

LET'S TALK ART



“It's all simply about understanding how to see.”

-Sadie Valeri  
San Francisco, CA

LET'S TALK ART - QUARTERLY INTERVIEWS WITH PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS

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## INTERVIEW with SADIE VALERI



### LOCATION

San Francisco, CA

### CAREER

I've been showing my artwork regularly since 2009, and teaching since then as well.

### EDUCATION

Rhode Island School of Design, BFA Illustration,



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1993. My primary Realist education has been through attending workshops with world class instructors, including Juliette Aristides, Michael Grimaldi, Ted Seth Jacobs, and Tim Stotz & Michelle Tully of Studio Escalier. I also attended the Hudson River Fellowship, run by Jacob Collins and Grand Central Atelier; a school I consider to be the primary training method and philosophy I emulate for my own school.

## WHAT IS A LITTLE KNOWN FACT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE?

I suffered a crippling artist block and did not create personal artwork for about 10 years, until I discovered the pre-20th century training techniques we call today [Classical Realism](#), and rediscovered my childhood joy for creating.



## **YOU PAINT IN A METHOD KNOWN AS INDIRECT PAINTING, IN CONTRAST TO DIRECT PAINTING. WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO METHODS?**

With Indirect painting, I paint many thin layers, about 3 layers of monochromatic (grey scale) underpainting and as many as 4-6 more layers of color. This helps me achieve very realistic effects and a very fine level of detail.

When painting with a Direct method, there is only 1 or 2 layers of paint, and every brush stroke is visible in the final painting. It is a faster technique, and while it can look “effortless”, it is actually in some ways more difficult, because the artist must control hue, value, chroma, shape and edge all in one stroke of the brush.

I am primarily known for my highly finished Indirect paintings of still life, but I also paint with Direct methods as well, and I enjoy both.

## **CAN INDIRECT PAINTING HELP AN ARTIST HONE HIS/HER SKILLS WHEN PAINTING DIRECT?**

I've been experimenting with more Direct painting recently, and I find both ways of working to be very challenging and satisfying. The final paintings for

each approach can look like very different methods, but I feel I am using everything I learn from painting Indirect when painting Direct. It's all simply about understanding how to see. The difference in how the paintings look is simply a matter of how much or how little time I have to study my subject.

Some of my favorite painters are very Direct painters like [Sargent](#) and [Velazquez](#), where you can see the brushstrokes and there is a fluid, fast feeling to the paint application. But I feel my studies of Indirect painting, where I carefully study the drawing, values, and color in separate stages of the painting, to be my way of learning to see, and helps me improve with all methods of painting. The better I understand drawing, value and color through slow study, the more easily I can apply that knowledge with a faster, more Direct method.



## **CAN YOU TAKE US THROUGH A TYPICAL WEEK?**

Like most artists, I do have a somewhat “distractable”

personality, but because I run a business and I have built a strong career as an artist, many people think I am very organized, and they would be surprised to know that by nature I struggle with organization and time management. I could not manage everything without my husband, who handles all the bookkeeping, taxes, and other business details, and who also produces my videos and handles all the details of running the rest of our life.

Most artists I know struggle to find time to create, since making art is by nature outside the regular activities of "getting through life."

In my teens and 20's, I used to believe that "real" artists painted 18 hours a day and barely slept, a very romantic and passionate view of the artist's life, and which perhaps works well for some. But I was never able to do that - I get sick if I don't sleep for a couple days, and when I was in my mid-30's I finally accepted that this is simply not my personality.

My natural schedule is to work very hard, and very focused, for about 8 hours a day, whether teaching or painting, and then I am done and I have to relax for a few hours watching a movie or reading a book, and get a good night's sleep, in order to be productive the next day. The thing is, I get A LOT done in those 8 hours per day!

Right now I have 4 days per week in my own personal studio, and 3 days per week I teach my classes at the [Atelier](#). We expanded into an additional studio space last year, so my personal studio is about a mile from my teaching studio, which is a perfect arrangement for me right now.

The hardest part about running a teaching studio in an expensive city like San Francisco is balancing the ideal number of students needed to support the space. I started teaching my first classes in my living room, and when I was easily able to attract 5 students for a class, I realized I could afford to open a teaching studio. The first studio was 500 square feet, but in less than 2 years demand for my classes had grown to the point where my husband and I incorporated the school to run together as a business and we expanded into an 1800 square foot space. After 2 years there, we needed to expand again, and last year we moved into a 3500 square foot studio, in addition to the current studio. We can now offer figure model classes and [workshops](#) without disrupting my ongoing Still Life and Drawing students, who are set up in stable, stationary stations so they can work on long term projects without disruption. [Classes](#) run at the studio 7 days per week, my assistants and guest instructors teach on the days I am not there. I teach about 80 students per week at the studio, and my

online class has about 100 students, but I have a lot of help from my wonderful assistants. My assistants are some of my [Full Time](#) Scholarship students.



## WHAT IS YOUR STANCE ON BLACK PAINT?

My first painting teacher at RISD taught me not to use black, because he was teaching with a [post-Impressionist](#) color theory, and mostly I don't, simply because I don't feel the need for it. I find black pigments tend to reduce chroma in any other color it happens to touch. If I use a chromatic 'near-black' black, mixed from other pigments, I find the rest of my colors stay higher chroma, even if a puddle of mixed paint gets slightly contaminated by my 'near-black'. When I paint with an Indirect method, I have the luxury of building up my darks with several layers. A few thin layers of a chromatic black mixture makes an excellent, deep black, and many people who see my paintings are surprised to learn I don't use black.

I am however not categorically against using black paint - sometimes I use it for a fast oil sketch, when I just want to be able to lay down a rich black not of paint without building up layers.

## **WHAT ARE YOUR "GO TO" TOOLS AND WHY?**

The longer I paint, and the longer I teach, the more picky I get about my materials! It drives me crazy to demonstrate on a student's painting, and use their tools, to find they are struggling with frayed brushes, weak paint, and some sort of random plastic tray for a palette.

I love Rosemary's wonderful brushes for Direct Painting, and a high quality oil primed linen. For Indirect Painting, I use small faux "white" sable brushes by Robert Simmons, and I prime my own panels with traditional chalk gesso. For both methods of paintings I love [New Wave palettes](#) - I use an [Expressionist Confident](#) when I paint Direct, and when I paint an Indirect Painting with lots of close details, I clip a [Small Stained Posh palette](#) directly beneath my panel.



**WHERE COULD SOMEONE LEARN MORE ABOUT SADIE VALERI ATELIER, ONLINE CLASSES, OR WORKSHOPS?**

Because I think it's so important to make the time-honored tradition of painting and drawing available to

everyone who wants it, I offer a variety of options for study, so artists can get access to skill-based training no matter what their schedule is like. I offer Part time, Full time, and Short Term Intensive study options for all levels. Information about all my classes can be found at [www.sadievaleri.com/classes](http://www.sadievaleri.com/classes). I also produce videos and run an online class for those not able to travel to San Francisco. Information about videos and online learning is at [www.sadievaleri.com/videos](http://www.sadievaleri.com/videos)

'Between Darkness and Wonder' 16" x 20" oil on panel

'Self Portrait at 41 in the Studio with Dog' 31" x 41" oil on linen

'Pink Rose Garland' 9" x 12" oil on linen

'Heavenly Creatures' 8" x 10" oil on panel

Work in Progress... end of Day 3 workshop painting

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