



original VISION

Jerry Markham explores the natural world with inimitable style

BY ROSEMARY CARSTENS

IF THE DISTINCTIVE style of an artist can be called his “voice,” then Canadian painter Jerry Markham is singing a melody all his own. The driving force behind his work is his desire to create an original vision, a personal interpretation of subject matter that he hopes will give viewers a fresh perspective. Although best known for his impressionistic landscapes, he also produces contemporary urban scenes and paints anything that captures his attention. “I always strive to grow and get better at what I do, so I often work on subject matter that challenges me in different ways, whether it’s pushing the composition, altering lighting or color, or experimenting with how I apply the paint,” he says.

Growing up on the prairie just east of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta, Canada, Markham has always felt most at home under a big sky with the grandeur of mountains nearby. He currently lives in Vernon, British Columbia, about five hours west of his birthplace, where the diversity of the region is a constant inspiration. The changing seasons energize him, and the lakes, rolling hills, and pastoral farmlands of his quiet community—plus easy access to the nearby Rockies, Calgary, Vancouver, and the U.S. border—provide a never-ending flow of ideas for his art.

Markham’s path to artistic success was not traditional. Growing up he was more interested in sports such as hockey and football than in creative pursuits. He was never encouraged or discouraged from doing art—the subject was not particularly on the family radar. But both of his parents “worked extremely hard,” he says, and provided a work-ethic role model that Markham respected and that he emulates in his own career.

After high school graduation, Markham attended Alberta College of Art and Design in Calgary, but the direction of instruction there soon led to disillusionment. What graduates were creating wasn’t even close to what he wanted to do. “They taught more about painting how you feel than how to paint. That’s fine, but that should follow learning how to mix color, create a strong composition, and other fundamentals,” he states. He stopped pursuing art as a viable career for four years, working in construction instead, until he met Calgary artist Doug



▲ **Ship Shape**, oil, 12 x 16.

◀ **The Heart of Montana**, oil, 28 x 32.

Swinton, owner of an art store and teaching studios. He went to work at the store, and the two men soon became close friends. Markham tagged along to Swinton’s workshops and learned the fundamentals of painting and how to paint from life—and he found the road to art he’d been seeking.

Often, meeting the right people at the right time makes all the difference. Swinton introduced Markham to Jean Geddes, another highly accomplished Canadian plein-air and landscape painter. Jean and her husband, Dean, became his “biggest influences in art and as human beings,” Markham says. From Jean, he learned more about values, clean color, painting from life, and how to paint what he saw. Jean and Dean taught Markham and his wife, Leah, a lot about the business side of art as well—pricing paintings, approaching galleries, teaching workshops, framing, and the multitude of other elements that go into being a professional artist. The four became fast friends, and Jean, Dean, and Markham still often go plein-air painting together. “Jean is the one person I send paintings to for critiques and comments,” Markham says. “But more than the art part, those two teach Leah



representation

Astoria Fine Art, Jackson Hole, WY; **The Avens Gallery**, Canmore, AB, Canada; **Peninsula Gallery**, Sidney, BC; **Gallery Odin**, Silver Star Mountain, BC.

upcoming show

Solo show, **Astoria Fine Art**, June 20-30.



Shapes of History, oil, 8 x 16.



Covered in Autumn, oil, 12 x 16.

and me about being good people. They are honest, hardworking, ethical, great communicators, and socially conscious. They make me want to be a better person and artist.”

Another important influence was William Reese, internationally renowned U.S. painter and sculptor, who helped the young artist find his own distinctive

style. His guidance led Markham to see that while the fundamentals of the craft are essential, he needed to push beyond mastering the tools of the trade to pinpoint what his art would have to say. “Bill made me see that the most important characteristics an artist needs to succeed are determination, a diligent work ethic, and a true love for what he does,”

Markham says. “I think what’s helped me most is my willingness to learn—even a pig-headed drive to make this work, which helped me to handle criticism. And, at least for me, having a supportive spouse is one of the most important things.”

MARKHAM IS often drawn to subject matter that shows the big picture, the “larger scene or aerial perspective,” but many of his paintings are born out of his desire to tackle specific challenges related to the craft of painting. For example, *COVERED IN AUTUMN* began because he wanted to see if he could paint a loose landscape, exploring how far he could go and still have a recognizable composition. He also wanted a purple element in a composition dominated by fall’s yellows and golds. Last fall, he spotted a group of buffalo, and he had his concept. Markham doesn’t always paint from life or from photographic references—he often creates his own original compositions, as he did here, manipulating components to say what he wants to say. A yellow underpainting shows through intermittently and reinforces the painting’s sense of space and atmosphere, creating an effective foundation for the artist’s vigorous brushwork. Strategically placed vertical elements purposely contrast with the dark bulk and repeating shapes of the buffalo, while the strong horizon line and the artist’s obvious knowledge of color harmony coalesce to create a compelling whole.

Exploring abstraction with flurries of brush and palette-knife strokes is a newer direction for Markham and adds to the breadth of his appeal. Greg Fulton, owner of Astoria Fine Art in Jackson, WY, is highly enthusiastic about Markham’s growing potential: “Jerry paints wonderful traditional landscapes, contemporary urban scenes, and near-abstract work, and his vibrant palette is reminiscent of Carl Rungius’ plein-air paintings. Very few artists have that kind of depth in their portfolio,” Fulton says.

In *SHIP SHAPE*, we see Markham’s growing fascination with combining his impressionistic technique with abstraction. “I wanted to capture the essence of the subject more than the specific detail,” Markham says. “If the work is looser, a bit more mysterious, there is more room for the viewer to interpret, to access the



Evening Rising, oil, 30 x 40.

painting through his own imagination.” This painting evolved from a photograph taken in Vancouver Harbor. Working wet into wet, the artist uses a panoply of marks, speckles, and strokes to bring the dark, moody scene to life. Thicker impasto sits alongside areas of scraped paint and lends a sculptural quality to the painting, while subtle shifts in value reveal the artist’s gift for rendering atmosphere.

Here and there in Markham’s paintings appear qualities reminiscent of Canada’s renowned Group of Seven, who painted the Canadian landscape from about 1920 to 1933 and initiated the country’s first national art movement. In addition to Doug Swinton, Jean Geddes, and William Reese, Markham has many favorite artists in the United States, such as Len Chmiel, Walt Gonske, and John and Terri Kelly Moyers. He is curious about and open to the world and considers himself the “con-

summate student.” With unmistakable style, he distills what he learns and acts intuitively and skillfully to push into new territory, to let his unique voice be heard.

In addition to creating his own work, Markham shares his knowledge in workshops and weekly classes for oil, watercolor, and acrylic painters. One of his plein-air workshops called Painting in the Footsteps of Masters offers a scholarship to a young art student from Canada or the United States. Markham believes in helping those just getting started—as he was helped early on—by teaching the fundamentals of landscape painting in the Canadian Rockies, “where Carl Rungeus, John Singer Sargent, the Group of Seven, and other masters have painted,” he says.

Over the past couple of years, Markham’s career has picked up speed. “It’s been full of new highs,” he enthuses.

“Being invited to the Coors Western Art Exhibit has been awesome, getting to show with and meet some of the great painters I have admired for years.” Following that, his acceptance into Astoria Fine Art was an important next step. “Being represented by a great gallery with fantastic owners who believe in you makes a big difference,” he says. “Having my first solo show there this month is very exciting—but, overall, the best part of these events is the people I meet!” ❖

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See more of Markham’s paintings at www.southwestart.com/featured/markham-j-jun2013.