

## SEA STRIPES

Why do these paintings look so different from my other work?

For many years, I have spent a week at the Gulf, sitting in bed with a cup of coffee at sunrise, or a glass of wine at sunset and watching the changing color of sea and sky. I've longed to capture those moments on canvas, because they were such pure bliss. I knew that to capture that feeling of space and luminosity a different kind of technique would be *required*. I also knew that I had absolutely no experience in putting on paint in that way. It took years to convince myself that it would not be impossible for me to tackle that subject. These paintings are made using oil paint applied with brushes like all my other work. But, I knew I would be applying it differently: with differently shaped brushes using different motions, a greater reliance on transparent color, different mediums mixed with the paint, and more smoothly prepared canvas. A multitude of things can go wrong when trying to paint a smooth gradient using thin, translucent glazes. All those things did go wrong, but eventually I did learn, and the results are here for your pleasure.

The paintings are designed using some ancient ideas about geometry. I hesitate to go into too much detail, but each painting has an underlying geometric framework that serves to place each major horizontal line and each subject (boat, bird, plane, dolphin) in a specific location. For example, in "The Beautiful Decent" the width of each stripe is a fraction of 10 (i.e.,  $1/10$ ,  $2/10$ ,  $3/10$ ,  $4/10$ ). Ten was a sacred number to the Pythagoreans (followers of Pythagoras) who chose a series of ten dots arranged in an equilateral triangle (like in the placement of bowling pins) as their organization's symbol. If you imagine an equilateral triangle in this painting with the bottom edge as the base, then the bird is placed half way along the left side. Many of the paintings use the "musical ratios"  $1/2$ ,  $2/3$ , and  $3/4$  (the amount of a string plucked to get the three notes that are the origins for chord progression in Western music) as the basis for stripe placement. Some paintings use the golden rectangle for their structure, others might use a particular geometric progression to locate the recession of the waves. The method I choose is often suggested by the composition of my original photo which is then tweaked to fit the framework. Sometimes some serious manhandling is required to push things where I want them. These works are a continuation of my efforts to create a place where everything is as it should be. Unfortunately, that seems to be easier to achieve in painting than in life.

- Peter J. O'Halloran