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# ianSHELDON: Landscapes and Skyscapes

INTERVIEW BY CORRY MONTEMURRO

## *What is it about the Western Canadian landscape that inspires you?*

I am a big fan of the prairies within the context of the Western Canadian landscape. To paint the vast, open plains is a vastly different experience than painting the mountains. There is greater subtlety and beauty in the plains, and they seem to require a delicate manipulation of colour to embody the richness within.

The wide open spaces and vast horizon are pivotal to my nature. The emptiness is somehow nurturing, and I have often wondered if this is not some backlash on my part against the endless turmoil and busyness that our contemporary and urban lives thrust on us. I welcome quiet solitude, and when I visit the open spaces, I feel enormously and spiritually restored. It is this restoration that I enjoy putting onto canvas.

## *How has your academic background in Natural Sciences and Wild Lands Management influenced your work?*

I wrestled for a number of years with career choices. With two science degrees, it seemed that my path was clear and that that was the field that made most sense. However, it was art that filled my time around my studies. I can't honestly say that the studies made me paint, but it was a logical consequence for me to pursue the natural world academically and as an artist.

Taking my studies to another level definitely allowed me to focus on the things that really mattered, and while researching for my Masters degree, I became greatly intrigued by people's

need and desire to be in wilderness. This has definitely extended to my paintings, and I thoroughly enjoy meeting and talking to collectors to find out what drives them to have a piece of wilderness that I've painted now hanging on their wall.

## *There is a foreboding sense of turbulence on the horizon line in some of your work, yet your technique in the application of paint and your chosen colours yield a calming serenity, almost like the 'calm before the storm.' Is there a greater narrative or symbolism embedded in this tension?*

I've enjoyed the high drama on the prairies. Storms and wild weather drive the essence of the land and shape people's memory and experience of the vast open skies. I am attracted to the momentary fusion of heaven with land during a storm, particularly in the form of rain. Rain is life giving, and the prairies have given me life. The tempestuous and brooding nature of some of my works is most often softened by a glimmer of hope, ray of sunshine, splash of colour... There is and should always be hope. I sometimes think that the stormy paintings represent my take on Alberta, that I am living in a political desert or storm, and yet somewhere out there I can find what I need to instill hope. This is not a motivation to create such art, merely a cognitive by-product. Most of all, I enjoy the experiential paradox of these brooding, stormy skies, for the subject matter is powerful and possibly construed as negative or dramatic, yet the blue palette I use represents nature's calming colours.



IAN SHELDON | **STORM FRONT** | OIL ON CANVAS | 20" X 48" | 2005



IAN SHELDON | **FLURRY DESCENT** | OIL ON CANVAS | 60" X 45" | 2008



IAN SHELDON | **BIG FLURRY SQUARE II** |  
OIL ON CANVAS | 36" X 36" | 2004



IAN SHELDON | **PINK RAIN** | OIL ON CANVAS | 16" X 19" | 2008



IAN SHELDON | **OCTOBER FIELDS** | OIL ON CANVAS | 18" X 28" | 2008



IAN SHELDON | **AUTUMNAL SKY DANCE** | OIL ON CANVAS | 24" X 60" | 2004



IAN SHELDON | **FLURRY FINGERS** |  
OIL ON CANVAS | 36" X 36" | 2008



IAN SHELDON | **EMPTY PRAIRIE DUSK** |  
OIL ON CANVAS | 10" X 10" | 2005



*The diversity of your talent stretches beyond oil painting. You have been working with glass recently as well. Explain this transition from oil to glass.*

My move to working on glass was one of those happy accidents. I saw glass tile samples at Panache Ceramics, and the rich texture and possibility within the medium was an instant hit with me. I just knew that I had to find a way to transpose my prairie themes onto glass and that the result would be very satisfying. There is a huge amount of energy in glass, almost electric. To put a prairie storm onto glass adds another dimension to the subject matter and makes for quite a different and captivating experience.

*Looking forward to the upcoming spring/summer storm season?*

Oh yes. I get a huge adrenalin rush from storm chasing. I'll be monitoring the radar every day to watch for the first signs of storms being generated. I am prepared to drop everything at a moment's notice in order to pursue a storm. Little else seems to matter at the time. Oddly enough, there is some stress to it too. Mostly, I am looking for specific weather phenomena at specific times of year, and when certain crops are past flowering and if the storms haven't come in the right way, I'll be finding myself short of the material I love to paint.



IAN SHELDON | **STORM FRONT** | OIL ON CANVAS | 20" X 48" | 2005

*Do you have any shows coming up?*

I have just finished working on an art book for Cambridge University Press in England, so I have not committed to any shows this year. I will, however, be taking part in the Whyte Avenue Art Walk (July 10 -12), which is a great community event where artists can sit on the street and show off their work. I've done that for 11 years, or maybe more, and I never miss it - it's just too much fun and a super way to meet and talk to people about my work. I'll also be at Stratus Gallery in Banff for a weekend of on-site painting during the first weekend of August.