

What is it about something that inspires you to take up your brush? Do you feel a rush of excitement when you open the latest issue of *Australian Artist* magazine? Does a shaft of light falling across a still life fire your imagination? Have you ever wandered through a gallery and found a piece of art that touches your emotions?

Now that's the magical ingredient, the "je ne sais quoi". It's the "something" we need to capture and exaggerate. We are all different, and of course our tastes change as we grow and become more aware, but when a piece of work, or even a collection of work, captivates us, it's then that we can analyse what it is about that work that makes it "speak" to us.

For me, painting is all about making a vision become real. An artist has the ability to take a piece of paper and some pigment and create the illusion of substance. It is no wonder painting is addictive! It's about seeing something evolve as the gentle transitions create a presence. Not just the form, but also the spirit of the subject.

Have you noticed how much influence light has on a subject?



Special Techniques for

EXCEPTIONAL NEW ZEALAND ARTIST, SUSAN HARRISON
COME TO GRIPS WITH THE ESSENTIAL TECHNIQUES NEEDED

BY SUSAN



Old Rambling Rose,
watercolour on 300gsm
hot pressed paper, 36 x 51 cm

It is a magical ingredient. Any paintings (in any medium) that appeal to me are by artists who knew/know how to use light in such a way that it sets the mood and creates atmosphere.

When I first ventured into watercolour, I searched to find an artist who painted the subjects that moved me. It was at that time I questioned what it was that I was looking for and wanted to create, and I realised I needed to see past the "visual" and capture a "feeling". Ah yes, atmosphere, light, and mood, that is what I most want to capture. I want viewers of my work to feel the same thing I felt when I first saw my subject. So I set about teaching myself how to do it in watercolour.

Without any formal training, I was blissfully unaware of the rules usually associated with watercolour. This enabled me to push past the preconceived boundaries and to experiment. I set about my challenge in a methodical way. Starting with analysis of what I felt, I then pushed watercolour to the limits until I got the feeling!

Watercolour is a challenging medium, but what a pleasure it is to master! I loved the medium from

Glorious Garden Flowers

TUSTAIN, HAS JUST RELEASED A VIDEO THAT HELPS YOU TO PAINT FLOWERS JUST LIKE THE ONES SHOWN HERE.

HARRISON-TUSTAIN



ART IN THE MAKING: USING THE



I lay in the initial washes . . . then I paint the shadows

MY SPECIAL PRIMING METHOD

One of the techniques I use now that I wish I had known years ago is the multi-layer "Priming Method" I developed myself. I show you how this works in the utmost detail on my new video. Here are the steps:

Qualcosa di Vecchio, Qualcosa di Nuovo, 61 x 25cm, watercolour on hot pressed watercolour paper. (Available as a fine art limited edition giclee print.)

The most important thing in this composition is the light. Feel how the light gives the illusion of a warm summer's day as it bathes the hollyhock in sunshine. Some of the blooms present themselves on an angle that reflects the light. Others, such as the lower facing bloom and the upper right bloom, are on a different angle and allow the sun to shine through their petals. This creates another aspect of dimension. It shows different focal planes and helps to create the illusion of depth.

MULTI-LAYER PRIMING TECHNIQUE



... the buds ... then I build up the layers on each petal. Next comes the stamens and bud ...

STEP 1

Wet the entire area to be painted. Then allow the paper to absorb the water just until the sheen has gone from the surface. When the paper looks right you are ready for the second clear water wash.

STEP 2

Moisten the paper again. This time you don't need to wet the paper quite as much, because the first wash has been absorbed into the inner-most layers of paper, reducing the "sponge" effect. Your paper is now primed and ready for your wash of pigment.

STEP 3

Float in your pigment wash.

the very start. The way its translucent qualities allow light to filter through the layers of pigment captivated me, just as if it were layers of stained glass, one on top of the other, each affecting the final hue. I was truly hooked!

I developed my own style and methods through trial and error — I wanted more than just realism. Most of all, I wanted viewers of my work to feel the "presence" of my subject.

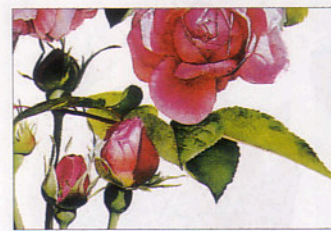
In this article I highlight things that as an art teacher/author and video presenter, I am most often asked about — the things people wish they had known years ago! □

SUSAN'S TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

My philosophy is to give artists the tools they need to create a painting that can touch the soul of the viewer. I like to show my students how to really see what is in front of them and to teach them how analyse what they see. I ask them to really think about what makes an intelligent composition, and then I encourage them to find the essence of their subject and emphasise it so that for a moment their viewers become lost in the world they have created.

Once the composition and essence of the painting are visualised, then it's time to take a look at colours and their behaviour — which colours are best for what, and why. I like my students to think and learn about "why". These "why" tools build the knowledge and confidence to create any painting, on any subject. With a little practice, seeing and knowing will become second nature to you too.

I hope I have given you some insight into the almost instinctive thought that goes into my paintings. May your paintings and their creation fill your soul with joy.



... Then I make the inner petals glow. The thorns and stems are completed ... and the background finishes.

THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS WHY THE PRIMING METHOD WORKS SO

- There's **more time** to manoeuvre the pigment before it settles and goes to the "don't touch" stage.
- It gives a **soft blended appearance** on most subjects. (I love to mould shapes and form using this method.)
- Priming allows **multiple fine washes** with minimum disturbance to the preceding washes.

HOW WHITE AND SHADE TRICK THE EYE

An interesting characteristic of white is that the closer the white object is to the viewer, the less white it is. Compare the daisies in the foreground to those in the background.

Shadows can also give the illusion of different focal planes. In this case you can experiment and see how shadows can push objects further back in your paintings. Try this. Cover the cast shadow on the almost central, lower daisy with your finger. See how the daisy looks much nearer. Now remove your finger and see the difference. So at the first opportunity try cast shadows to push objects back into the background as you've seen here. It's not magic — but it really does trick the eye!

A Daisy a Day,
watercolour on hot pressed
300gsm watercolour paper





t off.

WELL

- Soft edges can be created by extending the first wash of clear water to give a border of dampness just beyond the boundaries of the subject. Then, keep the second wash within the boundaries. The pigmented wash is also kept within the boundaries. The minimally damp border will give **softly blurred edges**.



Heightening transparency

As you can see in this detail, a shadow will become even more transparent if you show a vein, rib or crease running through and beyond the shadow boundaries.

HINT

I never leave the white of my paper unwashed — even the smallest amount of pigment makes a difference. Try it and see how the rawness of white paper can be softened to give a more natural appearance.



Josephine Bruce, 44 x 36cm, watercolour on hot pressed paper
(Available as a fine art limited edition giclee print on canvas.)

ACHIEVING THE LOOK OF VELVET

I knew the velvet surface of this rose was going to be a challenge. On a smaller area, the impression of velvet is more easily conveyed. Large areas as depicted in this painting needed special thought and plenty of trial runs on a spare piece of paper. Yes, cadmiums will give a dense velvety appearance, but on a large surface you run the risk of a blotchy uneven finish. This is because of the nature of these pigments — they sit on the surface of the paper. Subsequent washes disturb the initial washes and often the pigment becomes mixed with the previous layers and results in a loss of vibrancy and sometimes mud.

- For this painting I elected to use my “old faithful” yellow for the underwash: Schmincke Indian Yellow. Being a transparent hue, it gave a wonderful glow.
- I used a mix of Schmincke Alizarin Crimson and Le Franc & Bourgeois Bright Red to create the underwashes of red.
- I added Schmincke Phthalo Blue and a little Maimeri Sap Green to this mix to create the darks.
- Once I had achieved the depth of colour that pleased me, I then brought cadmiums into my palette for the final washes. I exchanged Schmincke Phthalo Blue for Schmincke Ultramarine Blue in the final stages. Ultramarine Blue gives a dull finish that is ideal for a matte velvet look. And there you have it!

3 BIG HINTS

- 1** To create a real appearance you have to study the subject well.
- 2** An intelligent composition is essential.
- 3** You must know your subject's character. Analyse it. Then think about the colours on your palette, and their properties, and choose pigments that will best describe what you feel.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Susan Harrison-Tustain is an internationally acclaimed New Zealand artist. She is currently working on a series of videos demonstrating and expanding on many of the subjects discussed in this article. The first video, “Glorious Garden Flowers in Watercolor, Part One: Understanding the Essential Techniques”, is a companion to her best-selling book, “Glorious Garden Flowers in Watercolor”. Turn to page 63 for full details on how you can order the video only, the book only, or take advantage of our special book-plus-video offer.

Susan Harrison-Tustain's web site is:
www.harrison-tustain.com

