



Christian C. Day

# STILL LIFE, STILL LAND

Oils 2016 - 2022

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*An exhibition at Dineen Hall  
Kossar Reading Room and Levy Atrium  
Syracuse University College of Law*

*March 21 - May 6, 2022*





## AN INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTIST

*What is your earliest memory related to painting?*

I remember drawing and painting when I was in first grade. (I started at age four! Different rules then.) I drew a destroyer and named it after my father, the U.S. Elmer W. Day, who served in WWII as a chief assistant engineer and Navy lieutenant. Since then, I have always enjoyed painting and drawing. I also sculpt clay bas reliefs, design needlepoint, paint watercolors, and make linoleum prints.



*Did you have an artistic tradition in your family? How did your training as a painter come about?*

My Uncle Eddie was an artist who worked for Robinson Clay, a pottery and China manufacturer in Buffalo, NY. My grandfather on my mother's side, whom I never met, was an artist who painted murals for the 1901 Pan

American Exposition in Buffalo. In my fifties, I discovered that my great grandfather, Gustav Dey, who served as an artillery officer in the Regular Army in the Civil War, was a watercolorist: one of his works is now in my office.

But my parents wanted me to have a career. I did, too. No starving artist here, I was practical: so, I went for law.

In my senior year at Cornell, I enrolled in painting and drawing classes with Gillian Pederson-Krag. She is one of the most influential persons in my life. She took an unteachable student and gave him some tools – palette knives and good paints. She was patient, insightful, kind, and spot on.

I started to work as a lawyer, but kept studying great art. I bought books and catalogues. I went to museums; thought about how to paint. Then I moved to my university career. I have painted most of

my life but took a hiatus from 1999 to 2014 due to teaching, research, and decanal obligations. When I started painting again, in 2014, I wrote Gillian and she graciously responded. She is a fantastic artist, guiding mentor, good friend, and, as I said, a very, very good teacher for unteachables like me.



*That's right: you are a painter, but also a jurist, a professor. How much do you think that (more or less consciously) your training and your professional activity have influenced your art?*

I paint what I see and what I want others to see. Because of my legal training and management skills, I think I am efficient. Because I was an athlete in a former life, I visualize. I go to sleep thinking about how to paint; I do the same solving problems for clients in practice or when teaching.

I think a lot about the subject. I have watched Ann's flowers for hours and hours. The hostas and begonias dance, swirl, and sway. The impatiens are always patient. Oak hydrangeas shake the snow. Amaryllis burst out of their leaves. The farms have stability and staying power. They are in my soul. I paint what I know. I paint what I love. And I want others to share the beauty.

*Can you draw an ideal line of artists you feel closest to?*

Turner, Constable, the Hudson River School, Whistler & Homer, Monet, Gauguin, Hopper, Sargent, the Ash Can School, Ida and Georgia O' Keefe, Michael Chamberlain, Elizabeth Robbins. I love mosaics. I love Raphael, Giotto, altars, stained glass, icons, illuminated manuscripts.

*The main poles of your painting are landscapes and still lifes: how did you come to these choices, and what connects them to each other?*

I don't know if there is a connection. Still lifes and flowers. Shapes, colors, textures, composition. I see something. A martini next to a

plant in the Studio. That's neat. I like the floating lemon peel – it's a Vesper. It shimmers. My still lifes tell me a story. Now, can I paint it? Landscapes. That field has a lot of colors. Can I mix the color? I am really simple and basic. A smash and grab painter. I throw color on the panel, push it around. The good brushes and colors do all the work. I am their medium. Also, I focus on the subjects, but I am always looking and assessing how someone might paint. That would be a great Sargent. There is Hockney. Whistler/Homer would paint that. I can't paint that landscape, but Sargent could.



*Speaking of landscapes, the Upstate New York countryside and its "monuments" – farms, barns, silos - are central to your painting. Can you tell us about your connection with these places?*

I grew up in Wheatfield, Niagara County, Western New York. It was farm country. Farms are beautiful and important. They have dignity and heft.

In Central New York the sky is everywhere. It is often overcast and gray. No golden hour. But there is beauty. So: really look at the damn sky and thank God you are alive!

Because there is great beauty, power, peace, and longing in the farmland, lakes, and rolling hills of Central New York.

That's it.

*(Interview with the artist by Luca Arnaudo, February 2022)*





## ABOUT A PAINTER

*Richard S. Risman*

My good friend Professor Christian Day teaches law at the College of Law at Syracuse University, NY. He has taught there for decades, and I have known him for 25 years of this time. We took a shine to each other because of my love for art, my family's collecting of art, his collecting, and his ability to produce fabulous paintings.

Chris's work coincides with that of many strong players in art history including landscape artists such as those of the Hudson River School in the mid-19th century northeastern United States, seascape painters such as Homer in the late 19th and early 20th century, and of course impressionist work in florals including that of the American painter Mary Cassatt whose works span the same era.



I liken Chris's landscapes to those of the Hudson River School painters. They painted landscapes, mostly of upstate New York, in large scenes of nature, with beautiful, gorgeous, luminescent skies. Chris's lush, detailed greens, and rising valleys and trees are complemented beautifully by signature, luminescent skies that only he does so beautifully. These works can be overwhelming and are

quite beautiful and accomplished. And I can only describe his skies as on the level of Turner, a 19th-century impressionist painter who painted the most beautiful skies, whether calm or turbulent, of any other painter I've ever seen.

His seascapes are also fabulous works. He has painted many of them and they carry a common theme: nature on display, and the power of nature. I don't know if this is one of his intended meanings, but the power of nature versus man and our insignificance given nature's dominance of time on earth and ultimate power shine through his paintings. His works, with white sea foam and rock, portray dramatic energetic, and dynamic scenes reminiscent of the style of Winslow Homer in design and style, but with the brushwork, color selections, and brilliance of the paintings of John Singer Sargent.



His work involving gorgeous, richly colored flowers and gardens just evolved seemingly on its own. I am proud to own not only the earlier works but some of these as well. They are in the style of impressionism and more particularly American impressionism such as that of Mary Cassatt. Chris's works, such as his garden begonias, rival the eye-popping colors and design symmetry and beauty of these works. Many of his impressionistic flower works and some of his landscapes that are thence more impressionistic tend to remind me of Cézanne and more particularly a piece of a Cézanne I once discovered in an alcove at the Guggenheim in New York 30 years ago, in which half of the painting is purposefully realistic and figurative, and the other half is impressionistic. This was a significant watershed painting that helped usher in the age of impressionism in France.

All that said, Chris's work is distinctly original; only reminiscent of these other masters. It is a mixture of realism and impressionism and I think that's why he refers to himself as an impressionistic realist—an appropriate title well suited to him and his work. Whatever the label, whatever the association, there is no question that Chris is talented and can push paint around the canvas in a variety of innovative and creative ways to produce wonderful representational paintings.

I am so happy Chris is having a show at the law school. May he have continued success and enjoyment in his painting and a growing reputation for his fine works.





## A DAY'S TRIP

*Luca Arnaudo*

In February 2022, I drove a full day from New York City to Syracuse. In the morning, leaving the Metropolis behind, I stopped in Paterson, the place sung by William Carlos Williams, then I left and crossed Central and Upstate New York, the land painted by Chris Day – ideas in motion, along the path, between poetry, painting, presence.

*No ideas but in things.* The famous line of Paterson's poem is placed at its beginning to indicate the path that the rest of the words will follow for five entire books. Looking beyond the steering wheel in white winter light, the vast road in front of me, I observe with the curiosity of the stranger the flow of things around – a clump of bare trees along the highway, scattered wooden houses, rocks set in the ice.



Williams is a poet who rejected the abstract waste land of the art of his time to dedicate himself to considering a well-defined place in history, of the world and personal. On this place, he then pivoted to support a universal discourse, convinced that only in a devoted knowledge of what is close to us can one be authentically present to oneself, and therefore to others.

Nothing but in ideas: because I no longer see anything. The snow

falls spreading an almost impenetrable veil around me, things become blurred images, vague sensations, and in this suspension of space and time, as if in search of a guide in the invisible world around, the landscapes of Chris Day flow before the mind's eye.

Day is a painter who carefully studied the most well-known general lessons of modern landscaping: you can see it from his approach to surface and composition, where, at first sight, Cézanne's solidity dialogues with Turner's atmosphericity on an idealized American terrain, the one originally delimited by the Hudson River School – with a Hopper's gas station not too far away.

But, like Williams, Day also finally resolved to focus on a well-defined detail: the landscape of his life, Upstate New York, a territory haunted by the ghosts of American Indian nations robbed of their world, fertilized by the hard work of those who built a new world here, reconsacrated by devoted consideration. To this space, over time, Day dedicated himself in an exercise of knowledge that allowed him to develop a personal vision, capable for this of being the means of broader contemplation.

It has stopped snowing, the journey continues, I find myself part of an immense and concentrated landscape, as if a vertical depth corresponds to the horizontal extension, giving an impression of fixity in the movement. Better, of duration.

Nothing but in shapes and colors (after all, this is what aesthetics originally meant: perception).

I stare at a fir forest that flows past the car, suddenly so solid in sight, and I am struck by an inner unity in the different expressions of Chris's art: landscape painting and still life. Both of them, I understand, are celebrations of the unexpected beauty of everyday life, of the quiet imaginism of real things, and I find a surprising amplification of all this around me. An internal bond connects, through consideration, the shapes of a tiny flower in a vase, of a vegetable in a plate, to the ones of a gigantic centuries-old plant.

Still life, still land. I see. In the manner of an object, even a humble one, in a painting or a poem, so much depends on it – and, at least for us, on the gaze we dedicate to it. Attention, then, ultimately becomes presence, a place to be.



The territory beyond the windshield is visible again, and the things I now observe resonate with the tones I have come to know from the sceneries where Chris feels at home. The scarlet farmhouse in the distance with its metallic gray silos, the blue masses of the sky, looming and welcoming at the same time, the deep black liquidity of a water stream that mysteriously participates in the same ethereal white matter of snow.

In a landscape transfigured by the dark light of the evening, groping along the yellow line that lights up in the gray asphalt, I too try to find my place, to go home, grateful to the artist for the ride.







## Artist's Bio



Christian C. Day was born in 1946 in Rochester, NY, and lives and works in Syracuse, NY.

While enrolled at Cornell University, he studied drawing and painting with Professor Gillian Pederson-Krag. He then pursued his artistic education by himself, in parallel with his career as a lawyer and law professor.

In the last five years, after many decades spent studying arts and painting, Day started exhibiting in both public spaces and private galleries of Central New York.

More recently, Day's oil paintings have been selected for the following exhibitions:

2020 *SumArt Show*, Point of Contact Gallery, Syracuse, New York  
*SnowShow*, Syracuse

*Artist of the Month*, the Art Store, Syracuse

2019 *Barns, Barns, and More Barns*, The Village Gallery, Caledonia, New York

*On My Own Time*, Everson Museum, Syracuse

2018 *Snow Splendor*, Onondaga Historical Association, Syracuse

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by Christian C. Day

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