

ARTISTS TO WATCH

BY ANNE HEVENER

We asked a few movers and shakers in the pastel universe to tell us about emerging artists who've caught their attention this year. Our list includes accomplished artists happily hitting their strides, as well as promising new talents just taking the stage.



MELODIE COOK

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GREAT HOCKHAM,
NORFOLK, ENGLAND

MELODIE COOK began her artistic career in the Italian fashion industry, and then—after 18 years—she left to set up a design studio where she worked on art and illustrations for children's books, stationery, ceramics and glass. After a few years, she returned to England to study fine art in London. Cook was elected as a member of the Pastel Society UK this past spring.

Tell us about this work [opposite page].

This was the first completed portrait in a two-year project called "The Circus Drawn," in which I portrayed performers in a retro-style circus based in the Cotswolds in south-central

England. I wanted a big project that would embrace my passion and fascination for both people and costume. Giffords Circus contained all the subjects and inspiration necessary to create some really interesting images. They graciously allowed me to visit for two seasons to gather material.

What was key to the success of this painting?

As a portrait painter, it's really important for me to convey the physical presence and emotional state of the subject, but most importantly there needs to be something magical or special about the image. In this case, that element is the beautiful serenity of the subject with the unexpectedness of the bird sitting on her head. Nancy is in profile, so the only eye contact is between the chicken and the viewer. The black background, a nod to classical portraits, also references the black curtains backstage at the circus and is repeated throughout the series of nine portraits. The black really helps focus attention on the extraordinary subjects.



"Melodie's work, once seen, leaves an impact; it's uniquely her. There's sensitivity and depth to her vision." — CHERYL CULVER



“Ivan’s passion for art is certainly outstanding for a young artist. He creates incredible details with mixed media and pastel.” — ISABELLE V. LIM

and crushed Starbuck cups for his trompe l’oeil treatment.

What is that you like best about working in pastel?

I love that pastel allows me to blend colors easily and to work in many layers. Recently, I tried acrylic ink for a series of cat portraits, but I couldn’t get the soft texture I wanted. After switching back to pastel, I was able to depict the soft smooth shadings and fur.

How did you come upon the choice of wood as a surface?

I’ve always felt that an artist must have his or her own unique style. I wanted to use something different that would add a unique element to my explorations of realism. I don’t want to create just a portrait of a subject—I want the subject to really “pop”—and the use of a wood panel enhances that effect.

Describe your general painting process and your preferred materials.

I usually start with a precise base sketch, using pencil or pastel pencils, depending on the type of wood. Next, I apply pastel, blocking in the base layer using PanPastel’s Sofft tools. I add the detail using sharpened Derwent pastel pencils. To blend, I use Sofft tools again and Derwent’s blending stumps. For mixed-media work, I usually start with an acrylic underpainting and work with pastel on top, sometimes adding acrylic ink to create strong highlights.



IVAN HOO

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SINGAPORE

IVAN HOO is a self-taught artist out of Singapore. His hyperrealistic paintings of fuzzy bunnies and friendly dogs—practically beg to be petted—have been featured in *The Huffington Post*. The artist also paints still life, but favors the everyday objects of a 21st-century consumer, such as spilling jars of Nutella

Goldendoodle
(pastel, charcoal
and ink on
plywood, 00x00)



ANNE STRUTZ

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CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

pastel to make direct marks or I manipulate the color through the use of tools—knitting needles, razors, various paintbrushes, bamboo skewers, erasers—to rub, scratch or brush the pigment on the surface. It allows me to be more impulsive and react more immediately to what’s happening in the painting.

“Anne’s work provokes thought on a very real social issue. Her explorations with pastel and mixed media create an intriguing vehicle for social commentary.” — SALLY STRAND

A LOVER OF ART from an early age, Anne Strutz pursued this passion throughout her work as a designer, teacher and artist. Her work in pastel have been accepted into several major shows, including the International Association of Pastel Societies’ 28th Juried Exhibition at the Salmagundi Club in New York City.

Tell us about this piece.

The ever-present cell phone has become like another person, with us at all times, and I was inspired to capture this shift in our culture in my painting. *Hanging Out in the 21st Century* is an observation of an all-too-common scene. The younger boys are concentrating intently on their game. They’re in a virtual world. The older boy is on his own device, in his own virtual world. By having the subjects in close proximity to one another, they seem to be together, but the viewer may contemplate how “hanging out” has changed. Overall my work is about observation and telling a story. I’m not painting portraits. Rather, I’m drawn to situations, moods and the interactions between people.

What do you like best about pastel?

To be able to pick up a stick and draw and paint at the same time lends itself perfectly to how I work. I love the variety of texture and mark-making, whether I take advantage of the



Hanging Out in the 21st Century (10x12)



Winter Lights
(20x16)



CLAUDINE GEVRY

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VANCOUVER, B.C., CANADA

WHEN NOT spending time on her own fine art painting, Claudine Gevry works as a children's book illustrator, contributing art to more than 70 books so far. All of her illustrations are done with soft pastels, which has helped her develop her techniques in the medium.

Tell us about this piece.

Winter Lights is part of a series of cloud paintings that I worked on last winter. Living in a northern country has compelled me to appreciate the beauty of overcast skies and storms. Bad weather, after all, generates the ideal conditions

“Claudine recently won third place in our national juried show; juror Richard McKinley noted that she represents ‘the future of pastel’ in her unusual and original approach to mark-making and imagery.”

— RUTH RODGERS

to produce great art. My paintings have become more and more abstract over time. I love getting to the essence of things, letting emotions and impressions speak through colors and shapes.

How do you typically begin a painting?

I start with an underpainting to add texture. Using brushes or palette knives, in a random fashion, I apply a thin layer of white gesso, etching as I go. In areas where I want extra texture, I use transparent gesso and acrylic ground for pastels. At this point, I might add collage or metal leaves—before applying pastel—to suggest depth and a sense of mystery. As light ebbs and flows, it adds an extra dimension to the artwork, making for a nice contrast with the matte appearance of pastel.

Can you recall a breakthrough moment in your art-making?

What has helped me the most is realizing that not everything I do has to be a masterpiece. There was a first version of *Winter Lights* that was too rigid and lacked freedom. I let it sit for awhile and then decided to remove part of the pastel with an eraser. Then, I reworked the whole painting like I had nothing to lose. It was exhilarating.



Dunes No. 1
(19¾x27½)



ANTONIO ABAD

ASPAS-PASTEL.ES
VIGO, SPAIN

ANTONIO ABAD'S body of pastel work, shown widely throughout Spain, includes landscape and seascape, and still life subjects, executed with a painterly touch.

What inspires your landscape painting?

I think that art was born as a search for beauty, and that's what has always guided my work. I remember reading a phrase years ago that made a lasting impression. A painter said that almost everything we see—everyday objects and places—are common, but we with our painting have an obligation to make them beautiful for the world.

Can you describe your working methods?

My process usually begins with a general sketch of lines and spots, and an idea of the dominant colors that I'm going to use. I like to advance the

whole picture at the same time without finishing any single part, paying attention to how the colors I place behave next to others, and making changes if necessary. I allow myself the freedom to imagine and introduce colors that weren't planned in order to give a magic touch to the final result. I avoid blending as much as possible, applying most of the pastel with direct strokes.

Tell us about a creative breakthrough.

There have been many moments over the years that have inspired my art—be it advice, books or new materials—but I'd say that access to the Internet may be one of the most important developments. It opened a window to the world. I became exposed to a lot more painting, artists and new ideas about pastel, which gave a spectacular boost to my own work.

“Antonio is the most impressionistic of the contemporary Spanish pastel painters.” — JOSÉ DEL RIEGO



Serenity (9x12)



GARY
RUPP

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WINTER PARK, FLORIDA

GARY RUPP'S interest in art, which he studied in college, was reawakened about 10 years ago when he began taking classes. Now retired, he has been able to focus full-time on pastel painting. His work has appeared in a number of local and national-level exhibitions.

What's the goal behind your art-making?

Painting is a way of speaking to people, and over time it has become my chosen language. Even

"I love the super-sensitive touch, excellent color harmonies and suggestive interpretations in Gary's work." — TERRI FORD

the most common scene can become a conveyer of beauty and joy that may touch someone deeply and change how he or she sees the world.

My goal is to paint reality as I experience it and to share that moment in my art. I want to avoid pitfalls, such as loss of enthusiasm, work that becomes mechanical or automatic, or staying too safe in the process. Making art takes courage. If it no longer requires courage, I know I'm off track.

What is it that you like best about pastel?

Pastels are the best medium to create what I call "layers of light." In nature, you don't just see an object that is simply lit, but an object where the light is changing, shifting and creating some amazing effects. Pastels give me the ability to capture such a moment by layering the light. The painting then becomes glowing, but not glaring.

Describe an important breakthrough?

My paintings were consistently too high key and I was frustrated with my plein air work; it looked alright outside but inside appeared anemic. Then I attended a workshop with Terri Ford and heard her mantra, "Don't be afraid of the darks." That directive transformed how I painted from then on.

"Glinda is a dedicated pastelist, devoted to painting dramatic landscapes of the disappearing marshlands of Louisiana." — ALAN FLATTMANN



Cocodrie
Saltwater Marsh
(24x36)



GLINDA
SCHAFFER

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TERRYTOWN, LOUISIANA

ALTHOUGH SHE has made her home in a variety of locations, Glinda Schafer has always lived near the coast, and her love of water has been a major source of inspiration and a recurring theme in her artwork.

Tell us about this painting.

Cocodrie Saltwater Marsh depicts the view from the top of a four-story tower in Cocodrie, La., which is literally at the end of the road where the land becomes marsh and joins the Gulf of Mexico. I've painted the marshes of Louisiana for several years and was fascinated by the difference in the grasses. The challenge presented by this painting was that I had to work from a photo I'd taken at midday. Although I loved the shapes of the grass masses and waterways, the lighting was flat and boring, so I combined it with a sunset photo I

had of another marsh. Learning that it's OK to manipulate a photo to suit the composition—that was a breakthrough for me.

What has been one of a paintings?

I enjoy painting en plein air whenever possible, but most of the areas that have the water pathways I love to paint are accessible only by boat. Pastels and small boats don't mix well, so most of my marsh paintings are done in the studio. Having been on the scene, though, and making mental notes, certainly helps.

How does this piece fit in with the rest of your body of work?

Although I occasionally paint other subjects, for several years the majority of my work has focused on Louisiana marshes. I've been told that they convey a sense of peace and harmony, so I feel I've been successful in my attempts to translate my love of the area. I've been asked if I ever get tired of painting marshes. The answer is always no. When an artist becomes enthralled with one particular subject matter, it can be exciting to see just how far the experimenting can be pushed. ■

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