

Taking Risks: Stir up new excitement with mixed-media

The Pastel Journal

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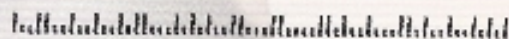
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Pastel Discoveries

Essential lessons that will invigorate your art

Still Life Revival

Two artists bring new energy to the genre



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The Purple Dress (detail; 16x12) by Brian Mathas Burt

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Electric Vision



Jennifer Gardner plays up one element in her city- and landscapes—brilliant color—creating work that’s expressive and full of joy.

By Jessica Canterbury

Jennifer Gardner is a risk taker. She left her native England to move to the United States, gave up a steady income to be a full-time artist, and now pushes boundaries with her colorful interpretations of the landscape. This aspect of her personality translates to her paintings, as well: They’re not precious, and never safe. Overflowing with electrifying color and textured layers, Gardner’s works—whether city- or landscapes—are full of spirit and energy.

Yet the artist doesn’t see her artistic style as a reflection of her adventurous personal life. “I think it’s probably a result of the fact that I just like bright, happy colors,” she says, from her home in North Venice, Fla. “Most of the people that come in to see my work at art shows all say I paint happy paintings, and I hadn’t really thought of it before, but I guess that’s probably true because I have to be happy when I’m painting them.”

She admits that it’s hard not to be pleased with her current situation: When the artist isn’t painting, she’s traveling, skiing, walking the beach or attending art festivals. But this wasn’t always Gardner’s life. Less than 10 years ago, she was living in England and practicing law. In 1999, she and her husband moved to Bedford, N.H., and shortly thereafter she decided to revisit her childhood hobby of painting. Unsuccessful attempts in oils led Gardner to seek out Linda Obremski, a local artist who taught pastels. That was in April 2001, and by that August, Gardner had already sold her first pastel painting.



Sun In the City (top; 22½x24)

City Sunrise (bottom; 22½x24)

City Sunset (opposite; 19½x18)



Fields and Clouds (20x22)

Her art-making picked up speed and, fast forward to 2008, she's now a successful, full-time pastelist.

"I didn't know what I was going to do when I moved to the U.S., but I did know that I wasn't going to go back into law," says the artist, laughing. A liberating decision, to be sure, but Gardner found it quite scary as well. "I saw coming to the U.S. as an opportunity to do something different. I didn't want to move to the U.S. to do the same old stuff that I was doing in England. Otherwise, there would've been no point in coming here. I really do think that I've got more control over my destiny now," she says.

Since rekindling her creative fire, the artist has shown her work in many national juried exhibitions and has earned various awards, including second

place in the Abstract & Non-Objective category in *The Pastel Journal's* 8th annual Pastel 100 competition. It does seem that the chances she's taken have proven to be well worth the risk.

A Pop of Color

Gardner isn't interested in hyper realism. Hers is a quest for imaginative expression and vivacity, as evidenced in her distinct marks and bold palette. It's a style that allows the artist to convey both her love of the countryside and the pulse of the city.

"I strive to paint interesting light effects," says Gardner. "I look for intriguing shapes and patterns in a scene and wonder how I can pull them together into a cohesive painting—this applies whether I'm

considering a cityscape or landscape. I'm attracted to potentially challenging and vibrant color combinations."

City Sunrise (on page 39) is just one of her works that contains such combinations. The artist recalls catching the morning light from a San Francisco hotel window. "I just got lucky and opened the curtains at the right time, which was probably around 6:30 a.m. All the buildings in San Francisco are a very pale color; most of them are whites and pastel colors. The sun was very bright when it started to rise, and when it struck the buildings, it turned this amazing set of oranges and yellows. Obviously, I put in all the purples and so on because that's what would make the yellows pop the most," she says.

This painting—as are most—is a result of travel, which the artist finds creatively vital. "I need to travel to see new shapes and colors," she says. "All of a sudden something I see sparks a light in the deepest recesses of my brain, and a new series of paintings or ideas is born—eventually. I always come back from a trip overflowing with ideas, but sometimes they don't actually evolve into a painting for another couple of years. Some subjects take a while to tackle," says the artist.

About the Artist

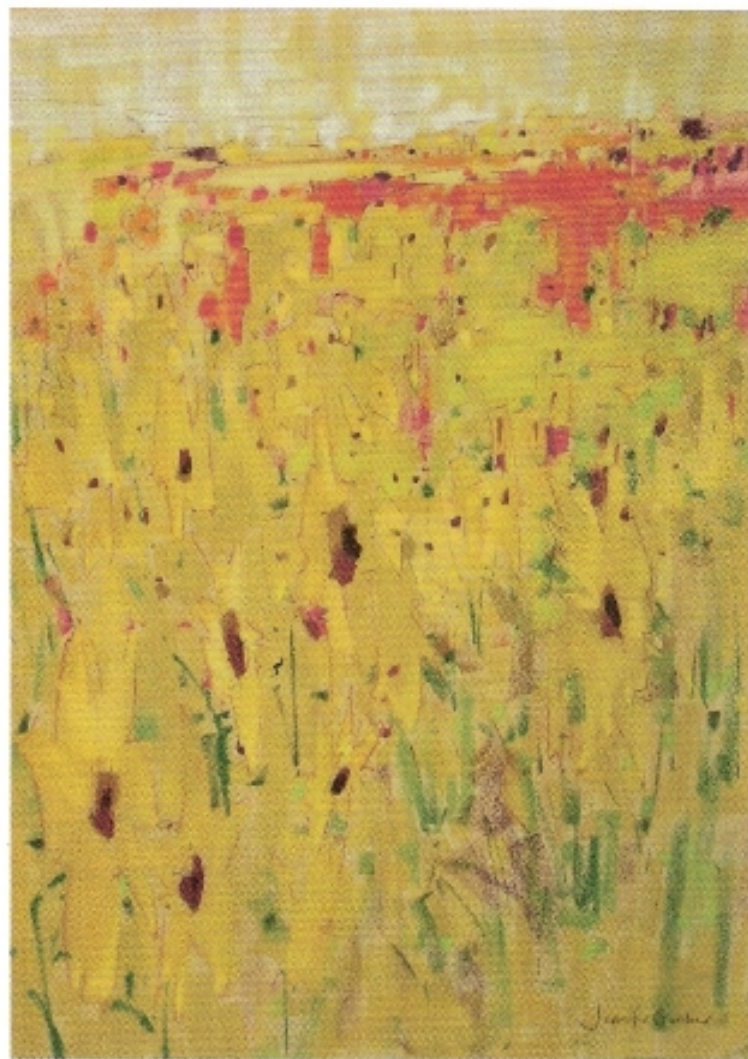


Jennifer Gardner (www.jennifergardner.com) was raised in Windsor, England, and lived there until 1999. Now in North Venice, Fla., she pursues art full time and exhibits her pastel paintings in juried shows and various art festivals through-

out New England and Florida. She's a juried associate member of the Pastel Society of America and member of the Southwest Florida Pastel Society. Her painting, *City Sunrise* (on page 39), won the Mabon J. Childs Memorial Award at the Arts Guild of Old Forge's 2006 Northeast National Pastel Exhibition. Gardner is represented in Massachusetts by Powers Gallery, in Acton, and The Walsingham Gallery, in Newburyport.



California Poppies and Hills (18x20)



Spanish Sunflowers II (24x18)

Cityscapes can be especially daunting subjects because of their detail, and detail isn't something Gardner wants in her finished piece. For a city scene, she works from digital reference photos to plan out her compositions. "I have to break the buildings down into blocks, and look at them more as compositions—ignore all the detail. Whatever detail ends up in the paintings is really only in my head and it's a result of how the pastel has been applied and what I've seen developing as shapes on the paper, which I then work to my advantage," she says.

Once her composition is planned, chromatic energy—rather than local color—becomes top priority. "I've never really painted with anything other than intense colors," says Gardner. "Having said that, my paintings have become brighter and more vibrant over the years." While an imagined color scheme isn't necessarily easy to pull off, the artist says limiting the palette helps. "I just pick colors that I like and I think are going to work, but I don't really go

overboard with them. I probably pick around five colors as my base colors, and then I pick a variety of different values around those color choices to create my full color palette."

Modern Effects

Textured layers are also a signature effect; the artist simply finds them more visually interesting. Certain surfaces also help to achieve texture, and a favorite support is Sennelier La Carte. Gardner has also started working with Kitty Wallis paper. "Especially now that I've started with Kitty Wallis, I'm using more and more layers of color," she says.

She begins a composition sketch in Nupastels. The next step is laying out where she wants her brightest and darkest colors, but ever so lightly, so there's possibility for design changes. The artist then works all over the paper, introducing color and layering soft pastels (Schmincke, Sennelier, Mount Vision, Rembrandt)—keeping blending to an absolute minimum to preserve the vibrancy of the pastel. Reinforcing and exaggerating colors comes in at this stage as well. If she's working on Wallis, she starts with an alcohol wash underpainting, being careful not to cover up a lot of the paper. Often she'll do a couple of these washes in various areas, which often results in shapes serendipitously evolving on their own.


"When I get about three-quarters of the way through the pastel application, I then start sketching all over the painting again [with the harder Nupastels] to reinforce outlines, to introduce other shapes," says Gardner. "Because a lot of the time when I'm painting, I'm not actually sticking rigorously to a drawn outline; I know approximately where things are going and roughly where things were, but because I want it to look more expressive and a little more abstract, I'm not really rigorous about where I'm putting the pastel. And all kinds of funny little shapes can evolve when you do that.

"Sometimes the painting doesn't actually end up much like the initial sketch," she says, "but as long as it's worked through a process—the composition is still working, and the lights and darks are still where I want them to be, which in theory should be at one of the focal points—they still work." Even her more traditional, impressionistic landscapes, such as her popular poppy field scenes (see *California Poppies and Hills*, on page 41), demonstrate this approach. "Even with those, I still do the outline around the edge, because it has a more contemporary appearance to me. It still has a slight distinction, as opposed to purely impressionist paintings. Sometimes I can push much further

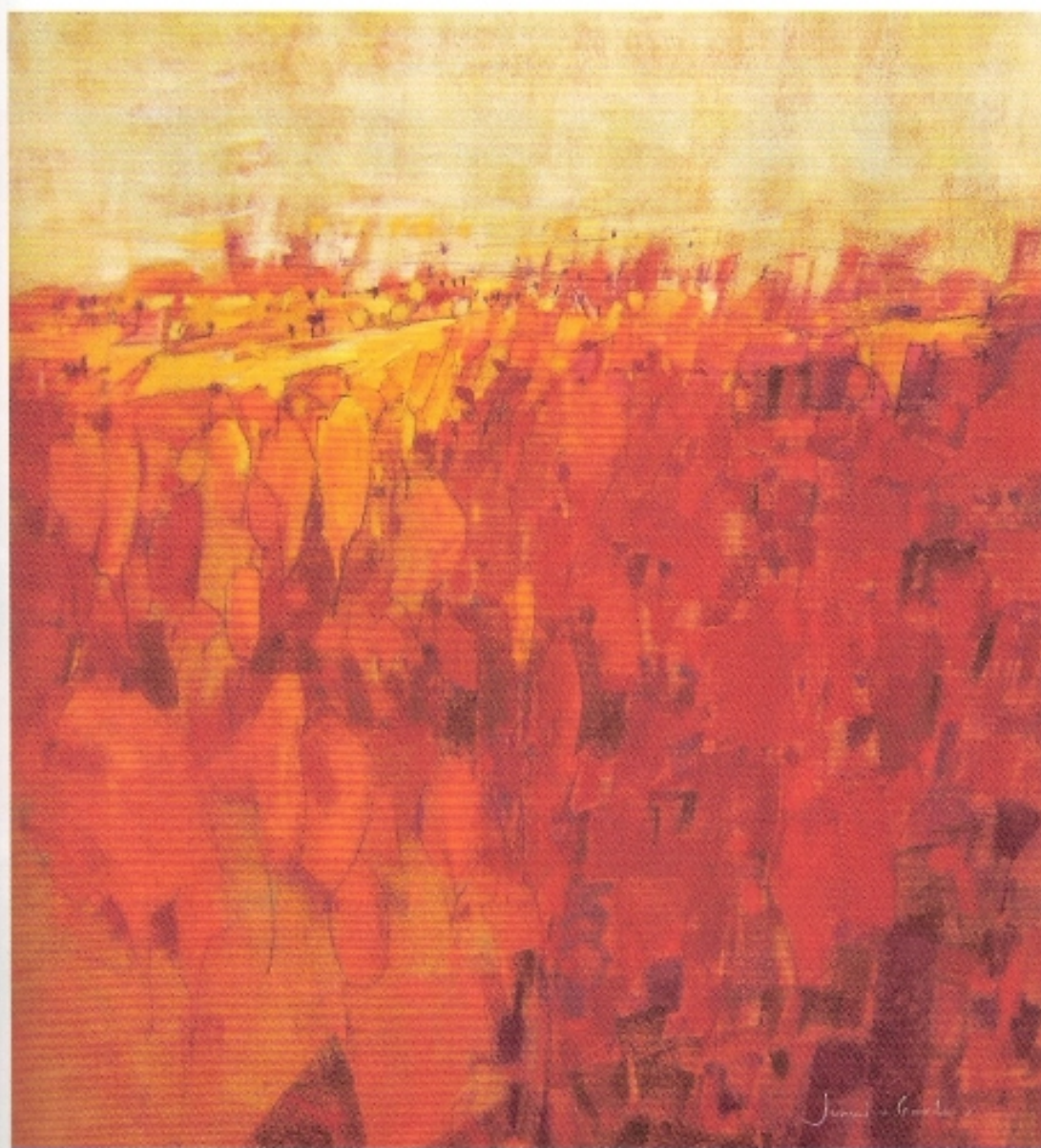
toward abstraction, like my *Orange Grove* paintings (see below), and other times they're still quite impressionistic but with a slight edge."

Imagined color also helps Gardner accomplish her goal of work that leans more toward abstraction. "I think when you put unusual colors side by side, that it just has a different resonance with some people in the same way that it does with me," she says. "That's why I love Monet's paintings. Throughout my whole life, I've only ever really liked Impressionists' paintings, but—although I was very keen on Monet's work, and he obviously

fills his paintings with very interesting colors—it's only since I've started to paint that I've wanted to get more abstract."

And yet the unknown is synonymous with abstraction. "When I start a painting, I really enjoy it," says Gardner. "But there's always that moment before I start when I think, have I got enough time to tackle this? Am I in the right mood for tackling something complex and large? But you have to take that initial step." 

Jessica Canterbury is associate editor of The Pastel Journal.



Orange Groves and Hills (20x18)