



above, *Daffodils on flower patterned tablecloth*, acrylic on wood, 34" x 34"
left, *Iris splitting the warm & the cool*, acrylic on wood, 48" x 30"

The Fine Art of Pushing Paint

written by Lorie Lee Steiner

Employed in the diverse arts field his entire working career, Angus Wilson's road to fine art was as rambling as the bonnie hills of his homeland. Born and raised in Scotland, he called numerous cities throughout Britain 'home' while honing an array of contemporary disciplines. After studying photography, film and animation in Art College, Angus then pursued a career in television and video, as well as the computer entertainment market. His work as a director, producer, editor and animator garnered international awards, while 'traditional painting' functioned merely as a sideline. That is, until 2004, when growing popularity for his brushwork had Angus envisioning a future –

not in gaming – but fine in art. Today, he jokes that his skills have 'regressed' from cutting-edge, multimillion dollar computer graphic animation projects to merely pushing paint around a canvas!

An understatement, to be sure, as proven by the artist's ever-increasing success. Working mostly in oil and acrylic, his style calls to mind the great Post-Impressionists – Matisse, Cezanne, even Van Gogh – re-imagined with an infusion of Angus Wilson originality. In 2007, Angus crossed the pond and relocated to the San Francisco Bay Area of California, where his work has developed a loyal following across the US, Canada and abroad. Today, his boldly coloured landscapes and still lifes are much sought after by museums, corporations and collectors worldwide.



above, *Sunflowers lemons and bread*, acrylic on canvas, 40" x 70"
 right, *Still life with sections of a chair*, acrylic on panel, 36" x 24"



Both Sides of the Easel

Choosing to drop the high profile career in favour of raising his children and painting professionally was huge. Angus admits, "This decision was taken when the kids were tiny and I soon realized I would go mad pretty quickly if I didn't have a creative outlet. I had a number of options available with my skill set; making a short animated film, writing a book, illustrating children's books or perhaps paint a bit? Naively, I believed this last one would be a laid-back career. I could easily pick up and drop the brush around my growing children and their lives."

Having learned first-hand that putting paint to canvas is just a wee part of the big picture, Angus explains, "The reality is, to do this career properly takes a serious amount of time and effort both behind the easel, as well as marketing, business and just plain thinking and planning. Artists tend to be 'all consumed' and I'm always wrapped up in thoughts about what I need to achieve or paint."

In the years when painting was just a hobby, Angus had primarily created large abstract pieces. But he consciously chose to take his fine art in a

different direction, struggling long and hard to find his voice within the medium. He notes, "I had always been drawn to Post-Impressionist artists like T Lautrec and Van Gogh, as well as many of the British post-war painters. I looked to these periods for inspiration and spent many months trying to reinvent my style and technique. One day, I painted a representational still life that went terribly wrong. For fun I started blocking it over with solid colour, quickly erasing all the mistakes and much of the form. Within this process I stumbled on the early seeds of the still lifes you see today."

That fateful 'accident' took Angus's art in a new and brave direction. Still life painting became a focus, demanding his attention. Here he speaks his mind on the fundamental importance of the genre:

"Beyond the Baroque period in history there have only been a handful of painters who are known for their still life paintings; perhaps artists such as Morandi or Cezanne. To me, it's a shocking oversight to neglect and overlook this rich subject matter. It holds in our perceptions the everyday, almost the mundane; the bowl of fruit



above, *Amongst the rocks*, acrylic on wood, 44" x 32"
left, *At the edge of the fields California*, acrylic on canvas, 40" x 30"

on the sideboard or a bouquet of flowers on the mantel piece. In art it's equally overlooked – the ubiquitous training tool till the artist moves on to more exalted forms such as the figure. It is these perceptions that I want to challenge and attack! Great art pushes our perceptions and boundaries, challenging our beliefs. What better subject matter to do this to than the humble still life."

Angus knows from experience that still life painting can break new ground. "Its presence demands to be considered, contemplated and enjoyed," he states. "No longer ignored, no longer passed over."

Visual Vocabulary

When it comes to influences and inspiration, Angus considers himself "a bit of a google" –using snippets of ideas from famous artists too numerous to mention. But, to him, the fundamental importance of his own signature style is paramount. Believing that too much

contemporary art is generic and unrecognizable from its peers, he was determined to find a voice that was singular and instantly recognizable. "An artist should always strive to break new ground or define their own brave space, to my mind it is distinctive work that lasts through history," says Angus.

His visual vocabulary was carefully constructed from this idea. Processes borrowed from artists he admired were molded into something distinctly his own. "W. Sickert, for example. He had a wonderful strength of brush work and he used broken lines," Angus relates. "You can see some of these ideas in my work, though it is shown in a very different way."

Henri Matisse is another great influence from the past. Angus largely follows the master's mantra, "Seek the strongest colour effect possible... the content is of no importance." In other words, it's the painting rather than the subject source that remains to be judged.



Pushing colors of the coast, acrylic on panel, 24" x 36"



above, Cool impressions, acrylic on canvas, 18" x 36"

below, Sunshine on Big Sur, acrylic on panel, 24" x 36"

Though initially Angus works closely with the subject, he progressively moves away to focus on the canvas itself. "There's nothing drearier than a faithful representation," he states. "By working on the canvas alone I can bring more of my vision, my emotions and passion to the work. Thus, I become closer to my ideals." One thing for certain – his vividly appointed canvases could never be called 'dreary'!

Today, Angus is impressed by visionaries who have taken a tired medium or subject in a direction no one believed possible. Artists like Alex Kanevsky for his astounding figure work, and Raimond Staprans for balance and purity of colour field painting in his brilliant landscapes. A self-described contemporary Post-Impressionist, Angus admits to being a colourist but dislikes the easy complacency of using 'art' labels. As his landscape and still life paintings grow and adapt over time, he sees the labels continually pushed into other categories and titles.

Refuge in the Studio

"In life, I have scuba dived in a shark infested cave, confronted and chased away a grizzly bear and run over a poisonous snake with my bike (accidentally mind). But my day to day life is rather pedestrian and few life perils threaten me at my art easel. Though I do joke with friends that if I'm painting when the big quake hits, I will hide under my easel, since it's a big and sturdy behemoth," Angus says.

Having a home studio is the ultimate convenience, especially for an active artist like Angus who "drops in and out" many times a day. Admittedly, the dimensions of the space limit the size of paintings he can produce. But not to worry. When he wants to paint 'big' on occasion, a temporary setup in the garage fits that need just fine.

The main studio is outfitted with loads of art books for reference, as well as pin boards displaying other artists' work and elements of Angus's paintings that he feels he did well. A huge



left, Delphinium on Peruvian table cloth, acrylic on wood, 35" x 24"



right, Sunflowers roses and plums, acrylic on panel, 24" x 18"





Outdoor warmth with Lilies, acrylic on wood, 30" x 46"



Poppies and Lemons on bird cloth, acrylic on panel, 24" x 36"

supply of vases, jugs, pots and plates denotes the paraphernalia of a still life painter – Angus admits to getting excited about repainting a certain jug or vase. Keeping up with the 'tech' life, he finds his iPad indispensable for carrying resource images, colour plans and all things inspirational. Listening to music and radio podcasts during the painting process is essential and a candy treat never hurts to boost the creative flow. The artist's advice to beginners is brief – don't listen to too many people. Follow your own thoughts and have fun.

Angus specializes in still lifes and landscapes – each requiring different approaches. He explains, "For still lifes, I go to the store and come home with armfuls of flowers and grocery bags of produce. I then spend a full day arranging and photographing my 'stars.' I do multiple setups and arrangements and pull only a few final images to make into paintings. For landscapes I prefer to do sketches with notes and photographs, occasionally small colour studies. Working from these materials and memory makes my art stronger and more creative than painting from life, when I tend to

be too literal in my portrayal. Having a layer of separation from the subject keeps it fresher."

While his paintings bring to mind a Post-Impressionist style, the colours and framing of the composition pull the work of Angus Wilson into the modern era. As well, the lines that penetrate and dissect his still life paintings speak to the 'visual voice' that separates him from other artists.

Emotional Connection

Angus's technique gives the illusion of an 'alla prima' painting – passionate and in-the-moment. In reality it's created fairly slowly over multiple stages beginning with careful lines, followed by layers of under painting in bright colours. He explains, "I then slowly block in the final colours; where possible I paint only once over an area but sometimes I need to go back and adjust colour or refine. I work methodically, deviating from a plan or colour scheme if I feel the need."

Sometimes he will intentionally paint something the wrong colour – just so he can enjoy the

challenge of making the rest of the painting work around that initial bold choice. "I have painted cyan blue lemons and then reinvented every colour in the arrangement to make the painting work," Angus says with a grin. "It would be easy and boring to be a true representational artist, the challenge is to push the edges and think on your feet. Break new ground."

Whether in landscape or still lifes, he is drawn initially to compositional shapes and arrangements of objects. There must be a good flow for the eye to follow, ensuring the viewer has a journey through a path on his paintings, not just one focal point. Colour plays a huge part but, often times, it's planning how he will adjust and change the colour that brings the excitement. "I love to paint irises," says Angus, "they have such powerful elegance to their stems and fantastic rich colours; the tonal subtleties within their flowers are a wonder to behold. I never paint a subject that doesn't inspire or excite me, when I work on something without an emotional connection the painting always fails."

Life Lines

The lines which both intersect and dissect the compositions of the subjects in an Angus Wilson still life never fail to invite contemplation and discussion. They are an essential part of the fabric of these paintings, essential to the very design of the works. According to Angus, "I do not place lines in my landscapes or portraiture and yet I am driven and compelled to add them to a still life. I feel the painting is unfinished unless I feature them. My still life paintings feature traditional objects. Classical representations of fruit and flowers painted in a 'simple' or straightforward manner. By placing the dissecting lines I immediately create a level of depth and resonance. The lines imbue the work with an intellectual stimulus, they excite the eye!"

Angus believes that too often in commercial art we are faced with simplistic 'crowd pleasing' images that require little thought. By adding the lines, he immediately challenges and engages the viewer. No longer can they just observe the painting, they must now explore and contemplate



left, *Iris in the blue*, acrylic on panel, 24" x 36"

above, *Bread, papaya and tangerines*, acrylic on wood, 12" x 24"
below, *Tulips on white table*, acrylic on panel, 18" x 36"

the work. "The challenge," he says, "is elevated by the subject matter itself, for nothing is less confrontational than a simple still life of fruit and flowers. Yet my technique attacks the very fabric of this conception and pulls both the painting and its viewer into uncharted waters."

Away from the studio, painting is still in the back of his mind. But when it's time to relax at week's end with some delicious Indian food and perhaps a tumbler of his favourite Scottish malt whiskey, Angus reflects that life is indeed good. There's just one little glitch that keeps him on edge... "I

often sign my work when it's 80-90% complete," he admits, "and I live in fear that one day I'll die suddenly and my wife will sell lots of unfinished signed paintings!"

Delve into the delightful work of Angus Wilson at www.anguspaintings.com, angus@anguspaintings.com or 408.385.1713.

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