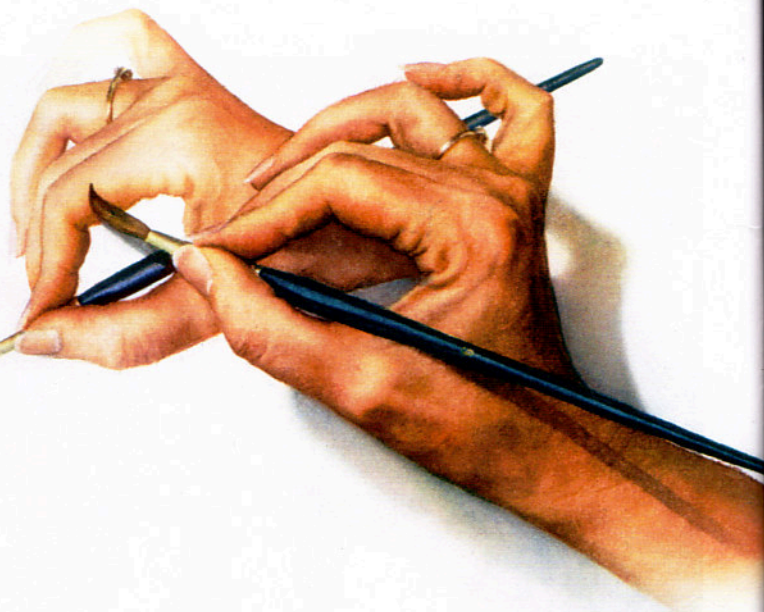


TRANSCEND THE PHYSICAL AND LEARN HOW TO INJECT EMOTION,  
CHARACTER AND EXPRESSION INTO YOUR PAINTINGS

# how to capture the *intangible*

BY

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**H**ow do we capture the intangible: a fleeting expression, a character that is revealed in the sparkle of an eye or an emotion that can fill a room with atmosphere? These are not things that you can touch, so how can an artist paint such things? How can we achieve a richness and depth of emotion and feeling in our paintings?

Most realist artists are initially inspired by and paint the physical things around them. But often those who reach higher echelons are those who can create paintings that reach out of the frame to connect with and touch the emotions of those that view the work.

It all begins with an intelligent composition that emphasises the nuances that give us an insight into our subject. An example of this is an old-world atmosphere enriched by the use of a muted palette of colours.

The feeling of depth and charm established by hues of this nature will capture the beauty of age and timelessness.

Good observation and knowledge of facial muscles and how they work in unison will support and bring a 'truth' to facial emotions such as laughing eyes, petulance and concern.

A serene background will suggest gentleness and a tranquillity of personality. There are many subtleties that allow us to suggest what we want our viewers to know and feel about our subject.

The eyes, along with the mouth, will convey more to the viewer about that person than any other part of the painting. Eyes have incredible power. If you portray them well, your painting will be a triumph, even if other areas pale in success. Glazing the blue of a cornea with several transparent oil layers will

give you the impression of liquid pools of hue that have no end to their depth. They draw the viewer in and give credence to the quote "the eyes are the mirror of the soul".

We all know how just one inadvertent flick of the brush can change the expression on the lips. Those of you who have struggled with lips will know exactly what I mean!

In my workshops and DVDs I put great emphasis on observation and my philosophy is to teach 'why' and 'how' things work – or why they don't! This opens a whole new world of possibilities and best of all creates excitement and enthusiasm, which helps us all to retain what we have learned.

Let's look at my demonstration portraits and discuss some of the things that will bring the added dimension of emotion to our paintings. □



◀ **Self Portrait 1, watercolour on Arches Hot Pressed Paper 300gsm (140lbs).**

Where my final tones are to remain light, I use very little yellow in my tonal underwash. Where the final tones are to be dark I may use three or four priming sets of washes to create enough depth of yellow so that it can glow through even the richest dark hues. Yellow underwashes take away the raw look of colours and establish a look of substance that can almost feel palpable.

I use Arches hot pressed paper as this has a wonderful hard-sized surface, which is ideal of detail and smooth washes for flowers and figurative work. I use Schmincke pigments because they are finely ground and luminous. Any brand of artists' quality transparent pigments should be fine but the emphasis is on transparent or semi-transparent. My methods will not work with opaque or semi-opaque pigments.

**The Wind's Song, watercolour on Arches Hot Pressed Paper 300gsm (140lbs), 1100 x 600mm**

John Mansfield's poem "Sea Fever" inspired this painting; "The flung spray... the gulls way and the whale's way and the wind like a whetted knife..."

As I look at this painting I am transported back to the place that inspired me to paint the heavy laden, threatening sky, the gulls being tossed by the wind and the girl who's skirt and hair are being blown against her body. I feel as if I can hear the gulls' cry as it is carried by the wind.

There are many threads that weave and support the narrative in this work. As the viewer is drawn further into this painting - past the obvious - their interest is held by the 'suggested' details: the lace skirt which is blown against her legs, the dumping of the wave as it plays at the water's edge, the back-washed waves as the foam bobs around on the turbulent undercurrent. The sky is almost ecclesiastical as a clear blue patch peeks through the smokey coloured clouds. A late afternoon shaft of warm sunshine illuminates the scene and the gulls as they bring the attention back to the girl. They are engaged by her and so is the viewer.





## art in the making faces that speak

**A**n example of capturing the intangible is my tribute to Vermeer's painting 'Girl with a Pearl Earring'. Although inspired by Vermeer's masterpiece, this painting is painted in my more detailed style.

There is much conjecture about Vermeer's masterful painting. I found myself musing on the notion of a modern-day girl with a pearl earring. With modern garb and a towel wrapped around her hair, I am able to portray a timeless emotion. I wanted to involve the viewer and allow them to become immersed in the painting. I

chose to do that by the suggestion of a tear glistening just above the lower eyelid. It asks a question and the viewer is invited to speculate further.

It is not difficult to give all of the answers, but better still, why not allow your viewers to apply some of their own history or thoughts to a painting? Involve those who view your work and give them the opportunity to participate. Quiet introspection can make the connection with your painting so much more rewarding and memorable.

### an emphasis on eyes

**N**on-painters imagine the whites of eyes (sclera) to be white. But of course we know that isn't the case. If we painted them white, they would look stark, staring, 'eye-popping'.

Take a look at the eye in my oil painting, *Glancing Back – A Tribute to Vermeer*. The hues I have used are anything but white. I have described the rounded form of the eye using colour temperature and tone. The lower part of the eye is a coolish yellow (Aureolin Yellow mixed with Flake White Replacement). The 'local colour' is a very light mix of Thalo Blue, Alizarin Crimson, Aureolin Yellow and Flake White Replacement. The area directly underneath the lid has a wonderful cast shadow. I have described this cast shadow by using a cool grey over the top of my local eye colour (cool grey mix: a mixture of Thalo Blue, Alizarin Crimson, Aureolin Yellow and Flake White Replacement). This cast shadow is a magical tool we artists can use to place the eye so that it sits back - within the head.

You will see what I mean if you try blocking this shadow out: hold your finger so it blocks out this shadow in my painting and you will find the eye will sit forward and look unnaturally staring. Take your finger away and you will see how the eye rests in the socket and feels part of the face. You will have learned another great lesson here: in the future you may create an action painting where you want a staring eye. So pulling the eyelids further apart can create this - therefore you not only see more of the cornea - you also reduce the cast shadow and give the impression that the eye is more protruding.

The pinkish red area between the skin and the eyeball, at the innermost end of the eye (Carunc Lacrim), is often the most



Detail: *Glancing Back – a Tribute to Vermeer*

wet-looking area. We portray the look of wetness by establishing un-blurred highlights. Blurred-edged highlights suggest a lesser degree of wetness and can be used for the general highlights in the eyes. Conversely if the eye is very wet possibly due to many tears, all of the highlights would be sharp and defined. It is all about suggesting emotion.

Notice how I have used a warm pink hue in the white area closest to the Carunc Lacrim? This is a natural occurrence in eyes and is possibly due to a greater number of blood vessels in that area, but it may also be the result of reflected colour from the Carunc Lacrim. You can see in this example how we can give the illusion of a ball, by using colour temperature, hue and tone.

The eye has the appearance of roundness because I have described its form using colour temperature and the use of these to give 3D form to our subjects.

Now let's take a look at the 'white' sclera at the other end of the eye. You will be amazed at how dark it is. Isolate it from the other parts of the painting by blocking out all but the sclera and you will see what I mean. It still surprises me after all this time just how dark it can be!

The strongest statement of emotion in this painting is of course the light line of 'tear' that I painted along the lower lid. I chose to use this emotive tool to create a narrative, a connection and an empathy with the viewer. The power of this revelation - although subtle in appearance - influences the entire consciousness of the painting and beckons the viewer to interpret the reason for it being there. The emotion is also evident in the subtle expression shown by the supporting muscles in her face. Is she sad or melancholy or touched by a fond memory? Can you feel the emotion?



## TOP TIP

### checking for dryness

I often use a hair dryer to dry my work, but only when the wet sheen has almost gone from the paper. At that stage, the pigment will have settled into the paper and cannot be moved around easily. Once the heat from the dryer has gone from the paper, touch the paper with the ball of your hand. If it feels cold, there is still moisture in there. If it feels 'room temperature', then it should be dry.

**"Good observation and knowledge of facial muscles and how they work in unison will support and bring a 'truth' to facial emotions."**



*Glancing Back – a Tribute to Vermeer, oil on Belgian Linen, 20" x 16"*

### notes on colour

**Hue:** colour

**Tone:** degree of light and dark and all that is in-between

**Colour temperature:** The relative warmth and coolness of a colour.

#### **For example:**

Red is the warmest of hues

Blue is the coolest of the hues

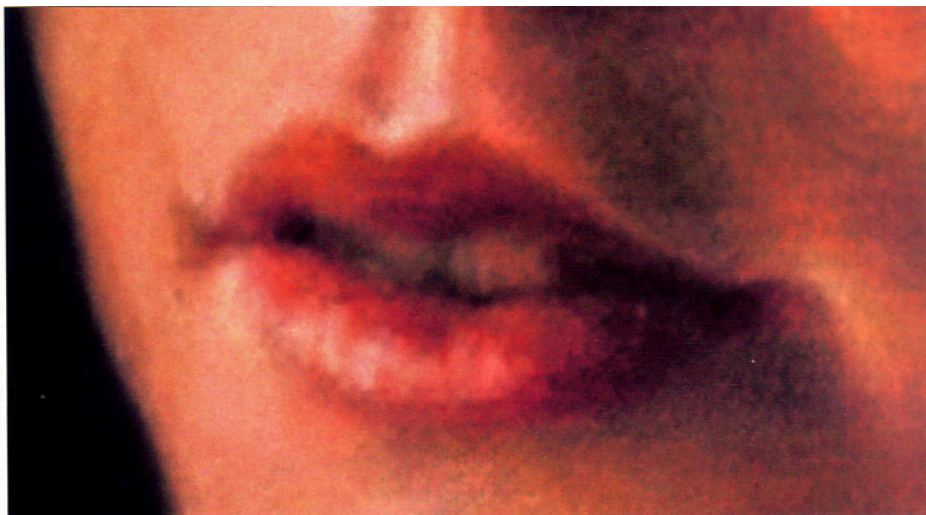
Within each colour there are also warm and cool colours: Alizarin Crimson contains some blue in the mix, therefore it is cooler than a 'tomato red', such as Cadmium Red.

Colour temperature is something my students often ask about. It can be a difficult concept, but I like to break it down to relativity. The degree of temperature is related to the colour temperature of those colours surrounding it. Anything that contains a touch of blue in the mix will be cooler than anything that contains a touch of red. Another example is Aureolin Yellow (which contains a small amount of blue). Therefore Aureolin Yellow is cooler than Indian Yellow (which contains a small amount of red).



## LIP TIPS

- ask your sitter to wet their lips
- careful drawing begins with the central horizontal lines
- use soft undefined edges'
- mould form with line, colour temperature and tone
- remember teeth are not white
- observation is vital



Detail: *Glancing Back* – a Tribute to Vermeer

### lips that tell a story

One wrong flick of the brush in the corner of the mouth and we can change an expression from happy to sad in one swoop. I like to ensure my drawing is very accurate before I begin describing lips with natural colour. There are many 'traps for young players' when painting lips.

### wet lips

Ask your sitter to wet their lips. Moistening lips gives a reflective quality that is in contrast to the matt look of skin. We all know how colours of a seashell come alive when it is wet. Wetting lips has much the same effect. It creates luminous transparent colours that add another dimension to the character of a painting. The piece de resistance is a shimmer of highlight reflecting off the moisture.

### drawing

The central horizontal lip line/s are always a good place to begin. The rest of the lip always flows in relation to these, just as a leaf always follows the central spine. Place these central lines correctly and you will find the other lines will be easier to describe. Watch for foreshortening. Lips will not be symmetrical if we are viewing them from an angle other than front-on.

### soft undefined edges

Lips that have sharp or hard edges look unnatural and painted. To create a naturalistic realism, we need to give the impression they have a gentle undefined edge where they meet the local skin colour. Take a close look at your lips in a mirror. You will see how the edges are not sharp and defined. Lips gradually fold and blend until they are lost in the local skin colour.

### mould form with line, colour temperature and tone

Lips generally have vertical lines that roll with the form. These are a wonderful asset as they help us describe the roll of the lip – but

they are best kept soft and sparse. Colour temperature is another tool that brings reality and a feeling of substance to all subjects. See how I have used colour temperature to describe each area of lip. The lightest highlight is toned white. I have added a tiny amount of blue to Flake White Replacement to keep the highlight cool. As the lip folds into the mouth, I have used Flake White Replacement, Aureolin Yellow and a touch of Alizarin Crimson to create a natural 'orange/pink' lip colour. The areas influenced by shadows are described using a slightly dulled orange mix of Aureolin Yellow, Alizarin Crimson and a touch of Thalo Blue. You can observe that the undulating form is described by favouring cooler hues – particularly more Alizarin Crimson and more Thalo Blue in the deepest shadowed areas. Pushing your colour-mixes to favour one or other of these hues will create a slightly undulating form.

### teeth are not white

Just as the white of an eye is not white – the same is true of teeth. Once again – isolate the teeth and you will see the colour is a similar hue and tone to that of the local skin colour. Teeth are generally wet therefore we see reflected colours and muted highlights. These are essential to help us to describe the surface of the teeth. One of the traps I often see in paintings is the over-emphasis placed on the deep, dark gaps between the teeth. Softly suggested spaces between the teeth give a much more pleasing and natural impression.

### observation

The benefits of good observation cannot be emphasised enough. It is not necessarily crucial for an artist to understand the theory behind colour temperature, tone, and form – if we paint the colours and form we see in front of us – our paintings should give the viewer the feeling of 'presence'. Having said that, then naturally an understanding of the theories will give us far greater options. My point is that observation is absolutely critical to naturalistic realism and creating a painting that has a 'presence'.



## art in the making *Shelley*



### stage 1

I always begin by building up a tonal painting using yellow underwashes and my priming method. Much like a black and white photograph, but using yellow instead of black and grey tones. Allow each wash to become bone dry after each set of priming washes. Avoid the highlights as these need to be kept light. Soften the highlight edges after each wash.



### stage 2

I begin moulding the form by using natural skin tones. I lay in washes using varying mixes of Alizarin Crimson, Translucent Orange, Indian Yellow and Thalo Blue. At this initial stage the painting will look a little disjointed and patchy. Don't panic! This is a necessary stage to go through as we are establishing the different planes on her face and arms. Although skin is generally one colour – naturally light affects how we see it – I push my colours to favour one or other of the above hues to help me describe what I see in front of me.



### stage 3

The eyes are created with darker hues than the skin – I leave them until I have almost finished my washes for the skin. The eyes are created using wet on dry techniques so remember that this will sit on the surface of the paper and will be disturbed when wet again. You need to be aware that if you bring any water too close to the wet-on-dry dark eye area you will soften the detail. I like this result so am careful to ensure that my lightly wet brush touches the edges of the dark eye area. This lightly blurs the edges and adds to the naturalness of the eyes.



### stage 4

We now have a number of washes established and you can see how this multi-layered technique using my priming method and then wet-on-wet method can give you skin you can almost 'feel'. The tonal range in Shelley's hair is now described with my tonal yellow underwash.



***Shelley*, watercolour on Arches Hot Pressed paper 300gsm (140lbs)**

### stage 5

#### Finished painting

You may notice I have chosen not to use hard edges. This painting is about gentleness and subtlety and I have reflected that in the way I have kept the lines soft and the dress colour almost monotone with the skin. Her nose is soft and her nostrils are understated. Areas of the skin under the brim of Shelley's hat glow with warmth as the sun radiates through the woven silk. This painting is full of nuances that when combined, support the feeling I wish to portray. Nothing shouts out – everything blends and allows the sitter's personality to speak from within the frame.

You can follow through this study in great detail on my DVD 'Susan Harrison-Tustain's One on One Watercolor Portrait Workshop', available through *Australian Artist*.





## what is local colour?

**'Local Colour' is the colour of the object before it is affected by light and shade. For instance the local colour of a leaf is green. The local colour of a red apple is red. The highlights and shadows often require a radical change in hue and colour temperature.**

### ***So Far Away,* oil on Belgian Linen**

Observation also involves thinking ahead. While in London, I was captivated by this evocative window, which was in the famous department store, Liberty of London. I stood for a very long time absorbing all I could, as I knew that one-day I would use this in a painting. A year later I planned a painting of a girl engulfed in soft light from a window. But the true essence of the painting came to me when I pondered the lighting. I have always loved the misty, ethereal, hallowed shafts of light that you sometimes see bouncing off dust particles and softening everything in its path. I felt totally engulfed in the atmosphere that the light and window created. I knew that this was what I wanted to say – that was the feeling I wanted to create. It is the perfect narrative for my story.



## my priming method

My priming method is successful because it allows pigment to be absorbed as far into the inner layers of the paper as possible. I use my priming method on the initial layers of a painting. As the painting progresses and I feel I have achieved the depth of tone I want, I revert to a wet in wet method for the middle few washes. Before I create my finest detail with dry brush, I fine-tune the colours I have achieved by laying in final washes to adjust colour temperature, depth of hue or change of colour, as I see necessary. Once totally dry, I use the age-old dry brush method to establish fine detail where needed. Of course you cannot wash over dry brush unless your intention is to lift some of it. Dry brush sits entirely on the surface of the paper and is easily dispersed. You can of course use this to your advantage, but generally my dry brush layer is my final layer.

I suggest the use of transparent colours with my priming method. In this way, you will find there is very little pigment movement between washes as transparent pigment is finely ground and is absorbed into the inner layers of the paper rather than sitting on the surface.

### step 1

Wet the area you wish to paint. Allow the water to be absorbed so the sheen has just disappeared from the paper.

### step 2

Lay in another clear water wash.

### step 3

While your previous wash is still wet on the surface, lay in your pigmented wash. Before you move on to applying another wash or set of priming washes as above, ensure your paper is BONE DRY.

#### **A Shining Star, oil on Belgian Linen**

Painted in a less-detailed style, this oil painting was inspired by soft light illuminating her form and creating a soft, hazy atmosphere.

Many years ago I visited an exhibition where Rembrandt's masterpiece, 'The Shipbuilder and His Wife', hung at the very end of a long exhibition hall. Despite the great distance, I could feel the presence of that painting as it reached out of the frame and into the hall. I studied what it was that made this painting so real and almost tangible and this one painting set me on an amazing journey of discovery that will always be unfolding in front of me. It is unfortunate that the specific methods of such Masters are not known for sure. It seems such a waste that the revelations they discovered on their journey are mostly left to speculation.



## about the artist

Susan Harrison-Tustain is an internationally recognised, award-winning New Zealand artist. As one of New Zealand's leading representational artists, demand for Susan's work far outweighs her output. Her natural affinity for timeless subjects is reflected in her highly sought paintings.

The essence of Susan's work is the presence and reality she creates within each painting. Largely self-taught, Susan's work is described as Naturalistic Realism.

Susan has written and illustrated a highly successful book featuring her paintings and her painting style. Published in the United States, *Glorious Garden Flowers in Watercolor*, (North Light Books, Cincinnati) has become a world-wide best seller and has introduced her art to a multitude of people.

Demand for her DVDs has also become exponential and she is in high demand as a tutor of workshops. In 2006 she began a series of international watercolor workshops. More are planned for Maine, Oregon and New Zealand in 2008 and 2009. Susan's work can be found in collections in the U.K., Italy, South Africa, France, the U.S., Turkey, Australia and New Zealand.

Susan is exclusively self-represented. Her exhibitions are only held once every three to four years. A sneak preview of her up-coming exhibition collection is available on her website.

[www.harrison-tustain.com/exhibition/index.html](http://www.harrison-tustain.com/exhibition/index.html)  
[www.susanart.com](http://www.susanart.com)



Susan with her oil painting, *Enchanté par La Provence*.