

James Shay

Artist's Statement

My paintings depicting western American landscapes use simple shapes, forms and strong color. They represent some of the sensuality within our natural world and contain memories of California's oak-studded hills and valleys. I like a high level of abstraction, and I love color.

I want the paintings to have a strong memory of time. To achieve this, I scrape and sand their surfaces with razor blades and sandpaper, so that the materiality of the paint and the scraped marks suggest time's passage. Before I finish a painting, it has evolved through many forms within its layers. In effect, the act of scraping and sanding back the surface of a work to its earlier stages creates a type of unique visual richness; earlier layers are resurrected and become visible either directly or as shadows within the final work. I paint with casein, one of the oldest painting mediums in existence. Casein helps create a fresco-like quality to the paintings' finishes.

The paintings are mounted on archival wood panels. Their solid structure ensures the longevity of the work. Painters, conservators, curators and other art professionals recognize that a painting mounted archivally on a panel support will last much longer and is safer from damage than a painting without a panel backing.

In architecture, a career I practiced steadily for twenty-five years, I seldom, if ever, got dirty hands. The visceral world of painting is much more physical and sensual, and naturally involves more color.

An office is generally a clean place where one's ideas can travel at the speed of light on computers and printers. A painter's studio is a bit more like a cave, filled with drips, smears and visual chaos. I like the cave.