



Bob
Oil, 31 x 28 in.

C A L I F O R N I A

Mian Situ

Better For The Struggle

REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES, says Mian Situ, are the inspiration for his art, which is why most of his work is figurative. “Some figure artists are only interested in the forms and colors,” he continues, “but I like to dig into the subject to give the painting more meaning by commenting on people’s experiences.” This intensity of emotion and universality of feeling draw collectors to Situ’s work.

LATE BLOOMER

Situ grew up with his grandparents in China’s countryside, and he still recalls many warm memories of time with his grandfather. Unlike many artists whose abilities are evident from a very early age, Situ says he didn’t become interested in art until he was 13 or 14. At the time, all of the schools in China were shut down because of the Cultural Revolution, so Situ began his education by learning from a friend who could draw and by reading every art book he could find.

Finally, in 1972, Situ was admitted into the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art, where he eventually earned a BA and an MA in art, and later became an instructor. His academic training, says Situ, had both

positive and negative effects. He now sees his thorough knowledge of painting based on observation as a flexible approach that can be applied to any subject. On the other hand, he feels there was not much room for creativity.

GOOD FORTUNE STRIKES

When China began to open its doors in 1987, Situ seized the opportunity to visit the United States. “Every young artist wanted to go abroad to study art and see the world,” he recalls enthusiastically. Situ arrived in Los Angeles with “next to nothing” in his pocket, facing the slim chance for success that all artists face. “The biggest obstacle to success was myself,” he says candidly. “I told myself I wasn’t good enough to walk into the prestigious galleries. I found an art dealer who was Korean, and this seemed closer to what I knew. He sold cheap copies of famous paintings, and he gave me a chance by allowing me to copy master paintings right there in his gallery — \$75 for each one!”

After traveling the world for a few years, Situ didn’t want to return to China, so he went to Canada, where it was easier to stay. He lived there for four years,



MIAN SITU AND DAUGHTER LISA ON CATALINA ISLAND

TIDE POOL
OIL, 14 x 12 IN.



RED SCARF
OIL, 30 x 20 IN.



THE PROSPECTOR
OIL, 18 x 14 IN.



working as a street artist, doing portraits for a few dollars apiece, while developing his impressionistic style and honing his craftsmanship. Making a living was still a challenge, but a series of turning points changed Situ's life.

On a whim, he submitted one of his paintings to the Oil Painters of America's annual exhibition. He says he "expected nothing," but he won the top prize of \$10,000. "I was thrilled," he says, the joy of the moment still resonating in his voice. "It was magic!" Soon, noted galleries were offering to represent him. His subsequent success as a multi-award-winning, top-selling artist paved his permanent return to Southern California.

Another turning point was the 2003 Masters of the American West show at the Gene Autry National Center. Situ had



A Joyful Moment
Oil, 30 x 20 in.

always aspired to be part of this event because of the caliber of artists who participate each year. Eventually, he was invited to contribute a work, with one caveat: The subject had to relate to the American West, which was not part of Situ's *oeuvre* at the time. "John J. Geraghty, the show's advisor, suggested that I paint the Chinese experience of coming to the West, which is my own experience," explains Situ. "It seemed like I was the right artist to do this subject, and it worked." Astoundingly, Situ walked away with three top awards for that one painting.

THE QUEST FOR PERFECTION

Infusing his paintings with a sense of the subject's life experiences, and the greater meaning to be found in them, remains Situ's objective. He says he is enjoying his life as an artist more today than ever, but ironically, he adds that painting never gets any easier. "My goal is to perfect my style," he says, "but if I got to the point where I thought my work was perfect, that would be the end. I enjoy the struggle, because the outcome is always better when there is a struggle." Perhaps what's true in art is true in life as well. ■