



RICHARD ORIENT

Lasting traditions

American landscape painting was largely invented in the Hudson River Valley, where Frederic Edwin Church, Thomas Cole, Albert Bierstadt, John Frederick Kensett and Sanford Robinson Gifford observed and painted the brilliance of light upon nature. The land has changed since then—as have painting styles—but modern painters are still inspired by its beauty. One of those painters is Richard Orient, who lives and works east of the Hudson River in Dutchess County, New York, about two hours north of New York City.

Orient's new show, now open at George Billis Gallery in Manhattan, will feature work of some of New York's most iconic landscapes in and around Dutchess County, as well as the Adirondack Mountains, where the artist conceived *Adirondack Morning*, a quiet view out over a lake and its tree-lined shore. The work, simply composed and colored, has abstract elements in its green mass of trees that line the horizon from both sides of an invisible axis, one side only exists in reflection.

"I have always looked to nature to guide me," Orient says. "I'll ask: What is that color? How many greens are in those leaves? What does the light do there in those trees? I don't really have any authoritarian needs, and I don't vary my paintings or push them to more extreme colors—I stay within the natural realm of color."

His show features a dozen fresh pieces, including several that take closer looks at elements of nature. One of those works is *Maple and Elm*, which offers a view into a tightly packed grove of trees. Sunlight, muted by the dense canopy of green and faded yellow leaves, filters through and brightens the scene, giving it an ethereal presence. It almost looks unreal, but Orient says he paints what he sees and is often shocked by nature's ability to surprise him.

"I'm often in that country setting, and I get so taken by so many scenes. It's the season, it's the air, it's the combination



1 *Jenny Lake Afternoon*, oil on canvas, 22 x 28"

2 *Amagansett Clearing*, oil on paper, 22 x 30"

3 *Maple and Elm*, oil on canvas, 40 x 50"

4 *East Hampton Dusk*, oil on paper, 22 x 30"

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of lights...it's all of it," he says, adding that he's trying to capture the beauty of a photograph, but without so much detail. "I want the work to go beyond a photograph, to depict what it actually felt like to be there, to capture the feeling of seeing it. With my paint, I can instill what I felt."

It helps, of course, that Orient's own studio looks out onto nature with views not that different than what Church would have seen out his window 125 years ago—his sprawling home and grounds, Olana, are just up the Hudson. Orient also has a home and studio in the Gramercy Park neighborhood of Manhattan, where he paints cityscapes with an equally attentive eye. But it's the natural landscapes that have guided him recently. "To occupy that space and see these views," he says, "it's just an amazing feeling to witness and paint." ●