English-born artist Jennifer Gardner gave up a career as a lawyer to become a full-time fine artist. A resident of Bedford, New Hampshire, she accepts commissions and participates in numerous juried shows, both locally and nationally. Most recently, she won the Merit Award in the Pastel Society of America 2004 Invitational Exhibition. She is a juried associate member of the Pastel Society of America, a juried member of the New Hampshire Art Association, a member of the Pastel Painters Society of Cape Cod, and the member's chairperson on the board of the Manchester Artists Association in New Hampshire. Contact the artist through her website at www.fineartinpastels.com.

am lucky enough to travel extensively in the United States and across the Caribbean, as well as to Europe, on a fairly regular basis. This gives me the perfect opportunity to explore many different landscapes and cultures, and has provided an almost endless source of inspiration for new painting ideas. In particular, I am always looking for simple landscapes with dramatic color, which I capture on film for later reference.

My painting technique centers on developing color harmony and enhancing the vibrancy of the pastel medium. One way I do that is by selecting my colors carefully from the outset and setting them aside in a working palette. I try to avoid going back to my larger pastel collection, except for the odd finishing touches. I think this is a useful way of controlling color, especially for an artist like me who regularly departs from the local colors of a scene. To take advantage of the richness of the pure colors, I heighten the color and value contrasts as much as I can. I tend to place my colors side by side, which creates far more resonance and energy than if I had blended their edges together.

WORKING FROM PHOTOGRAPHS VERSUS DIGITAL IMAGES

The only drawback to all my travel is that I cannot paint on location easily. Therefore, I always work back home at my studio from photographs or digital images. An excess of caution leads me to capture images with both my single-lens-reflex camera and a digital camera. Most of the time, I don't paint from the standard 4"-x-

Developing an impastolike surface with short, unblended strokes of pastel retains the pure color and visual excitement of a scene.

From Travel Photos to Vibrant, Engaging Paintings

BY JENNIFER GARDNER

Avenue of Trees, Champagne, France II, 2002, pastel, 17 x 25. Courtesy the artist.

6" photos; they are really just an additional reference in case of emergencies. I work almost exclusively from a high-resolution LCD screen attached to a computer in my studio, which stands head-height by the side of my easel. I can view the digital images directly from my camera's CompactFlash card, using a USB CompactFlash card reader.

I haven't encountered any prob-lems with color distortion. On the contrary, colors appear to me far more realistic with digital images than with 4"-x-6" photos. Because I am able to look at the image at a greatly increased size on my screen, a lot of the detail I can't see on a standard image is quite clear, including such difficult areas as deep shadow. Cameras are not readily able to adjust extremes of light and dark, so they tend to darken and flatten out the image. I find that using a digital camera lessens that effect. Another advan-tage to using digital photography is that I can take as many images as I want at no cost and delete the ones that I can't use.

MATERIALS

I originally painted only with Nupastel and Schmincke sticks, but it wasn't long before I realized I

DEMONSTRATION: *LAVENDER, SENANQUE, PROVENCE*
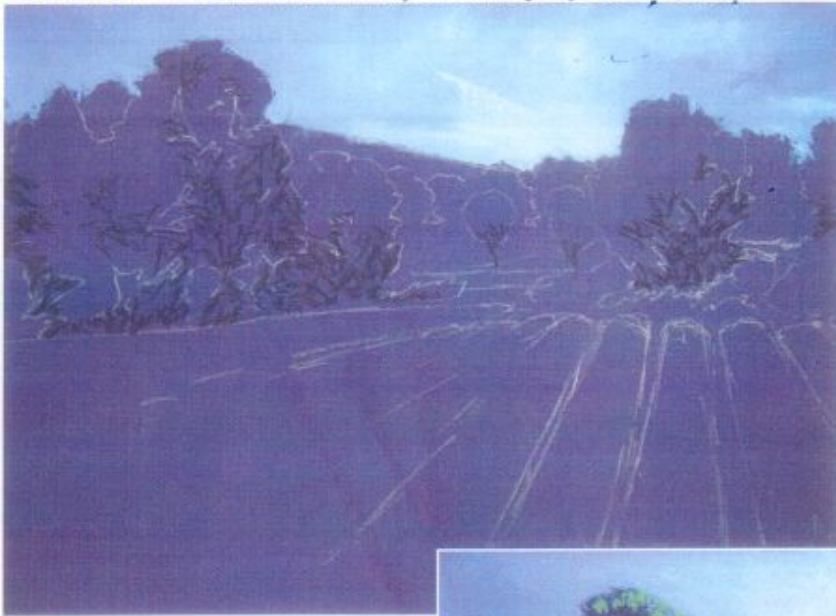
Step 1. Using hard pastels, I first laid in the sky color, leaving the shapes of the trees as silhouettes. I rubbed the pastel into the surface to reduce the texture and make the sky "sit back." I used at least three shades of blue and a shade of pale green at the horizon to create a sense of atmospheric distance. I then established the darkest darks in the trees, using quick strokes, dots, and lines.

Step 2. I developed the background hills and trees with muted blues and blue-greens and smooth, soft strokes. To soften sharp lines and edges, I dragged a very soft pastel over the foliage area. I also pulled some of the sky area into the trees. I started to develop the foreground trees and quickly laid in a few grasses. With a stub of a hard pastel, I positioned the lines of soil between the lavender rows.
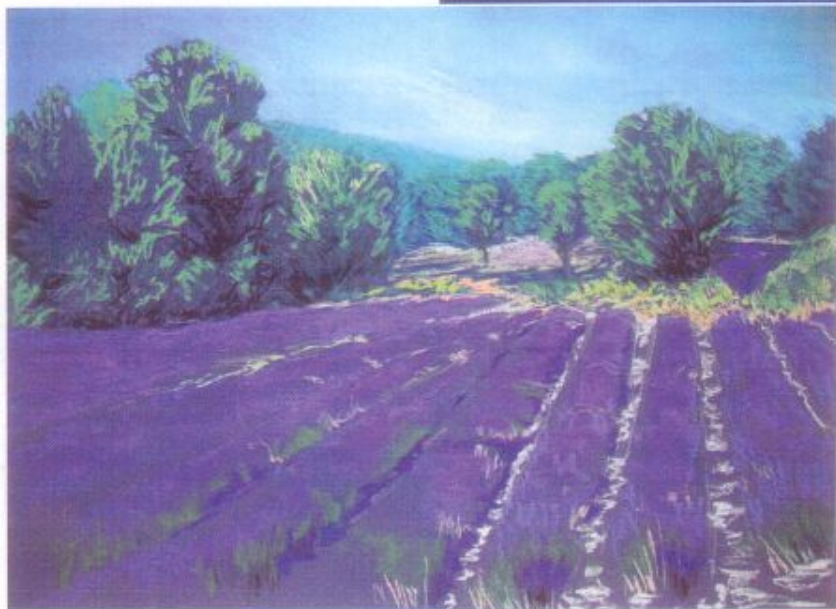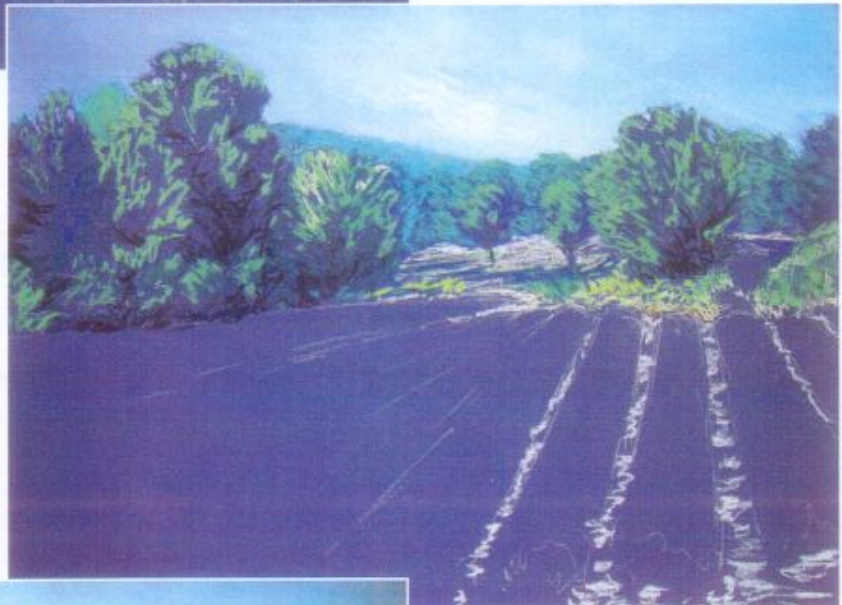
Step 3. Next, I tackled the lavender rows, starting with the darkest darks of the plants. I flattened some of the detail in the distant lavender, using side strokes for the shadow sides of the plants, then worked toward the foreground by turning the pastel lengthwise to create short vertical strokes that suggested the foreground plants. In effect, the strokes followed the direction of growth. I began to establish a center of interest with greatest contrast and variety of strokes in the three lavender rows on the far right leading back to the single tree.

Step 4. Working all over the piece, I added more medium darks to the foreground trees, several blues, and then mid-value to light greens in both hard and soft pastels. I carefully added highlights to some of the leaves in the main tree and some of the foreground lavender flowers, applying dashes of color within the gaps left by my scribble strokes to keep the color clean. I next varied the strokes and textures in the grass area for interest. To finish the painting, I closed some of the strokes in the background and darkened some areas in the trees. I knocked back the distant trees with a slightly grayer blue-green and some crosshatching to de-emphasize any hard lines. The completed painting: *Lavender, Senanque, Provence,* 2004, pastel, 13 x 17½. Courtesy the artist.

needed a fuller range of colors and values. In fact, I saw a dramatic and sudden improvement in my work when I bought a much larger supply of Schmincke pastels and various smaller collections of other brands. It gave me a considerably expanded choice of subtle color variations, which was invaluable to me. In addition to the Nupastel and Schmincke brands, I now depend on Grumbacher and Winsor & Newton colors for variety, and CarbOthello pastel pencils for fine details. In addition, I bought a set of Sennelier pastels recently, which has again expanded my color and value range.

I had used Art Spectrum Colourfix sanded paper exclusively, but I've recently started experimenting with Sennelier La Carte paper. I find it less abrasive than Colourfix, and both offer excellent colored grounds. The choice of paper color is particularly important to me because I like to leave some paper showing through, such as in the backgrounds of trees or in shadow areas.

I use workable fixative only when absolutely necessary. It can be a useful tool for darkening areas, and if I can paint over it with more pastels, it doesn't lose much of the luminosity. However, I am not an advocate of final fixative. I have seen it applied to one of my paintings after sale by a framer (despite my recommendation to the contrary), and to me, the painting was ruined—vast tracts of beautiful, rich, deep darks turned so dark and dull they looked black.

COMPOSITION

Many of my compositions and designs are different from the reality of the scene that first attracted me. One of the greatest tools of the artist is the ability to edit out unwanted elements. While an interesting light effect or configuration of colors may have first caught my eye, the resulting range and palette of colors are invariably a figment of my imagination, borne out of push-

ing colors as far as I can go without losing a sense of reality and harmony.

To begin a new painting, first I do quick thumbnail sketches in graphite to make sure the composition and shapes are working to my overall plan and that the distribution of values creates the effects of lights and darks that I want. I spend only a few minutes on these sketches because I am eager to start painting with color. Then I do an even quicker outline sketch of the main elements of the painting on pastel paper and delve straight into my colors.

DEVELOPING A PAINTING

A typical landscape begins with the sky. I start working with small broken pieces of pastel sticks that I rub or scribble across the paper. When there is enough pastel dust on the paper, I blend it with a finger or with a harder pastel over soft pastel, which pushes the pastel dust into the paper. I prefer to use a bare finger because the natural oil blends the pastel more effectively, and it also helps to bind the pastel to the paper. Because I like to leave some of the paper showing through the final image, I have to work the sky around the

sketched outline of the trees. I also have to think about the position of the sky holes among branches and leaves.

It is important that the colors I use remain as pure on the finished painting as they were in stick form, so I avoid any blending after the sky is completed. A close examination of my paintings will show that many colors are simply laid side by side, particularly in dense areas of trees and foliage with tiny patches of the background paper showing through.

After working on the sky, I apply the darkest darks, positioning

First Light, Château de Vitry La Ville, France, 2003, pastel, 16½ x 17. Courtesy the artist.

Shadows Indiana, 2004, pastel, 15 x 17½. Collection Mark Illingworth and Julie McCoy.

them very roughly in my composition. Having finished the distant background foliage or land as much as possible, working downward from the sky, I concentrate on the middle ground and foreground and work backward and forward between them until they are finished almost simultaneously. Working the majority of the painting in this way helps it to develop uniformly and to maintain color harmony. Finally, I add the finishing touches: the very lightest highlights and more darks if the contrast isn't strong enough.

TECHNIQUES

There are many ways to apply pastel paints: rubbing and blending, scumbling, hatching, and crosshatching. I prefer to be able to see each stroke in the middle and foreground elements of my painting, and in this way, each stroke can also be a useful tool for representing an entire image shape. For instance, a single stroke of the stick applied at the right angle, with the correct amount of pressure and in a suitable color, can reveal a blade of grass, a distant field, a leaf, a branch of a tree, a poppy, a group of distant poppies, and so on.

Although I avoid blending, I do blend skies and distant areas of sand in my beach scenes. When painting skies, one way to ensure that the sky "sits back" in the painting and doesn't compete with the strokes of the foreground, which could interfere with the sense of distance I am trying to achieve, is to close up the pastel strokes. I do this by blending either with my fingertips or by using soft pastels and pushing them into the grip of the paper with harder pastels.

Because pastel sticks are made up of tiny crystals, the more they are touched, rubbed, and blended, the flatter they become. To create a livelier image, I try to achieve an impasto effect. If the grip of the paper can take it, I apply the pastel as thickly as possible to ensure a purity of color.

My paintings are very much the product of my technique: short, strong strokes, scribbles, and dabs of color in which I aim for color contrast, vibrancy, and energy rather than painstaking detail. In this way, I transform my travel photographs into paintings that capture the essence of a scene. ■