

STEPHEN MAGSIG

Interplays of Light and Shadow



1
Savoy, oil on canvas,
48 x 40"

2
White Street Shadows,
oil on canvas, 48 x 40"

3
Shadow Tags, oil on
canvas, 62 x 48"

Stephen Magsig's unpopulated city scenes are alive with people who may have just passed by or stepped into a shop. He uses the built environment as a set to examine and portray the interplay of light and shadow, undistracted.

Working from photographs, he has taken over the years as well as from plein air studies, he uses a grid to enlarge the image to canvases as large as 5 by 4 feet. The plein air studies, he says, "keep the color honest." The grid helps keep things straight and corrects for his astigmatism. Magsig's underpainting is begun with thin paint rather than a pencil drawing allowing him to maintain spontaneity through the process.

The finished paintings are full of detail—not only the details of cast-iron building facades and signage but the extraordinary subtleties of the effects of light and shadow on the colors and forms of the buildings.

Magsig, who lives in Detroit and often travels to paint in the Southwest, spent a lot of time in New York in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Savoy was an early farm-to-table restaurant on Prince

Street in Greenwich Village and operated for more than 20 years. Magsig captures the human touches that we might overlook but that make a place welcoming. Red geraniums fill the window boxes beneath the second-floor windows and mark the edge of the concrete ramp to the door to prevent people from tumbling into the open access to the building's basement.

Human presence in a different form occurs in *Shadow Tags*, a building facade marked with graffiti. The shadows echo the flowing lines of the tags as they wrap around the columns and flow down the facade.

The cool blues and purple of *White Street Shadows* are complemented by a strip of brown door at the left and the light brown strip above the first floor, forming a frame for the doorway and windows.

Magsig's paintings are precise yet lively and, as he says, "slow people down to look and wonder about the scene." ●

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