



JENNIFER GARDNER

Location: Do you like to work in a studio or outside? How does the environment change the way you work?

I am a studio painter for sure. The only time I tried painting plein air landscapes in Arizona, I was constantly distracted by bugs, wind, sun... you name it! Now that I paint abstracts most of the time, studio painting suits me perfectly. I can zone out of reality with my cat, Harvey, casting a critical eye from time to time from his cushion on the studio floor, without external irritations and distractions.

Time: Do you prefer working during particular seasons or times of day?

There has to be absolute peace, calm and tranquility when I paint. If there are other matters which require my attention (the boring parts of my career, such as show applications, ordering supplies and so on) they must all be completed before I can successfully wander into the studio and paint anything of substance. I am most creative in the morning (once the chores are done, of course) when my enthusiasm is fresh and my energy level is high. Often by the afternoon I am involved in the less creative preparatory stages of underpainting a new piece. Since I live in Florida in the year round sunshine, the seasons are not an issue for me.

Technique: What type of medium did you use? How important is your choice of medium to the expression of the piece?

These three pieces were created on sanded paper. The first stage was a very loosely applied alcohol and pastel underpainting. There is no particular plan in mind as to composition or design, and I choose a fairly restricted color scheme depending on my mood of the day. The pastel is applied in scribbles and in color swathes and then brushed over with a fan brush dipped in alcohol. The intention is not to produce a thick, solid layer of color, but rather a more translucent, feathery effect. I stand back and evaluate which areas appeal to me, which can be exploited or used as a focal point and which areas I will continue to work over until the whole piece works together. These pieces have a strong structural element with, ultimately, a combination of substantial areas of solid color balanced with much smaller shapes of contrasting and complementary color intended to draw the viewer's eye to the focal area.

Theme: Do you think of a theme before starting your abstract piece? How do you choose your theme?

I never think of a theme when I am painting abstract pieces. I think only of colors, shapes and textures.

Composition: How do you plan the composition for your piece, if at all?

I rarely plan my abstract compositions. If I do attempt to do so, I find they are too contrived, without spontaneity and certainly without the happy accidents of unusual color combinations, layering and interactions of media, which I think set apart the more interesting pieces from the more mundane.

Advice: What advice do you have for aspiring artists?

Learn as much as you can from analyzing the paintings of those artists you admire, make notes on why you think a piece works and what was successful in it—color ranges, the distribution of lights and darks, shapes and sizes. Then clear your mind, pick up a few colors that appeal to you and dive in without deliberately trying to emulate another artists work—this will be stifling, unchallenging and uncreative. The most important observation I have made in the evolution of my own work is that frequently introducing new materials and products into my repertoire forces me outside of my comfort zone and into interesting artistic explorations. With almost every new product I try out I am compelled to experiment and, as a result, learn new techniques, which has had an amazing impact on my creativity. I never get bored! Currently, I am most interested in mixing media—pastel, acrylic, watercolor, gold leaf, collage and so on.

Style: How would you describe your artistic style?

Nonobjective, expressionist, colorist and spontaneous!

◀ Left, INTERSECTION, pastel, 20" × 18" (51cm × 46cm)

▶ Page 54, RED SERIES #4, pastel, 30" × 22" (76cm × 56cm); Page 55, GOLD SERIES #6, pastel, 22" × 20" (56cm × 51cm)

