



CAPTURING MORE THAN FISH

David Tibbetts keeps it simple in his contemplative watercolor paintings



BY DIANE TAYLOR

David Tibbetts doesn't like to let things get complicated. He is a self-described KISS — Keep It Simple Stupid — kind of guy.

Nor does Tibbetts, a watercolor artist and lifelong fly fishing enthusiast, like to take himself too seriously. "I take my art as a way of life, as the way I think, seriously," Tibbetts explains. "But I don't take it seriously. I've never gone looking for fame or recognition."

But that doesn't mean that Tibbetts' work itself is simple, or that others don't give his watercolors serious consideration. His work

is sold through galleries in Maine and New Hampshire, and he accepts a few commissioned pieces each year as well. He turns away the work he doesn't want. "I don't do anything I'm not interested in," Tibbetts says. He also has his own showroom, One Flight Up, in an office complex behind the Shaker Museum in Enfield, N.H.

What mostly interests Tibbetts is fishing. He has spent a lifetime on lakes and rivers, rod in hand, casting a fly over both still and fast moving waters, soaking up the sights and sounds

of those natural environments until they seemed to become a part of his own being. When Tibbetts finished a successful career as a graphic designer and turned to painting in his retirement years, it was almost inevitable that he would create images grounded in the contemplative sport of fishing.

The images Tibbetts paints are primarily of solitary figures, lone men and women on New England waters, surrounded by dense woods, dark rocks and pale, foggy skies. These are quiet and mysterious scenarios. The faces of the people remain indistinct; yet the poses they strike are immediately recognizable, somehow familiar. They draw people in.

Tibbetts says it is not uncommon for viewers to project their own memories into his paintings. "I hear it all the time," Tibbetts says. "That looks just like my dad, or that looks exactly like such and such a place. It isn't, of course, except if that's what they see, then in some ways that's what it is."

When it comes to the actual painting, Tibbetts says he works quickly. True to his KISS philosophy, Tibbetts tends to limit his pallet to three main colors, plus one accent color. Committing his paints to sturdy, 300-pound paper with copious amounts of water, Tibbetts lets the colors run and blend as they will when first applied. As the paint is drying, Tibbetts uses smaller brushes and hatpins to lift colors out and shape images. When the paint is completely dry, he scrapes out highlights with pins and sandpaper.

"To me, the most important part is what I leave out, not what I paint in," Tibbetts writes in his book, *Tight Lines*. "I always want to leave room for the viewer to go where they want to go and not where I want to take them."

A typical Tibbetts painting is indeed a simple thing: a man wading in water up to his hips, standing on a rock, or sitting in a row-boat. Tibbetts is well aware that fishing is not everyone's idea of a meaningful experience.



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But Tibbetts is certain he has discovered something profound. He believes it is the spiritual nature of the work that pulls people in.

"It's the world," Tibbetts says, "deep and stupid at the same time."^{ABC}