



Up close and personal

Susan Harrison-Tustain likes to get up close and take a bee's-eye view of flowers in order to take people right into the character of her subject.

Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow, watercolour on 300gsm Hot Press paper

The deeply veined leaves are part of the character of this rose. You can indicate this successfully by exaggerating the highlights and lighter areas on veined leaves. Take a look at the far left leaf. Unlike the green areas, the highlight is painted over an initial very PALE wash of Indian Yellow — the subsequent wash is Phthalo Blue with a touch of Alizarin Crimson. Without these highlights we would lose the impression of sunlight. Place your finger over this area to see what I mean. You will notice that eliminating this light will change the whole appearance and feel of the painting. The rich greens are painted over two or three washes of Indian Yellow.

My style of painting is all about feeling. It's about capturing that magical moment when the truth and sheer beauty of nature makes you catch your breath. You know the one. You wander around a garden, your eye is attracted to a flicker of light and you see for a moment an enchanting radiance as the light dances across the surface of a petal, or glows luminously through a leaf.

Have you ever gazed at a dewdrop poised precariously on a petal as it emits shards of shimmering refracted light? The slightest breeze will lift the curtain on the play and your mind can see the ensuing events. Capturing this moment will bring movement and energy, expectation and life to your painting.



I like to take a bee's eye view in my paintings to take people right into the character of my subject. I try to take the feeling, the unfolding story, and bring the viewer into that world. To do that I analyse what it is about the scene that has me spellbound. I ask, is it the shimmering light? Is it the refracted shards? Maybe it's the angle of the dewdrop indicating the breeze that makes the stem sway gently, causing the dewdrop to lilt? It's all these things, and the best way to emphasize them is to get up close and personal.

You will see that all my work uses this principle. It is instinctive. Writing my book, *Glorious Garden Flowers in Watercolor*, and filming my new video, *Glorious Garden Flowers in Watercolor Part One*, made me analyse what I was doing. It was a time of learning for me too. We never stop learning. It's a

This rose has a variety of colours within each cluster of flowers — allowing me to use many colour mixes, all of which are created from a very limited palette of transparent hues.

Notice the arrangement of light and shadow and the warm and cool colours.

Notice how the stamens sit proud of the petals and create a contrast in texture and form.

The leaves are gentle and act as a wonderful foil for the cluster of roses.
The perfect subject!



Sally Holmes, watercolour on 300gsm Hot Press paper

The Sally Holmes rose is one of my favourites. In fact, I chose one to star in my new video because it makes a tremendous demonstration subject and allows me to point out a multitude of important techniques in great detail, especially my priming method. On the video I also provide all the essential information needed to paint in this style of romantic realism.



**Laura Alexander, watercolour,
300 gsm hot pressed paper, 56 x 36cm (22 x 14"),**

There is a beautiful story behind this painting that I would like to share with you. Last year I was approached by TVNZ to paint this very special rose. The feature was part of a "wish programme" called "Kev Can Do". Julie McKinnon wrote to Kevin Milne telling him of the sad tale of her two children, Laura and Alexander, who had passed away soon after birth from McKinnon's syndrome. Her wish was that a rose be named after them. Her wish was granted and I was asked to paint a rose chosen especially for this purpose. It was an incredibly moving story and throughout my painting, thoughts of Laura and Alexander influenced the direction of this image. I wanted it to glow — like a new dawn, but gentle as a child. I wanted soft, lost and found edges allowing the roses to emerge from the luminous background. I wanted a peaceful composition and one ideal for the memory of these two cherished babies. The spent flowers indicate the story of life. The buds are symbolic of promise. The petals are softly kissed by the dappled sunlight. It was a

great honour to be asked to be part of this story and this painting expressed how deeply moved I felt by it.

Once again I used my priming method to begin forming these butterfly wing-like petals. A very fine wash of Indian Yellow eliminated the "raw" appearance of the white paper. Building up fine veils of colour I floated in washes of Indian Yellow and Alizarin Crimson. The rose coloured edges were a mix of these two colours to which I also added a touch of Phthalo Blue.

See how the edges almost look ruffled? If you think about it — you'll know how that was done — I simply used the theory of light against dark.

The area of the ruffle touched by light was emphasized — with very little blue at all in the mix. The deeper hue in the areas that fold inward was described by simply adding more Phthalo Blue to the mix — and a little more Alizarin Crimson where necessary. The illusion was completed with the addition of a thrown shadow — which followed the direction of the light. Remember, an emphasized area needs a cast shadow.



Priming

Prime the paper by wetting it then lay in a wet-in-wet wash of very diluted Indian Yellow.

Working on one petal at a time, re-prime the petal you choose to work on. Float in another wash of Indian Yellow to strengthen the depth of hue where you see it necessary. Go carefully — not too much colour. It is easy to add a little extra in the next wash — it's never as easy to take it out.

Continue to build up washes using my priming method. Then introduce some shadow colours using a mix of Indian Yellow and Translucent Orange with a touch of Alizarin Crimson and the tiniest amount of Phthalo Blue.



Fine veils of colour

Work you way around the petals, gently building up fine veils of colour giving depth and richness. Indicate soft folds by adding more Phthalo Blue to your mix in the shadow side of the folds. Bear in mind, the essence of this rose is it's soft, gentle form. We want to emphasise this so we need to keep the edges of our shadows soft. Keep a barely-damp brush ready to soften these shadow edges before they become too dry.



Painting the dewdrop

The dewdrop is one of the easiest things of all to create — it's just the local colour of the petal showing through. I like to deepen the colour slightly and I often add a dash of orange or yellow as you see here. Keep a spot of lightness for the highlight. Now it's time to add the shadow. Watch the dewdrop "pop" when you place a shadow beneath it. Magic!

journey that is forever leading us down new paths, revealing new directions. We must never be afraid to experiment. Decide what is the essence. Paint what moves you and it will show in your work. Believe in yourself. Paint from your soul. Paint what touches your heart and paint it in a way that lifts your spirit. Then not only will you be sharing a part of yourself with others, you will stir the viewer's emotion. This is what people remember — not how cleverly you have painted something, not how precisely you have used your brush. It is the way your vision has reached out of the painting and engaged the emotions, allowed viewer's to become absorbed and bewitched by that moment.

Let's walk through a gallery of my work and take a look at the seductive elements that will give your work that special something. □



Painting the buds

The buds are a cooler yellow — use Aureolin. Build up your colours in much the same way as you did for the main bloom. Add a blush of pink with Alizarin Crimson, the smallest amount of Phthalo Blue and Translucent Orange.

The green is Sap green. A rich red can be created with a mix of Alizarin Crimson and Phthalo Blue.



The background

Note the depth of yellow at the base of this painting. You need this richness to ensure you have a glowing background. Without it you'll find your painting will have a raw, dull finish. So go ahead, prime your background and drop in two or three Aureolin Yellow underwashes. Allowing each one to dry before re-priming and adding the next.

The sky should be painted in exactly the same way. Prime the paper and simply drop in a mix of Phthalo Blue with the merest touch of Alizarin Crimson. Allow this mix to concentrate in areas to indicate wispy clouds.



Finished

Begin establishing your dark colours by priming your paper again and dropping in a variety of mixes of all the colours previously used. Lift some colour out where you'd like to see a stem. Add a shot of Alizarin where you'd like to see warm colour. The darkest darks should be a mix of Phthalo Blue, Alizarin Crimson and Sap Green. Leave some lighter areas to suggest light filtering through the undergrowth.

Make a note of the things that went well and those that you would like to practice. Then have another go.



**Jonquilles Pour Ma Mere,
watercolour on 300gsm
hot pressed paper,
40 x 20cm (16 x 8")**

To me, painting fabric is like painting petals. A rose petal can have the appearance of crushed silk, or calico. In this painting, Sarah's gown is painted in the exact same way as I would paint slightly stiff rose petals.

I used multiple washes of very warm colours in her gown. I counterbalanced this with a purple/blue shadow, which brought the effect of complementary colours into play. See how the warm colours glow when juxtaposed by these complementary colours. The gentle folds are created by using my priming method — where would I be without my priming method!

I laid in the colour, allow it to be slightly absorbed into the paper, then with a brush that has the moisture squeezed out of it, I ran down the edge to soften the effect. This creates a gentle fold rather than a hard line. I use this same method to describe a soft fold in a petal. A sharper crease would be made more real by allowing more of the wash to be absorbed before coming back in with a slightly moist brush. You can use this same method to describe the soft folds of ruffled blooms or the gentle curve of the petals as it presents itself.

This painting is available as a fine art limited edition giclee print.

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 of the series is a companion to her best selling book *Glorious Garden Flowers in Watercolor* (North Light Books Cincinnati Ohio USA) which is available world-wide.

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