



HOWELL GALLERY

JAMES ANDREW SMITH

"I paint still life as an adult artist because it is what I learned first as a child. As a single parent and a taxi driver, my mother used her taxi as a means to meet people and discover opportunities that would not have otherwise been available to me. She was instrumental in arranging a way for me to begin instruction in oil painting when she convinced a local art instructor that allowing a 12-year-old aspiring child-artist into his all-adult class would not be disruptive. He agreed and stood me on an upturned milk crate so that I would be able to view the still life set up from the same vantage point as the other students. In those classes I learned composition, arrangement, brush handling, color theory, color mixing and paint application along with a dozen or so other adult students.

Over the past 40 years I have built upon that early foundation, honing my hand skills and my eye for composition and color. The author, Patricia MacLachlan wrote "what you know first stays with you," and over the years I have come to truly love the still life genre. It's what I know. It's where I'm comfortable. It feels like home.

Painting still life allows me to work alone and without distraction. It is a very cloistered vocation. In that regard, it is a labor which is reflective, intentional, and persistent. Still life allows me complete control in composing the tableau. I most often choose to include flowers because of their beauty and for what they represent, the acme of life. I am able to capture on canvas that moment when everything is as good as it will be. The flowers are at their most beautiful, the fruit is ripe, the light is perfect, the reflections are clear. When complete, the painting forever preserves that halcyon moment. Nature's beauty is impermanent, but the still life will endure."

James Andrew Smith began painting when he was 12 years old, studying with a respected Tulsa artist. The only child in an adult art class, his instinct for color, light and form were clearly evident and they continue to be hallmarks of his work as a contemporary realist. James attended Booker T. Washington High School, Tulsa's landmark program of school integration, where he continued art exploration. His art teacher was instrumental in providing him with the encouragement to pursue his creativity. During high school, James worked for Renberg's, a once local Tulsa department store, creating hand-drawn fashion illustrations for their weekly newspaper advertisements.



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After high school, James attended Kansas City Art Institute for a short time before returning to Oklahoma to complete a degree in Graphic Design. After 10 years as a successful designer, James returned to his childhood love of oil painting and formally began his art career in 2001.

James' focus is primarily the still life, a context that allows him to control the composition, lighting, and subject matter. In taking ordinary objects and presenting them in a contemporary manner, his work carries on the historic precedent of elevating commonplace subject matter to the status of fine art. As a Native American artist, James believes that the tradition of still life allows him to explore the complexities of representation, examining what is seen as well as that which is obscured.