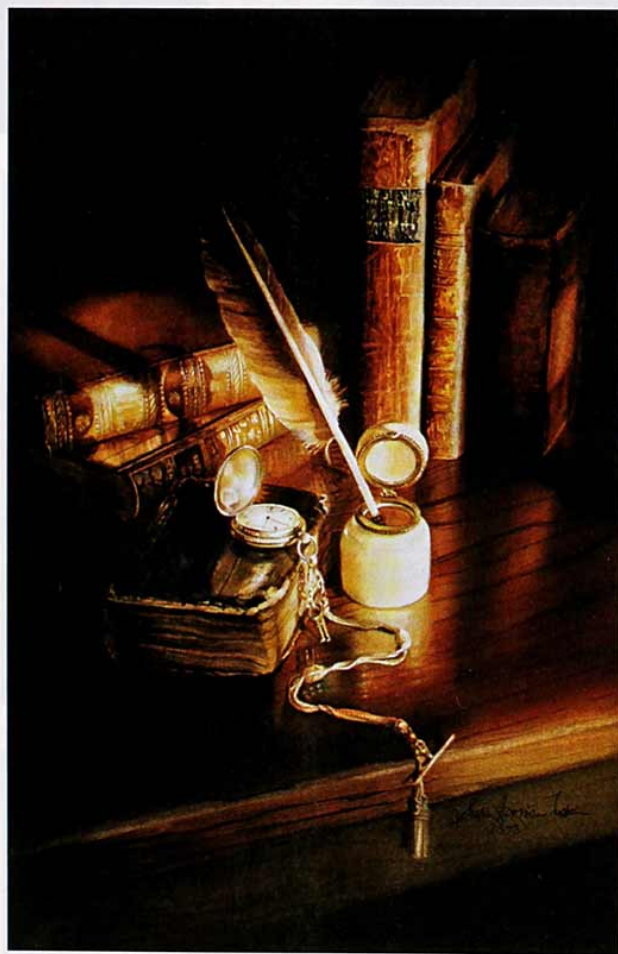


Is it Oil or is it



The Scribe, watercolor on Arches 140lb (300 gsm)
Hot Pressed paper, 15 x 12" (394 x 257mm)

Have you seen watercolor paintings, so rich in hue and depth, that at first you imagine they must have been painted in oil? How does an artist achieve that? Isn't watercolor generally perceived to be spontaneous, washy and most often loosely rendered? Watercolors tend to be lighter in tone, don't they?

I can show you how to break free from pre-conceived perceptions that create boundaries that limit our potential.

Convincing realism can be achieved in any medium, but when painted in watercolor, some may still expect to see a 'raw' and painterly look. Comparatively, an oil painting is generally expected to portray a greater feeling of substance, sense of depth and presence.

Now almost anything is possible. Watercolor paintings can be confused for oil paintings and oil paintings can be created utilizing the white of the canvas, instead of using white oil paint, just as we do in watercolor. Now with this whole new realm of possibilities at our fingertips, the excitement really begins. There is so much more to watercolor and to oil painting!

Take a look at the two examples her without looking at the captions. Can you guess which of these is watercolor?

Both of these paintings could be painted equally well in oil or watercolor.

Viewers of *A Quiet Celebration* know instinctively that if they picked up the champagne flute, the outside of the glass would be wet from condensation. These enticements that artists can

emphasise, tease the sense of reality and invite the viewer to step into the world inside the frame.

In the case of these two paintings, our thoughts focus on the composition, the mood and atmosphere that the warm hues and tonal values evoke. It is not until the viewer has explored these that they begin to ask themselves about the medium used.

How to give your watercolors substance, depth and presence

Watercolor?



A Quiet Celebration, oil on Belgian Linen, 15½ x 11½" (394 x 290mm)

A Quiet Celebration is a timeless painting enhanced by the rich Old Masters palette I have used. Painted in oil, this is a subject that would be equally successful in watercolor. Just as *The Scribe* would be equally successful in oil. The depth of realism is the same; the atmosphere and mood create the same emotion. So why did I choose the two different mediums to paint subjects with the same message? There is another factor that influenced this decision. With *A Quiet Celebration*, I wanted to use a frame that added weight to the composition; a frame against the edges of the painting; a heavy, ornate old-world frame that emphasised the atmosphere I wanted to create.



A Quiet Celebration - framed, oil on Belgian Linen, 15½ x 11½" (394 x 290mm)

You can see from the comparison of the two still lifes that, in subjects such as these, watercolor can be just as convincing, just as evocative and just as compelling as an oil painting. But if I want to emphasise this more, I then think about the type of frame I want to use and let that guide me in my choice of medium.

The Scribe lent itself ideally to a light colored mat board. The painting was about writing and paper. It seemed ideal to extend on that by painting it in watercolor on Hot Pressed Paper, with its smooth, almost egg shell surface.

Creating a presence in a watercolor

Creating a true sense of reality requires an awareness of many things. For me a basic ingredient is my yellow underwash. After devising my priming method, my biggest breakthrough was discovering how a 'tonal map' (not dissimilar to that which the Old Masters used in oil painting) could give me a reality that was previously unachievable.

The other key ingredients are learning about warm and cool colors and how to juxtapose them so they help describe and mould form. Tone, and of course how to mix colors, are also skills that I learned from observing things as they are in nature. Playing with color, limiting my palette to just 12 individual hues and becoming familiar with how they interact, has now become instinctive.

Three layers of yellow underwash to create a tonal 'map' in watercolor

Watercolor painting is a vast subject and we have just touched on some of the invaluable breakthroughs I have discovered on my journey. I love to share what has taken years to accumulate because I remember how it felt when the window of understanding opened for me so many years ago. It felt like a light had been turned on and I was finally able to see where I wanted my work to take me. The methods I use not only give that pure look of light, but they also allow me to create clean luminous and transparent depths of rich dark and atmospheric hues. The awareness of the nature of watercolor and how we can capture our world with this amazing medium, has allowed me freedom and flight. Establishing textures in watercolor is fascinating, because the surface is really a painted impression using tonal values, color temperature and line.



“Don't rely on detail alone to create realism: we need to create layers of interest.”

MY PRIMING METHOD

STAGE 1

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

STAGE 2

Lay in another clear water wash. The amount of water you use will depend on the effect you want to achieve.

STAGE 3

While your previous wash is still wet on the surface, lay in your pigmented wash.

Remember to let your paper become bone dry between sets of priming method washes

Decision Making Time

Ask yourself questions about what you see and how you want to portray it.

Don't rely on detail alone to create realism: we need to create layers of interest. Capturing the imagination of those who view our work is one thing, but a sensitively painted piece entices the viewer to delve deeper and deeper and become more immersed in the private world created through thoughtful composition. Painting the obvious is easy, but with a little thought you can invite your viewer to journey further into the painting.

Consider my painting *Windfall*. The viewer is involved the minute they stand in front of the work. Take a good look. Can you see the large tree reflected in the window? The viewer senses they are surrounded by the scene in the painting. The apple is not a fresh, crisp apple. Can you imagine the sweetness of the aroma of this partially rotting apple? The painting was of a house in Searsport, Maine. It was autumn and apples lay strewn on the ground. The heady aroma of fermenting fruit was all around.

Watercolor allowed me to capture all I felt about this place. I wanted the viewer of this painting to feel compelled to reach in and flick off a piece of the peeling paint; to connect and become involved with the feeling of 'being there'.



Windfall, watercolor on Arches 140lb (300 gsm) Hot Pressed paper, 14 x 9½" (355 x 240mm)

Let's take a look at a High-Key painting

Before discussing how I reached my decision between oil or watercolor for these paintings, let's look at a high key and a mid key painting.

Before deciding on the medium we are going to use to portray our subjects, it's a good idea to give some thought to the inspiration behind a painting. Why do we want to paint this subject? What do we want to say? How do we want our viewers to feel about this scene? What mood or atmosphere do we want to create?

The inspiration behind this watercolor

This watercolor painting of a white pigeon in the beautiful Provencal village of Peillon, is one of the first paintings for my 2011 'Recollection' exhibition. I love the notion that this pigeon is free to nest wherever she chooses. She has chosen this ancient building of crumbling stone, which has a breathtaking view of the Mediterranean from her vantage point.

Once again, this painting could have been suited to oil or watercolor, but I chose to paint it in watercolor because I wanted to play with the light hues, create softness and gentle transitions in the hand-made glass, and I wanted to give a feeling of the airiness of a summer's day. I wanted the painting to feel light and fresh and yet earthy, real and tangible.

'Feel' is the word I want to highlight here – every sense of it. I want this painting to speak of that particular place, that specific scene and I want my subject matter to be so real and tactile to the viewer, that they are not aware they have entered the story themselves. It is somewhat like sitting in a good movie, so absorbed by the story, that we are not aware we are in the theatre until we feel ourselves gradually emerging from such a state. Our thoughts keep returning to the story and we know we have been connected to it on many levels. That is my ultimate goal in my paintings. That is what I strive for. There was no lengthy deliberation in choosing a medium to create this painting. For me, watercolor is the perfect medium to capture those all-important nuances in the rustic texture, earthy hues, incredible light and warm luminous shadows.

Why didn't I choose oil? Let me ask you some questions, which I hope will lead you to the answer. When you look at this painting, do you sense a feeling of 'airiness'? Do you feel aware of that special Provencal light? The white of the paper plays a strong role in giving us these impressions. This natural paper white



Liberty, watercolor on Arches 140lb (300 gsm) Hot Pressed paper, 19 x 11" (480 x 280mm)

permeates through the light hues and can be used to great advantage in a painting such as this. The gentle gradations of hue also describe surfaces and textures that do not give the impression of them having been painted.

If I were to use oil for this study, I would paint the light areas using mixes that include white oil paint, which of course is very opaque. That opaqueness gives the opposite effect from the one I am after.



Liberty, watercolor on Arches 140lb (300 gsm) Hot Pressed paper, 19 x 11" (480 x 280mm)

It tends to give solidity. I want translucence and a feeling of radiant light and clear air.

You may be able to create this effect in oils, if you used light, transparent oil glazes, allowing the white of the canvas, linen or board to show through, but the time taken for each glaze to dry would make it a long, drawn out process.

I hope the viewers of this painting will feel their senses stirred and a connection that beckons them to apply their own history and life experience to what they see in front of them. Watercolor has helped me to create a feeling of 'being there' and that is the key to it all. To create a painting in a naturalistic realism style, choose the medium that lends itself most to being able to transport yourself and the viewers of your work to that place.

I want things such as the tactile texture of the crumbling sill, mortar and stone wall to add to the strength of the narrative. I love giving the impression of nature, as she spreads her cloak and gradually reclaims what was always hers. This is the reality of Liberty.

The windows felt tall and commanding and I emphasized that by the angle of the composition. I loved the light as it helped describe the undulating glass; each hand-made pane random in pattern. The broken pane is the entrance to 'her' sanctuary and the wood, rendered bare by time, are some of the things that support the impression of the opportunities that nature presents. I particularly like the suggestion of an earthy and unaffected freedom that this painting portrays.

Pale washes of watercolor give a delicate softness to the pigeon plumage, allowing us to emphasize the contrast between the velvety feathers and the texture of the rough stone. While Hot Pressed paper has almost no surface texture, we can create a convincing impression of any surface or texture with the wise use of tone, hue and color temperature.

my art in the making **Liberty**

I could have painted Liberty in oil, but I feel watercolor allowed me to capture the naturalness of the scene with sensitivity, utilizing the white of the watercolor paper.



Stage One Priming method

I began the white pigeon with some basic washes to describe the form and tonal values.

I almost always start by using pale washes of Aureolin Modern. Using my priming method, I wet the paper and then rewet it before I lay in my pigmented washes. This allows the hue to flow evenly and create soft gradations of color.

Once dry, I began describing the form of the feathers, using a mix of Alizarin Crimson, Phthalo Blue and Aureolin Modern. The light areas are being created, so at the same time I also paint a very dark area to judge the tonal scale I will be working in. My darkest dark is the eye. Remembering how essential it is to retain the white highlight, I laid in an underwash of Aureolin Modern. I allowed that to dry and then created a very dark hue using a mix of Phthalo Green, Alizarin Crimson and Phthalo Blue. I let this mix favour Alizarin Crimson on one side of the eye and favour Phthalo Blue on the other. I use such changes in color temperature to help me establish rounded form.



Stage Two Mapping the feathers

I vary color mixes to create feathers using Phthalo Blue, Alizarin Crimson and Aureolin Modern, with the occasional addition of Translucent Orange and also Scarlet Red. This allows me to create a simple 'map' of the feathers that will be fine-tuned later.

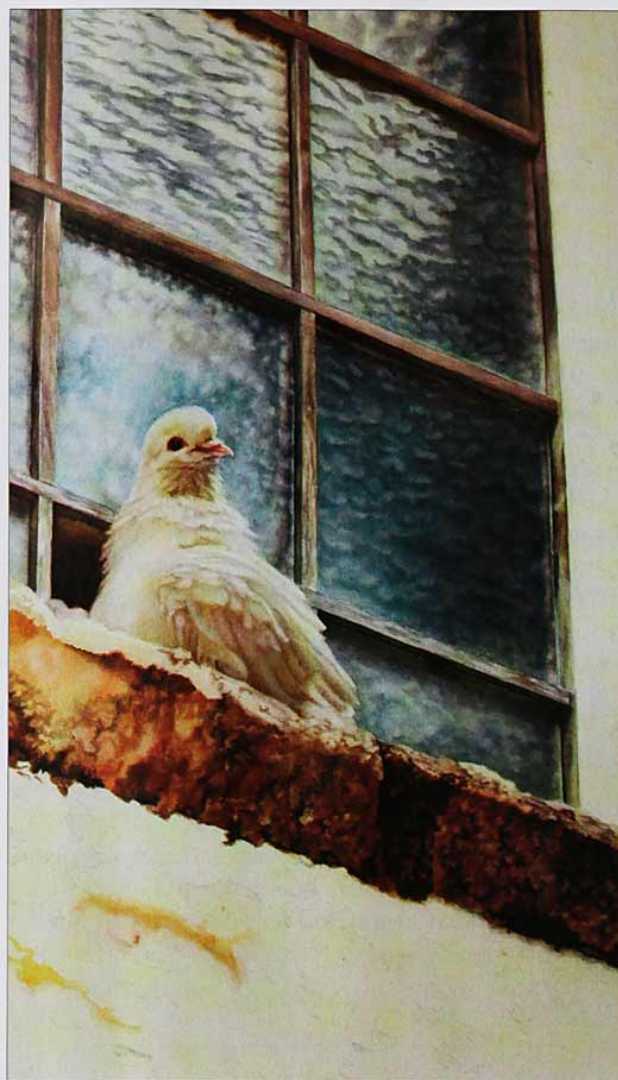
You can see how I lay a yellow underwash under most elements, including the wood. I vary the depth of yellow depending on the strength of the final color. It's also important to consider whether the final color is to be blue or purple. If that is the case, I use yellow extremely sparingly. Too much yellow would result in green or brown instead of the blue or purple I wanted.

Take a look at how I have created a wave pattern in the glass. Each window is on a slightly different angle to the others, so each pane reflects and absorbs the light differently. Take a close look at the window. See how much purple I have used? Also note that each raised area is described as a highlight and in the depressions I have a shadow, which adds to the impression of an undulating surface.



Stage Three Strengthening the washes

With more window panes completed, you can now see how the yellow underwash and some Translucent Orange give a warm glow in the shadowed areas of the wood frame. I have strengthened the washes in the pigeon and have established that there is a missing pane of glass behind the bird. See how the dark warm hue of this area gives a compelling point of interest. Place your finger over this to block it from your view and you will see how important this strength of color is. It also allows me to describe and emphasize the softness and lightness of feathers, as they contrast against the darkness of the missing window.



Stage Four Details emerge

Working on the stone sill, I once again began with an Aureolin Modern underwash. You can see here how I began with soft washes to create the warmth of the stone. I also added some Translucent Orange and Alizarin Crimson and Phthalo Blue in deeper shadowed areas. Can you see the detail of the stone beginning to emerge? Finally on the right you can see the finished detail. I have deliberately made my colors warmer than I want them to be, knowing that my final all-over washes will dull this down, just enough to retain a glow, but also to provide an earthy and natural hue.

If you now view the finished painting, you will see I have completed the stone work using more of the same hues, methods and techniques. Once totally dry, I laid in three fine washes of Paynes Grey Bluish over all of the stone, until I was happy with the depth of hue and the naturalness of the appearance of the stone. The warm glow is still retained, but the stone now has a naturally aged appearance.

I completed the wooden frame around the window. Have you noticed the glow of yellow and orange on the upper right hand side of the window frame? Without the warm underwashes, this timber would have a dull, cold and raw appearance. Instead, we have the warmth of orange juxtaposed next to the complementary blue/grey of the glass. I did not want 'pretty color', but I wanted the colors to be gentle, yet glowing, and also to have an earthiness that reflects the natural appeal of the scene and warm late afternoon light.

Before you begin drawing

Give some thought to the following:

OBSERVATION, OBSERVATION, OBSERVATION:
the key to holding interest – yours and that of your viewer.

- Look at your subject and ask yourself if it would just make a nice 'wall decoration' or if it would really invite the viewers to stop and engage with it.
- Does your subject say something, stir an emotion, evoke a memory?
- Analyse what is in this subject that causes you to feel something.
- Is it the atmosphere, the items you have used, the placement, the lighting, the mood?
- What of the supporting objects: are they in keeping with the subject and the era you have in mind? Are they a foil to allow the main subject to speak?
- What of the condition of the objects: are they worn or are they new? What do you want to portray? Do they say what you want them to say?
- Ask yourself how you can emphasise what you want to say
- A good example: in my painting *A Quiet Celebration*, I wanted the viewer to know that if they reach into the painting and touch the champagne flute, they would feel the chill of the champagne and dampness of the condensation and hear the snap of the fine bubbles as they surfaced.
- Although there is no person in sight in my still life paintings, I want the viewer to feel a connection, a presence and a familiarity. These objects may tell us more about the owner of them than a portrait can tell us of the person.
- When making a decision on the medium you are going to use, give some thought to the overall impression of the framed painting.

RICH DARK BACKGROUND



Time Stands Still - detail

LUMINOUS TRANSPARENT MID-TONES IN OIL



Faraway, oil on Belgian Linen,
22 x 16" (560 x 410mm)

This painting is an example of mid-range hues. I could have used oil or watercolor for a study such as this, but I feel oil had the edge. I wanted to create the look of condensation on the bus window. By drizzling oil medium down the window pane, I was able to create the effect I wanted without having to be precise and exact. I wanted to suggest condensation rather than paint it perfectly. I wanted the condensation to be a frame around her face. Partially hidden, she peers through the window, but she really doesn't observe does she? Her thoughts are faraway.

MOULDING FORM AND DESCRIBING MOOD WITH LIGHT AND SHADOW IN OIL



À Côté de la Fontaine, oil on Belgian linen, 19¼ x 15¼" (490 x 390mm)

Can you see how I have used bright sunlight to help me describe the roundness of this rose? This painting speaks of summer sunshine, warmth and lushness borne from the constant nurturing water of the fountain. Ideally suited to oil painting, this subject emerges from the dark background. Many years ago I studied Rembrandt's use of lighting and how he used complementary colors placed next to each other to push a subject forward. He also used colors with a similar color temperature and placed them next to each other to pull areas of the subject back into the background. This is how I created form in this subject. Oils were ideal as they allowed me to use white in the mixes, to describe the highlights that project the petals out from the canvas. The white allowed me to describe the substance of highlighted petals.

“To create a painting in a naturalistic realism style, choose the medium that lends itself most to being able to transport yourself and the viewers of your work to that place.”

Your paper must be bone dry between sets of washes

The same applies to layers of transparent watercolor. To establish the illusion of substance, I begin by laying in under-washes of yellow using my priming method. I then lay in subsequent washes of color. The final hue you see is a combination of all the hues that have gone before. The yellow underwash glows luminously through all the subsequent washes. The colors are deliciously rich, clean and transparent. Muddy, sullied, uneven, scratchy color and lifting hue are easily avoided - simply remember to ensure that each color wash is bone dry before applying the next.

Are there limits to this method?

My method will create exquisite color, from softly blended delicate, light hues to rich, opulent darks. The gentle gradation and blending of color helps me to describe the surface of my subject, whether it be skin, rose petal, sky, rich and dark background, or fabric.

SKIN



Adesso chi la sente La Mama - detail

SKY



The Wind's Song - detail

FABRIC



Awakening - detail

My magical watercolor palette of 12 hues



My signature brush set



This is my signature watercolor set

When you limit your palette, you are not limiting your choice of hues; you are asking yourself to create all of the colors you will ever need with just the limited palette you choose. I have used this very limited palette for some time and I have never needed or searched for any other hues. This palette is predominately transparent or semi transparent. I do have one or two semi opaque hues, but as Schmincke is very finely ground and I use my colors in very fine washes, the particles are therefore absorbed into the inner layers of the paper and this allows them all to be transparent.

The quality of your paint and paper is important.

Look for a watercolor paint that is very finely ground. The paints I use allow me to multi-layer up to 20+ fine washes without the concern of creating that dreaded mud. The pigment density and intensity also means I use very little. What I particularly love is that I can have a number of ceramic palettes with different mixes: skin hues, sky hues,

My magical palette of 12 hues Schmincke Brand

- 208 Aureolin Modern
- 220 Indian Yellow
- 218 Translucent Orange
- 363 Scarlet Red
- 357 Alizarin Crimson
- 351 Ruby Red
- 367 Purple Magenta
- 484 Phthalo blue
- 494 Ultramarine Finest
- 519 Phthalo Green
- 530 Sap Green
- 787 Paynes Grey Bluish

old masters still life hues, light floral hues etc. I revisit them, perhaps months after they were last used because this pigment re-disperses readily, even once it has become totally dry on my palette. It never cracks. Just a brush over the top with clear water and you are ready to go again.

MY MATERIALS

My watercolor methods are not traditional. They have evolved from years of trial and error to where I can now create any subject in watercolor using the methods I have developed. The paper, paints and hues and of course techniques I use are the reason I am able to produce these depths of translucent color in watercolor.

I use the following products.

Arches Hot Pressed paper
140lbs (300gsm)

da Vinci Brushes

No 3 Artissimo series 44

No. 2 & 6 Maestro series 11

No. 2 & 4 Nova synthetic series 122
brilliant for softening edges and for lifting

No. 50 Cosmotop Series 5080

1 inch drafting tape
*for creating a clean crisp white border
around my paintings*

ROSE PETAL



Innocence - detail

Lukas white gummed tape
for stretching watercolor paper to board

Gatorfoam Board $\frac{3}{4}$ inch depth
24 x 16" (610 x 410mm)

You can read more about the materials I use and why
on my website. www.susanart.com/suppliers.html

**You can also read how to stretch watercolor paper
onto board and how to remove your finished painting
from the board in the free Art Lessons section here:**

www.susanart.com/blog/articles-free-watercolor-lessons

WATERCOLOR IN SUMMARY

Watercolor painting is a vast subject and we have just touched on some of the invaluable breakthroughs I have discovered on my journey. I love to share what has taken years to accumulate because I remember how it felt when the window of understanding opened for me so many years ago. It felt like a light had been turned on and I was finally able to see where I wanted my work to take me. The methods I use not only give that pure look of light, but they also allow me to create clean luminous and transparent depths of rich dark and atmospheric hues. The awareness of the nature of watercolor and how we can capture our world with this amazing medium has allowed me freedom and flight.

My Basic Oil Palette

I love Oil Painting equally as well. The hues I use vary dramatically depending on the subject matter and mood I wish to create.

- Gamblin Titanium White
- Gamblin Naples Yellow Hue
- Gamblin Yellow Ochre
- Gamblin Cadmium Lemon
- Gamblin Cadmium Yellow Deep
- Schmincke Norma Cadmium Red Light
- Old Holland Alizarin Crimson
- Gamblin Cerulean Blue
- Gamblin Ultramarine Blue
- Gamblin Phthalo Blue
- Old Holland Scheveningen Green
- Gamblin Sap Green
- Gamblin Black Spinel

I find it interesting to see the different hues that result when mixing the same colors in oil and watercolor. Despite simulating the same components, the colors can be markedly different. Hence the different palette from my watercolor palette.

Establishing textures in watercolor is fascinating because the surface is really a painted impression using tonal values, color temperature and line. I enjoy the variety of surface textures achieved with oils, too. When I began oil painting I strived to achieve a totally smooth surface, but I'm now enjoying utilising the innate textural characteristics of oil paint. I love to see the light catch the edges of the oil paint in subjects such as cracked plaster on an ancient wall. This can be emphasized by contrasting the topography with the blurred integrated edges of a subject affected by distance and aerial perspective.

MY PHILOSOPHY

My teaching focuses on observation, analysis, asking ourselves questions and challenging what we already know by introducing a new awareness and understanding of our mediums. My goal is to create and to teach others how to create paintings that reach out of the frame and speak to our viewers. I want the memory of that connection to stay with the viewers long after they have left the paintings' presence.

The key to new horizons is to understand the different mediums we use and not to be scared to push past the boundaries. I challenge and push myself out of my comfort zone.

I begin by analysing what it is that captivates me about a subject. I 'live that painting in my mind' until I resolve all of the issues. It is then that my choice of medium is overpoweringly obvious.



about the artist

At the age of six years, Susan sold her first painting. This was the beginning of a highly successful career. Now internationally recognized, this New Zealand-born artist's works are always in great demand.

Susan has travelled extensively and her keen eye for observation and her skilled paintings have brought her international acclaim. Teaching painting is one of Susan's greatest passions. Her three watercolor 2-disc DVD sets are all international best sellers and her workshops in NZ, US and Europe are highly sought. Susan and her husband, Richard, lead international sight-seeing, painting, photography and wine appreciation tours.

Susan is the author of the book 'Glorious Garden Flowers in Watercolor' (North Light Books, Cincinnati, Ohio), and she has been a contributor to several other books world-wide.

Susan's paintings have featured on international magazine covers. Her work can be found in numerous international collections.

Representing herself, Susan's exhibitions are visited by patrons from many countries.

Signature paint and brush sets created by two leading German companies are now available.

Susan lives in the beautiful, clean, green New Zealand countryside overlooking the coastal towns of Tauranga and Mount Maunganui.

www.susanart.com