



'Canyon Haze'

Michael Obermeyer, 2016, oil on canvas, 11 by 12 inches

THE ARTIST: As far back as he can remember, Michael Obermeyer wanted to draw and paint: dinosaurs, planes, people – it didn't matter. He worked as an illustrator in the defense industry and later got on staff as an artist at a design studio whose client list included Disneyland and Coldwell Banker. But he was happily lured away from his 9-to-6 office job by Laguna Beach's thriving *plein air* scene. He loved the freedom and fresh air. "I was like, 'Why didn't I do this five years ago?'" he says. Then the Great Recession hit. To help pay the bills, Obermeyer took a part-time job at Starbucks for three years, painting before and after his shifts. He keeps his old Starbucks apron in his Laguna Beach studio as a reminder that he's exactly where he wants to be. "I don't have bad days," he says. Obermeyer and his wife, Lori, live in Aliso Viejo and have three children ages 28, 22 and 15.

IN OBERMEYER'S WORDS: I love painting in the winter here. When I'm painting indoors, it's almost like exercise for me to go out and do some *plein air* painting. I went out to the canyon on a Sunday morning. I had decided to go out there on the spur of a moment. I did a quick sketch and said, "Oh, this'll just be for me." Once I got it home, I really just liked the warm light. The way it bounces off the cars and the highway and you just get that glow. When you're outdoors, you really have to paint what you see and not what you know. I did a little sketch where I included part of the sky and I thought, "Well it doesn't need the sky because the canyons create this veil." The trees and the poles give it focus. I just kept it simple. They're in the process of taking those poles out now so it really is capturing a moment that won't exist anymore. **As told to Jodie Tillman**