

*In the Artist's Studio featuring Warren Chang*

# INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTIST

## **When did you realize that creating art was something you had to do?**

I've been interested in art since I was a young boy. Art was encouraged in my family, my father an amateur artist and intellectual, was always working with his hands, whether a block print, sculpture or drawing and painting. As a boy I was inspired by comic books, later illustrators, such as Norman Rockwell and NC Wyeth and fantasy artist Frank Frazetta. My interest in art was always in realism, and frankly this was always my only option, as I could not relate then or now to modern notions of contemporary art, which is like a foreign language to me.

## **Tell me about your studio?**

My studio is relatively small, a stand-alone building constructed in the backyard of my house in 2007. Inspired roughly by the architectural drawing of Norman Rockwell's studio, it boasts a large bay window from the direction of the north.

There is a long bookshelf installed along the north wall, containing hundreds of art books and literature, which are of constant inspiration to me. There is a small loft on the second floor primarily used for storing paintings and this is where I also stretch my canvas.

## **What is your most important tool?**

I think drawing. My foundation is the accuracy of my draftsmanship and understanding of light and shadow, of how light falls upon form.

## **Has your practice changed over time? If so, how?**

Yes, in the beginning, I worked exclusively from "life," direct from nature, using live models. I shunned my illustrative roots, deeming them inferior and lacking substance. Today, I embrace more of my past career as an illustrator, more in regards to procedure and methods. In essence, my work could be described as illustrative fine art.

## **When you're working on an idea or making a painting, what is your daily routine? Do you have rituals or patterns that you follow?**

My paintings always start with an idea. This idea might be lay dormant in my mind for months, if not years, before I finally take action. Then, the first stage of development is always a thumbnail sketch in pencil or pen in my sketchbook. This little rough drawing, not much more than stick figures, can be easily overlooked for its looseness and unrefined quality, however it is perhaps the most important stage of any of my paintings. All the inspiration and meaning is found in this little sketch. When compared to the finished painting, you can clearly recognize how this idea developed from this humble beginning.

I follow a pretty consistent procedure, in first searching and gathering photographic reference. More often than not, I have to hire models, gather wardrobe and more, prior to photographing my hired “actors”, as I like to refer to them, for a photo shoot. Once I’ve gathered these photographic references, which might take weeks or months, I then develop a compositional sketch. This will be very finished and will later be transferred to a larger canvas. But before going to this final step, I almost always complete a small color study, sometimes on panel, sometimes on illustration board. These small studies are looser than the finished paintings, but contain the essence of the painting, in regards to color, value and feeling. Once the color study is complete, I use this as a guide to completing the finished painting. Sometimes, the finished painting is very close to the original color study and sometimes the finished painting looks different, improvising off the original color study. I may add or change a figure or element and that sort of thing.

### **What are the influences and experiences that inform your work?**

I’ve derived most my inspiration by the study of the [Great Masters] European masters, Rembrandt, Velasquez and the like. However I draw as much inspiration from literature and music as I do from more traditional artists and painters.

Specifically, I’ve drawn inspiration from authors John Steinbeck and Pearl Buck, and also the writings of Tolstoy.

### **Are there personal or cultural conflicts that inform your work?**

My art is very personal to me, reflecting my deepest thoughts and feelings about life.

### **In your opinion, what role does the artist have in society?**

Quoting Tolstoy, I believe that the purpose of art is to educate man’s feelings.