

SUSAN HARRISON-TUSTAIN
Constance Spry – Pink Cabbage Roses,
watercolour

We all know that dramatic light can be much more interesting but it has to be handled differently with flowers. When painting other subjects a semi-silhouette with a strong light coming down from above or behind will often yield a sensational result. Objects in front of a window or a figure in a doorway have their own bit of drama. But when you think about drama and flowers you run the risk of overwhelming the flowers and you have to think slightly differently.

When you are designing a flower painting your aim is cohesion. The painting as a whole needs to flow. Think carefully about how the background can be used to support the flower arrangement. Think about how you can carry colour through in the vase to the flowers, especially if the flowers have long stems.

When you are composing, first identify where the lightest tones are, because this will be your focal point. The eye is drawn to the light. Ask if the focal point is well within the main body of the painting. Check that the focal point is not too close to the sides, but not central either. Check for a design that flows. Do lines lead your eye out of the picture? Lines may be the edge of a book, a curtain or strong shadow. You may just have to soften the line or slightly interrupt it, or place something else that overlaps it to bring the eye back to the main subject. Break up those bleak table horizon lines that cut the painting in two.

Screens make great backgrounds but also keep your eyes open for material or rugs that can be used to give interest.



Of course, for the floral painter a collection of special vases, jugs, urns and pots is essential.

Usually, a painting that takes your eye further into the subject works better and gives a better feeling of depth or mystery.

Floral paintings that show a room interior are especially fascinating and intimate.

Consider different viewpoints. Would an overhead approach work? What about a lower viewpoint?

Setting up the composition can take time but once it's done you can work fairly quickly.

TONE

It is a law of nature that the eye is attracted to light. And nothing enhances light like dark. Therefore, once you have decided on the composition and focal point you can manipulate tone to support this area.

Check whether the flowers are isolated into spots of light or whether they are grouped. You can connect isolated flowers by putting highlights on the foliage. Perhaps light touching the vase will make a connection between the flowers and the table.

You can see that composition and tone are vital to each other. □