

Randall David Tipton: Rendering Emotion in the Non-Traditional Landscape

by Luke Fannin

Regarding any artistic endeavor, be it photography or literature or painting, to speak of an artist's intention or ability to "capture" something — a moment in time, the truth, reality, the essence of ... anything — is, at the very least, borderline cliché. Not merely because it is an overused, wrung-out metaphor, but because it quite often simply doesn't seem true. A failed work of art obviously doesn't capture anything besides generalities or falseness. But then to say the opposite of a successful work of art just isn't enough. It implies there is something of the thief in the artist and her work, and though perhaps not all would object to such a comparison, it doesn't do justice to the honesty, patience, and deep introspection required for such an achievement. But every so often we come across an artist like Oregon landscape painter Randall David Tipton, whose work invites us to set down the overlaid baggage that is our default method of experiencing and talking about art, and to simply start fresh.

Mr. Tipton's thoughtful, deeply layered works evidence an introspective and intensely analytical approach to painting. "It behooves the painter to look inward and say, why do I want to paint this" he explains. "I spend a lot of time just observing. I can be compelled by a landscape and not immediately know why, so I have to take the time to figure that out. When I know, I can begin." Of course, it's never that simple. Conception and execution are two vastly different things, and even when both are perfect — well, something just happens. "One of my teachers told me: I can't paint what I want. I can only paint what I would have wanted had I thought of it first," Mr. Tipton recalls. "It's really true. My technique can be pretty sloppy to begin, but then I refine again and again. In that process, every painting changes fundamentally from what I thought it was going to be... There's a lot of that in my work, a kind of groping. But it's intentional groping — knowing I'm not necessarily going to get what I saw or what's in my mind, but knowing I'll recognize what I need when it's there."

Part of this process produces the abstract elements that highlight Mr. Tipton's work: bright splashes of color, distorted perception, contrasting brushstrokes and levels of detail — all so suggestive of flagrant, unbridled emotion, a direct transfer of his experience from brush to canvas. It seems a stark contradiction to his measured, thoughtful approach, but it's all part of the process. "Sometimes, to get any kind of emotional content, you have to distort it," he says. "I like to have a lot to look at, dwell on. I know I've succeeded when there are several places that draw the eye and demand your attention. I want paintings to be dense. I want you to be able to read it at a glance, but then it makes you come back again and again."

The effect is manifold: we experience the painting not merely as a captured emotional response, but as a development, a detailed rendering of nature's ephemeral qualities pressed up against our own. In the grip of Mr. Tipton's work, we are changelings, subject to any one of a painting's rich multitude of layers and the profound emotional potential we feel in each.