



Gregory Frank Harris A Creative Chameleon

Gregory Frank Harris creates landscapes, abstracts and figurative works with equal facility, sliding between a more traditional, painterly style and a modernist aesthetic; and between mediums and tools. But Harris is not only multitalented when it comes to painting. By age 5, he was drawing and sculpting, and at 8, he began to sing and play the piano by ear.

After studying art and theater at California's Long Beach University, Harris began playing gigs in nightclubs up and down the West Coast. While on tour in 1977, he purchased John Rewald's seminal book *The History of Impressionism* which catapulted him into a period of vigorous study.

"That book changed my life," says Harris. "That, when you step back from these little dabs of color, they create a scene. To me, that was pure magic."

When you search online for Harris, the first images that come up are of his early works—period pieces of ladies of leisure or bucolic peasant scenes that look plucked right out of the 19th century. Although Harris hasn't painted in that vein for years, they were crucial in igniting his career—in 1980, several of his old master copies appeared in the film *Annie*.

A selection of 16 new works, mostly regional landscapes with a few of his small-scale head-and-shoulder portraits, is the subject of an October show at Acosta Strong Fine Art in Santa Fe.



Tierras Antiguas, oil on linen, 36 x 48 in.



Gran Cielo, oil on canvas, 18 x 24 in.

After bouncing back and forth between coasts, studying under renowned artists like David A. Leffel, Harris moved to Santa Fe in 1996. In 2000, he moved back east where he exhibited and taught at the historical Lyme Art Association, before spending several years in Vermont learning alongside Richard Schmid. In 2003, he returned to Santa Fe, this time for good.

"When I moved here it was radically different," he says. "The mesas, the non-green areas that are more conducive to modernism. That's what captured those artists back in the early 1920s and '30s...The pueblo-style architecture, the [blend] of Hispanic and Native American cultures, the arroyos...I found all of it refreshing, as it must've been for Georgia O'Keeffe, moving here in some ways was like a revelation."

The jewel-toned *Tierras Antiguas* is exemplary of Harris' modernist approach. The large-scale work was painted mostly from life in Abiquiu, New Mexico. For this type of painting,



Blue and White Shall, oil on linen panel, 10 x 8 in.



December Night Fall, oil on panel, 18 x 24 in.

Harris begins with colored pencil on a warm-toned ground, sometimes starting the piece upside down. "It forces you not to render, and only focus on shape and color," he says.

On the other end of the spectrum are softer, traditional landscapes like *Gran Cielo* and the nocturnal view from Harris' studio depicted in *December Night Fall*. Both are aglow with the quality of light particular to a certain time of day and, lacking hard lines, draw attention to the paint itself.

Gregory Frank Harris: *Paintings from Life* opens at Acosta Strong Fine Art on October 14 and runs through October 31, with an artist reception on October 18, from 5 to 7 p.m. 🐿