



STEPHEN MAGSIG

Visceral scenes



1



2

Stephen Magsig took his first art lesson when he was 10 from an aunt who lived on a neighboring farm in Michigan. When his family moved away from the farm, he lost track of his aunt but found her again through the internet when she was 85. She saw an exhibition of his paintings and began painting again and remarked that it was the best time of her life.

Magsig's life and paintings are full of human moments. He calls Detroit home but frequently sublet a friend's loft on Broome Street in New York. "My urban landscape paintings are portraits of how we as a society have affected and continue to alter the environment around us. My paintings are the language I use to communicate the things I can not articulate," he says.

His latest large-scale paintings of New York will be shown at George Billis Gallery in New York, May 7 to 27.

He frequently paints in plein air to keep his

painting fresh and "to keep the color honest. I love the immediacy of doing the small paintings. It can take a half-hour to do a good one and two to three hours to do a not so good one." An added benefit of the small paintings is "Anyone can afford to buy them."

Keeping himself fresh by painting out of doors, he returns to the studio to lay out and paint his large canvases. *Shadows on Greene Street* measures 62 by 48 inches. His Facebook friends have been able to follow its progress from his initial layout to the finished painting. He was drawn to the scene by the "interplay of shadows" from the sharp shadows of the close in fire escape to the soft shadow of the street lamp that was farther away.

He often paints from photographs he took several decades ago. "New York was simpler then," he says. Commenting on his painting *31 Cornelia Street*, he points out the red awning of number 29, the

1
The Singer Building,
oil on linen, 62 x 48"

2
Washington Square Hotel,
oil on linen, 42 x 36"

3
31 Cornelia Street,
oil on linen, 42 x 36"



3

Cornelia Street Café. The café has been an institution in New York since it opened in the 1970s, hosting visual artists and musicians. It has been called “the heart of the Bohemian Village.”

Magsig recounts that the restaurant’s rent was \$450 a month in the ’70s and is

now \$33,000...a month. He laments the “greed that’s destroying what makes New York New York” but continues to celebrate the city’s uniqueness and its artistic challenges. He is attracted to the shadows beneath the *Manhattan Bridge* and the light on the *Washington Square Hotel* in

the neighborhood where Edward Hopper had his studio.

He works to keep the visceral immediacy of his reactions to a place in the spontaneity of his brushstrokes, invoking the place and the life that has animated it for generations. ●