

**STUDIO VISIT INTERVIEW
WITH ANDREA BURGAY**



Scott Bennett, *Woolly Bully*, 2022, acrylic and collage on canvas, 57x42"

Q: The surfaces of your paintings beckon with rich color in thick slathers and slabs, rough bits of texture, and washes that absorb into the surface, to name a few of the many ways you apply paint. What has led you to approach painting in this way?

A: It's happened over years and decades of using acrylic paints and mediums, and certainly has a lot to do with the still historically new availability of so many different kinds of mediums, gels

and pastes. (Thank you, Golden Artist Colors!) I started using acrylics early on as I loved watercolor and was attracted to the ease of thinning and cleaning up with water. I was introduced to acrylics and a few acrylic mediums very early on in New Jersey when I was in 8th grade, as my art teacher at the time was a painter who used acrylics. That was in 1964 - 65. I remember using acrylic mediums to glue cardboard and paper to canvas boards, combined with paint to create textured raised surfaces in that class. So I knew that acrylic paints and mediums could be used in lots of different ways—thin like watercolor washes and then what one might call a “regular” or traditional paint consistency.

But it wasn’t until 1980, when Golden Artist Colors started making thicker Gel Mediums and other kinds of mediums with different working properties, that I started working with even thicker passages. What led me there was my personal response to paint and how it feels to apply it with varied tools on a surface, how it can be used to create a large range of types of colors and surfaces. What newer acrylic paint technology did for me was pave the way to expand on painterliness seen in Old Master, Impressionist and early types of abstract painting, and do so without the technical problems that oil paint can have.



Scott Bennett, Studio wall with two paintings: left is *Winter Hill*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 35x57", and right is *Pine*, 2018, acrylic and collage on canvas, 47x40"

Q: Can you share a bit about your background? What are some of the experiences that have been most influential on your path as an artist?

A: I was one of those kids who had artistic abilities early on. I was drawing all the time and always felt like I was an artist. However, during my college years, I was unsure exactly how I wanted to pursue those instincts. I had to explore some other areas before committing to being a painter. While attending Syracuse University in the early 70's, I had a lot of independent study, which included some video work with Bill Viola, working on an independent film and doing special effects makeup, along with continuing to draw and paint. I ended up in the Synesthetic Education department and got my teaching certificate with my BFA. I didn't really want to teach in the public schools and the choice had more to do with my fascination with the ideas and

exploration I was allowed in that department. I did teach for 3 years as an art teacher in Ithaca, NY, but chose to leave that profession and focus on painting and doing whatever I needed to do to support that. A fun fact: I had Nick Sagan, Carl Sagan's son, in my 3rd grade art class!

Around 1975, right after graduating from Syracuse, I met the painters Darryl Hughto and Susan Roth via my painter friend Mark Raush. Darryl was mixing up various kinds of acrylic glazes and applying them with squeegees — seeing the possibilities with this was a definite influence. Later on, seeing Susan Roth's large scale shaped canvas on canvas collages, using lots of thick mixtures of gels and paint, was a revelation. Still is. The method of working on the floor with canvas off the stretcher, as Pollock and many of the painters following him did, was taken in early on as it was such a practical way of working. I was also regularly going to New York City to see shows at André Emmerich and other galleries where Larry Poons, Jules Olitski, Ken Noland, Helen Frankenthaler and others were showing regularly, and their use of acrylic paints and mediums was most definitely a strong influence, as was the sheer quality of the work. I saw, in different ways with each one of these artists, the large range of painterly and even sculptural effects that were possible and I wanted to try it all out in my own work. The range of different kinds of surfaces and painterly effects was so broad and exciting to me, more so than with oils, which had built in technical limitations for thick use.



Scott Bennett, *Waiting for the Storm*, 2022, acrylic and collage on canvas, 29x22.5"

I learned early on what David Smith wrote about in reference to young artists and the use of art materials: Don't skimp. The basic idea Smith put forth was to buy and accumulate lots of materials so you don't feel precious about using them. If you always have this unconscious thought or idea that you really should be careful about using too much of that red or that medium, etc., then this ultimately affects your art. I took this to heart and into my studio.



The artists whose work I was drawn to early on, who I mentioned above, along with regularly looking at works by Old Masters, Impressionist, Italian and Spanish Renaissance painting, Rembrandt, Velasquez, Manet, Matisse, Bonnard, Morisot, Monet, and many others, all contribute to and have influenced me and my work. Really, anything that registers as “Good” or visually interesting with my “eye” is an influence, and that has included looking at quilts, African and Oceanic tribal sculpture, fabric design, etc.

All of this taken in and stored ends up being food for creative action in the studio. Mostly unconsciously, but certainly sometimes consciously. I have also always loved certain earlier American masters such as Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, Charles Burchfield, John Marin and others. Adolph Gottlieb has been a huge influence as has Hartley. I feel like I am essentially a landscape painter who needs the freedom of a non-objective painter.



Scott Bennett, *Sun*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 23x30"

I met the critic Clement Greenberg in 1980 and began showing work to him on a regular basis up until his death in '94. This was scary at first, but ultimately served to give me confidence, when I might otherwise have allowed the usual artist self-doubt demons to hold sway. Those demons will always be there to fuck with most artists heads...it's part of the deal with making art. It can be easy to be misdirected and to misdirect yourself, and having a community of artists, or someone who has a "good eye" who you trust, is critical to making good art, especially early on.

Q: There is a collage sensibility in the way that you juxtapose surface textures, colors, and patterns in many of your paintings. In other works, you literally collage older paintings, paint

skins and chunks of paint into your works. How does collage compliment your painting process?

A: The direct answer is that collage is another tool in the painter's tool box, and for me I use it when the painting seems to want or need it. It creates a different kind of drawing in a work. The cut or torn edge is distinctive. And once again, newer acrylic paint and medium technology makes collage easier and easier to expand upon on a larger scale and in a more aesthetically aggressive way. Collage allows for a fast, immediate addition to a work that you can move around and play with, change position, etc. in ways that paint cannot provide. And yes, I use pieces of dried acrylic paint and medium most often peeled out of old paint containers, but sometimes made specifically for collage. Failed paintings are often saved to cut up and use as collage elements as well.



Paint skins and "failed" paintings in the studio

Q: How does the element of time play into your work? We talked about revisiting a painting over time to gain distance from it, or to internally come to terms with something new that has happened within it. Can you share more about these ideas?

A: Sure. Making art...or at least making good art...is hard. There are no rules, and so we are faced with a very open and free scenario, with the materials providing some of the main limitations. If we are ambitious and serious about making something good, then part of the due diligence is to allow for aesthetic distance while working, as it can be very hard to see what we have done. This is especially true if we are pushing the work, pushing what we sense as the boundaries, which is always ultimately governed by what we sense as "Good" or "Best." Aesthetic distance via time away from seeing the work can help. I will often turn a painting around against the wall so I can't see it for anywhere from days to months. For most artists it is not uncommon to feel pretty intense doubt while working, and I have found that allowing a work to "cook" for a while is helpful to bring our eyes up to speed. Ideally, I want to see my work like it was made by someone else, like I'm looking at a painting where I have no idea who made it. And I want to be surprised and delighted. I think we have all had the experience of making something that initially looks really good or exciting in some way and then it falls away over time, and the reverse happens as well. That scenario is tricky as sometimes something that makes us nervous or doesn't look good initially has to do with our "eyes" not being up to speed

with that particular work. So allowing some distance via time is very helpful with that from my experience.

Q: In your studio, you shared that these works are inspired by the experience of being in specific landscapes. Can you tell us more about how you translate the experiences being in these natural places, into color and paint?

A: That is a good question and also a difficult one to answer. First, I have always been attracted to the natural environment and spent a lot of time in the woods as a kid so these connections have been with me for a long time. Over time I found myself attracted to certain specific kinds of environments that were these transitional places or the very isolated places such as swamps, bogs and fens, alpine meadows, heathlands, wet savannahs, rocky places, etc. Gravel pits and similar places were among my favorite types of places to play as a kid. Something about rocks and rocky outcrop type places, and if you throw in some water trickling over the rocks then something deep inside me is activated. Sometimes it feels like genetic memory.



Scott Bennett, *Nova Scotia*, 2022, acrylic and collage on canvas, 47x41"

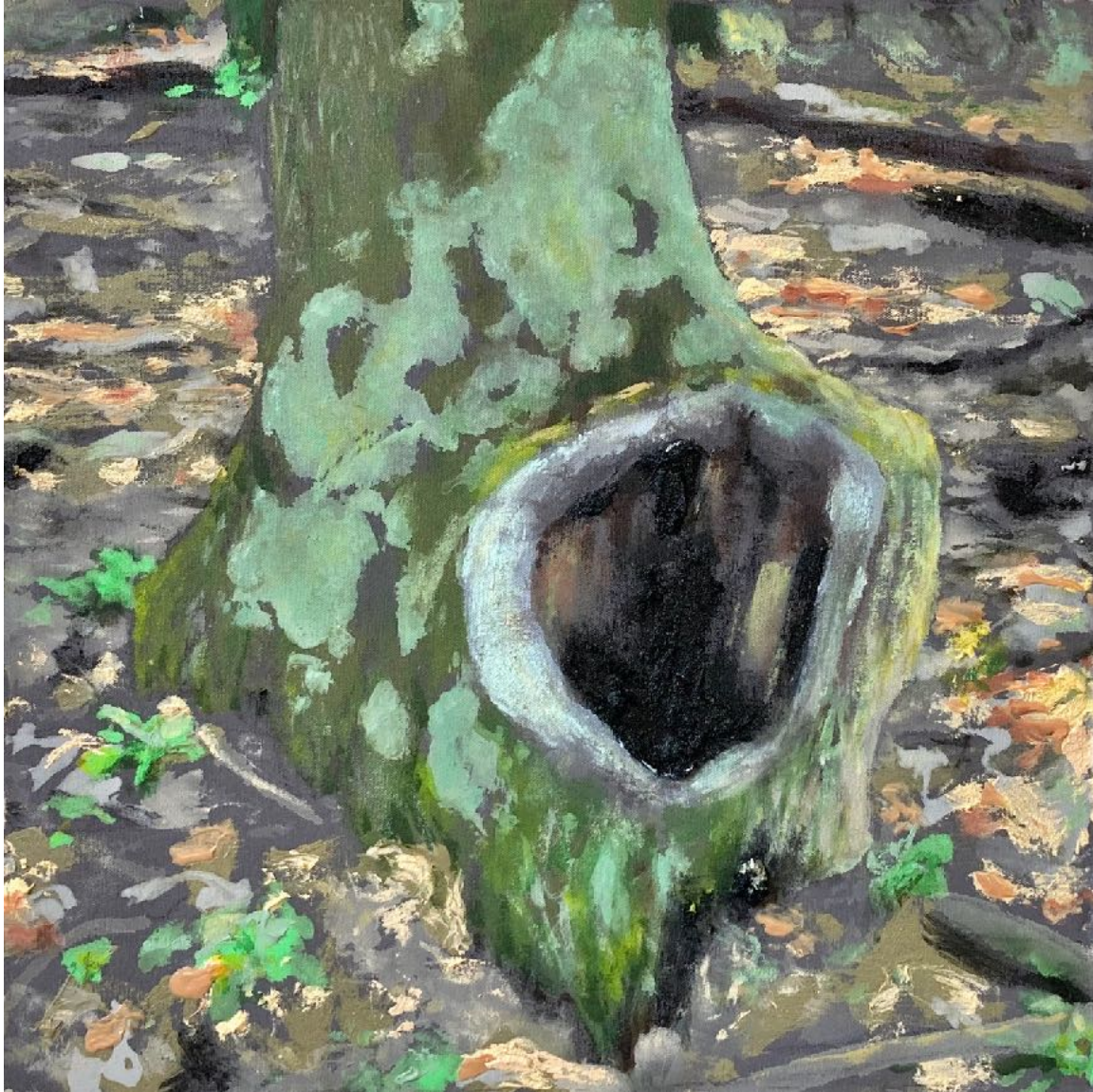
And the specific kinds of plants that grow in these places as well. I grow carnivorous plants and these tend to grow in a lot of same environments I am attracted to. For a while, I made very detailed botanical watercolors of these plants. You can see some of them on my website. As to exactly how I translate all of this into color and paint, well, I don't have a real good answer. When I have attempted to do it more directly, I find something is lost, at least for me, and it seems that its best to allow all of that "stuff" that is always there inside me, to come out unconsciously rather than trying to force it out or do it consciously.



Scott Bennett, *Gray Sea Stack*, 2022, acrylic and collage on canvas, 47x40.5"

So the format with my Sea Stack pictures and related types have allowed that to happen more. The term "Sea Stack" refers to a geological landform. Early on with these types of pictures someone mentioned they looked like sea stacks and I had never heard the term before. I wasn't actively, consciously painting sea stacks, but it stuck as a name for that group of paintings. I also have an ongoing series of pictures I call "Tree Portraits" where I am very consciously painting specific subject matter and focusing on it. In a way they also relate to the sea stack format that I am attracted to. It has been said that every artist is painting variations of the same painting over and over again throughout their lives.

Again, I think that one always has to be open to possibilities and ready to ditch what seemed like a "good idea" for what works and enables the best work. This does not always comport with the current trends or with an easy to market series of works for the "art world".



Scott Bennett, *Howl*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 23x23"

Q: Do the paintings inspired by specific experiences, memories, or landscapes change your relationship to the original event or place?

A: Hmm. I have never been asked that before. Interesting question. I guess I would have to say yes, because of course now when I am in the woods here in upstate NY, or hiking in the mountains up above the tree line, or in a bog somewhere, or in Scotland or Nova Scotia or the Olympic Peninsula looking at actual sea stacks, then I do think of my paintings. I do have a pretty intense desire to somehow get the intensity of those experiences into my painting. It seems that in order to do that more successfully, I need to abstract more. At least so far.



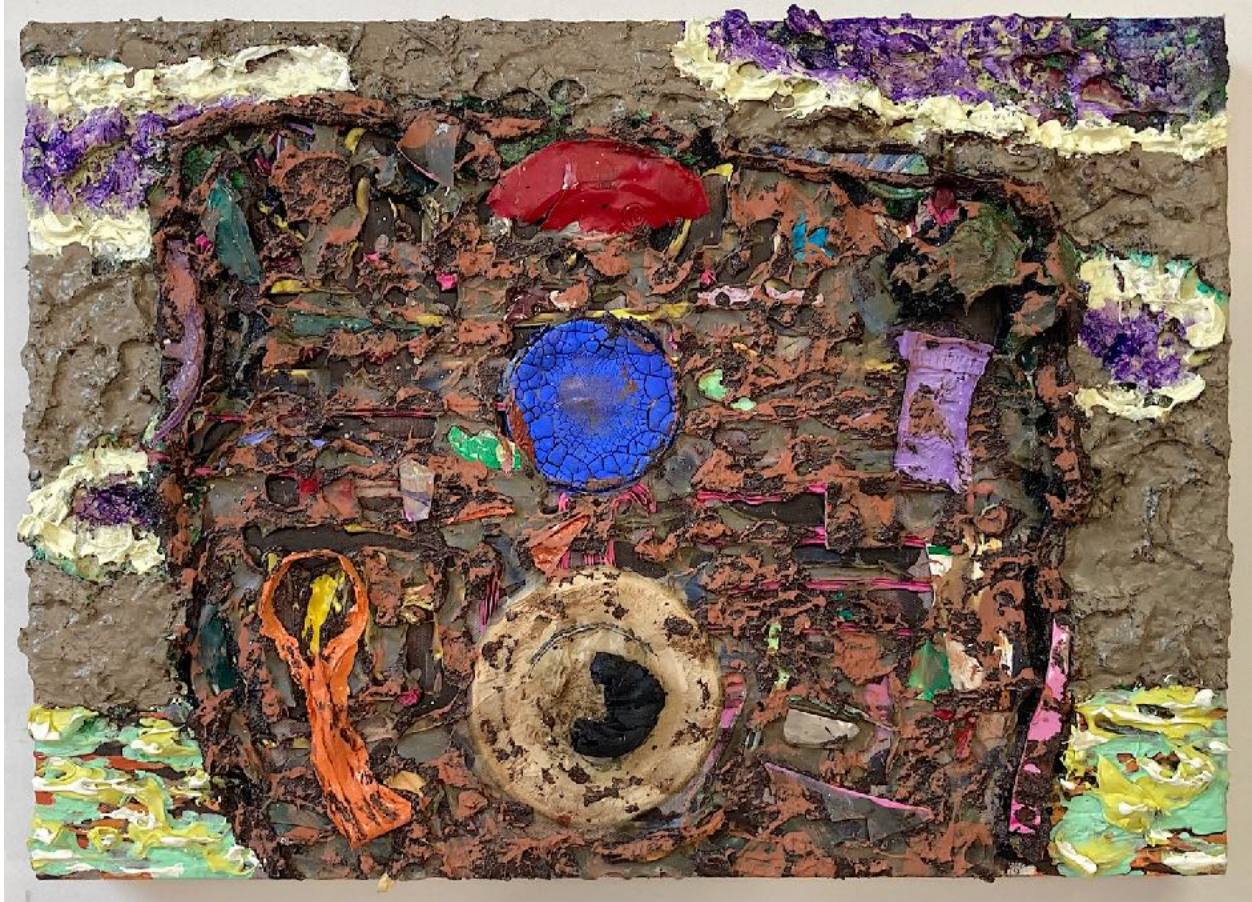
Scott Bennett, *Bee Hive*, 2022, acrylic and collage on canvas, 24x28"

Q: What are you planning next?

A: Well, as I often feel like I have too many paintings bottled up inside me - just keep painting and doing my best to make the best paintings I can. There is always the tedious business side of the career or life of an artist, and so tending to getting the work out in front of more eyes is certainly on my mind. I am hoping to find more representation for my work and schedule more exhibitions. I think the usual things that all of us as artists aspire to and work toward achieving with our careers is on my mind, but the most important thing, as it has always been for me, is to get into the studio on a regular basis. And that, I am doing.



Studio view showing two paintings on walls: Left is *Sea Gull Sea Stack*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 47x56" and right is *New Hill*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 47x54.5"



Scott Bennett, *Beachcomber*, 2022, acrylic and collage on canvas, 16x22"



Scott Bennett, *Color Totem*, 2018, acrylic and collage on canvas, 36x25.5"



Scott Bennett, *Balsam*, 2022, acrylic and collage on canvas, 30x22"



Scott Bennett, *House Boat*, 2020, acrylic and collage on Sintra panel, 21x24"



Scott Bennett, *Yggdrasill*, 2022, acrylic and collage on canvas, 47.5x37.5"

