

Paint to Preserve the Scenery You Love

9 Sep 2010 by [cjordan](#)

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Air and Water:

Blue Skies with Water in Shadow

2009-10, oil on canvas encased in lead, 72 3/4 x 52 x 2 1/2 in.

All works by Adam Straus.

Courtesy [Nohra Haime Gallery](#).

“My appreciation for the natural world came from my childhood growing up in south Florida and being outdoors so much,” says Straus, whose 20-years worth of seascape paintings will be on view at the [Nohra Haime Gallery](#), in New York for the next several weeks. “I’ve painted with almost a reverence for the atmosphere, water, and landscape, and trying to get a feeling of being there,” he says. “When you look at incredible examples of 19th-century landscape paintings you can smell the air and sea, you can feel the wind. The artists transport you into the picture. That’s what I’ve been attempting to do.”



Oil Slick, 2002,

oil on lead and canvas encased in steel, 59 x 74 1/8 x 2 in.

As an artist who has painted the natural world for over 20 years, Adam Straus has a complicated connection to his environment, one that respects nature as both powerful and vulnerable, dangerous and endangered. In the 1990s, Straus started a series of paintings titled *Oil Slicks*, which referenced the oil spills that were happening at the time, and the relevancy of which has been asserted again and again over the years.

The artist has also painted seascapes that often contain a sense of foreboding, often jarring to viewers who expect serene images of waves crashing along the shore. The works lend themselves to that 19th-century understanding of the sublime. In many of his paintings Straus demonstrates that nature, although welcoming, still has the power to match that of any manmade structure. “Nature is a powerful force and can destroy what we build in a matter of minutes,” the artist says. “Haiti and New Orleans are examples of that.” Lately, the artist has reduced the environment depicted in his paintings to its most elemental. Seascapes compositionally winnowed down to water, air, and the horizon line that joins the two.



Shelter Island in Fog, 2009,

oil on canvas encased in lead, 33 1/4 x 35 1/4 x 2 1/4.

Oftentimes Straus finds that his paintings make an even bigger impact than he intended. “I recently did a painting of the marsh grass outside my home, only to later read an article about the fact that those marsh grasses are dying off and no one could figure out why,” he says. “All of a sudden that painting became relevant. It almost became an artifact: a painting of a pristine space that a year later could be gone.”

Although Straus does not believe his artwork can singlehandedly change the world, he does feel that his works are powerful—because they are meaningful to him. “Any artist should paint what they love and think about and feel about most strongly,” he says. “Artists do a lot simply by documenting the beauty of what they see—and by acknowledging that it is finite. It is one way of saving and preserving it.”

In and of itself, plein air painting is a rewarding and invigorating endeavor. But its power increases exponentially when we realize the roles we can play to preserve the spaces that sparked our creativity in the first place. [Plein Air Painting](#) is our largest magazine dedicated to the subject, and it gives you all the resources and information you’ll need to paint powerful, moving works in the hills, on the shores, and in the forests that inspire you. You’ll be able to create works that reflect your vision, and move viewers of your work with equal power.

Courtney