



# Anything Goes *(with Acrylic)*!

From Control to *(Beautiful)* Chaos!

From *The Artist's Magazine*



# Piecing It Together

Mixing media—acrylic, wax crayons, colored pencils, and inks, plus rice and salvaged papers, three artists construct dynamic designs that embrace both image and text.

BY MAUREN BLOOMFIELD



RIGHT: *Koi 3* (acrylic, collage, 20x24)  
by Elizabeth St. Hilaire Nelson

# Elizabeth St. Hilaire Nelson

## Painting & Shredding Paper

### MATERIALS

**Paper:** found papers; personal ephemera; Japanese washi and torn Unryu rice papers

**Panels:** American Easel wood painting panels

**Brushes:** Princeton Catalyst ½- and 1-inch filberts for applying gel medium and painting the underpainting

**Medium:** gloss gel medium for gluing the pieces of collage

**Varnish:** polymer UVLS (ultraviolet light stabilization) varnish



On American Easel panels that she primes with several coats of acrylic gesso, Elizabeth St. Hilaire Nelson draws an outline of an intricate design. She then paints the separate segments of the design with fluid acrylics. On top are shreds of paper that she has meticulously torn and either already painted or painted and retrieved in a process that includes weaving, layering, and “pushing and pulling colors, values, and patterns” that, she says, “makes collage like music.” The result is a riotously colored, highly textured surface that’s a palimpsest, with traces of words that move in and out of the viewer’s focus.

Given the diverse range of effects evident in her work, it’s clear that the artist has a number of techniques at her command. One of the most unusual resulted in the spots visible on the koi in the series shown here, which started as studies for a public art contest, ArtPrize, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. “To create the organic spots on the koi,” says St. Hilaire Nelson, “I put black gesso or deep brown fluid acrylic paint on my toes and walk all over rice paper. Any time you see dark spots on the koi, they are, in fact, my toe prints that I then tore out of the paper and glued down.” As a result, she says, “A little bit of me is in every fish!”

**ABOVE: *Koi 2***  
(acrylic, collage, 20x24)

**RIGHT: *Koi 7***  
(acrylic, collage, 20x24)



## Cathy M. Woo Scraping with Spatulas

### MATERIALS

**Surface:** Philippine mahogany 8-inch boards, sealed and primed

**Papers:** Japanese rice papers and fragments of watercolor paintings

**Tools:** scraper spatulas from the hardware store

Cathy M. Woo describes her process as entirely improvisational: "I like my pictures to have energy; they're not carefully made. There's no preplanning, which means that the process is fun and also scary." Selecting a primed and sealed Philippine mahogany board, she puts out jars of acrylic paint and unfolds a large piece of propylene as a palette. Her tools of choice are plastic scraper spatulas in a number of sizes. "Sometimes I mix the colors on the plastic palette and sometimes I mix them on the board," says Woo. "Usually I put out big blobs of pigment and smear them. The first layer establishes the color theme, although not a lot of that color will show through in the final piece."

The process extends over several days, as

she lets each layer dry. Simultaneously, she layers torn pieces of paper: Japanese rice papers or old watercolor paintings she has cut up. "The collage pieces are the 'mixed media' component in my work," she says, "but I'll also apply graphite, colored pencil, watercolor pencil, wax crayon, and water-soluble crayon to the collage elements and sometimes to the board."

In *Stir Fry* (below), for instance, the polygonal shapes around the green pieces are made with crayons. "The whole thing is pretty scribbly," Woo says. In *Citrus Salad* (at right), she dropped the dots of paint from a brush and then took a wet paper towel and blotted them. "The wet paper towel takes off the top layer that hasn't dried, and leaves the rest," she

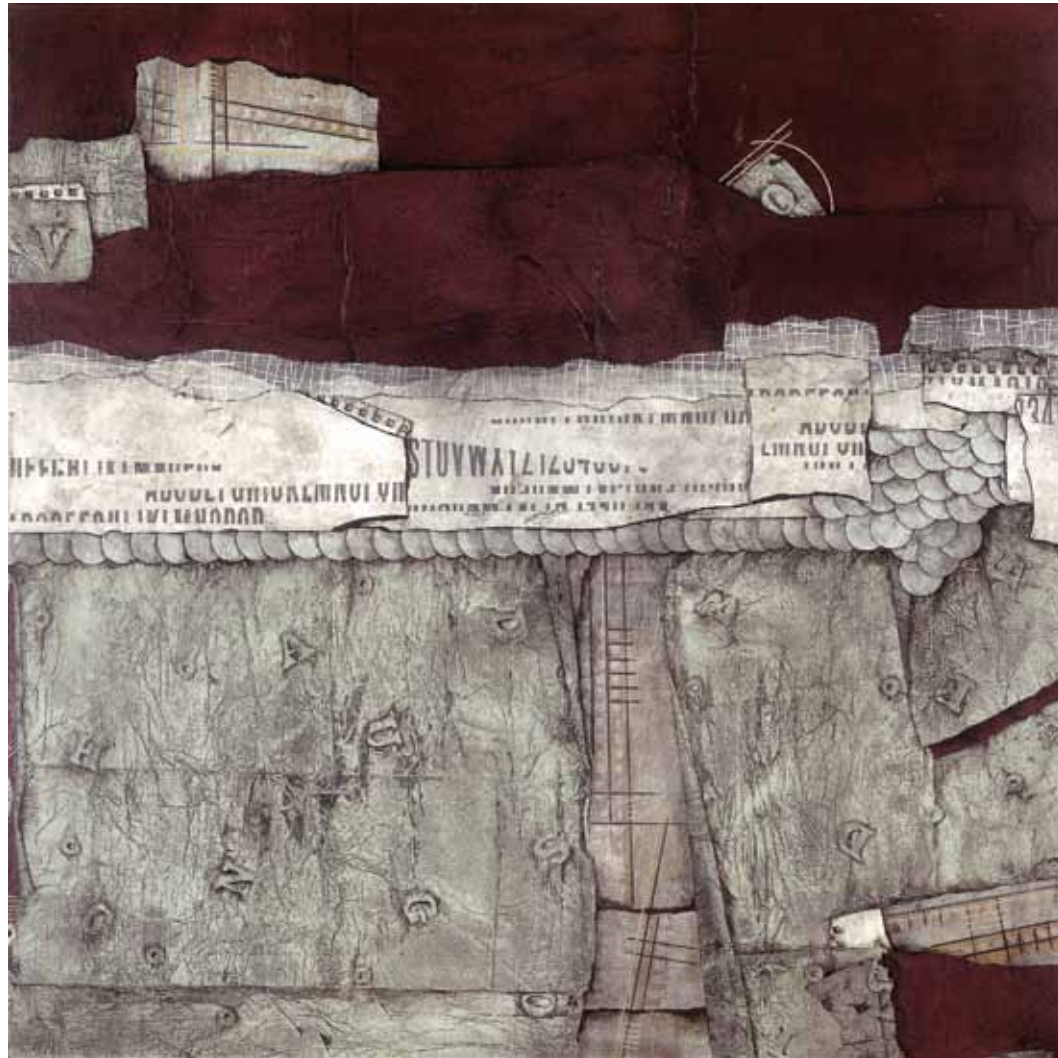
**RIGHT: *Stir Fry***  
(acrylic, mixed media, collage, 36x36)



explains. And at different points in the process, she plugs in an electric sander and sands the surface down!

While Woo was working on *Stir Fry*, *Citrus Salad*, and other pictures in this series, she was practicing Buddhist meditation on affirmation. In the upper left of *Stir Fry* and *Citrus Salad*, you can see a message. "I try to make it subtle, Woo says. "Some see it; some don't."

**ABOVE: *Citrus Salad***  
(acrylic, mixed media, collage, 36x36)



**RIGHT: *Poke Salad Annie*** (acrylic, mixed media, collage, 36x36)

## Laura Lein-Svencner Preparing A Palette (of Papers)

### MATERIALS

**Papers:** pages from old books; tissue papers stained with acrylic; kraft paper textured with gesso

**Other:** Caran d'Ache Neocolor II wax crayons and a tacking iron

Preliminary to creating a mixed media work, Laura Lein-Svencner spends weeks staining tissue papers and sanding and altering pages from magazines. She also uses maps as the surface for linoleum prints; she applies gesso and acrylic to pages of engineering plans and blueprints, too. "That's the fun part," she says. "Sometimes I know what I want to create and other times I don't, so the making of collage papers is a time for me to loosen up and play."

To prepare the collage pieces, she coats them evenly on both sides with acrylic polymer, which she also uses to coat the canvas that will become the surface for the collage. "The layer of polymer is what melts and fuses the papers when I use a tacking iron to adhere them," says Lein-Svencner, "so no wet glue or medium is needed."

The colors for *Poke Salad Annie* (above) came from the pokeweed plant and the imagery, from hearing "Poke Salad Annie" by Tony Joe White, what she calls "my husband's music heard from the garage." The paper letters are sandwiched between stained tissue papers and drawing papers that have been painted and printed on. The artist used Caran d'Ache Neocolor II wax crayons and acrylics, as well as the transferred image letters.

In *Relationships* (at right), some of the papers were sewn together and then fused to the surface—a process that illustrates the piece's meaning. "I was thinking of all the different relationships I encounter in my life," says Lein-Svencner, "from the sturdy to the momentary. And I forced myself to take a risk, using purple, which is not in my palette." ■

## About the Artists

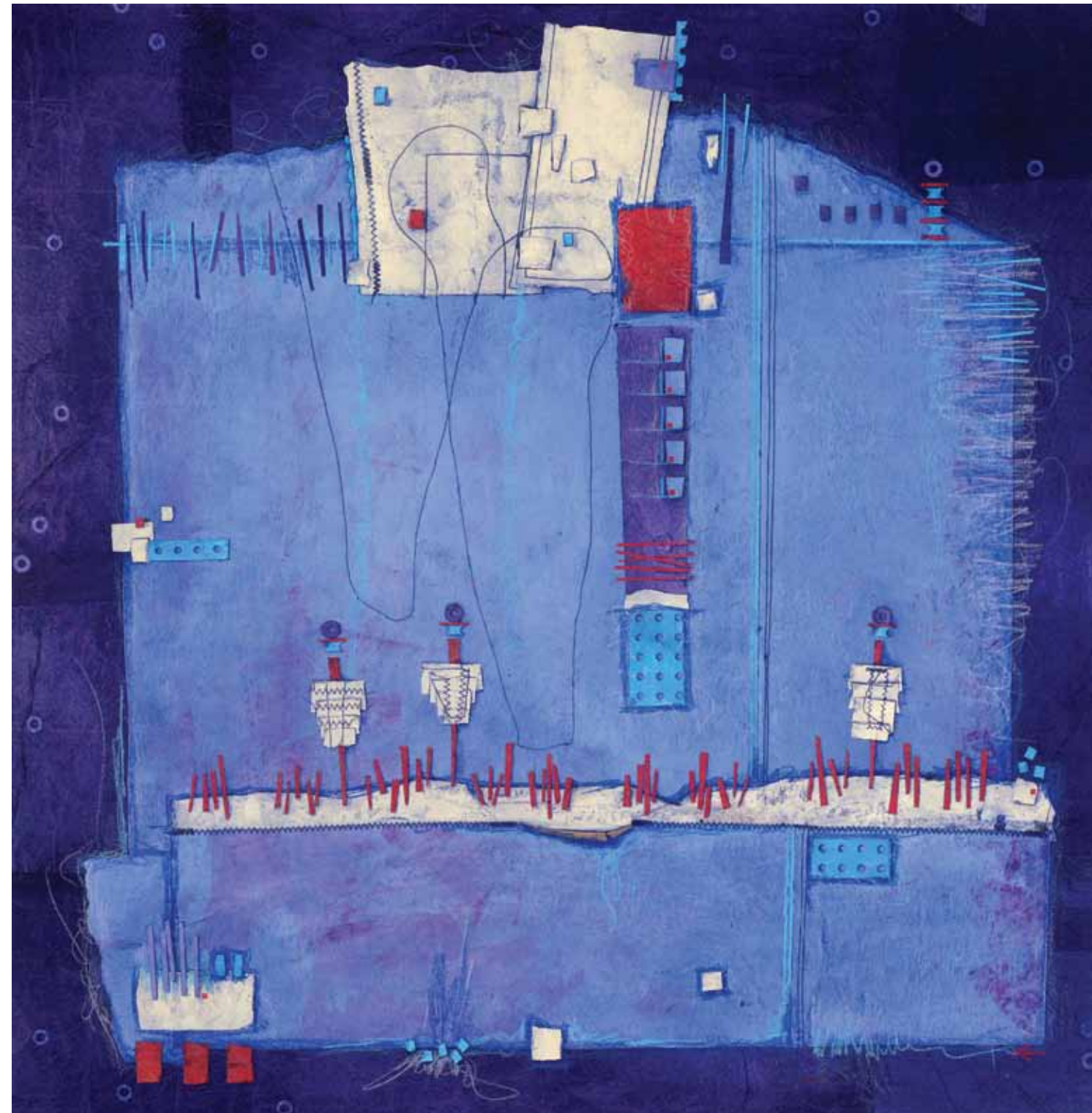
**ELIZABETH ST. HILAIRE NELSON** ([www.nelsoncreative.com/gallery](http://www.nelsoncreative.com/gallery)) started working with collage as a way to give an extended life to memorable documents. She won a 1st place in our All Media Contest in 2010.

**CATHY M. WOO** ([www.cathymwoo.com](http://www.cathymwoo.com)) has been painting and teaching for over 25 years; she is a signature member of the National Watercolor Society,

which awarded her its highest award in 2000. She served as a judge for our 2010 Annual Competition.

**LAURA LEIN-SVENCNER** ([www.lauralein-svencner.com](http://www.lauralein-svencner.com)) has had a lifelong love of paper. Her award-winning work has appeared in *Watercolor Artist*, *Incite I* and *Incite II* (published by North Light Books), and other publications.

**BELOW: *Relationship*** (acrylic, mixed media, collage, 36x36)



# layer upon layer

Versatile and various, acrylic astonishes with the range of effects artists can conjure. Five masters of the medium share tips.

BY MAUREEN BLOOMFIELD

ABOVE: *Pomegranates In Autumn* (acrylic on board, 24x36)

RIGHT: *Caracara* (acrylic on board, 24x18)

## Sherry Loehr Veils of Translucence

AT THE START, I worked in watercolor. I'd draw something like a bowl or a few apples and basically just color the objects in. Not knowing what else to do, I left the background unpainted. That made for a dramatic composition, but before long it began to feel like a gimmick, so I took the plunge and asked myself, What is that around the subject? The answer, of course, is space, but how in the heck do you paint that? Many years and many paintings later, I'm still trying to answer that question.

Many of my paintings have Japanese-inspired motifs that provide a counterpoint to actual objects. For *Pomegranates in Autumn*, I applied a layer of opaque color followed by many transparent glazes; then I made a collage of three separately scanned images of geishas. I printed an enlarged, reversed photocopy, which I transferred to the already glazed surface.

It's all experimental really: That's the fun of it. It starts with a question: What would happen if the first glaze were red, followed by a cool blue? I have no idea; I have to try it!

One of **SHERRY LOEHR's** still lifes appeared on the cover of *The Artist's Magazine* in September 2004. To see more of her work, visit [www.sherryloehr.com](http://www.sherryloehr.com).

### Materials

**Surface:** hard-board (generic Masonite), sealed and gessoed

**Mediums:** I try everything—gels, pastes, all of it.

**Brushes:** a whole slew of them because acrylic is really tough on brushes

**Other materials:** alcohol wipes—alcohol dissolves acrylic, so it's great for quick cleanup

### Cleaning Tip

I love **Murphy's Oil Soap** for cleaning brushes that are really messed up. I soak them for a couple of hours in straight soap (no water), and wow—that acrylic is gone.



# Utrecht Artists' Acrylic Colors

*Handcrafted in Brooklyn, New York*



Sharon Fox-Mould, *Hibiscus*, painted with Utrecht Artists' Acrylics

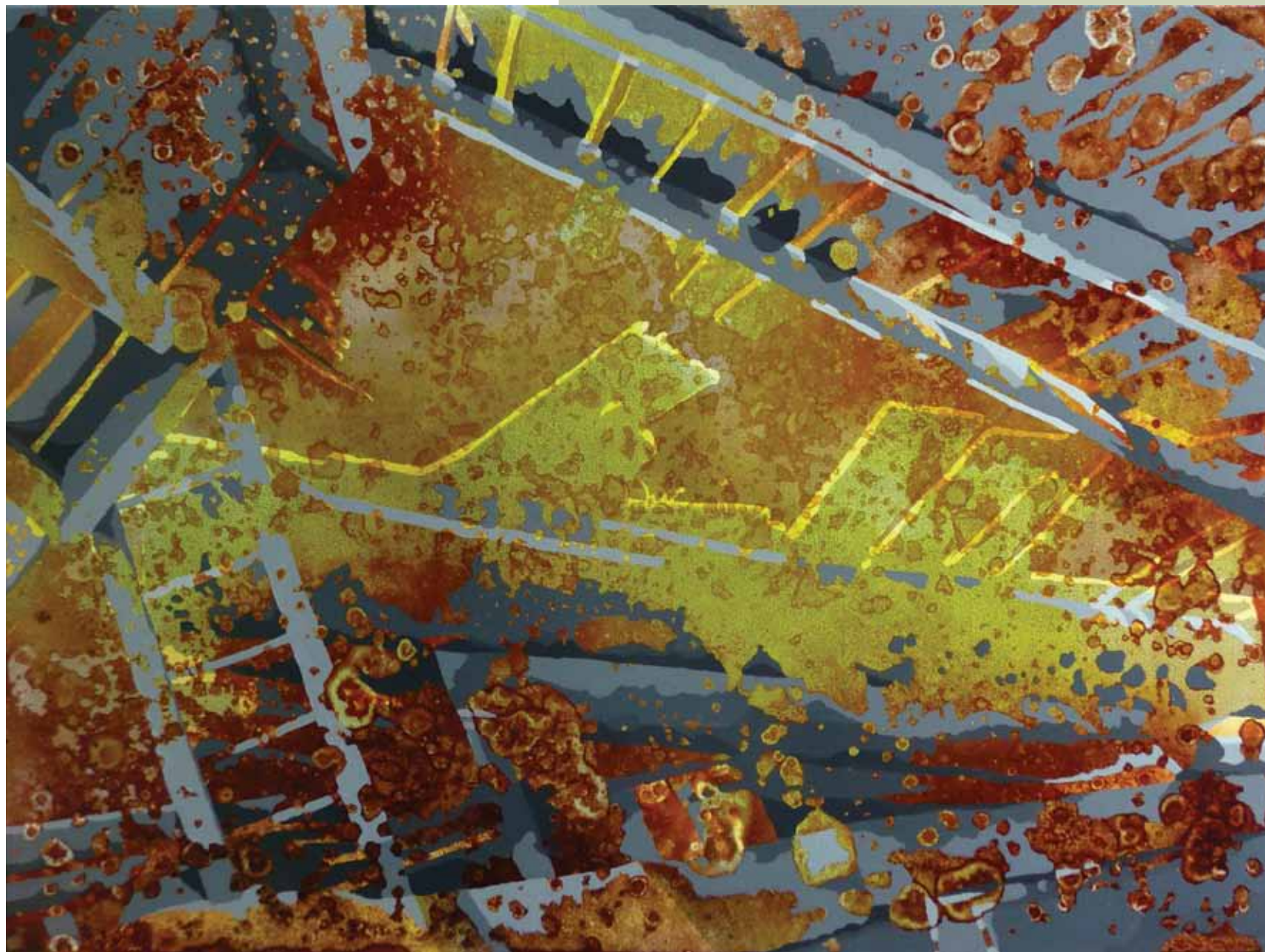


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**LEFT: *Chromatic Aberration*** (acrylic on canvas, 30x40)

**RIGHT: *Trace Remains*** (acrylic on canvas, 36x36)

## Pat Stanley

### Burst of Fire and Water

A WHILE AGO I SAW a documentary called *Life After People*, which illustrated, through computer graphics, how our constructed environment would decay if it were no longer maintained. I began photographing abandoned rural buildings and, later, bridges. Using PaintShop Pro, I crop and manipulate a photo and then use PC software to reduce the image to 8 or 10 colors. I print out this image and refer to it while painting. In *Trace Remains* (at far right) the underpainting ranges from bright yellows and greens through midtones and darker greens—very diluted, transparent acrylic paints over a gessoed surface. I put the

canvas flat on the floor, pour paint, use large brushes across the surface, and tip the canvas back and forth as I spray it with water and rubbing alcohol. There's only a short window of time during which the rubbing alcohol will react with and repel the pigment. I then seal that layer with diluted fluid medium.

When that underpainting is dry, I sketch out the main architectural shapes using watercolor pencil in white or darker shades, depending on how dark the underpainting is in that spot. I use watercolor pencil so I can remove some lines later, as many of the paints I use are transparent. Next I decide where the

highlights are on the structure and paint those with opaque white and shades of opaque gray. As my brush encounters distressed blotches (created by alcohol) in the underpainting, I may paint over them or around them, or I may allow them to cross through the structure in a nonlogical way. The resulting effects suggest a future in which all these structures, rural or urban, are reclaimed by the natural world.

**PAT STANLEY** studied drawing and painting at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts School of Art and Design, at McGill University and at Concordia University School of Art. Visit her website at [www.patstanleystudio.com](http://www.patstanleystudio.com).

## Materials

**Surface:** pre-stretched, pre-gessoed gallery-depth canvas on wood stretchers

**Mediums:** fluid mediums, in matte for diluting the paints and also mixed with gloss medium for the final surface

**Brushes:** 4- and 8-inch brushes for the underpainting; **Curry** (store-brand) brushes, made specifically for acrylic paints, Nos. 2–14; **Da Vinci** 3-inch varnishing brush for applying the final layer

**Other tools:** **Derwent** Inktense water-soluble ink pencils; blue “shop” paper towels from a car service store (they have no pattern), spray bottles from a dollar store; plastic tubs with lids for the diluted paints

## Special Effects Tip

What looks like corrosion is actually the effects of alcohol on the underpainting; the corrosion appears sometimes to be beneath the dominant image, and other times it appears to be on the surface. That uncertainty, as well as the illusion of degradation, is an important element in my work.





## Rick Pas Shimmering Color

**BELOW:** *Iris with Bumble Bee* (acrylic on board, 18x24)

GETTING OUT in the woods, fields, lakes and rivers is therapeutic for me. It helps me think. In addition to observing and remembering what I've observed, I consult reference photos and thumbnail sketches; then I use a computer to play around with the composition. The next step is a detailed pencil drawing on the prepared panel. I often do a black-and-white

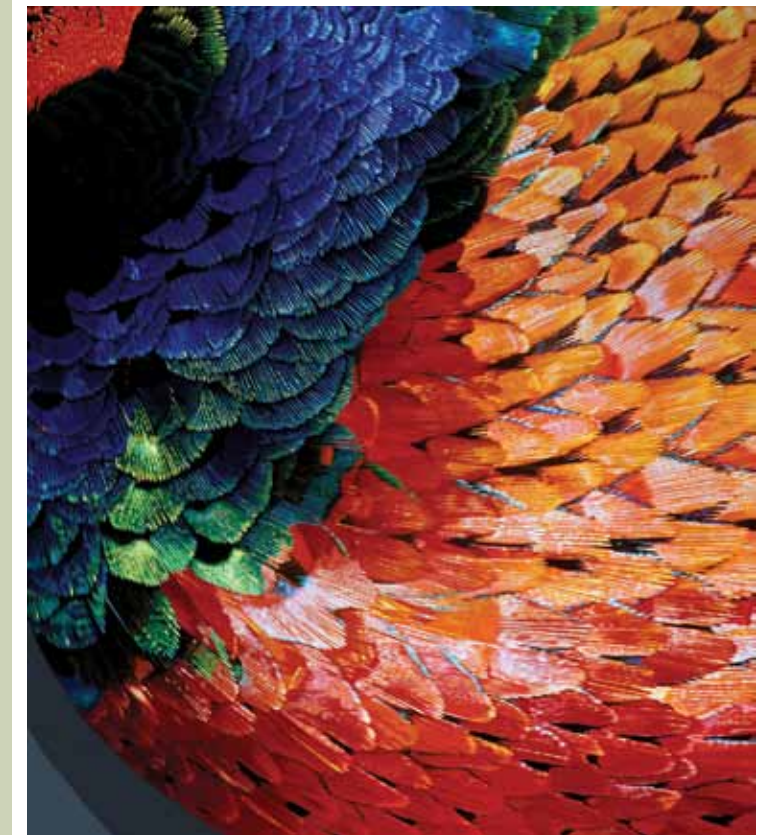
underpainting (black acrylic paint and matte medium), but for *Iris with Bumble Bee* I didn't want to use a black-and-white underpainting to render values and depth on the flowers because the iris's petals are so thin and translucent. Instead I built up the color through many layers of thin glazes.

The iridescent feathers of the ring-necked

pheasant, whose origin is in Asia, can appear almost metallic. *Ring Neck IV* focuses on the bird's neck and breast. The composition is basically a square divided into two triangles. One triangle is like shimmering copper; the other is deep blue, green and purple with a splash of red on the wattle in the corner.

**RICK PAS's** pictures have been featured in *Acrylic Artist*, *Southwest Art*, *American Art Collector* and *The Artist's Magazine*. To see more of his work, visit [www.rickpas.com](http://www.rickpas.com).

**BELOW:** *Ring Neck IV* (acrylic on board, 39x35)



### Materials

**Surfaces:** hardboard (generic Masonite), medium-density fiberboard (MDF) or PVC foam board (Each one is covered with gesso and sanded to a smooth finish.)

**Medium:** soft gel medium (matte)

### Tip for Seeing Details

I keep a magnifying glass at hand because I'm interested in the structure of my subject and how I can represent that in a painting. For very tiny details, I sometimes use airbrush acrylic paint and a technical pen.

## Mark Bratovich

### Labyrinths and Lattices

I PREPARED THE SURFACE for both *Surrender* and *Retirement* by applying two coats of acrylic gesso followed by layers of color and a protective coat of acrylic matte varnish. When I work out a composition that encompasses diverse elements and trajectories, I pay a lot of attention to balance—between lights and darks, textured and smooth areas, bold and subdued marks, and geometric and organic shapes. In a picture like *Retirement* (below), I'll attempt to establish a path so that the eye's movement can be continuous throughout the picture—so that the viewer, in effect, will find no end to the work. In *Surrender* (at right), there's a succession of lattices that function as labyrinths. By modifying the color and degree of opacity on the visual roads, I implied varying degrees of recession into space. As a result, viewers can feel as if they're looking through layers and layers.

My goal always is to produce dynamic, visually interesting paintings that are at the same time soothing because balanced.

**MARK BRATOVICH** is a sculptor as well as a painter. To learn more, visit [www.markbratovich.com](http://www.markbratovich.com).

### Materials

**Surface:** Fredrix GalleryWrap canvas

**Mediums:** extra-heavy gel/modeling paste, fluid matte medium, gel and matte varnish

**Other tools:** palette knives, **Robert Simmons** bristle brushes, 320-grit sandpaper, 2-inch plastic putty knife, blue painter's tape

### Study Tip

Study art of the far and recent past. I probably have been most influenced by Paul Klee, Jasper Johns, M.C. Escher and Richard Diebenkorn.



**LEFT: *Retirement*** (acrylic on canvas, 20x20)

**ABOVE: *Surrender*** (acrylic on canvas, 24x24)



**ABOVE: *Timeless*** (acrylic and collage on canvas, 16x16)



**LEFT: *Oneness*** (acrylic and collage on wood, 30x30)

## Materials

**Surface:** canvas, wood support

**Mediums:** acrylic matte medium (used as an adhesive); polymer varnish with UVLS (matte)

**Other materials:** rice papers, hand-painted tissue papers, digital images, book pages, maps and other elements

**Other tools:** flat brushes, watercolor pencil, brayer, palette knife

## Collage Tip

Design your own collage papers. Hand-paint them by applying acrylic paint to rice and tissue papers with a brayer.

## Donna Watson Cyclic Meditations

IN JAPANESE GARDENS, COMPOSITION follows from placement of the first stone. I approach my mixed media (acrylic and collage) paintings the same way. Using my acrylic hand-painted rice papers and digital images, I start by placing the first element—be it a shape, texture, text, color or image—and then arrange all the other collage elements in relation to the first one, with attention to principles of design such as balance, contrast and movement.

For *Timeless* (at left), which illustrates the recurring cycles of the seasons and the weather, I primed the canvas surface with white gesso. I placed the digital tree image, which was painted over with acrylic, and then positioned my hand-painted tissue and rice papers. With a brayer, I applied acrylic paint to some areas, and I also drew in circles with watercolor pencil.

I used a wood support primed with white gesso for *Oneness* (above). After laying down the acrylic-painted digital bird image, I arranged the rest of my collage elements, including Japanese book pages and a large old Japanese map. *Oneness* is based on memories of my trip to Kyoto, Japan, to research my heritage. The circles in acrylic represent my subsequent feelings of completeness. ■

**DONNA WATSON** began painting in watercolor, moved later to acrylic and now works in mixed-media collage. To learn more, visit [www.donnawatsonart.com](http://www.donnawatsonart.com).

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