



# Jeff Jamison

## In Reflection

by Deborah Walden

There exists in most people's minds that unfortunate stereotype of the quiet, tortured artist struggling to create. Jamison is not that man. Full of gusto, always ready to laugh, he is above all a communicator. For him, each painting is a potential connection to a like mind. "It's like a phone that is ringing out there in the world, and someone picks it up. Wow!" Unlike so many artists of his generation that cut their teeth on psychedelic music and Abstract Expressionism, Jamison found art in unexpected places. "Sports and James Bond movies got me into art. When I wasn't playing sports, I was in my room listening to sports and drawing sports." A promising high school athlete, Jamison planned to play football in college. A knee injury during a baseball game cost him that dream. "I eventually got over not playing football . . . I got over it about last year."

Jamison began college at MTSU but dropped out to sell suntan oil on Miami Beach. In Florida, he returned to school where he honed his skills as a painter. For many years, Jamison worked as a free-lance illustrator. Ever a pupil of naturalism, he could not find a place for his work in a Miami fine arts scene that favored abstract painting. The advent of digital media affected Jamison's career in the same way that it changed the lives of many an illustrator. Jobs dried up. This period, he claims, happily coincided with "a Renaissance of representational painting" in the United States. The skill for accuracy and detail that Jamison had developed through his career as an illustrator offered him entry to a new world as a painter. He claims, "I even painted Western art for a while because there was more representational art out West."

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Jamison quickly tired, though, of painting cowboys and horses. They were not really a part of his experience. He began a quest that he continues to this day to find his own voice and purpose as an artist. "I think it was turning fifty or something. I began to ask, 'What is it that I want to say? What is it that I want to be about?'" Jamison's curiosity did not end with inquiries about his work—he began to explore the universal elements of art and to consider how his work on a canvas might resonate in the minds of people he had never met. "Is there a universal? Is there a song we're all humming that we don't know? What draws a person to a painting to connect with it so strongly?"



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ABOVE: *Lawyers, Lovers & Clergymen*, Oil on canvas

RIGHT: *Studio Morning*, Oil on canvas

All of those years in illustration gave Jamison a thorough vocabulary of forms and figures. He began to use this “toolbox,” as he calls it, to establish a kind of art that speaks directly to his audience. “What I am doing with these paintings is like creating characters on a stage. The perspective is pulled back, giving more of a panoramic view. I use the figures as players in a scene.” This approach, he believes, draws viewers into the quiet drama of his works. It allows them to become part of the world of the painting in the same way that one is transported while watching a film. Creating these spatial illusions comes easily for Jamison. “I studied pre-engineering and architectural drawing. I’m terrible with math, but I have a fascination with numbers and spatial geometry.” These elements, he finds, attract the eye to the focal points of the canvases. “Humans,” he says, “are always drawn to line and color.”

As Jamison has evolved as a painter, his works have taken on greater elements of abstraction. Even in his earliest meditations, geometric patterns of brushstrokes and fuzzy, incomplete areas of paint abound. A careful selection of basic shapes or a seemingly random, but perfectly placed, scumble of bright paint here and there imparts an element of liveliness and movement to his work. Jamison achieves this effect through a cocktail of instinct and intention. “Sometimes a painting creates itself, and sometimes you call it a truce. If you change any little thing in a painting, you change everything in that painting. What I have found so enjoyable is that I no longer try to control everything that happens from beginning to end. I take myself out of the whole process. I basically create problems and then correct them.”



RIGHT: *In the Service of the Queen*, Oil on canvas

BELOW: *Early Evening Stroll*, Oil on canvas

BOTTOM RIGHT: *Summers Hammock*, Oil on canvas

In approaching art, Jamison credits his training as an athlete with the discipline that has defined his career. “It’s the training. Football is a hard game. Art is the hardest thing I’ve ever done after football. I’m glad I have the discipline from athletics because every painting is game day.” As he composes a painting, applying various shapes and colors, Jamison depends on that discipline to achieve balance. “There’s a dual existence in your mind. On one hand, it’s the teacher. On the other hand, it’s the student. You have to police yourself. I don’t know where this is coming from—I’m just there being the referee. It’s like herding squirrels.” Regulating his instincts and allowing himself to be expressive free Jamison to paint scenes that are enigmatic. They are both universal and specific. We have all walked down one of Jamison’s sidewalks, although most of them do not represent a particular location. It is Jamison’s inquiring attitude and tireless search for connection that generates these intersections between the mind of the artist and the eye of the beholder. That whole process embodies Jamison’s supreme joy as a painter. He reveals, “I love being an artist, but I probably just love moving paint around on a canvas and thinking.”

Jeff Jamison is represented by Ella Walton Richardson Fine Art in Charleston, South Carolina. [www.jeffjamisonstudio.com](http://www.jeffjamisonstudio.com)



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