

## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

IN THE STUDIO WITH/Tom Christopher

Capturing Times Square  
From Greener Pastures

By D. DOMINICK LOMBARDI

**T**OM CHRISTOPHER paints here in South Salem, creating impressive representations of the amalgamation of the commerce, the construction and the humanity of New York City.

Born in Los Angeles, Mr. Christopher in 1996 moved here, a bucolic setting amid horse farms and dirt roads where peace and quiet could be found to help him decode his main source of inspiration, Times Square.

Mr. Christopher is obsessed with Manhattan. His paintings capture that nervous energy, the deteriorating infrastructure and the machine that makes the work day longer and harder than most anywhere else. His paintings primarily focus on the beginning, middle and end of these long work days when all who take part in the daily grind are in the streets.

Mr. Christopher discussed his work recently in his studio, where he has just completed a mural of Chelsea.

**Q.** One of the first things one notices about your work is the loose, but recognizable way you depict specific areas of Manhattan. What are you thinking about when you paint?

**A.** I like Abstraction and Expressionism — the freedom that those styles of painting afford the artist. That approach to me best

works in capturing the mix of poetry and brutality of Manhattan. The buses are all business. The buildings that face the sun appear to dance in the light.

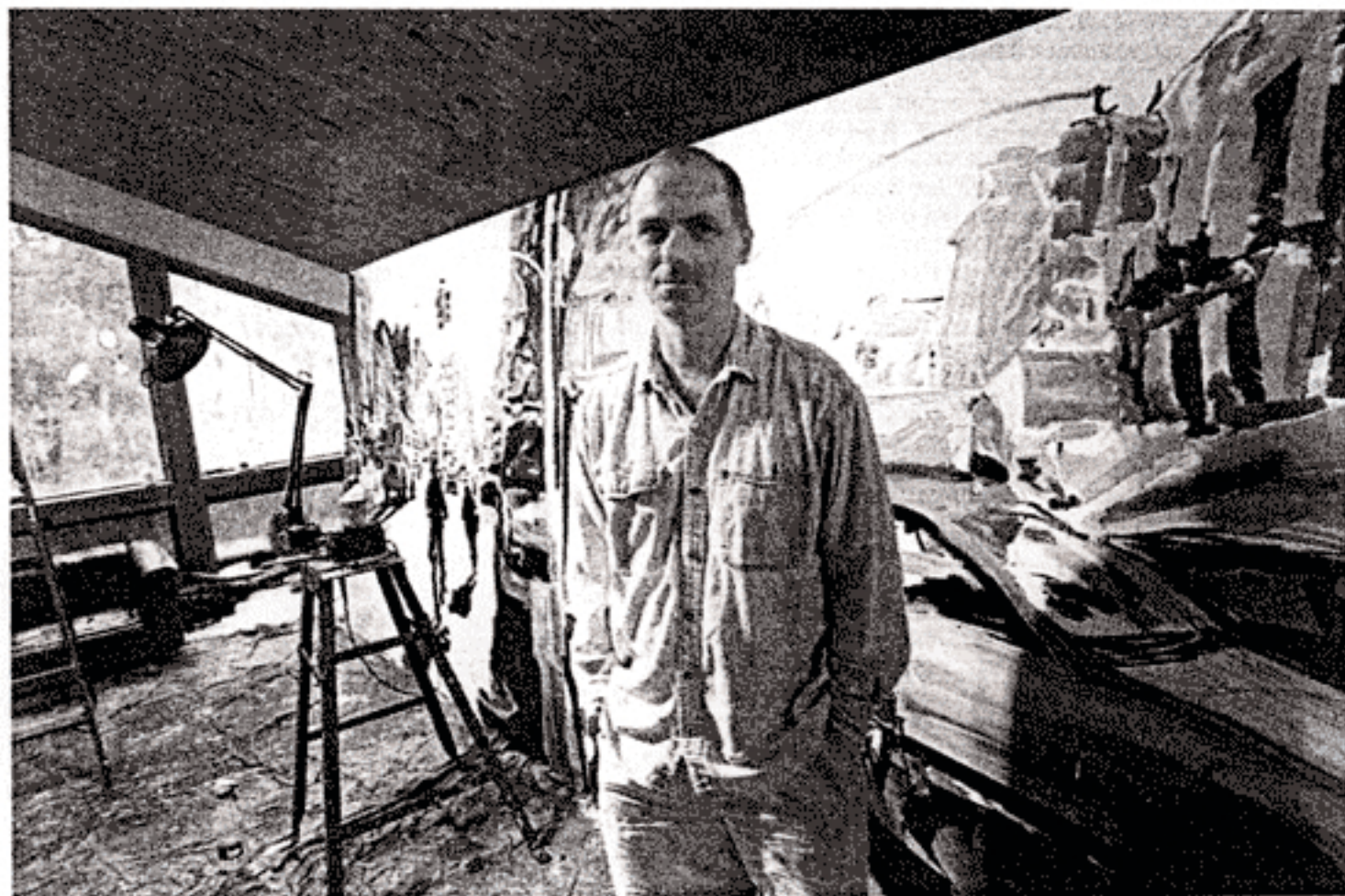
A lot of that incidental stuff that for the most part goes by without too much thought, to me, becomes very intriguing abstract components. The Expressionist style gives me the opportunity to inject a little ugliness, which is an important part of Modern art.

**Q.** Is that preconceived ugliness in Contemporary and Modern art, in your mind, a way of expressing the downside of life in Manhattan?

**A.** There is incredible pressure in New York. Regardless of where you are on the economic ladder, you're always looking at the next guy, thinking that they have a little more than you. This, combined with elements like the crumbling infrastructure that manifests itself as water main breaks, and the like, creates a sort of excitement that you never know what's going to happen next.

**Q.** Besides your success in New York, your work has been well received in Paris and Germany and Japan. Why do you think your art is so popular outside New York?

**A.** Europe has been ravaged by war. I think they relate to the tension, the collapsing perspective and the open voids in the compositions. I'm told that the Japanese see a calligraphic line in my work, especially when I paint people as they stride across a busy intersection or whiz by on a bike or



Chris Maynard for The New York Times

Tom Christopher in his studio in South Salem in front of two panels that will go in the lobby of the London Terrace apartment buildings in Chelsea. Mr. Christopher, who loves to paint scenes representing New York, said of the city, "There is optimism, and I try to capture that."

skate board.

**Q.** The Chelsea mural that you have just completed has four separate views. Each is a different time of day, though there seems to be an elastic exuberance throughout the work. Would you say that this mural is more positive than negative?

**A.** I love to paint New York. I think that, despite all the problems, it's a forward-looking city. There is optimism, and I try to capture that.

**Q.** Your technique is varied, to say the least. What is the process of a typical paint-

ing?

**A.** I start with numerous sketches and photos. I need to do the photographs to be able to capture the gesture of a speeding messenger or the bob and weave of a skateboarder.

I start the final canvas with pencil. I draw and draw, and I never erase. You can still see the lines when the painting is finished. From there, it really depends on what I'm trying to capture. The ground here is thick with texture — those buildings in the distance are done in a thin wash of paint, and

there are areas where paint is thickly applied, then scraped off.

I want there to be a contrast between the shadows and the light, and I choose the colors accordingly. Most anyone can pretty well paint a tree or a landscape. The challenge is to paint a McDonald's in Times Square with an axle-grease-covered messenger darting by.

Mr. Christopher's work can be seen at the David Findlay gallery at 984 Madison Avenue at 77th Street. Phone: (212) 249-2909.