

WAYNE THIEBAUD INFLUENCER A NEW GENERATION

A Search for the Extraordinary: Working with Wayne Thiebaud

By Fred Hope
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In 2011, Wayne Thiebaud walked through a two-man exhibit in Laguna Beach that included about 20 of my recent paintings. Wayne was there because my co-exhibitor, Professor Gene Cooper, is a longtime friend. After he looked at the exhibition, I had a few minutes to meet Wayne and his wife, Betty Jean, before they moved on to their next appointment.

Below you see one of my paintings that was on exhibit.



Arabesque, 2011. 36 x 48 in. Oil on canvas.

With some hesitation, Gene later relayed Wayne's assessment of my work: "well painted, but rather ordinary." Gene went on to say that Wayne's advice to me was to endeavor to find a way to make work that is "extraordinary."

I could tell that Gene was trying not to be discouraging as he relayed these words. He knew that I was an admirer of Wayne and his work going back to my art school days in the 1970s, and he didn't want to be the source of discouraging news. He need not have worried. Wayne's assessment was correct, and perfectly aligned with my own.

My work was selling adequately enough to provide support, and I was showing in local exhibitions, festivals and galleries. But I was not satisfied with the depth of the work, particularly with regard to stretching creatively. Wayne's comments were a perfect catalyst to start make the changes I had been thinking about. I adjusted my priorities, and began concentrating on a more direct, personal and (I hoped) unique approach. I was determined to change my trajectory.

I began to develop work exclusively born of my personal history and to explore subject matter that was unique to me; work that I hoped would evolve into something extraordinary. My art history library was expanded as well. An enthusiastic art historian, Gene Cooper inspired me to delve deeper in that arena.

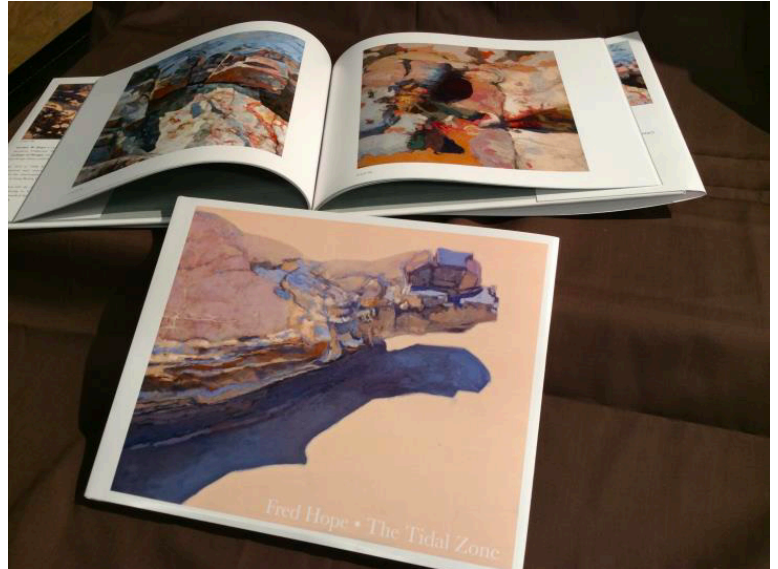
Gene and I also began a series of discussions about Wayne and his approach to painting — talks that continue to this day.

After three years of pursuing my goal, I had created a body of work that I felt was beginning to represent my most unencumbered ideas and that might represent a newfound personal direction. I assembled a small book and wrote a summary statement that spoke of my enthusiasm for and dedication to the further development of my new body of work.

When the first draft of the book was completed (at right), Gene offered to show it to Wayne, thinking that he might be interested in my efforts and progress.

Gene reported that Wayne had been impressed by my willingness to make such a significant effort to move my work forward and that he would be interested in continuing to meet periodically to discuss the work, and to suggest ideas to help push the process forward.

With some trepidation, I made a call to Wayne and was invited to come up for a visit and to bring a few of my current paintings.



As of this writing, I have been working with Wayne for almost six years, traveling from my home in Orange County to his studio in Sacramento every six weeks or so with a carload of new work. We talk about my paintings and about painting in a general, and I always leave with new ideas to explore through exercises and experimentation. On the seven-hour drive home, when I stop to fuel up, I always take time to jot down notes about our discussion.

In recent years Wayne has also asked me to look at his recent work and to give him honest feedback. It is quite a privilege. There is now a subtle sense of friendship and a feeling that on a certain level we are engaging as peers, if only in our inner search for the creation of those elusive “great works” out there in front of us somewhere, waiting to be discovered by just doing the work!

The last thing we always talk about is how lucky we are to be doing this “painting thing” every day. These visits with Wayne always fuel my enthusiasm. I depart eager for a quick return to my studio to continue on this painter’s journey.