

“This Is the City...and the Country”

Nick Savides is a New York artist whose landscapes, whether the streets of Manhattan or the beaches of Martha's Vineyard, evoke a distinct sense of time and place.

By Brian Scott Mednick

The scene is Wall Street, a month after the 9/11 attacks. It is early morning. The buildings stand tall and proud, a luminous orange glow reflecting off of them as American flags gently wave. People are bustling to get to work as streets remain cordoned off. Two cops are checking someone's I.D. One lady is walking in the opposite direction to get away from the crowd. This is all happening in richly textured oil paint on a 48x60 canvas, courtesy of Nick Savides, a New York artist whose work is deeply evocative as it captures times and places with an understated eloquence.

Savides is a New Jersey native who has been painting since he was a boy. His mother was an amateur painter who taught him the basics, which he later refined with a formal fine arts training at Brandeis University. “I studied painting under Paul Georges there and learned fundamentals of classic oil painting, composition, as well as art history, so I felt I had a well grounded education in the arts, certainly in the classic method,” says Savides.

Classic is one word that could be used to describe Savides' work. Traditional may be another. You don't need to interpret what you are seeing when looking at his paintings. “One of the things I like to do is make the paintings accessible,” he says, “because I feel like they should be experienced on two levels. One is a sort of visual beauty which is kind of immediate and then the other is just the feeling of understanding and knowing and sometimes recognition or remembering. So people can sort of make their own connections with their past... The idea is to get people to experience it on different levels.”

The majority of Savides' paintings are outdoor scenes. In addition to the many New York City landscapes he has done, he is also at home doing country vistas. Upstate New York, Martha's Vineyard, the American West, and Paris are among the subjects of Savides' other paintings. “It's very different,” Savides says of his rural work, “because

in the city it's almost like just putting many things together into a solid composition. The country, it's a little bit more, I find, doing more with less. There's obviously less going on. You don't have the hustle and bustle that you'll see in the city. But it's funny because I've been told also that sometimes my country scenes are more dramatic and my city scenes are more peaceful... The city scenes, there's obviously a lot more geometry involved. The country, it's more fluid. But there are similarities in terms of compositions – how to deal with composition, the affect of light, spatial relations, juxtaposing textures, things like that are common.”

In person, Savides, 50, is soft-spoken and looks like a cross between the actor Jonathan Pryce and filmmaker Quentin Tarantino. He credits his fine arts educational background with making him the artist he is today. “I think it had a lot of influence,” he says. “Even though I could technically produce paintings before that, understanding what art is all about from a historical perspective and a craft helped a lot. Certainly the methods of composition, perspective, use of paint and all that brought me to a much higher level of sophistication than I could have learned on my own.”

Though he has dabbled in watercolors in the past and also does nude drawings, most of Savides' work these days is oil on canvas. “You can work with it more,” he says of the oils. “I'm a studio artist – and I like working on things and developing them over time and I find that's very suitable to oil painting. Also, the ability to change things. You may discover things that you didn't see originally. You can't exactly do that with watercolor. It's a sort of different mindset.”

Savides cites Vermeer, Rembrandt, and Edward Hopper as his biggest influences. Indeed, Hopper's sense of isolation and loneliness is apparent in such Savides works as “Movie House Row,” a brooding work depicting Midtown Manhattan at night, as well as “Village Crossroads,” in which a lone male figure dominates an evening of shadows and light in Greenwich Village.

Savides' work is in numerous private collections and he also works closely with the Brooklyn Waterfront Artists Coalition (BWAC). One of Savides' biggest exhibits was a recent two-person show of past and present New York paintings called “New York Stories” at the Nabi Gallery in Chelsea. Savides had his work on display at the van der Plas Gallery at the South Street Seaport earlier this fall as well as at the Frederick

Galleries “Breeder’s Cup” exhibit in Allenhurst, New Jersey. At the moment, he is working on another painting in his Bleecker Bob’s series, which depicts an actual record store in the West Village. “I’ve done two prior to this over the course of the years,” he said. “They’re from the outside looking in – sort of outside looking at the storefront. This one is inside looking out. So it’s kind of reversed.”

Like many artists, Savides has often had to balance the “business” of art with the actual process of creating it. “Having your work displayed in galleries is a very big deal,” he says. “It’s kind of something that you really have to do. So I think the important thing is finding galleries that are in tune with the kind of work you do. And usually, I’ve always been able to find galleries that are kind of interested. There are art galleries that will exhibit traditional work. Some galleries won’t. But it’s important to have a gallery that’s sort of in tune with the work that you want to do or do. It’s often a struggle between marketing your work – the business side – and the producing of your work. And there have been times where I really wasn’t promoting my work at all, I was just focused on doing the work, making art.”

Asked to sum up life as an artist in 2007 New York City, Savides said, “Well, it’s exciting. It’s always something about discovery, either within yourself or outside. It’s a tough profession. But it’s the kind of thing you do because you have to do. It’s almost like your lot in life, so it’s tough, but you have to do it anyway.”

To view Savides’ work, you can visit his Web site at www.nicksavides.com.



Wall Street, Early Morning

Oil on Canvas, 48" x 60", 2005



Movie House Row

Oil on Canvas, 30" x 36", 1987/2005



Village Crossroads

Oil on Canvas, 48" x 36", 1987, Private Collection



Sunset Over the New York Harbor

Oil on Canvas, 28" x 36", 2005



Bleecker Bob's #2

Oil on Canvas, 36" x 24", 2002



The Cliffs of Lucy Vincent

Oil on Linen, 36" x 24", 1991



Grand Canyon at Sunrise #1

Oil on Canvas, 2000, 36" x 24"



Nick Savides