

# practical painting

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Jennifer Gardner : Contemporary Fine Art in Pastels

America

Born in England, Jennifer has had an interest in art since childhood. A lawyer by profession, she moved to New Hampshire, America, 6 years ago and gave up Law to paint full-time.

Jennifer travels extensively (lucky girl!) around Europe, the Caribbean, the Far East and her adopted home of

America for the inspiration for her landscapes and seascapes. She is a Juried Associate Member of the [Pastel Society of America](#) and a juried member of the New Hampshire Art Association.

Avenue of Trees, Champagne, France II, pastel 25" x17" : [Click to enlarge](#)



## How long have you been using pastels?

I picked up my first pastel in spring 2001 when I started weekly classes with a local teacher in NH. I had been trying to locate a landscape oil teacher as I thought I might be interested in learning landscapes and hadn't really thought much about alternative mediums. I wasn't having much luck when I met a very popular pastel teacher in my town and she suggested I think about trying out pastels. I hadn't given them any thought until then!

## What is it about using pastels that is more attractive to you than other mediums?

I have never really tried any other mediums seriously. I dabbled with oils for a few months at home before being introduced to pastels and have never looked back. What I love about pastels is their immediacy, their ease of use in terms of very little clear-up and preparation time, no drying time, and, most

importantly, of course, their intensely vibrant colors. They are really great fun to work with although there are a few drawbacks too. There isn't much information available on health and safety so I take all the precautions I can; I always wear a dust mask and vinyl (non-latex) gloves when I am painting. I am concerned about the long-term effects of inhaling the dust but then again I think any artist takes a risk of one kind or another whatever their medium. For the long term, pastels will also not deteriorate over the years (they won't crack or yellow or fade over time) so long as they are stored properly or framed behind glass.

[Click to enlarge](#) : Lavender, Senanque, Provence, Pastel 17.5" x 13"

## How would you describe your style?

Something between impressionism and slight abstraction depending on my mood on the painting day in question!

## Strong lighting looks like a key element in your work. How important is this to a successful painting?

In my most successful paintings I think strong lighting has been absolutely fundamental. I have always been attracted to shadow shapes across fields and trees, side-lighting and back-lighting. Anything which allows the opportunity for abstract shapes and inventive color! I am highly unlikely to be attracted to a



scene which is muted in color so I tend to be drawn to scenes which are filled with strong light - whether that is bright midday blue sky light or the warm colors of late afternoon.

#### How do you keep yourself motivated to create?

I am always motivated to paint - that's just something internal for me - it's the successful creation which is tougher and the initial fear of failure which is far harder to overcome! Every time I start a painting I have a fear that it won't work so it feels I'm on a knife-edge for a while when I don't know if the painting will work or whether it will be a disaster then all of a sudden it might come together and I discover I've finished it! With my more abstract style landscapes I try not to have a specific plan in mind and sometimes my most interesting paintings can result from initial mental chaos!

Normandy Poplars II, pastel 18" x18" : [Click to enlarge](#)



#### What Brands of pastels do you use most?

I started with Nu-Pastels which I think are probably many people's starting point! Since then I have acquired hundreds of different pastels and my collection includes Sennelier, Schminke, Winsor and Newton, Grumbacher, Carbothello pencils and most recently I have bought several sets of Mount Vision pastels. I prefer the softer brands and for the moment am using Schminke, Sennelier and Mount Vision for most of my work on Sennelier La Carte paper and I use Nu-Pastels for very fine lines.

#### What colors do you find yourself using most?

If you had asked me that question 18 months ago I would have said mainly blues, purples and yellows but never greens nor many warm colors. I suddenly realized my paintings were somewhat cool (not surprising when my favorite color is blue!) and I decided to experiment with some other color combinations to try to broaden my artistic horizons! Surprisingly, I rarely use much blue now and I have discovered several color palettes which have been very

successful from warm oranges, reds and golds with olives to all shades of greens and yellows with turquoises. Now I think it would be very difficult to say which colors I use more regularly as I paint with almost an entire range of hues.

#### What papers do you use?

I started out using ColourFix (Ultramarine, Aubergine or Sand) almost exclusively but have recently discovered Sennelier La Carte paper which I absolutely love. I think it would be fun to try a velour paper for some of my more abstract landscapes but for the moment I'm addicted to the Sennelier Light Green Mist. I also like the Salmon and Sienna colors depending on what color scheme I'm working with.

Late Summer Color, pastel 17.5" x 17.5" : [Click to enlarge](#)

#### What steps do you follow when developing a painting?

It depends on whether I want to follow one of my photographs fairly accurately or whether I'm looking to





create something more abstract. If I want a more accurate representation I do a quick sketch and mark out where the main groups of lights and darks will be using a CarbOthello pencil. Then I start, generally speaking, with the sky and work down the painting towards the horizon and lastly I finish with the foreground. I work alternatively between the lights and darks but tend to start off laying in the majority of the dark or shadow areas in first.

If I'm trying to create something more abstract I do still start with one of my photographs for inspiration but then when I have studied it for a while I don't refer to it again at all. I want to paint the essence of the scene which inspired me rather than what is there in the photographic reproduction. I almost need to 'forget' what I saw on the photograph and start again free to use whatever colors I choose and to add shapes and detail which I find

attractive or interesting to the whole without being restrained by my memory of reality. It's not as easy as it sounds! My abstract style landscapes are still very much a half-way house. I still need to "lose" more of the reality before I get where I want to go!

**I understand you work from digital images you take displayed on your computer screen. What are the advantages over using photographs?**

When I am trying to see greater detail in the photograph, especially in the shadow areas, it is far easier to see them on a 17" screen than on a 4"x6" photograph. You also see many more color variations and tones which are almost impossible to see in a standard photograph. I guess it all depends on the skill of the photographer though - I don't have any skills past being able to spot a reasonable composition, point the camera and push the button!



Cornfields II. pastel 24" x 18" : [Click to enlarge](#)



**What would be the main technique you use when creating your work?**

I am a relatively fast and physically enthusiastic painter! I tend to jab about all over the place in the hope that I'm getting the right values in the correct places, I paint with dabs and side-strokes and lots of scribbles. As I am not trying to be too realistic it doesn't matter if things don't end up the way I intended or the way they are in reality so long as they work together overall.

One of the best ways to keep on track for me is to stand back every few minutes and take a good look at where I am heading. If anything unattractive is emerging I can catch it early enough to change it without too much difficulty. If you get too embroiled in the minutiae and don't take a step back to see the progress at frequent intervals I think you run the risk of either messing the whole thing up or having to spend a long time correcting whatever has gone wrong!

I am an artist very at ease with throwing away any painting (even at a very early stage) which hasn't worked for me without too

much difficulty right from the start. Whilst it is relatively easy to make alterations and rectify errors with this medium I don't tend to invest much time in reparative work. The moment I spot something I am unhappy with which cannot be rectified immediately and without any signs of repair it tends to "disturb" me and I know that at the end of the day I'll never think it was a successful painting - so it will inevitably be trashed. The view I take is that it's better to have learnt that about myself early on in my career (and as early on in the painting as possible!) and not to waste my time trying to change something which I know will never be as I want it to be. They either go right from the start or they are blemished for me!

Rose Island, The Bahamas, pastel 18.5" x 10.5" : [Click to enlarge](#)



**You had your work published in American Artist Magazine, November 2004 -How did this affect your profile ?**

It's a nice thing to have on my Biography and I think it did have an impact in some cases on sales. I also had more requests for private lessons than before! Other than that I'm not sure yet!

**Do you have any recommendation for those trying to get the attention of Art magazines?**

I was approached by both American Artist and The Pastel Journal (who should be writing an article on my work later this year) as a result of

exhibiting in national shows. An editor from AA saw one of my paintings in an invitational show at the Pastel Society of America in New York City and an editor from PJ saw a painting in a juried national show in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania! I have never approached a magazine directly but I think they are willing to accept slides to consider. So, my experience would be that the more national juried shows you can get into the better - you never know who is going to be there enjoying the exhibit and looking for new artists!

[Click to enlarge](#) : Afternoon Stroll, Grand Cayman, pastel 10.75" x 17"

**You have won many awards for your work. What tips would you give someone who is thinking about entering his or her work in competitions for the first time?**

Make sure you get good quality, professional slides and follow all the entry requirements so that your work isn't rejected because of some technicality irrelevant to the quality of your work! I never thought I was "ready" or good enough to enter slides to shows - I think it takes the encouragement of someone else who's opinion you value to persuade you to enter your slides for consideration for the first time. Now I don't worry so much whether they are accepted or rejected as it's all a very subjective process anyway.

**What would you like to do in the future with your art?**

I want to become more abstract in my landscape painting . I think landscapes (and the occasional cityscape) will always be my inspiration over other subject matter but I would like to work more loosely, to break away further from a simple reproduction of the scene and to create something which is different, exciting and exclusively mine.

Jennifer will displaying and selling her work in Art Shows and Festivals over the next few months.. Check out her "[Art Shows](#)" page on her website to see if she will be at a venue



near you!

To see more of Jennifer's work visit her web site at  
[www.jennifergardner.com](http://www.jennifergardner.com)



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