

WILLIAM ARMSTRONG

William Armstrong started out at 14 painting signs for butcher shops, in Newark. He went on to become one of the world's leading scenic artists, creating dozens of major movie sets.

An accomplished artist, painter, sculptor and craftsman, Armstrong has worked with Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, Spike Lee and Woody Allen. Among Armstrong's ornate movie sets featured in *Architectural Digest* have been *Meet Joe Black* and *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, the project that brought the painter to Savannah, which he and his wife Monique now call home.

Armstrong typically works from pen and ink drawings and pencil sketches, carefully observing the landscape and people around him. His luminous Low-Country landscapes are worlds away from the high-profile movie sets of *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, *Scent of A Woman* or *Conspiracy Theory*, but they enlighten viewers with their heightened sensitivity to the ineffable beauty of a palm tree at sunset or the mystical presence of a weathered wooden dock on the marsh.

Technically, it appears the artist can achieve almost any result – in oils, watercolors, pen and ink, sculpture. "You have to be a magician in the film business," he says. "I learned to create *faux* finishes, marble out of plywood, illusory tricks that could not be told from the real thing, and that adds a lot to your technical repertoire."

Since settling in Savannah, Armstrong has found himself, like many area artists, fascinated by the ever-changing light and shadow. "I could tell I would enjoy painting here because of the wealth of weather changes you have," he says. "You have instant storms and beautiful sunrises and sunsets."

Armstrong enjoys creating watercolors on location, in the *plein-air* tradition, painting a shell-pink and pale-lilac sky over the marsh at sunset or celebrating the view across the river at Bonaventure Cemetery. Inspired by the watercolors of John Singer Sargent, Armstrong explains that he strives for a "looseness with the brush strokes" in his watercolors, which showcase palm trees with spiky fronds silhouetted against plush, diaphanous clouds.

Armstrong's best work is the product of an intense, almost superhuman, attention to his surroundings. "Most people think nothing changes," he says, "but things change all the time -- if you're paying attention." This keen focus on the world around him enables the artist to capture nuances in the water and sky, unique to a particular season or time of day. Using rich oil paints he can intensify the colors of a Beaufort marsh, creating a rosy haze echoed visually in the sky and in the river.

"It's amazing what people don't see, even when something is right in front of them," he says. "Through my painting I try to help people see the beauty in their own neighborhood and to learn to see the day-to-day changes in the world around us."

William Armstrong's work is exhibited in his Savannah certified national historic residence where the public has been invited to attend multiple shows since 2001. He is also represented in Charleston by Charles II Art Gallery.