

Artist to Collect

Merv Brandel





previous page, November Path, oil on canvas, 24" x 36"



above, Autumn Solitude, oil on canvas, 24" x 24"



Acadia Point, oil on board, 12" x 12"

## A Perfect View

written by Debra Usher

Love is a many-splendored thing, especially when the object of affection is also your career. Artist Merv Brandel readily admits that the ongoing searching and learning involved in being a painter gives him unconditional joy.

Merv was born a west coast boy in Kelowna, British Columbia in 1948.

In 1969, he was accepted to the Alberta College of Art and Design for a 4 year program. Armed with a commercial art diploma, he began working for Commercial Printers in Calgary, followed by a

stint at Nelson MacDonald Design.

He then decided it was time to head out on his own and opened a business in Calgary specializing in renderings of buildings for architects and developers. His portfolio also included designing brochures and logos for new businesses and existing companies.

Feeling increasingly restless, Merv believed the time had come to return to his roots in the Okanagan Valley. So in 1980, he did just that; relocated his business and his family to the scenic city of Kelowna. In 1985 he started painting full time and hasn't looked back since.

The first location to accept Merv Brandel's work was Kelowna's own Collectors' Gallery. At that time, the gallery was owned by Harold Lyons, an outstanding painter who we profiled in an earlier issue of ARABELLA. Harold is now basking and

painting in the Arizona sunshine full time, except for when he comes up to Canada to visit.

In the mid-90s, Merv and his family moved once again, this time from Kelowna to Hornby Island, Secret Cove on the Sunshine Coast. They remained there for 4 years before finally settling down in Qualicum Beach on Vancouver Island, where they have lived for the past 13 years.

When wanderlust returns, the Brandels will trade house with another couple for an agreed period of time. The family traded houses with an artist from England for 6 months and then with a couple from Nova Scotia for 9 months.

Merv says, "It is a unique way to see different places and experience them more as a resident than a visitor." He embraces travel because it "always brings a new experience to paint and a new scene." Of course, thanks to the power

of digital cameras, he now has thousands of photographs on his computer of places he would love to paint.

It was always about Art

Merv Brandel enjoyed art from an early age. Most of what he remembers from his childhood seems to have had something to do with drawing or colouring. "During my time in elementary school the teachers had me painting pictures on blackboards with coloured chalks," he recalls. "I also made drawings on T-shirts for friends in school."

When he was a young boy, he would stop off at the local art galleries on his way home from the beach in Kelowna. One of the galleries was owned by a local artist named Jack Hambleton. Jack took an interest in Merv and offered him used brushes and half tubs of oil paint, which Merv would take



Brandel

Taylor River, oil on canvas, 18" x 24"

home and use to create paintings. Jack passed away before Merv started painting full time, but later on Merv was able to show his work in Hambleton Galleries.

Whenever there was an art project to be done in high school, Merv was always the one picked to handle it. Even most of the art contests he entered had him winning one prize or another. And he was fortunate to have a really good art teacher who encouraged him to go to Art College. When he told his parents he wanted to pursue a post-

secondary education in art they were all for it. In fact, Merv can't remember being discouraged by anyone at any time. It seemed that right from the start everyone knew he was going to be an artist.

There have been many people who helped shape Merv's career along the way. He is forever grateful to his mother for teaching him how to draw in the first place, and his Uncle John, who provided young Merv with art supplies. Then there was Mrs. Wood, Merv's high school art teacher. She sent him to the Alberta College of Art to meet the president before he had even been accepted. "And of course, Harold Lyons," says Merv, "who accepted me into his gallery, the first one to do so."

Merv also credits his wife Dawne who was totally supportive when he told her he wanted to paint full time. "I started my art career in commercial illustration because I needed to support my family," he admits. "Then my father-in-law died and it made me realize that life was short and if I was going to start painting for galleries I had better start now."

Because of his commercial illustration



Whiskey Creek, oil on canvas, 22" x 28"

background Merv felt the need to stay with realism in his paintings. That's what he knew best.

Starting a Painting

#### Starting a Painting

Merv begins his oil paintings with a brush on canvas. He starts with a line drawing but doesn't include much detail. He then paints from the top of the canvas and ends up at the bottom. Sometimes he will paint the object first, if it's complicated enough.

"I really like working wet into wet," he states. "For the object I start with a base colour and



Powers Creek, oil on board, 12" x 12"



Winter Silence, oil on board, 16" x 16"

work other colours into it. It takes me days to complete a painting so I make sure that I complete the section I am working on before I go to the next part. I like oil paint because it stays wet for a while and allows me to make changes along the way."

Merv finds the hardest part of his work is getting the drawing right. "Once that is right everything else falls into place," he says. "I take a lot of pictures and download them onto my computer. The computer monitor is right beside my easel. I search through the photos and pick one or two that I think will make a good painting."

process changes his technique. "You have to work fast because everything changes in an hour, and because of the pace it also changes my style," says Merv.

During his painting career, he has tried almost everything, spanning watercolour, acrylics, coloured pencil and pastel. Some of his experimental work includes all of the above. But in the end, oil is his favourite medium.

He has tried several different styles and has even done some abstract paintings. Recently, he even worked in tandem with his son on a painting and they are currently trying to get enough pieces together for a family show some day.



The Blue Season, oil on board, 18" x 24"

He then makes a drawing from the photo and starts to paint. He usually paints in the background and ends with the foreground. The finished painting will sometimes sit in his studio for quite a while, giving him time to see if there is anything he doesn't like and then he can make the changes. When the painting is dry he adds varnish to the finished canvas.

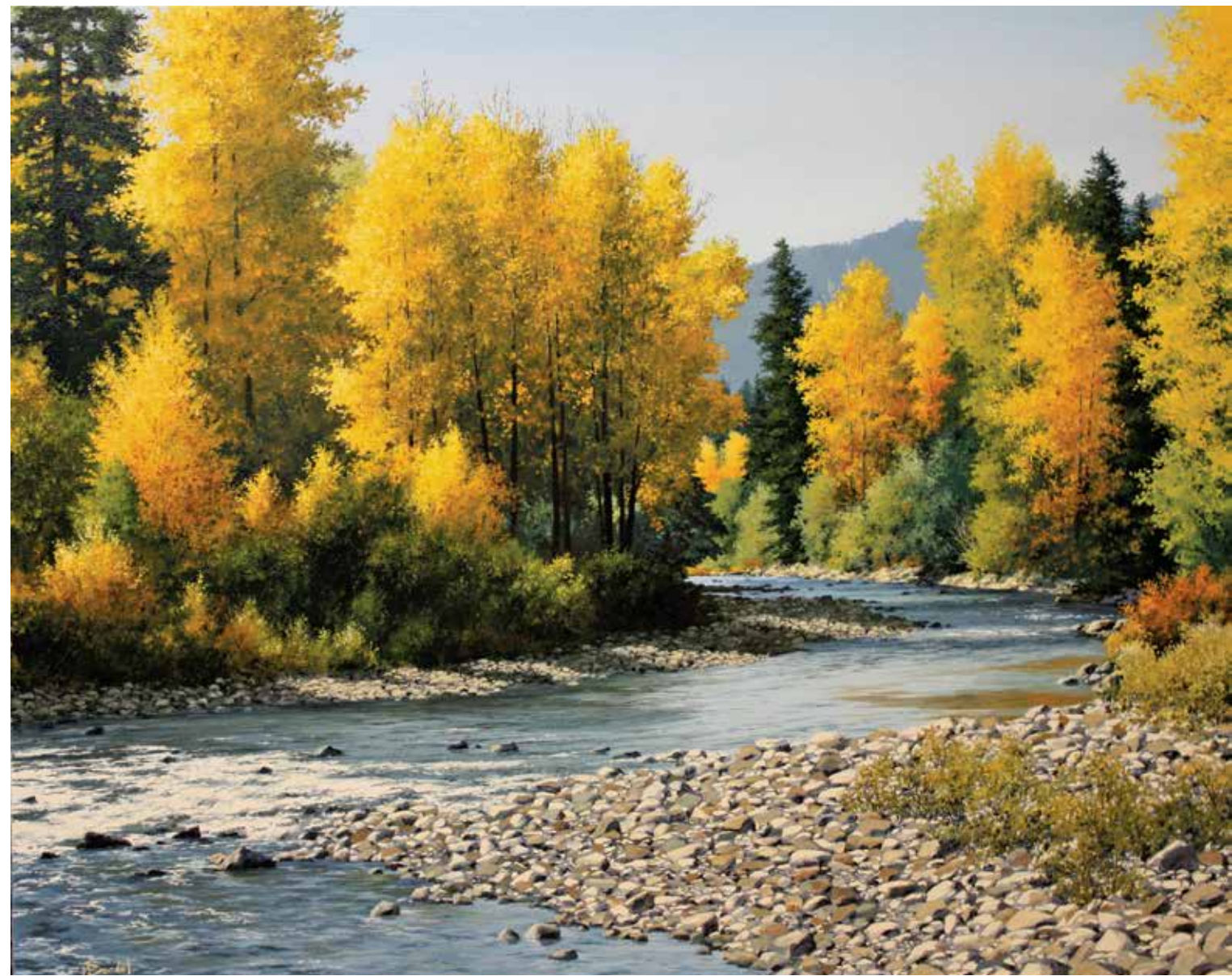
Sometimes he paints on location and that

Living on the Island

When Merv and his wife started building their new home in Qualicum Beach, Merv incorporated the studio he had always dreamed about. He describes it as "very spacious with lots of light. I feel very good in here and I have a lot of music that I listen to all day when I'm not listening to CBC radio. Because of the larger space it makes me want to paint larger canvases."



Slocan Alpine, oil on board, 18" x 24"



left, Buttle Lake, oil on board, 24" x 18"

above, Coldwater River, oil on canvas, 24" x 30"

He likes to surround himself with several finished or almost finished paintings in his studio that he can make changes to as he is working on the current work. He also keeps books about famous artists on hand to read when he gets a chance. "I like to study other artists' styles and techniques," he says. "It helps me with my own style."

Merv loves living on the island because it is always easy to get to a beach, and the one thing he truly loves painting: the ocean. One thing you will always notice in a Merv Brandel painting is the fabulous way he puts light into his work. The air seems to come alive.

"I guess because of my realistic style I feel as though I can paint almost anything that inspires me," he states. "Every so often I'll get away from realistic landscapes and try something new

and different but I always return to realism. I'm always drawn to realistic paintings in galleries and magazines. Realism has this calming effect on me, probably because it's been around for so long and we live in a world of uncertainty and constant change."

Anything to do with water seems to inspire Merv's work. Most of his paintings involve rivers, lakes, ocean, rocks on the beach, driftwood and fishing boats. The seascape is a subject he has come to know and paint superbly.

Painting is his only job. He loves the work and he has a growing group of collectors and galleries who are certainly glad he does. He even teaches painting at The Old School House in Qualicum Beach – one session in the fall and another in the winter. "I tell my students that drawing and composition are







Previous Page, Canal Flats, oil on canvas, 20" x 30"

above, Rain Forest, oil on canvas, 24" x 24"

the most important part of any painting. Then, the colour and style. I feel that if the drawing is right then everything else will fall into place. I am still learning when it comes to colour."

Merv says what he loves most about painting is the process, which includes constant searching and learning. "It's also the emotional connection between the artist and the viewer that I find most rewarding. I try to depict whatever is presented and observed and use my abilities to make the viewer see what I saw. I want the work to express my ideas, emotions and moods. I learn something new about painting almost every day.

So it looks like we can expect Merv Brandel to continue painting and learning for a long time to come. And that's great news.

Merv Brandel can be reached at [mbrandel@shaw.ca](mailto:mbrandel@shaw.ca) or visit him at [www.mervbrandel.ca](http://www.mervbrandel.ca). Galleries exhibiting his work include:

Adele Campbell Gallery in Whistler, BC, [www.adelecampbell.com](http://www.adelecampbell.com). The Alicat Gallery in Bragg Creek, AB, [www.alicatgallery.com](http://www.alicatgallery.com). Gainsborough Galleries in Calgary, AB, [www.gainsboroughgalleries.com](http://www.gainsboroughgalleries.com). Jenkins Showler Gallery in White Rock, BC, [www.jenkinsshowlergallery.com](http://www.jenkinsshowlergallery.com)



September Shadows, oil on board, 16" x 20"



San Josef Bay, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"



Twisted Limbs, oil on board, 18" x 24"



above, Creek Side, oil on board, 30" x 30"  
top right, Cape Scott, oil on board, 26" x 36"  
bottom right, Pebble Beach, oil on board, 20" x 30"