



Jeff Larson, *Tangerines*, 1999, oil on canvas, 24 x 38.

## Jeff Larson

Jeff Larson is an artist dedicated to working from life in every sense. This means not only that he engages his subjects directly, whether working plein-air or in the studio, but that he takes his inspiration directly from his own experience. His work depicts the life around him: his home, his family, and the community he lives in. He interprets these themes in genre, portrait, landscape and still life work.

Larson works outdoors in the summer and moves indoors during the winter months. Outdoors he works in time slots, depending on the weather. "Typically I start working on my first piece about 7 a.m. and go until about 8:30. I start on another about 8:45 and work until 10, and so on, working on as many as five pieces a day." On cloudy days he works for longer periods on fewer pieces because the light doesn't change as quickly. His focus outdoors is on the intensity of light, as seen through color. He works only from life and uses as many as four or five models a day. "The past few years I have enjoyed working around a laundry theme. This motif



Jeff Larson, *Portrait of the Artist's Daughter, Sophia Rose*, 2000, oil on canvas, 44 x 36.



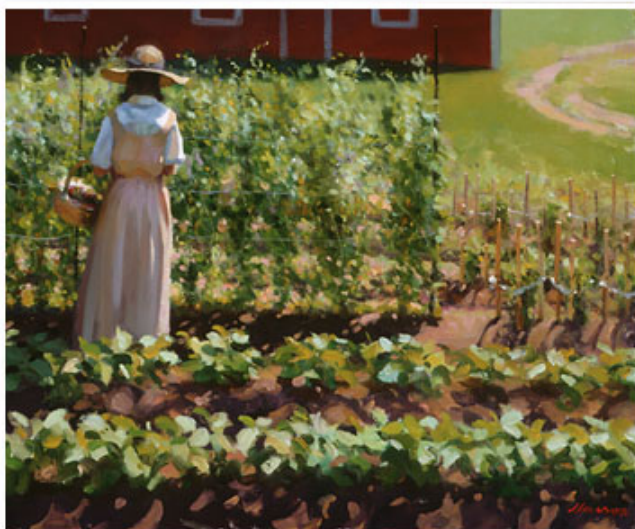
Jeff Larson, *White Bag*, 1998, oil on canvas, 20 x 24.



Jeff Larson, *Today is Yesterday, Tomorrow*, 1999, oil on canvas, 26 x 48.

provides opportunities to compose more abstractly and to manipulate the set-up and color theme. It's also fascinating to study the effects of light as it passes through and bounces off the fabric, and as it reflects onto and engulfs the model." Larson balances this plein-air work "by concentrating indoors during the winter on values, drawing, edgework and composition. I have noticed that when I come back into the studio after a season of painting outdoors I bring





with me the intensity of the outdoor color I have seen; my eyes seem to see a bit cleaner.” Working in the studio provides him with the opportunity to proceed under more controlled, studied conditions. Consequently, he says, “When I go back outside, in the spring, I sense that my figures are drawn a little better. I see values more accurately, and with more refinement and subtlety.”

Larson has admired and studied the work of many artists, both contemporary and past masters. His interests have varied and shifted over the years, but one of the most lasting impressions made upon him came when he viewed an exhibit of the work of Spanish painter, Joaquin Sorolla, in Kansas City more than ten years ago. “I literally felt like I’d been hit in the gut. My enthusiasm for outdoor light and figure work has only intensified since then.”

His training under the guidance of Richard Lack in the early 1980s also left a lasting impression. “One of the most important guiding principles I learned from Richard Lack is to ‘always work on that which is furthest behind.’ This applies not only to working on any given painting, but also as an approach to continuous study as you progress. For example, after I graduated from Atelier Lack, I felt that my eye for color was weak, so I worked outdoors painting landscapes for several years. When I felt more confident about my color, I realized that my drawing and composition skills had fallen behind, so I spent a couple of years focusing on sculpture, portraits and imaginative pieces. To this day I am very critical of my weaknesses, challenging myself to always improve and never become complacent.”

Larson believes that good painting is a matter of mastering basic skills. “The more I experiment and

Counterclockwise from the top: Jeff Larson, *White Gown*, 2000, oil on canvas, 30 x 40. *Rose Print*, 2000, oil on canvas, 24 x 30. *Snap Peas*, 1999, oil on canvas, 20 x 24. *Full Bloom*, 2000, oil on canvas, 28 x 30.



personalize my methods, the more I become convinced that it primarily comes down to mastering fundamentals. My focus may shift — in one canvas it might be on bold patterning full of intense light and shadow, and in another it might be beautiful muted tones and subtle value shifts. But my method remains the same. I don't believe that 'the secret of the Old Masters' lies in some special medium or in the colors you lay out on your palette. I believe a trained and discerning eye, and a sensitive study of great works of art is absolutely necessary. However, it is just as important to have the capacity in your personality to make mistakes and learn from them, and to be able to dedicate yourself to countless hours of practice. These are much more important ingredients to success than what ratio of stand oil to damar you should use."

In an essay titled, "Coming Full Circle — The Changing Art World," Larson wrote:

"This century has seen Modernism, Post-Modernism, and one 'ism' after another come and go. These movements found expression in every artistic discipline. All but the art of painting retained belief in the value of a classical training, after which an individual is prepared to undertake whatever direction or challenges they may find. By some obscure reasoning the visual arts world decided they were above this necessity, believing that it somehow stifled creativity, and discarded 600 years of tradition. Imagine young violinists 'expressing' themselves onstage without the benefit of training.

"Those who did find and complete training were often ridiculed and ignored. By 1980, when I was fortunate enough to be accepted into Atelier Lack in Minneapolis, I knew of less than a dozen schools worldwide legitimately offering thorough traditional training.

"Since then, I've seen a huge resurgence in interest. It has come from the public, and not from the 'experts.' I believe that people are hungry for works that celebrate beauty and reflect their own lives."

Jeff Larson lives with his wife, Heidi, and their three children in northern Wisconsin near the south shore of Lake Superior. Jeff and his family have converted a former country school in a rural area into a home and studio. Larson has been featured in articles in *US Art* and *The Artist's Magazine*. He won an Honorable Mention in



Jeff Larson, *Woman in Garden*, 2000, oil on canvas, 24 x 30.

*The Artist's Magazine's* 2000 National Contest in the still life and portrait category. He has shown in many group exhibitions and has held numerous one-man shows, including annual exhibits in recent years at the Meadow Creek Gallery in Edina, Minn. He travels frequently to present seminars on oil painting around the U.S. He completed four years of training at Atelier Lack in Minneapolis during the early 1980s, and followed this with study of human anatomy at the University of Minnesota, museum study around the U.S. and in Europe, and the study of bronze casting in private foundries in Minneapolis.

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