

Brent Cotton

Hueys Fine Art, June 1-30

BRENT COTTON'S portrayals of the natural world aglow are widely admired for their striking, almost ethereal radiance. Glimmering, backlit rivers and the haloed silhouettes of solitary fly fishermen are among the artist's most recognizable imagery. Those subjects, among others, appear in his solo show this month at Hueys Fine Art in Santa Fe, NM. "My continued exploration of the light is a strong motivator for me in my work," says Cotton, whose works delicately straddle the line between tonalism and luminism. "I'm absolutely enamored with light and how to capture mood and drama in a scene."

It's easy to see why *Embracing the Light* is the title for his latest show at Hueys, where as many as 12 new oil paintings are unveiled on Saturday, June 1. On the following weekend, Cotton takes part in the annual Prix de West Invitational in Oklahoma City, where he garnered the prestigious Wilson Hurley Memorial Award for Outstanding Landscape last year. He then heads to Santa Fe for an artist's reception at the gallery on Friday, June 14.

Visitors to the show can expect to see many of Cotton's trademark subjects, including illuminated riverscapes and rural scenery, evocative nocturnes, and anglers fishing along light-dappled trout streams. In all of his work, notes gallery owner Keith Huey, "Brent is reaching beyond the reality of the world we see around us. He goes from the natural to the sublime, engaging viewers in light and shadow, and I think it gets people to think about the spiritual quality of mankind."

An avid outdoorsman and fisherman, Cotton resides in western Montana's Bitterroot Valley, where he derives as much inspiration from the local rivers and streams as he does from the light. Although the artist frequently uses his plein-air studies and photographs as a "jumping-off point" when working in



Evening Rise, oil, 32 x 40.



Then the Morning Comes, oil, 12 x 16.



Entering the Canyon, oil, 32 x 40.

the studio, his intimate knowledge of these waterways tends to be his chief guide. Cotton began *EVENING RISE*, for example, as a winter moonscape. Early in the process, however, he decided to eliminate the moon and instead began improvising a glittering, early-evening river scene while preserving the “intense greens and blues” of his preliminary moonscape. “So I ended up with colors I wouldn’t have thought to use [otherwise],” he says.

As he worked, Cotton also added a fisherman to the scene to commemorate a memorable summer day of fishing and

camaraderie with his brother Clint on the East Fork of the Bitterroot River. “As the day was fading, I was struck by the silhouette of my brother and the shimmer on the water,” he says. “The memory of that day begged to be painted.”

Allowing his paintings to “morph organically” this way is part and parcel of the artist’s creative process, which he describes as a combination of experimentation, exploration, and simplification as he continually works toward “saying more with less.” Someone once told him, “Your paintings make me remember things I’ve never seen.” It was

one of the best compliments he’s ever received, says Cotton. “That’s what I want. I want to create paintings that people can escape into and derive peace from.”

—*Kim Agricola*

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www.hueysfineart.com

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