

## JAMES VAN PATTEN

EVERY PHOTOREALIST ARTIST seems to have his or her own explanation of what they do and why they do it. Not surprisingly, James Van Patten has his own distinctive explanation, as he has his own distinctive look and choice of subject matter. Almost alone of the Photorealists connected with Exactitude, his subject matter is entirely non-urban, and his preoccupation with water in the landscape is virtually unique. Whereas others may from time to time incorporate a stretch of river or a pool in an urban park into the scene painted, Van Patten concentrates entirely on the margins of water in the wild. Sometimes it may be a long shot involving a stretch of water bounded by a little piece of land; at other times it is an obsessively detailed close-up of the plants that grow with their roots in the water and their heads in the sky.

Van Patten is unmistakably a Photorealist, in that his paintings look as much as possible like photographs: indeed, it would be difficult to distinguish one of the original photographs from a reproduction of the painting based on it. This, of course, is quite deliberate and self-conscious:

When I have found the image that I wish to paint, I use the intermediate eye of the camera to see the nuances that I have missed. The anomalies of the camera lens also provide additional information that exists only in the photograph of the image. By incorporating these qualities, such as a softening and colour-rimming of the edges, my paintings provide surprises to me and, I hope, to the viewer. From the beginning of the painting

process I know what the image is, but I am never sure what the picture will be when brought to paint.

Van Patten is distinctive in a number of other ways, too. Most Photorealists paint primarily or entirely in acrylic, which makes sense in terms of the speed of application and impermeability of the medium, facilitating a painted result closer to the effect of a photograph than would otherwise be possible. Van Patten does use acrylic, but he also works a lot in watercolour and mixed media including crayons and pencil. To obtain the requisite colour density and solidity of image in such media must be incredibly work intensive, but that surely contributes satisfactorily to the process of constant discovery that Van Patten values so highly in the whole business of painting.

Discovery is in fact the keynote of his work. Not for him the spectacular highlights of landscape. He seeks rather to penetrate deeper and deeper into the secret places:

Though taken from nature, the imagery in my paintings might, at first glance, be unnoticed in the natural world. At best, a throwaway memory. Yet it is the mystery of reflection, shadow and light, and unexpected colour, that makes me want to paint these throwaway scenes.

We should never forget that one of photography's great assets in relation to the unaided human eye is its ability to seize the moment and fix it forever. Consequently, Photorealists can do something that the Impressionists wanted to do and could never quite achieve.

**Shadow and Reflection**  
(detail)  
2002  
Acrylic on linen  
122 x 183 cm





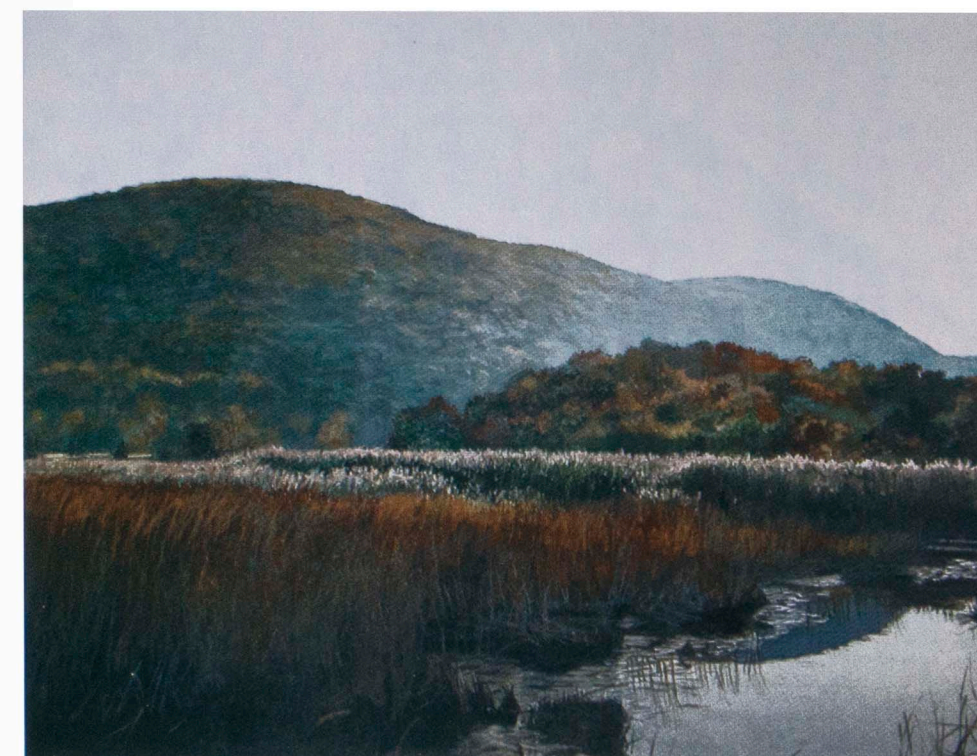


**Study in Orange and Blue II**  
2006  
Watercolour on paper  
35 x 25.5 cm

**Sunshine and Fog**  
2005  
Watercolour on paper  
25.5 x 35 cm



**Charlotte's Valley  
Small Swamp**  
2007  
Watercolour on paper  
26 x 34 cm



**Growing Gloaming**  
2002  
Watercolour on paper  
25.5 x 35 cm



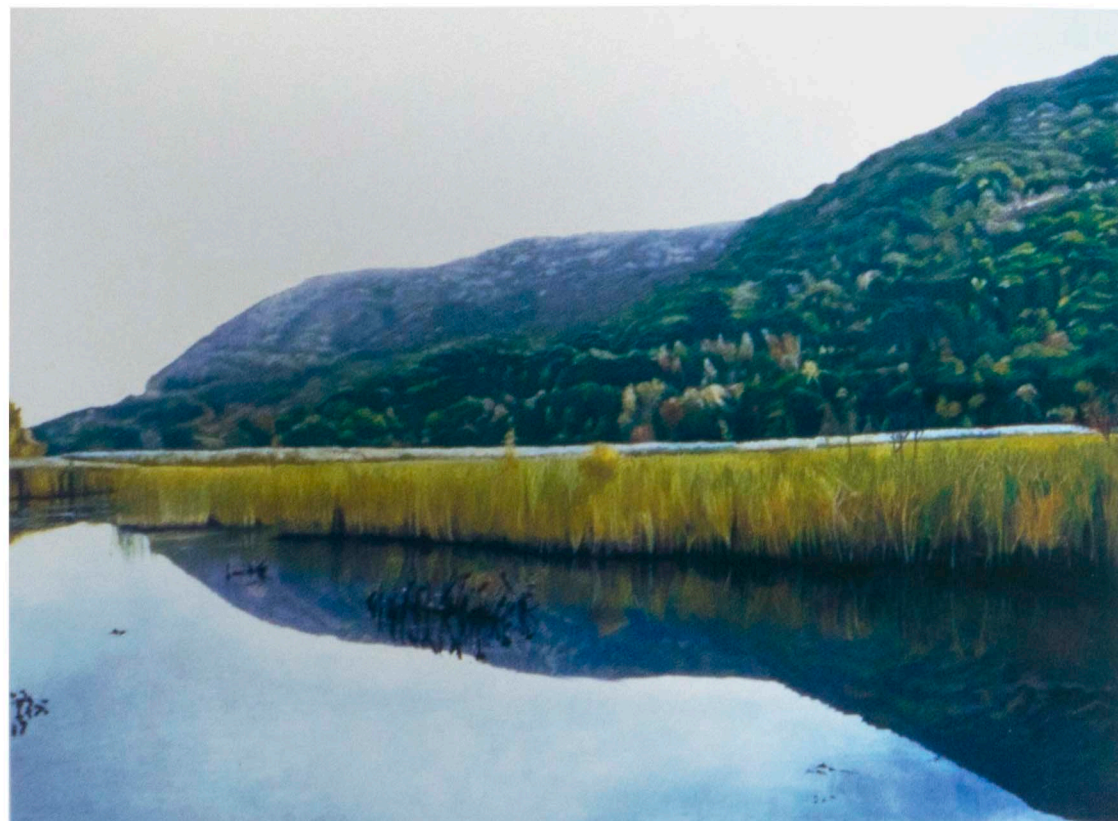


**Spring Flooding**  
2005  
Watercolour on paper  
35 x 25.5 cm

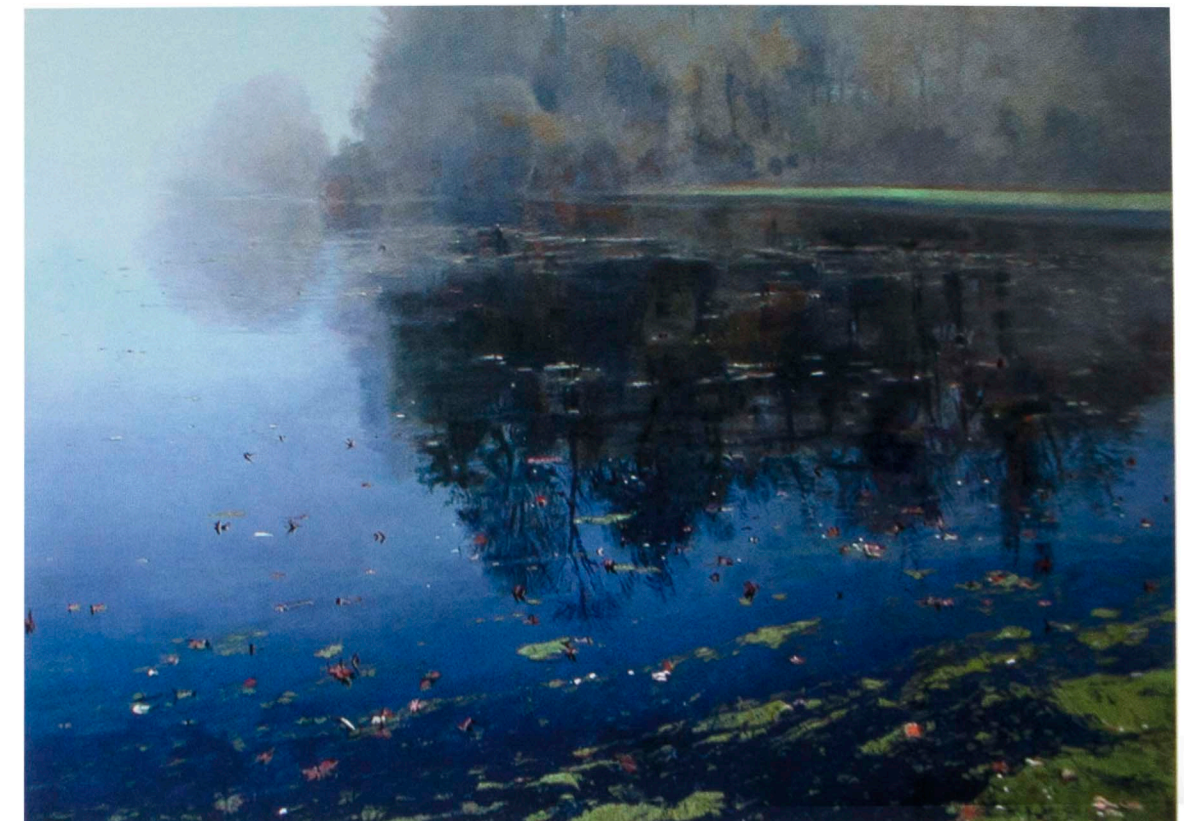


**Lake Carnegie**  
1992  
Crayon, coloured pencil and  
watercolour on rag board  
61 x 61 cm

**Hudson Backwater**  
1992  
Crayon and watercolour  
on paper  
21 x 86 cm



**Mist Morning**  
2005  
Acrylic on linen  
91.5 x 137 cm





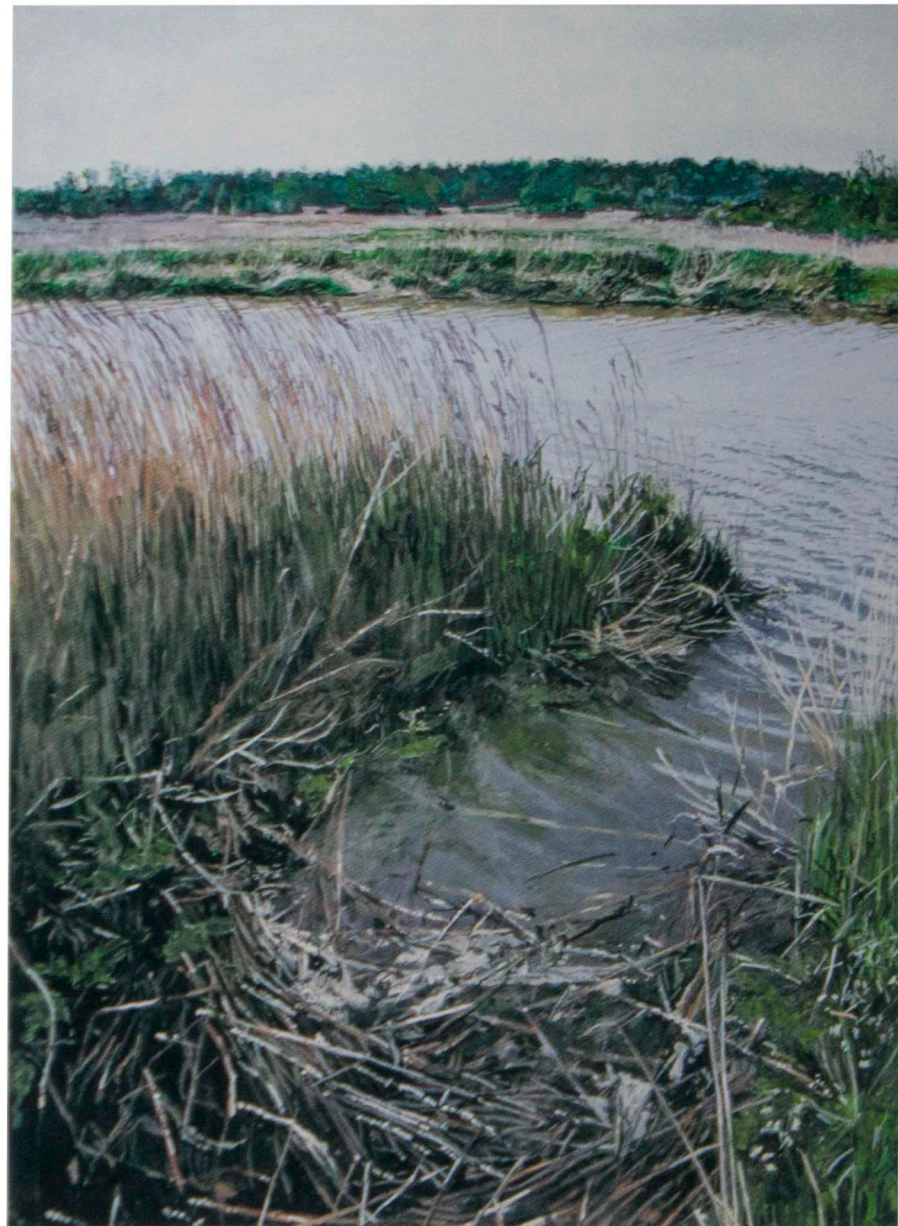


**Shadow and Reflection**  
2002  
Acrylic on linen  
122 x 183 cm



**Just After**  
2001  
Watercolour on paper  
25.5 x 35 cm

**The River Blyth**  
2006  
Watercolour on paper  
34 x 26 cm



**Almost Unnoticed**  
2007  
Watercolour  
35 x 25.5 cm



**Study in Orange and Blue  
with Other Colours**  
1996  
Acrylic on linen  
122 x 122 cm





**Over the Edge**  
2007  
Acrylic on linen  
122 x 152.5 cm



**Blueberry Lake I**  
1987  
Acrylic on linen  
122 x 183 cm



**Flood Mud**  
2003  
Watercolour on paper  
25.5 x 35 cm



**Blythe**  
2006  
Watercolour on paper  
25 x 35 cm

