too strong in the sciences, or very interested in mathematics. I remember my parents, when I was about nine, had to take me out of school because I was one of a small group of troublemakers who were playing truant and generally causing mischief. They put me into a Jesuit boarding school to shape me up, which it did, and effectively. I became much more successful as a student, generally, but through it all, art was always my strong point. And English.

Where did you live?

All through my childhood we moved around a good bit. My mother used to renovate houses, and my father was a barrister, a lawyer in London. My mother is still alive, her name is Suzy Davis, and my late father was Timothy.

I was born at my grandparent's home. They owned and ran a little prep school in the southwest of England (the school closed the year after I was born, but they kept the property) and I developed strong ties to that part of the country. We often visited them in Somerset, near Cornwall. The one place that stayed the same was where my grandparents lived.

What came next?

My father took a job as a magistrate in Hong Kong during the last two years of my high school, and we all went out there. The English system narrows the focus of your education, and you take many exams in many subjects by the age of sixteen, and then three subjects for the last two years of high school. My choices, in Hong Kong, were in history, English and art.

- **A lesson from rejection—**

How big a lesson was it?

It was a big lesson in dealing with rejection. I took the exam a second time and got an A, but the previous experience still rankled me. On top of that, I had great trouble getting into a foundation course. I tried three or four places but they all rejected me; but I managed to find a place at the last minute. That course lasted a year.

In the same way, I had several choices for colleges for my degree, but was rejected by them all. Two art schools in London, one in Cornwall and one in the cold, wintery north of England. They all said, "Not interested".

The lesson was excellent preparation for when I left art school. I had to either accept that those people were right, I was not qualified, or choose to disagree and just believe in myself. To have learned this early proved invaluable, I have known many artists who struggled with rejection throughout their careers. After that, I was never rankled by rejection.

Did they give you an analysis of why they rejected you?

They probably did give me an analysis, I don't really recall. I will say in retrospect that they may have been right! I don't know if my work was that strong.

So, you felt there were elements of correctness in their evaluation?

Well yeah, absolutely. When I am teaching, I often tell students that I got pieces of good advice but ignored them. I just decided that I was going to be an artist, and that there was no option to not to be an artist.

Julyan, every artist and writer struggles, especially at the beginning of their careers.

There is a common bond between successful people who have gone through that and come out better for it, not worse. I know exactly what you are implying with your question: that every writer or artist struggles until they become a success.

- **Influenced by Music—**

What were some of the major influences on you as a child?

My father was an avid 'Americanophile' with a great interest in folk music, so I grew up listening to as much American folk music as Scottish and Irish folk music. This influenced my painting, particularly here in the South.

Did you have favorite music during your childhood?

Well, the earliest stuff was by people like Burl Ives, *The Wayfaring Stranger* and all the other albums he did.

I met Burl Ives and told him he was my favorite singer when I was a kid growing up in Brooklyn, and that his song about a dog always made me teary.

Old Blue, oh yeah, that is a very sad song.

- **Reading and Writing—**

I understand that your father was also a writer, and that you have writing in your veins.

My father actually considered joining a law firm in Santa Fe, but he never got to move to the States. He was leaning towards moving to the American west, so I grew up with that idea, and I guess that led to my interest in Southern literature. *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee was required reading in high school back then, and that book got me interested in Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor and that whole lot of writers.

Later we went on a trip to the States to the Grand Canyon and hiked all around Utah and Arizona, and that certainly made an impression on me. That trip came after I finished art school in Bristol, and at that time my father was an established crime fiction writer. I have his books over there, *Kid Glove Charlie ,The Gentleman from Chicago, The Cook General.*

His real name was Timothy Francis Davis, but he wrote under the name John Cashman, who was a notorious nineteenth century forger.

When did he write the books?

He wrote them during his thirties, from the 1970's into the early 1980's. They were fictional novels based on real-life Victorian criminals. *The Gentleman from Chicago* was based on a poisoner who started in London and moved to Chicago, and some people think he may have been 'Jack the Ripper'. *The Cook General* is a famous case of a maid who murdered the lady she was working for, rather gruesome. *Kid Glove Charlie* was about a fabulous character, Charles Peace, a fearless burglar who even went to Scotland Yard dressed as a woman to give misleading evidence against himself.

What came next in your pursuit of art, and are you also writing?

I had attended the Byam Shaw School of Art in London for three years and received a degree in fine art and printmaking. The school no longer exists. It has been incorporated into the University of London. When I came out of the art school I tried my hand at being an artist.

At the same time, this was in 1987, I had found an original copy from the thirties of Carl Carmer's book *Stars Fell in Alabama*. It made me think about doing some writing. I saved enough money to travel to Alabama, via the New York Public Library and the Library of Congress for research, and began playing at being a writer. I had no firm idea, it was just sort of just an image, you know. For me, that period of time was romantic and had a comic aspect to it. That is how I was drawn to the South.

I'm currently working on a couple of books, one a sort of reflection upon the South and my career as an artist here, the other a comic novel set here in Asheville.

- **Living in an art and cultural community—**

You own this house that you've been living in for six years in a very quaint section of Asheville, which is well-known as an art and cultural community. Tell me the history of why you picked this house.

I had been living near Highlands in Scaly Mountain, North Carolina, and that was wonderful but very secluded. I would come up to Asheville a lot, and so I decided to get a condo here.

started looking around. I stumbled upon this house which was larger than I wanted. But the decision was really made for me when I discovered that the previous owner was Peggy Seeger, half-sister to Pete Seeger. Her parents had been very influential collectors of folk music, and she had known folks like the Lomaxes, Woody Guthrie, Josh White and Leadbelly. I was familiar with Peggy's career. She had lived in England for many years, and had been married to the Scottish folk singer and song writer Ewan MacColl, who wrote *The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face* for her.

You light up when you speak about Pete Seeger.

Yes, I recently read an interesting article about Pete Seeger in *The New Yorker* magazine that mentioned he lived out in the woods, and there wasn't a single stick around the place, as he would collect all the kindling for firewood. It made me remember when I lived in Scaly Mountain and had that same kind of self-sufficient lifestyle.

- **Teaching and helping—**

Switching gears, you said you taught art, and taught an apprentice for a year. Tell me more.

Teaching has been very intermittent for me, and I've never done it large-scale for financial reasons. It is very cost-ineffective, unless you take it on full-time. I don't have the full qualifications to teach at the university level because they require a Master's Degree now.

Do you help youngér struggling artists?

I've done that, and one particular case especially appealed to me when I was living between Highlands and Asheville. There was this little frame shop in Franklin that did all of my framing, and they were showing work by a very talented young artist in his last year in high school who I took interest in and helped. He was my apprentice for a year. Unfortunately he learned that at least some galleries are unnerved by a lack of the expected qualifications. Based on his work, they were all ready to take him on until they discovered his age and lack of an official degree. Then they lost their nerve. He is now in art school, but at least not an overpriced one. We stay in touch. He is a great young man.

I have a couple of folks I teach periodically now. The first to approach me was the terrific blues singer, Chuck Beattie. He brought a portrait he was working on to show me, and I chatted with him about approaches he could take. We have become fast friends since. The second is a man half his age, Sandusky Parris, a part-time student. He and I were asked to paint at a charity event. Sandusky liked what I did and took me up on an invitation to drop by the studio anytime. We also have become good friends.

Both these folks are enthusiastic and interested, and often act like my guardian angels. Chuck paints for pleasure, Sandusky would make more of it. His fairly remarkable achievements for a thirty-two-year-old suggest to me that he is close to being able to support his art. Both gents kindly pay their way at the odd lunch, or in Sandusky's case, fixing pretty much any mechanical obstacle that strays into my path!

- **Similar landscapes—**

I am struck by the similarity of the landscape in England and in the American South.

Tell me about your studio.

The studio suffices for now as a space, and I am still teaching and offering advice to local artists. It is currently filling up with my paintings scheduled for the Greenville Museum in May 2012.

- **Techniques and subjects—**

How would you describe your technique, and what subjects do you produce on canvas now?

Right now I am painting mainly urban, lived-in places. The majority of paintings are of buildings, and recently a lot of interiors or of some human presence, and set in the South and in the Southeast.

All of that work has a sort of haunted presence, a sense of something having taken place, a kind of narrative going on, a mood.

I am no art critic, but I said basically that same thing to my wife last night.

Parallel to that my work explores the music that first influenced me, as I mentioned earlier. In art school my work was about folk music, sea shanties, mainly.

In the last three years I have come back to painting the figure. I have two current bodies of work: the empty places and the narrative paintings based on the music.

How would you describe your evolution as an artist and your artwork?

I really labor to make sure a painting is definitely seen as a painting. My work has been described as looking very realistic from a distance, but up-close as very abstract.

I love all forms of painting. I began by learning all the traditional techniques, and I've done abstract, expressionist and photo-realistic paintings.

You are considered a prolific artist, Julyan. How many paintings have produced professionally, how many are in galleries, and how many have you sold, ballpark?

I have done perhaps 1500 paintings total during my career, I've sold nearly all of those. At the moment my work is represented in galleries in London, Charleston, Atlanta, Nashville, Morehead City, two in Maine, and one here in Asheville.

Where are the Maine galleries?

In Stonington, on Deer Isle, and in Portland.

- **Influences of other artists—**

What twentieth-century artists do you admire?

That is a good question. There are a a great many painters I like, rather than particular works that have altered my path. It is their approach and the way they have chosen to work that I find influential. I like Francis Bacon, Balthus, Matisse, Bonnavld, even De Kooning

What painters are you closest to in the history of art?

I studied your realistic painting of a living room and wondered if you put a certain curve on the lampshade to show it was a painting and not a photo.

Yes, absolutely.

The one thing in writing as well as in painting is to have a tension between all manner of things. You can have a beautiful subject that is painted in a very ugly fashion, and that is a very interesting tension; and you can have an ugly thing painted very exquisitely, and that is another kind of tension.

In all of this there is like a push-pull between old and new painting all the time, so inch-to-inch you go between twentieth-century and nineteenth-century painting, and that is what I work towards.

Subject matter determines the technique, so mine has always been to see how far I can go, and that is my work.

- **Other influential artists—**

Who are the artists that influenced you the most, and who do you admire the most both past and present?

It would be Velazquez first. When you step up to his work, it dissolves into pure paint. Rembrandt is the painter I should put probably first, he covered everything as a great draftsman, a great landscape painter, a great figure painter, a great portrait painter. He painted every aspect of his life, and in so many media, like print-making, painting, drawing, everything, but for some reason he remains a close second for me.

Bonnard is a favorite, one of the latter post-impressionist painters. I love his color.

Now, what contemporary artists do you like, or perhaps emulate?

I don't really watch many contemporary painters in that way. I try in a way not to study them too closely. But I do follow writers, and it's funny that you should ask me that question about contemporary artists. That was a very big thing when I was in art school, and particularly now. They say to go to every exhibition of every artist, but I think it can stop you from exploring things.

I understand you are going to have a show in May 2012 at the Greenville County Museum of Art in South Carolina. That museum has a large collection of Andrew Wyeths. How do you judge him as an artist?

A lot of the art world looks down on Andrew Wyeth; they think he is a bit too sentimental. I went to the museum on the Olson Farm where he painted up in Maine, and that is when I realized that Wyeth had been a really big influence on me when I was a teenager. I just hadn't thought about it before; hadn't made that connection.

But Wyeth was the only painter I'd ever looked at who did sort of deteriorated rooms, and interiors. And I was interested in that even before art school. I'd done paintings of my grandparent's school which was falling down, and so that is where the interiors come from, and from that Wyeth influence. I am very pleased they are hanging my show alongside their huge Wyeth collection.

There are no insufficient answers to that question; a connection to the universe is a personal feeling or experience.

Okay, I will answer in terms of my life at this point. I certainly feel that I've lived an immensely fortunate life and am fulfilled. I feel if I was told tomorrow that I had some terminal illness that I've achieved quite enough. When I was young I wanted all kinds of accolades from certain places, but not when I became a true artist. I feel I have found my place in the world, in the universe.

- **Facing adversity—**

You said you feel fortunate. Expand on that a bit.

I feel lucky, as though my life has been remarkable. I also feel that the difficult things have all been necessary parts of my life.

All those up and down experiences chiseled and forged you into the man you are now, right?

Yes, yes! I have made mistakes in my life, and there are things I regret, but it is important to keep trying to improve oneself.

You've accomplished a great deal for someone in his mid-forties, though maybe not all you wanted to.

I agree on both counts. There's certainly room for improvement.

- **Giving Back—**

What is your attitude about giving back to the community, and to society?

A lot of people tend to put artists on some kind of moral pedestal, particularly if they suffered for their art. I don't. There is nothing morally wrong with inflicting your opinions upon the world, but rarely is there anything morally courageous about it.

There may have been a time when a painter could risk his life with the subject of a painting, but not anymore, at least not in the Western World. If an artist suffers, it is their choice to do so.

These thoughts have always bothered me. A lot of artists feel guilt for being in such an ephemeral craft. What use are we in the real world? How are we contributing other than by producing a luxury? Expensive, flat, furniture, in my case! We artists are always being asked to donate paintings to auctions for good causes, and we almost always do. There are no tax benefits other than the value of the materials, but the gesture is not as grand as it might seem, as we might give away an old set-aside painting or something like that.

What I do consider an accomplishment came about when I moved to America and was introduced to the concept of tithing- to give away ten-percent of one's yearly income. This became a tradition- checks were written each Christmas morning, not for religious organizations, but for varied charities. Doctors without Borders and the Carter Center received the lion's share. At the time, because I was earning a lot, it did not seem a hardship, more a pleasure. Only now, when times are much harder, does it seem an achievement and something to hold on to.

President Jimmy Carter to my ex-wife Madeleine and I. They are prized possessions. I can only strive to be able to affect others at that level again. It is the most important lesson I can teach my son.

Most if not all of your twelve notables, Jack, are driven folk. It seems we have all learned that philanthropy is sweet absolution for our greedy obsession with self-advancement.

- **The spiritual Julyan—**

Do you consider yourself a spiritual person?

On the spiritual or bigger picture of life, I was raised Catholic but am definitely a lapsed Catholic, and I have not been to church for many years. But now that I have a young child, I am very much aware of trying to give him some sense of meaning of the bigger picture. And I am very aware that religion gives you, particularly at an earlier age, the gift of faith.

The greatest gift of religion is that it allows you to be agnostic. If you have no religion from day one, you are never given that luxury. You have to know faith to doubt it, or to say "I don't know." As for atheism, you are born with that. I don't really want my son to grow up with no kind of religion.

I was writing an essay about all that when a friend of mine showed me a sign he had picked up on the side of the road in Alabama, a piece of classic folk art that read "Gob is goob". The person who made the sign had accidently reversed the two d's.

Now I think that the saying "Gob is goob" is kind of my religion.

I don't really believe in an afterlife, or that God is going to step in and help you, but I absolutely believe in those aspects of mankind that are supernatural, and in goodness.

Sounds like you've thought a lot about this subject.

Yes, I have. There was a spiritual response provoked by the threat of Darwinism. It said something like, "I'll take everything you are saying into consideration, but there are three things you are not covering about man."

If I am remembering correctly, the argument referred to design, which is man's creative ability to create- in architecture, art, writing; and the second was to the scientific mind- the capacity to think in terms of mathematics and physics and such abstract subjects. The last was our unnatural (according to Darwin's view of nature) capacity to give selfless love, to give to something outside your family, or to die for a total stranger, that kind of thing.

- **Work ethic—**

You must possess a strong work ethic to have produced so many paintings by age forty-five. How much of a work day do you put in these days?

I paint about six to seven hours a day now, but I used to do a great deal more. I've been putting a lot of focus into it, and it seems stronger than ever, which is good, and now I can work more quickly.

I was working very long hours when I was doing very detailed, almost photographic realism. So things have gotten lighter work-wise in that respect, which as how it should be.

Do you ever wake up in the middle of the night and head for your easel, sort of like I do with writing?

No I don't, but that is a good question. I am someone who tries to always paint by natural light. It was a problem finding a studio in Asheville with enough natural light.

- **'Art-speak' explanations—**

Explain In 'art-speak' why your work is stronger now, and why natural light is so important to an artist.

Well, in terms of the work being stronger, I mean I am not having to labor over things as much, I am far quicker at finding my subjects, and a lot of my subject matter is really gaining respect in the world of art: And I push myself in terms of trying to do work that is unlike anything out there region.

A lot of artists work by electric light, and many do not demand as much light as I do. But if you do a painting by electric light at night when you look at it in daylight it can be a very unpleasant shock.

Also, a painting could be hung in a stairwell or next to a large window, so I figure if it looks good in direct sunlight, it will look good everywhere.

Does painting in natural light allow you to give a more realistic portrayal of your subject?

Not particularly, it is really just the quality of the colors. If you paint under electric light, that yellow light will affect all of the colors when they are seen in natural light, which is a bluer light.

How is the appreciation of your work within the community of artists manifesting itself?

Just two days ago I got a very nice email from an established artist who said he was looking at the Charleston gallery website and saw my work, then proceeded to go to all my websites. He actually said he should put his brushes away, which he meant as a compliment, and he also said that I seem to leave no stone unturned. Then he assured me that I was a more Southern painter than any Southerner he knew of.

His critique must have buoyed your spirits.

It did. Although it came at a time where I feel my work is getting a lot of critical notice and the value in it has gone up, this is still a dificult economy and words like this are a great help.

Explain what's going on with your work now.

The work is selling at good prices, but only in a few, strong markets. The regional art market generally consists of middle-class buyers rather than the wealthiest collectors, and therefore, with this economy, the buying public has diminished.

- **His own worst critic—**

Are you your own worst critic?

I think I am my most critical critic, yes.

On my blog I wrote a thing about how to effectively destroy a painting when it is beyond salvage and only tying up your time. I wrote that you must not kick it, or punch it because canvas is quite resilient and

You have a unique perspective. For example, you've said that awards and prizes are unimportant, but now as you enter your middle years, the end of your beginning years, however you label them, acceptance means more. Right?

Not more, no, less. But it is still important. So is a sense of humor. For example, I was painting with two guys on the Outer Banks recently, and sharing jokes and funny stories about the nuts and bolts of the business. I told a story. An artist asked me "Where do you show in .....?" I replied, "I show at ACS Gallery." "Oh, yeah? I haven't heard of it. What does ACS stand for?" "Air Conditioned Storage."

And a lot of dark humor, too. Our favorite question from Sunday painters attending workshops, "Mr. Davis, what kind of pliers do you recommend for opening tubes of paint that have dried shut."

What discourages you?

The number one discouraging thing at the moment for me is that art has gotten rather dumbed down. The galleries enjoyed a boom through the nineties and got lackadaisical about educating the public.

Many artists also got lazy, and the quality of their work dropped off, pretty much because anything they painted got sold. There needs to be a level of competition for art to be of high quality.

The galleries could sell anything then, so an awful lot of Sunday painters joined galleries that said, "Come aboard." And that became a very big bone of contention with professional artists.

So, art purchasers were then less discerning and relatively uneducated about how to judge what was the better art.

Exactly, and that is very discouraging to my peers and myself. Now many galleries are in this position where they have access to good art, but they don't really have the tools to sell it.

Are you saying that some of the people selling art don't understand it themselves?

Oh they get it, but they are not comfortable saying "This painting is an investment" or that "This artist is better than that artist." One of the reasons I recently had to raise my prices, was simply to draw attention to my experience and achievements compared to new, younger artists. My peers tell me my prices are still too low for where I am in my career.

- **Overcoming negatives—**

So, you are overcoming the negatives through self-promotion, raising prices and therefore perceived value, and elevating your reputation via museum showings.

That is all true and very well put. In that respect for instance, the work I am doing now is better than ever because I realize I've got to paint completely unique things that almost force people to look, that draws people's attention, that requires the gallery to explain it, and to an extent that justifies the new pricing.

Where are you now in technique and choice of subject matter?

I started focusing on interiors and it seems people are responding, so that is basically what has become a large part of where I am heading subject-wise.

My work, as I said, started off as very traditional, but part of it was modernist, inspired by the post-

What came next for you?

I had this second body of work, and that played quite an important part in my career.

I don't know if this story should be in the book but it is interesting as an overview. I was doing a crazy amount of work painting seven days a week producing sort of nineteenth-century type landscape paintings, big, heroic canvases showing Maine and the landscapes of Western North Carolina and parts of the south.

It was a lot of work, but they were priced reasonably and sold as fast as I could paint them. They allowed me to keep experimenting at home.

I had a big show at a gallery that had always sold well. The owner told a local paper that my kind of art paid for them to show the real art exhibited upstairs. They published this negative quote. That was enough for me.

The next year they gave me another one-man show, and I gave them all of the work I had done for myself of the same subject matter, but this time it was very brightly colored expressionist paintings. The public was not amused. It was sort of like when Bob Dylan switched to an electric guitar. It was not popular.

But that was something I had to do as an artist, and it totally revitalized my work. Financially it was a big blow, as I had made 150,000 dollars the year before but that year made only a third of that amount.

Because I had changed my work across the board, and every gallery received the new work, a number of galleries said, "You know this is not what we want, but we prefer your older paintings."

Do you take a lot of risks like that?

Artists take risks, unintentional or not! There is mythology in art that artists always start traditionally then loosen up. Well, they do loosen up, but that is just a pleasant side effect of ageing!

- **Painterly realism—**

How would you respond to a critic asking "What word or phrase would describe your work?"

I would say my work is 'painterly realism'.

In other words it looks realistic.

That is what I would call it, realistic, but 'painterly' is the art-speak term I would use. It is important to get that clear, so let me put it another way. Some people say my paintings look photographic at a distance.

Most artists hate the word photographic, but that is the best word because at a distance they do look photographic. But when you get close, they dissolve into abstract paintings, and that is really the best definition of painterly realism.

It works on a double level, and that is what satisfies a painterly painter who wants this strange double thing going on when you look at the painting. It could look like a distant hill, and at the same time like two pieces of paint laid over each other.

towards the sort of work that I first painted when I came to America, of overlooked, abandoned places. That has been the main direction in my work, but my art does reflect my life, too.

I don't how this is going to market, but I am enjoying working on a smaller scale just doing pure landscapes in places like Maine and South Carolina, and from my recent trip to Kiawah. This is all being done on a small level, very painterly, almost abstract.

Does that fill a part of your inner sense of you want to be alone, to be private, to be sequestered?

I have certain landscapes I visit often. They show no sign of man and they give me that sense of peace. There's a tiny island I have painted again and again up in Maine. On my last trip Finn's (my son) mother suggested we paddle over to it. — She was always very good at pushing me to try new things. The interior of the island was littered with shells, old lobster shells, all manner of things dropped by seagulls, all this below the trees shrouded in moss. It was a magical place. I did several quite abstract paintings based just on the memory of this.

- **Confidence going forward—**

Are you confident about your art career in the future?

I think I have confidence in my art, and that probably helps me with rejection and those sorts of things; but finding new ideas and handling problems is one area where I am unfailingly confident.

That aspect of your nature probably helps you accept critique.

That is so true.

Thanks for being so forthright. The goal is to portray the inner essence of each Notable, including Julyan Davis.

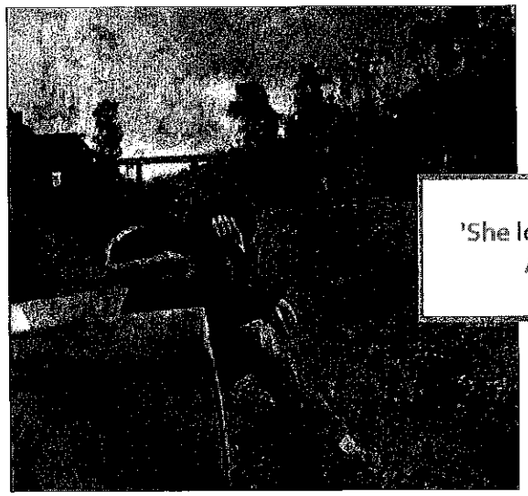
This has been very interesting for me because so many changes have happened in my life in what seems like a short time, but this project of yours has caused me to stand back and take stock of my life and career.

After a long period of financial success I am now just like every artist who faces the trials of this economy. But I also am able to begin another chapter in my career as an artist, and I feel better than I have in years about my work and where it can go.

So, after all is said and done, things are looking up for you.

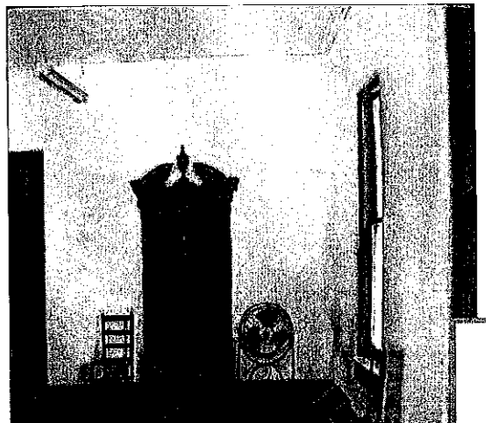
Yes, I really believe they are.

Section 4: **Photos of Julyan Davis' Paintings**



'She looked east, she looked west' (Barbara Allen) Oil on canvas 36x38" 2012

Shady Grove Oil on carved Oak 2002. The traditional music of the Appalachians provided Davis with an emotional tie to the landscape of WNC



Bank Interior, Newbern 2003
Oil on canvas 30x24"