

The Seven Pearls

**An Interview with Tom Bluemlein,
Painter, Fort Mitchell, Kentucky**

EDITORS' NOTE *After graduating from the Central Academy of Commercial Art in 1969, Tom Bluemlein went on to study painting with several masters – in particular, John Pike of Woodstock, New York. His career as a Design Consultant and Fine Artist spans 37 years. A native Kentuckian who has spent considerable time in art-rich Santa Fe, New Mexico, Bluemlein is a member of the Salmagundi Club in New York, the Cincinnati Art Club, the Ohio and Kentucky Watercolor Society, and Oil Painters of America.*



Tom Bluemlein

How has your work evolved over the past few years? How do you define your art?

Over the last five years, I've been embracing the traditional academic approach to oil painting that was most practiced by the great Impressionists. I'm finding myself working outdoors more often – working from life rather than cramped in the studio. About five years ago, a master painter introduced me to the concept of “the seven foundational truths.” Some people refer to them as the “seven pearls.” They are seven things, such as a really nice light source, that are consistently found in every wonderful painting. So I've embraced the knowledge and the magic of the masters. Look at Sargent, Homer, and Monet: Those guys really knew what they were doing, and they left us contemporary artists with a starting point.

What type of subjects have you been painting lately?

I just returned from an exciting trip to Glacier National Park, where I painted the mountains. I'm also getting into a bit of figurative work. I just finished a painting of some human figures in a boat on a lake; it has a very turn-of-the-century feel. I just finished a French collection – about 30 paintings that were a result of a trip to the Loire Valley that I took last October. For three weeks, I painted while staying in an 11th-century chateau. It was beautiful. I



was with a group of six other painters, and we painted together every day for about a week, and then I went off on my own. I spent time in Paris, on the Normandy coast, and in southern France, and put together a beautiful collection.

We just debuted it last week in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, at the Horizon Fine Art Gallery.

How do you choose your subjects?

There's a golden rule of painting: Only paint what interests you. A lot of people have a lot of different interests, but usually, at one time, you'll be thinking about one particular thing. So I'll do several paintings of, say, boats on the water – maybe three or four in a row – and then I'll switch to another subject. I'll start painting pure landscapes or forest scenes. I really love to paint the streambeds in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Blue Ridge Mountains. I've done a lot of work there. I have galleries in North Carolina and in South Carolina that sell my work. I find the hills inspiring – the cascading water, the rocks, the hemlock trees, the light streaming from above. It's heavenly.

Water seems to play a large role in your work.

Water is a metaphor, I think. If you want to be happy in life, row, row, row your boat gently down the stream. I always try to keep another thought in mind: Don't push the river; the river does just fine on its own. The flow of water is significant. When I'm working on a painting, I often get so deeply enmeshed in it that it's like I am not physically there anymore. I call that “flow time,” because it reminds me of the flow of water. Painting water is a very calming thing. It's dreamy, and it does something to you. It's nice to be around water, to be there on location and be painting it. It's a win-win situation. It's great.

At one point in your career, you were best known for your portraits and for your paintings of special occasions – what you called “legacy art.” Are you still producing those types of work?

I do it on a very limited basis, because it's so personal and so important that, if I did a lot of that kind of work, I wouldn't have time to do outdoor work and the other things that have allowed me to grow as an artist. A lot of research and emotional effort is required to pull off legacy art. You really have to tune in to people on a deep level to paint one of these things. So I'm very careful about whom I even accept as a client, because you have to have good energy flowing both ways. So I will only take on a limited number of legacy paintings per year.

Are there certain pieces that are too precious to you personally to sell?

There are a few. Occasionally, my wife and I decide that a piece will become part of our estate collection – our legacy to hand down to our children.

Did you always know you would be an artist?

I had a very difficult time in school. It wasn't until I was 30 years old that I was diagnosed as dyslexic. Because of my reading disorder, I consistently fell behind in school, but in eighth or ninth grade, I found that art brought me so much joy. It didn't require the same skills as reading, and I started doing more and more of it. People encouraged me and it built my self-esteem. Now I can't imagine not being an artist. Is it anxiety free? No. There's always a little discomfort of some sort when you start a project. But once you get into it, you hit flow time and you're fine. ●

Day's End by Tom Bluemlein