

ROBERT GOLDMAN

Driven By Intuition

By Gael Hees



People, places, and painting—those are the things Robert Goldman loves. His award-winning, nuanced landscapes not only capture light and color, they have captured the attention of a growing roster of collectors throughout the world.

Goldman's life is punctuated with drawing classes, degrees, studies with other artists, and participation in critique groups as he challenges himself to develop new skills and new ways of seeing. He seeks out the opinions of others and pays attention to their advice. And he

(Above) *Last Light, Grand Canyon*, oil, 40" by 40"

"For the past 10 years I have participated in the Grand Canyon Celebration of Art during which I really fell in love with this view of Yaki Point. Sunset at this spot is phenomenal, and I wanted to play up the light in this painting by introducing a spot of light on the foreground cliff, which I imagined could have been there if the conditions were just right."



Above the Little Colorado, oil, 24" by 30"

"The Little Colorado River on its way to the Colorado River and Grand Canyon has carved deep narrow canyons surrounded by massive towering cliffs and buttes. This area is located on Navajo reservation land dotted by a few scattered dwellings and roads that seem to go forever. From this view, one can see the Little Colorado deep down in the canyon. My goal was to capture a sense of the massive cliffs and gorge as the canyon recedes into the distance."

credits much of his success to the teachers and artists who have influenced him along the way.

In the early '80s, Goldman attended a workshop conducted by Taos artist Ray Vinella, who had a favorite saying: "Three looks, two thinks, one stroke." Vinella had a profound impact on Goldman, who says, "That was the first time I really got a feeling for what it meant to be painting outdoors and interpreting light and color. Up to that point, I could do detail really well, but I would add white to my color, thinking that would make it brighter, and it would just gray it down."

Goldman also studied with West Coast figurative artist, Wayne Thie-

baud, and was influenced by several other award-winning artists, including Phil Starke, Matt Smith, Bill Anton, and Ray Roberts, one of his colleagues at the Art Center College of Design. He also credits Paul and Susan Bingham, founders of the Thunderbird Foundation, with helping him to find his artistic voice. "Paul and Susan believed in me as an artist and gave me lots of encouragement and advice," he says.

Growing up in Los Angeles, California, Goldman's family valued creating art. His older siblings encouraged him, but his artistic partner was his younger brother, Kenny. "We were enthralled with the Andrew Loomis books on drawing

heads and hands; we studied them all the time," he says. "When I was eight years old, I just kind of had this sort of vision or whatever—I just knew I wanted to be an artist. I even figured, 'Well, I'll probably do okay, but I won't start doing well till I'm in my sixties.' I had heard somewhere that artists do better when they mature. It's interesting, because that's pretty much the way it's gone. In my sixties, things started clicking a little more after I gained more experience."

When Goldman graduated from the University of California in San Diego with a visual arts degree, he was painting large, non-objective acrylic pieces that don't depict any-



Winter Light, Bryce, oil, 24" by 30"

"A number of years ago, I was told by the owners of the Thunderbird Foundation, where I was having a show, that the artist Maynard Dixon had avoided painting Bryce. So, of course, I had to take up the challenge and do just that! When I visited Bryce, it was about 12 degrees and mostly overcast. I stayed overnight and the next morning caught the sun hitting against the canyon, which contrasted nicely against the cool notes of the snow in shadow."



Glowing Sunset, Sedona, oil, 18" by 36"

"In 2024, I participated in the Sedona Plein Air Festival and had a chance to spend a lot of time in the area. This particular sunset view intrigued me with the last bits of light hitting Sail Rock with the moon on the horizon. I infused the painting with an overall envelope of warm light."



Dawn at Lipan Point, oil, 30" by 40"

"This view is located at the Eastern end of the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. I first painted a 9" by 12" study in the morning to catch the dramatic light. In this 30" by 40" version, I was able to push the color contrast, especially the warm midground cliff against the cooler notes of the distant canyon."

thing recognizable from reality, and that evoked a variety of responses. One day he watched as a family was looking at one of his large abstract paintings that was on display at the San Diego Museum of Fine Art as part of the California-Hawaii Biennial exhibit. The father moved closer to read the descriptor tag, stepped back, gathered his family around him, and said, "If you ever see this Robert Goldman in a dark alley, I want you to run like hell!"

Goldman went on to study graphic arts at San Diego City College, worked for a year at an adver-

tising agency, and then attended the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles. In his mind, mastering the art of figure drawing was a requisite milestone for an accomplished painter. Then, and only then, could one paint spontaneously and let go of many of the rules, he says.

As an artist, Goldman is an interesting mix of practicality, intuition, and spontaneity. His work is simultaneously accurate and playful. He also has routines that don't in-

volve art. He's at the gym every day at 5 a.m., shooting a basketball and trying to sink 25 in a row. "It's kind of like a meditation," he says.

He also paints every day, often in concentrated bursts of an hour or two. Accompanied by Diesel, a border collie mix, he works in his garage-cum-studio as he listens to a shuffled playlist of 8,000 songs.

Goldman has a specific formula for beginning each painting. "I start with a little study first, plein air, if

"I just knew I wanted to be an artist."



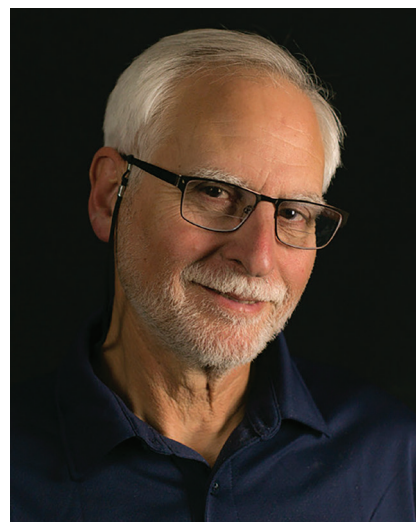
Along the Bulldog Cliffs, oil, 24" by 24"

"East of Phoenix, Arizona, on the way to Saguaro Lake, the Salt River runs along the dramatic towering Bulldog Cliffs. I was attracted by the color contrast between the warm cliffs and the cool water and vegetation. I also wanted to emphasize the design of the various shapes and added some figures to provide a sense of scale in the composition."



Into Coalmine Canyon, oil, 48" by 48"

"I came across this place in a Google search. This is one of my early versions, showing my fascination with the variety of intricate shapes and colors in this geologically diverse location. Working on a large scale like this was both challenging and rewarding because it was an adventure to see it evolve. It is still one of my favorites and has been in an important collection for many years now."



possible," he says. "I focus on what's in front of me; I get a sense of the color notes, and I take reference images. When I'm back in the studio, if I'm going to do a large painting, I'll work up a smaller one first. I need to get a feeling for what's going to be involved."

As he works, Goldman moves away from the reference images and starts to paint more from memory and to inject his imagination into the process. "Sometimes I think I'm looking at the monitor, but what I'm really seeing is the image in my head," he says.

Color is what grabs him and forces his hand as he paints. "I think we all have a different tolerance level for the amount of color we're comfortable with," he says. "I tend to push it to some extent, although I try to keep it under control. But, at some point, it starts coming through, and that's when I'm really kind of in the zone, so to speak. I'm not intellectualizing; a color pops into my head, and I don't question it; I just put it down. Subconsciously, I can come up with a result that I would never have expected, because it would never have occurred to me to work like that. That's the advantage of going with your intuition."

Goldman likens that process to his early days spent in the waves off San Diego. "When you surf, you sometimes get a wave that's pretty intense, and all you can do is react," he says. "Afterward you think, 'Oh gosh; I did this, I did that, I did a



Early Light, Vermilion Cliffs, oil, 30" by 40"

"My friend, Ray Roberts, introduced me to the Vermilion Cliffs in northern Arizona a number of years ago, and I have been visiting the area ever since. This particular view is located before the Navajo Bridge as you enter the area. Here, the early light is incredible and is captured through the use of saturated color."

bottom turn. I kind of banked off the lip, but it all happened so fast all I did was react, and then it was over."

The last few brush strokes of every piece sneak up on Goldman. He almost always comes to an impasse; it might be balance, or color, or light. When that happens, he has several solutions. He often hangs the picture on a wall. At some point, he'll look at it out of the corner of his eye, see the problem, grab it off the wall, go to his studio to add three brush strokes, and he's finished.


Other times, when he gets frustrated, Goldman will simply turn a painting to the wall and ignore it for a week or more. Later, when he

picks it up and turns it over, he sees the problem in a flash and quickly finishes the piece. He'll also sometimes use a mirror to view a piece, and get a similar result.

Even if the issue isn't daunting, Goldman will often snap a picture of the piece and send it to his brother, Ken, a successful artist in his own right, to get some feedback. The two artists have been critiquing each other's work since they were children and continue to do so today. Sometimes Ken gives it a thumbs up, but he's always able to recognize a problem if there is one and to offer a solution.

Now living in Prescott, Arizona,

Goldman travels throughout the Southwest to attend shows, visit with other artists, and create sketches for future paintings. He also makes time to mentor four art students online through Mastrius, an artist mentoring website.

As a signature member of the Plein Air Painters of America, he will exhibit several of his paintings at the Colorado Grandeur Exhibit and Sale in August and at the Sedona Plein Air Festival in October. 

Gael Hees lives in Little Rock, Arkansas.