

Richard Sheehan: painting scenes of cities, fields

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Richard Sheehan of Milton is not your run-of-palate landscape painter. Since the days when Corot initiated outdoor painting, landscape artists have flocked to the fields to paint soft rolling hills, grazing sheep, and gentlemen farmers in distant pastures.

Sheehan, however, breaks tradition. While classifying himself as a landscape artist, he paints cityscapes more often than country fields.

Sheehan developed his affinity for urban settings while growing up in the asphalt-paved landscape of Dorchester. Urban alleyways, cluttered sidewalks and rusting city scenes are to Sheehan what blazing haystacks, spangled lilies and pastoral scenes were to Monet. Still, the two have something in common. Their approach to art.

Like the man who influenced him greatly — Monet — Sheehan paints with an impressionist's glimpse of beauty and nature. He favors the early Monet, a period when the artist painted in sheets of color to produce

spatial relationships. Similarly, Sheehan arranges colors to give depth, vitality and light perspectives in his work.

Sheehan, who started off as a cartoonist, is a purebred Boston artist who now lives in Milton. He painted still lifes for years and while he attended classes at Massachusetts College of Art. Sheehan switched to landscape work when he went to Yale for a master's degree. Realizing that the studio painting was giving him claustrophobia, Sheehan moved outdoors.

"The transition to landscape painting was more exciting than different. It was a change to something radically new for me, but more importantly it brought excitement. I was relieved to be outdoors," said Sheehan.

Finding fresh air and new energy outside the studio Sheehan made steps of progress which soon cashed in. When Sheehan graduated from Yale, Allan Fink, director of Boston's Alpha Gallery, invited him to show in Alpha's annual New Artists Show. "Allan has always been interested in young painters, and it was a nice

honor and real break to be associated with a gallery so soon after graduation," said Sheehan.

Sheehan sold almost all his paintings during the show. Not a bad start. The Alpha Gallery now has exclusive rights to show Sheehan works.

No doubt it was the right gallery for the right man. Only two years later, Sheehan met his future bride in the same gallery. She was Leslie Foss, the gallery's new assistant director. Sheehan and Foss were married two days after Christmas a year later. At the same time, a San Francisco gallery owner visiting Boston read an article in the Boston Globe Magazine. The article, coincidentally published on Sheehan's wedding day, portrayed the

young artist and his latest paintings.

The gallery owner, Jeremy Stone, decided to invite Sheehan to put on a one-man show in San Francisco this fall. "I couldn't have ordered a better birthday present myself," said Sheehan.

Since his days at the Massachusetts College of Art, Sheehan has hopped from apartment to apartment, moving each time his painting revenue afforded him better quarters. He is not one to lead the bohemian life. Privacy, poverty, and solitude are not for him.

"Some people want to play out the artist's life. I just want all the things everyone else wants. I just want to get them by being an artist," said Sheehan.

Unfortunately, there is no steady paycheck in Sheehan's trade. "It's like show biz. People have to like the way you are performing in order for you to make a living," said Sheehan.

Apparently, people like Sheehan's performances; both gallery owners and art collectors are moving quickly to obtain his paintings — now ranging in price from \$500 to \$2,000.

For Sheehan, painting is not just a hobby made profitable. Art is work for him — difficult and draining. Sheehan awakes early each morning and works on three or four paintings daily.

"Working outside the studio is much different. You can spend an entire day in the studio concentrating

on one still-life. But outside, light changes quickly. So, I do a painting at 10 a.m., another at 2 p.m., and finish with one at 6 p.m."

"It's not easy. You have to constantly be thinking and critical. And that is draining. At the end of the day I know I have put a day's work in. If you don't keep that critical edge, then you fall into a routine and produce shabby works of art," said Sheehan.

"I try to always be innovative and avoid being reminiscent of what I've seen. You can't paint to please your audience or collectors. You can only paint what excites you and gives you energy. If you do that well, it's likely that people are going to like your work," said Sheehan.

