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# Art & Life with Brian Rutenberg



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Today we'd like to introduce you to Brian Rutenberg.

**Brian, please kick things off for us by telling us about yourself and your journey so far.**

To experience transcendence, you must know your origins. Where do you come from? What place stacked your bones into the shape of you? I live in the most cosmopolitan city on earth, yet I look more like an overweight Greek waiter than a "dazzling urbanite," to borrow a line from Blazing Saddles. My wife, Katie, and I wear black to fancy receptions, but I'm never more than one burp away from the beach bum that I really am, preferring flip-flops, shorts, and a T-shirt, even on chilly days. I don't take myself very seriously, but I do

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know on which side my bread is buttered; I know where I come from. The most soulful paintings are tethered to one idea, one place, a single heat source, and no place burns hotter than the American South. Because it remained somewhat separate from the Western expansion of the United States in the nineteenth century, the South was perceived as complex, isolated, and exotic, an ideal breeding ground for eccentrics, storytellers, songwriters, and artists.

You know as well as I that there isn't one Southern landscape any more than there is a single Southern identity, yet all of us lucky enough to have been born there wear the same tattoo of geography across our sunburnt shoulders. I live in New York City, but I'm tied to the shape of the Carolina coast, whose tangled woods and oppressive heat don't represent progress over nature but defeat at its hands. I grew up in landscapes so hauntingly beautiful that it was unbearable. As a kid, I believed that I could see the languid air that stuck to my eyelids and hung like curtains at dusk. The South spawns many writers and artists because it's so damn hot, and heat makes people crazy. Some artists seek inspiration in her languorous scenery, while others surrender to humidity's curfew and allow their eyes to be torched by untamed light. That's the difference between a landscape painter and a Southern landscape

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painter; a Southern landscape painter extracts poetry from capitulation. An artist is born the moment he or she gives up. If you're making art, you're trying too hard. Stop it. The best paintings look like work, not art. I gave up trying long ago and what was left over, that sleep-deprived, desperate version of myself, was my spark. I've built a successful career fanning that spark.

**Can you give our readers some background on your art?**

I do one thing. Every painting I make begins and ends with the same image, a tree trunk and its shadow; that physical marking of location. A tree and its shadow say, "This is here". By paying attention and drawing them in great detail with pencil on paper, I respond, "I am here." I've never needed a position because I have a place. I don't paint my native South Carolina, I manufacture a place and South Carolina becomes it.

All of my landscape paintings refer to standing in one season peering ahead into another, longing for October in May. I always go back to the wisdom of Winnie the Pooh, who said that his favorite thing isn't getting honey, but that moment when he might get honey. Perhaps this is the source of all art: unfulfilled longing. It has taken me 42 years of painting to see what all was there along, that something can only come to life when we can't have it.

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### **Any advice for aspiring or new artists?**

1. Show up every day.
2. Don't ask for help.
3. Send handwritten thank-you notes on fine stationary.

### **What's the best way for someone to check out your work and provide support?**

I have been represented in Atlanta by TEW Galleries for over a decade. The gallery is located at 425 Peachtree Hills Ave NE. Tim, Jules, and Corky are happy to show my paintings and works on paper to anyone who is interested. Every two or three years, I create a new body of work for a solo exhibition there. I love showing in Atlanta. My paintings can be found in such museums as Yale Gallery of Art, Bronx Art Museum, Greenville County Museum of Art, Butler Institute of American Art, Peabody Essex Museum of, and many others.

My best-selling book "Clear Seeing Place" is about how I became a painter and how I endure as one. It is available on Amazon.

[www.brianrutenbergbooks.com](http://www.brianrutenbergbooks.com).

I produce a monthly series of YouTube videos called "Brian Rutenberg Studio Visits" in which I open the door to my studio and talk candidly about my process and career. There are 63 videos and counting. I get daily mail from people all over the world sharing third triumphs and miseries. They remind me that I am not alone. I like being of use to other artists.

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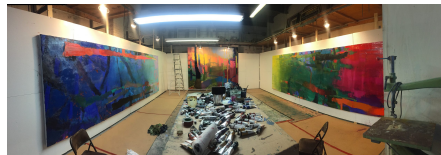
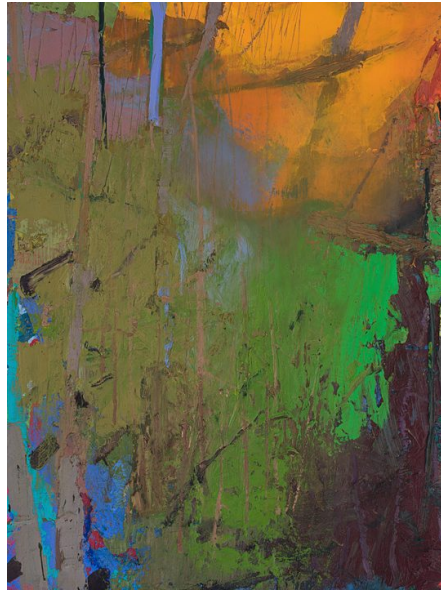
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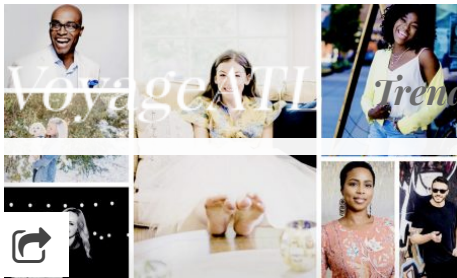
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