



artist daily  
*presents*

# ACRYLIC PAINTING TECHNIQUES

*Methods on  
How to Paint with Acrylics  
for Acrylic Landscape  
Painting and Interiors*



**Rounding the Bend**

2009, acrylic, 20 x 30.

This painting won first prize in the acrylic category of the American Artist/Utrecht painting contest in 2009. All images in this article collection are by the artist unless otherwise indicated.

# Compose & Paint

## *Varied Landscapes With Acrylics*

When **Jeanette Chupack** moved from Vermont to Florida and became an avid kayaker, she had to adapt her acrylic-painting procedures to respond to the complicated, repetitive patterns she observed along the waterways of the Sunshine State.

*by M. Stephen Doherty*

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It took Jeanette Chupack a couple of years to adjust to the landscapes she observed while kayaking along the waterways near her home in Cape Coral, Florida. The new locales were quite different from the rolling landscapes she used to observe and paint in Vermont. “The Florida landscape presents its own challenges because it is flat, filled with wildlife and tropical plants, and saturated with moist atmosphere during most of the year,” Chupack explains. “I was excited about discovering the scenery, especially as my husband and I spent more time kayaking along the network of waterways. It took me two years to develop a good painting from the images logged

in my mind. I had to find a way of seeing the spaces and vegetation in a completely different way, and I had to consider a new approach to composing the elements into acrylic paintings.”

About the same time Chupack moved her studio, she changed from using photographic film to digital memory cards in her camera. “I’ve always used photographs as a key piece of source material, but in the past I relied on slides and prints to catalog potential images, and I had to adjust for the differences between what I remembered and what the film and processing presented. With digital photography, I have instantaneous and complete control over the informa-

**Sparkling Waters**  
2008, acrylic, 8 x 10.  
Private collection.

tion recorded on the spot. I bought a waterproof Pentax camera I could use while kayaking, and now I immediately review the photographs—even the ones I take underwater.”

Chupack also bought an LCD projector so that she can enlarge the full or detailed digital photographs when she wants to refer to them while painting. The projector also allows her to trace the images directly on to her gessoed canvas using a graphite pencil. “The landscape is often a densely compacted display of repeated colors, shapes, and patterns, so I start with one photograph and then adjust the projected drawing to get a stronger, more focused composition,” she explains. “I may have to take elements from five or six photographs—some detail shots, some wide-angle views—in order to have one center of interest and a hierarchy of supportive shapes and colors. I look for those kinds of elements as I move along a river so that I have enough information when I’m painting in my studio.

“The light is very important in a landscape, and I may pass a location hundreds of times before the pattern of light and shadow makes it visually appealing,” Chupack continued. “As soon as I see that kind of pattern, I take lots of photographs because I know it will help in adding interest to what might otherwise be an average scene. Back in my studio, I play around with the digital image in the computer by changing the colors or levels of contrast or by cropping, using the editing options in Photoshop or Picasa. My biggest challenge is usually trying to



**ABOVE**  
**Lady Slipper Orchids**  
2006, acrylic,  
13½ x 10½.

**LEFT**  
**Stepping Out**  
2009, acrylic,  
33 x 42.



simplify and focus the composition.

“It is important for artists to work from life so that they can bring an in-depth understanding to their interpretations of photographs,” Chupack insists. “Photographs flatten the spaces and distort colors and values, and unless one has drawn and painted from life, he or she won’t know how to compensate for those distortions. Before I could ever work from photographs I put in years of time working on-site from still life arrangements and from the figure. In fact, I ran a life-drawing class every week for about 15 years when I was living in Vermont.”

Once Chupack is satisfied with the edited photograph and has the basic outline of the forms projected and traced on the canvas, she begins building up layers of acrylic paint. “I stretch and prepare the canvases

myself by sealing them with several layers of acrylic gesso mixed with a small amount of yellow ochre to give the painting surface an off-white tone,” she explains. “When the surface of the canvas is dry, I secure it into one of two Richeson easels I have in my studio—one handles small paintings and the other can hold big ones.

“I apply a coat of retarder over the entire canvas to slow the drying time of the paint, and then I block in all the areas of the picture with an approximation of the local colors so that I can quickly assess the strength of the composition,” Chupack says. “Continuing with Golden heavy-body acrylic paints, I focus on building up the layers from the background shapes to those in the foreground. The exception to that progression is when there is a large body of water in the painting and I need to

**Grand Old Cypress  
of Prairie Creek**  
2007, acrylic, 20 x 30.



block that in fairly early in the painting's development so that I can judge the balance of colors and values. I always avoid getting caught up in painting details because I have to make sure the picture holds together before I start fussing over details or applying glazes of tone."

Chupack says she does a lot of glazing with Golden or Utrecht brands of paint thinned with semigloss soft gel medium. "I layer closely related colors and values, not complimentary colors," she says. "It's my way of unifying the brushwork of the fast-drying acrylic paint that has a tendency to look fractured and dull if it isn't adjusted. Layering and glazing give the painting more resonance and depth of color. I use synthetic brushes for most of the painting process, but

I do switch to bristle brushes when I want to push the paint harder when painting something like clouds, or I use sable brushes when I want to add linear details. I also have a fan brush available for painting grass and one giant sable brush I can use for painting big areas quickly."

Chupack says she usually has four or five paintings in her studio that are in various stages of development, but once she has a clear vision of how a painting needs to be completed she will concentrate on that one image until it is resolved. "I tend to concentrate on a painting until I finish it, and then I sketch ideas for several other paintings on stretched, toned canvases," she explains. "I may leave a work unfinished for as much as a year before I decide what it needs. I seldom

**Clear Day, Prairie Creek**  
2008, acrylic, 20 x 30.



**Telegraph  
Creek Oak**  
2008, acrylic,  
30 x 20.



give up on a painting and like the fact that acrylic allows me to quickly make changes without having to wait days and weeks for the layers of paint to dry thoroughly.”

Once her paintings are completed, Chupack applies a coat of high-gloss medium over the entire surface unless the canvases are especially large. “I like to add a layer of protection, and I find collectors are more receptive to paintings with a glossy finish because they are accustomed to looking at oil paintings,” she explains. “If the canvas is really large, I use a semigloss medium over the surface because high-gloss finishes often create so much glare that it is difficult to see the entire image at

one time.”

Chupack sells her paintings through commercial galleries and her giclée prints on the internet. The prices for original paintings range from \$500 to \$900 for small (8”-x-10”), unframed canvases up to \$7,000 for a 40”-x-60” unframed painting. Her prints sell from \$40 for an 8”-x-10” image up to \$250 for a 20”-x-30” print. Some of her prints have recently been published as part of fund-raising programs sponsored by environmental groups.



**ABOVE**  
**Green Turtle**  
2008, acrylic, 33 x 42.  
Private collection.

**TOP**  
**Osprey Nest in Florida Bay**  
2009, acrylic, 17 x 22.





## ABOUT THE ARTIST

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**Jeanette Chupack** earned a B.F.A. from Syracuse University, in New York, and an M.F.A. from Indiana University, in Bloomington, and she attended the Yale Summer School of Music and Art, in Connecticut. She taught at a number of institutions, including the University of Vermont, in Burlington, and she has conducted painting workshops. She currently maintains a studio in Cape Coral, Florida. For more information, visit [www.jchupackart.com](http://www.jchupackart.com).

**Still Life for a Summer Afternoon**  
2007, acrylic, 40 x 60.

# Artist Daily Step-by-Step Beginner Painting Tips

Learn acrylic painting in 7 steps. *by M. Stephen Doherty*



The rooms inside private homes, historical museums, and public buildings make excellent subjects because they give artists the chance to create interesting relationships between adjoining rooms, reflective windows and mirrors, contrasting natural and artificial light, and organized furnishings. The cool light from a table lamp in a living room can be shown close to the warm sunlight of a nearby kitchen. A heavy Victorian sofa can be balanced by a delicate spindle-backed chair. And a six-foot hall mirror can reflect the images of people sitting in an adjacent room.

All of these possibilities can be explored in paintings derived from photographs, drawings, or on-site studies of interiors.

**Game Room,  
Sims House,**  
1996, acrylic,  
14 x 10. Private  
collection.

Ronald Lewis became interested in painting interiors when he began to grow bored with the oil landscapes he had been producing for a number of years. “I was getting burned out,” he explains. “And even though I loved the smell of oils, I felt I could really take advantage of the fact that acrylics dry so much faster. I decided to focus on acrylic paintings of interiors, a subject I had explored on occasion but never really focused on. I quickly discovered a whole range of possibilities with the subject and the medium.”

Lewis is one of many artists who have added acrylics to their repertoire of painting mediums. While oil paints and varnishes have qualities that can't be

matched by other paints, they dry slowly and require the use of mineral spirits, turpentine, or other potentially hazardous solvents and mediums. Acrylic paints are mixed with water and can be altered with water-based acrylic mediums and additives to increase their thickness, extend their drying time, and modify their finish. Furthermore, acrylics dry quickly and permanently, making it possible to paint additional layers of color over them within a matter of minutes.

**Guest Room,  
Sims House**

1996, acrylic,  
14 x 10. Private  
collection.

Lewis came up with the idea of painting interiors while visiting the homes of friends in Birmingham, Alabama, where he lives. He asked to take photographs and make sketches of the rooms and later used that material in his paintings. Once he decided to create more such works, the artist made a trip to the historical town of Eufaula, Alabama, which, because of its position on the Chattahoochee River, once prospered from the riverboats that passed on the way to the Gulf of Mexico. Wealthy families built large, ornately appointed homes there that Lewis now finds to be excellent subject matter. The paintings shown in this article depict rooms in one of the artist's favorite homes in Eufaula, the Sims house.

Even though he begins his paintings by referring to photographs and sketches of actual rooms, Lewis changes things so radically that the paintings seldom end up looking like the actual locations. **"One of the advantages of acrylics is that as long as I keep the paint relatively thin during the initial stages, I can make whatever changes I want,"** the artist explains.

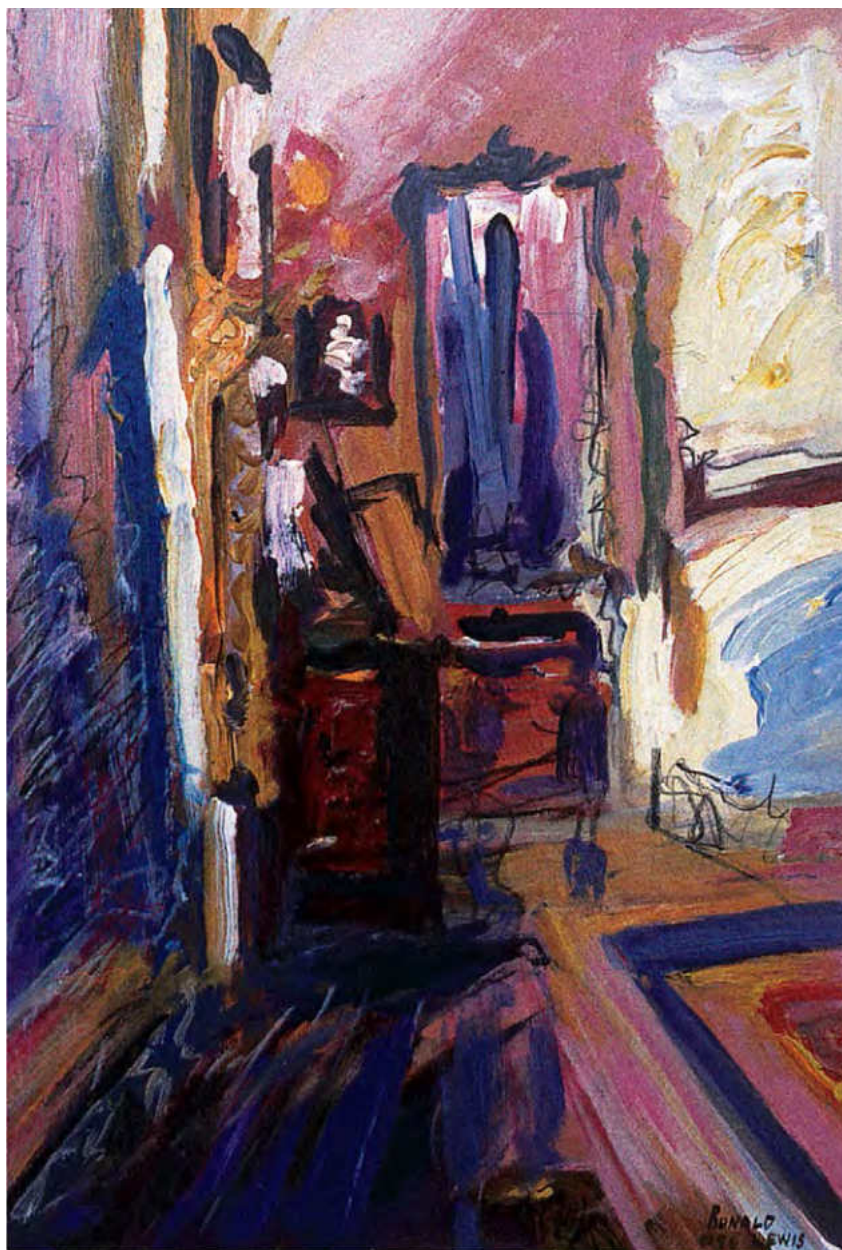


"I can add and subtract furniture, re-create the framed pictures on the walls, and change the colors and patterns in the room with no problems. I once turned a canvas on its side and converted a horizontal picture into a vertical one."

Sometimes Lewis paints on watercolor paper, watercolor board, or Masonite, but about half his acrylic

paintings are done on Fredrix acrylic-primed canvas. The acrylic paints are versatile enough to also be applied to wood, paper, or certain plastic panels.

Beginning with thin applications of paint and later switching to thicker, more opaque brushstrokes, Lewis takes advantage of the fact that most manufacturers of acrylic paints sell both a fluid and a thick formulation. The



**Guest Room, Sims House  
(Second Impression)**

1996, acrylic, 14 x 10.

This painting and the one on the previous page show the same interior, and show the diversity of Lewis' approach to acrylic painting. He sometimes prefers a loose, gestural style rather than a tight, detailed presentation.

of acrylic gloss medium, which brings out some of the underlying colors and gives the picture the glossy surface of an oil painting.

The artist sells most of his paintings through commercial galleries, but he also exhibits in a few national and regional outdoor festivals. "Most of my sales occur in the spring and fall, so I try to get my work out as much as possible during those times of the year," he explains. "The best outdoor shows are usually the ones that are juried, and it's a good idea to exhibit in the same show for several years in a row so collectors can become familiar with your work."

Lewis graduated from Alabama College (now the University of Montevallo) in 1967. He has received nearly 100 awards for his oil, watercolor, and acrylic paintings in juried shows organized by the American Watercolor Society, Watercolor U.S.A., the Southern Watercolor Society, Arts for the Parks, and other national organizations. He has illustrated two books, *My Country Roads* and *Papa's Old Trunk* (both Buck Publishing Company, Birmingham, Alabama). Lewis' paintings have been featured in *Southern Accents* and are in many private and corporate collections as well as in those of the Birmingham Museum of Art and the Fine Arts Museum of the South in Mobile, both in Alabama, and the Columbus Museum, in Georgia.

fluid colors are usually sold in jars or squeeze bottles, making it convenient to work with thin paint. The thicker formulations are usually available in standard paint tubes or in jars. Lewis' palette normally includes the following colors: titanium white, burnt umber, burnt sienna, yellow oxide, raw sienna, cadmium orange, cadmium yellow, Hooker's green, dioxazine purple, Grumbacher's alizarin crimson, cad-

mium red, and Mars black.

During some phases of a painting's development, the artist may add Golden's acrylic retarder to thin the paints and slow the drying process. This step is particularly important when he is trying to establish a subtle blend of colors or a soft transition between adjacent tones and needs to keep the paint from drying too quickly. But once a painting has been completed, he applies a coat

**TURN THE PAGE FOR A  
STEP-BY-STEP**

## **Demonstration:**

# Reading Chair, Sims House

### **Step 1**

After making a rough graphite drawing on acrylic-primed canvas, Lewis applied a thin underpainting of burnt sienna and burnt umber.



### **Step 2**

He then blocked in the walls with cadmium orange, yellow oxide, and titanium white.



### **Step 3**

The fireplace and hanging pictures were then painted with Hooker's green and yellow oxide. He toned the picture down with dioxazine purple and titanium white.



### **Step 4**

Next, Lewis painted the chair. He added some Golden's acrylic retarder to increase the drying time of the paint so he could blend details before the paint dried.



### **Step 5**

This detail shows how Lewis used a white charcoal pencil to draw the table and books more carefully before painting them.

### **Step 6**

Finally, he blocked in the bed and rug using blue, red, purple, and burnt umber with titanium white.



#### **Reading Chair, Sims House**

1996, acrylic, 18 x 14.  
Courtesy Bryant Galleries,  
Jackson, Mississippi, and  
New Orleans, Louisiana.

# 5 Acrylic Artists

## *Share Methods, Materials, and Techniques* by Karyn Meyer-Berthel



### **Diligent**

by John Garrison,  
2007, acrylic, 48 x 36.  
Private collection.

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## JOHN GARRISON

Chicago artist and illustrator John Garrison uses acrylic paints and mediums because they behave similarly to oils but dry much faster.

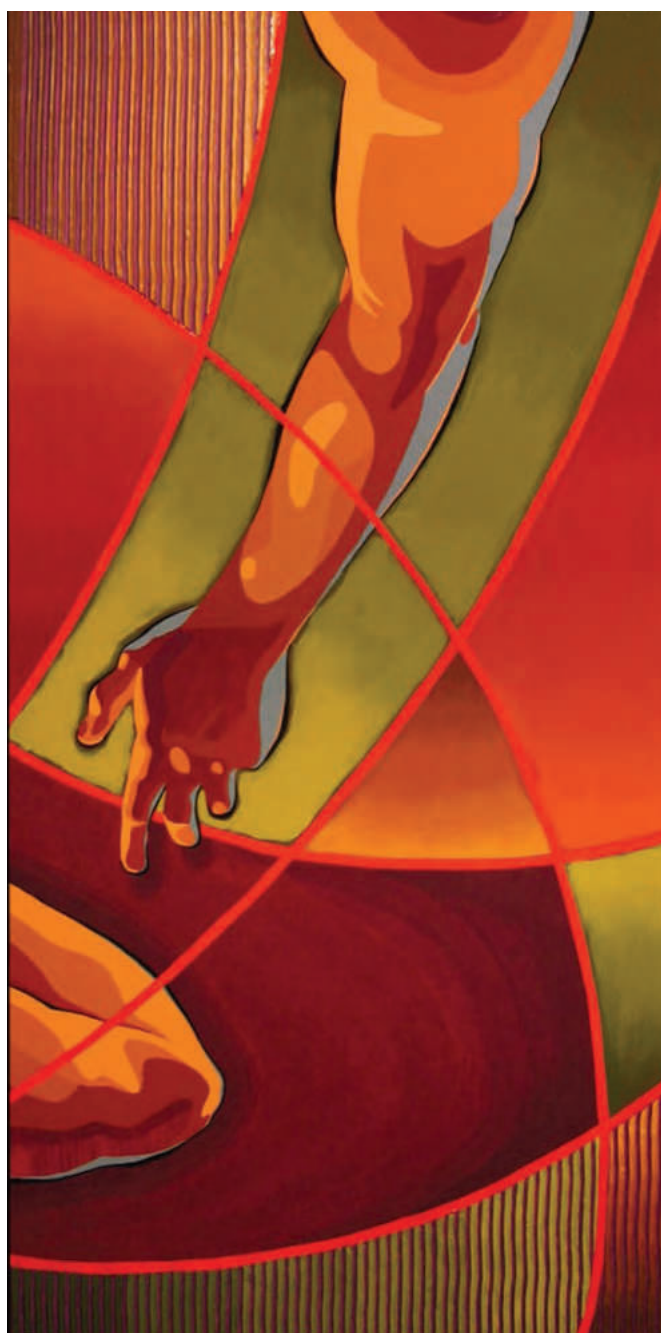
John Garrison has always been interested in architecture and design. “Because I am a graphic designer and illustrator, I am attracted to the simplification and stylization of images,” he says. “I admire both the Art Nouveau and Art Deco movements, and I am enamored with the extant structures designed by architect Louis Sullivan (1856–1924).” Garrison’s figure paintings incorporate elements of Art Deco objects and architecture, and his subjects are also portrayed in motion. “I look for subjects that allow me to convey a sense of movement and energy,” he explains. “I work from photographic references, sometimes combining multiple images in the final painting. If I could afford to use live models, I would, but that’s just not practical.”

Acrylic is Garrison’s preferred medium because he feels it gives him more control over the painting process. “Acrylics are great because they can behave like oils but dry much faster, and cleanup requires only water—plus, they don’t fill the air with the smell of solvents,” he says. “I use Liquitex acrylics because they’re of a high quality, and I can count on their performance.” The ability to trust his products is yet another way Garrison can exercise

### Iron Cross

by John Garrison, 2007, acrylic,  
24 x 48. Private collection.





control, which in turn allows him to work more quickly. Because he knows how his materials will behave, he can focus solely on realizing his vision—something he likes to do as fast as possible. “I’m impatient, so I often work with a brush in one hand and a blow-dryer in the other to speed up the drying process,” the artist explains. “If I need to extend the drying

time of acrylics, I mix them with matte medium. Although the paints normally dry to a matte finish, I coat some areas of the dry painting with gloss medium so that the final piece has a visual play between the two finishes.”

For more information on Garrison, visit his website at [www.garrisonart.com](http://www.garrisonart.com).

### Convergence

by John Garrison, 2007, acrylic, 36 x 36. Private collection.



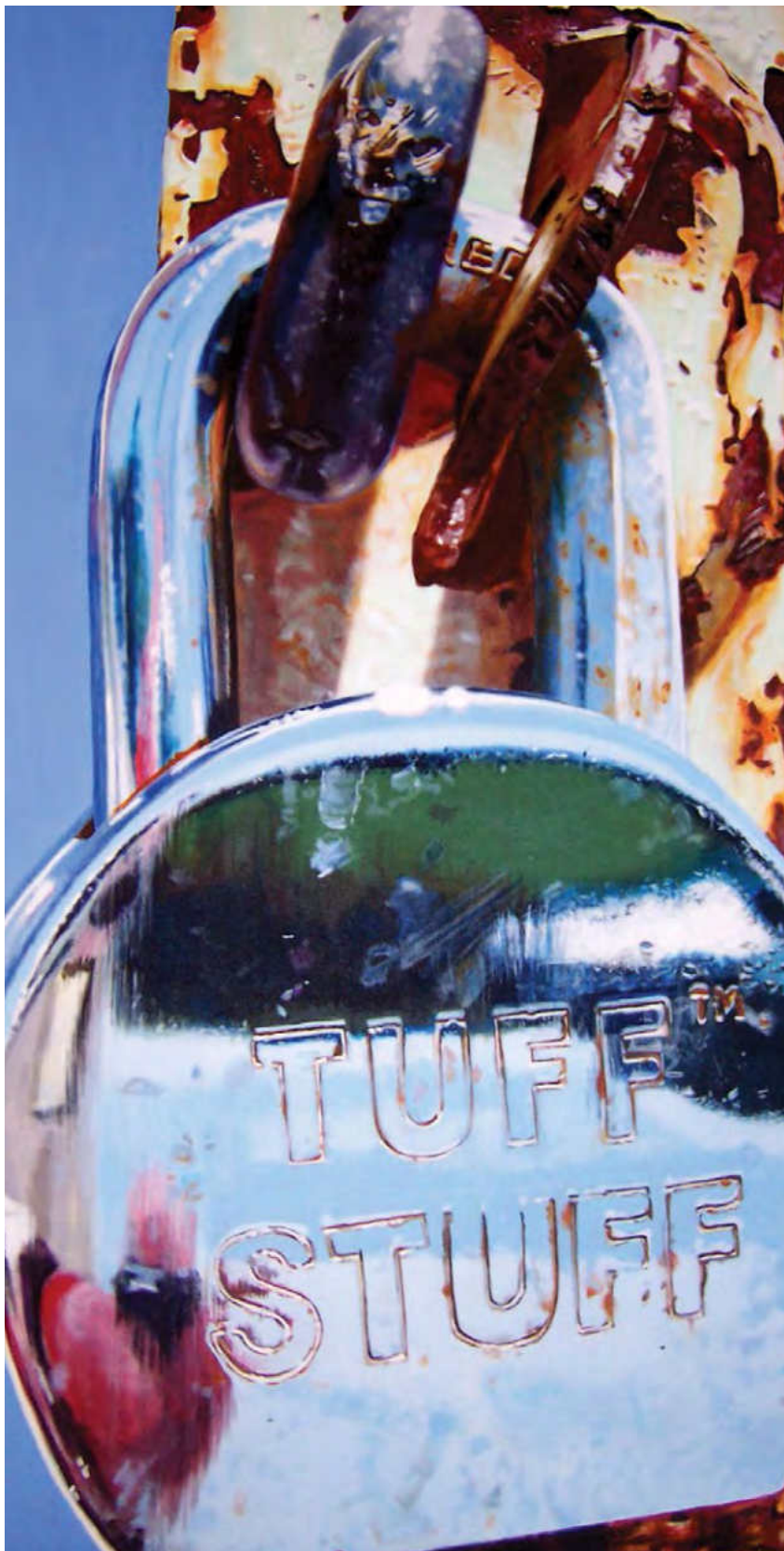
**Mack Truck Dog**

by LJ Lindhurst, 2007,  
acrylic, 36 x 36.  
Collection the artist.

## LJ LINDHURST

Brooklyn artist LJ Lindhurst creates large-scale paintings of everyday objects to record details of our culture.

“I am a photorealist painter, and I want my paintings to present reality without an obvious style or embellishment,” says LJ Lindhurst. “Because of that philosophy, I reproduce the photographed image as accurately as possible. Form, composition, and style occur naturally and are illuminated by this neutral approach. That’s why I work from my own photographs or images lifted from mass-media sources, such as print advertising and television-screen shots.



### Lock No. 3

by LJ Lindhurst, 2005, acrylic,  
48 x 24. Collection the artist.

“Thematically, the subjects of my paintings are varied,” Lindhurst adds. “I am attracted to macro views of totems of popular culture such as toys, Easter bunnies, chocolates, shiny metal locks, dolls, and other seemingly innocuous items. By closely examining these otherwise ordinary images and rendering them several hundred times their normal size, I can capture an unusual sensuality and uneasy sense of comedy. Other artists might consider this painting process to be tedious, but I find it to be engrossing and quite relaxing. After several hours work, I enter a meditative state, and it’s in these moments that I see subtleties in the colors, shading, or tiny imperfections in the surface of objects. Flat areas suddenly reveal a more complex palette and details that might otherwise be overlooked.”

Lindhurst works with acrylic paints diluted with small amounts of water and Liquitex Flow Aid, which allows her to control the opacity of the colors. She also turns to Liquitex for paints, although she likes blacks and whites by Golden Artist Colors. When she wants to create the illusion of depth, she mixes paints with varnish or gloss gel medium. “I also use gloss gel medium if I want to make one color more luminous, and in those situations I paint several transparent layers of a color so that it doesn’t end up looking flat,” she explains. “I use the traditional process of working from dark to light values, layering colors of varying opacities on top of one another. A typical large-scale painting can take anywhere from three to six months to complete, although I can sometimes finish a smaller or less detailed piece in a matter of weeks.”

For more information on Lindhurst, visit her website at [www.ljindhurst.com](http://www.ljindhurst.com).



## DAN MANDISH

As a professional illustrator and graphic artist, Dan Mandish uses a traditional thin-to-thick painting technique, sometimes blending colors and softening edges with a brush loaded with water.

“My work is concept-driven and focused primarily on naturalistic subjects,” says Oregon painter Dan Mandish. “I work from my own photographs, and from these I typically make detailed drawings before I begin to paint.” The artist works in a variety of media and produces a substantial amount of work in acrylic. Although acrylic paints don’t require an artist to adhere to the fat-over-lean or thick-over-thin dictum, Mandish employs these oil-painting techniques in his painting process. However, he accommodates the fast drying time of the acrylics by following strokes of paint with applications of pure water. “My preference is to work on smooth panels

### The Diver

by Dan Mandish, 2006,  
acrylic on board,  
21 x 21. Courtesy  
For Artsake Gallery,  
Newport, Oregon.

coated with gesso ground and toned with a middle-tone earth color such as a combination of raw sienna and terra rosa,” he explains. “I then block in the images using thin washes of the darkest colors and work up to the lightest values, gradually increasing the thickness of the paint applications.

“The exception I make with acrylic is in blending colors,” Mandish goes on to say. “I use two brushes, one loaded with pigment and the other holding pure water, so I can apply paint and then immediately feather one value into another. I experimented with adding acrylic retarding mediums to slow the drying time of acrylics and facilitate blending, but I still find that working with the two brushes gives me more control.” The artist uses sable or sable-synthetic brushes in a wide variety of sizes.

“I prefer Liquitex colors because I’ve used them from the start,” Mandish says. “I know what to expect from them, and I’m intimately familiar with the available color selections, including which colors have high tinting strength, which colors mix well to create neutrals, and which are stiff when squeezed from a tube. These variables differ considerably between paint manufacturers.”

For more information on Mandish, visit his blog at <http://saltandlighteditions.wordpress.com>



## DAAN HOEKSTRA

Daan Hoekstra, an artist based in Sonora, Mexico, uses raw pigments mixed with acrylic binders to create translucent murals on masonry.

Daan Hoekstra is a classically trained landscape, still life, and figurative painter, and he received much of his training in the atelier system under Richard Lack. During his time as a student, Hoekstra began painting murals, working as a buon fresco assistant for artist Mark Balma in the 1980s, and today many of his commissions still come from mural work. He

### **Humanity at the Crossroads**

by Daan Hoekstra,  
2008, acrylic, 24' x 90'.  
Courtesy Grand Rapids  
Community Foundation.

considers his approach methodical, and his choice of materials is determined by what will increase the longevity of his work. “I try to use conservators’ materials and processes when possible, so I usually start with a coat of Lascaux Hydro-Sealer to the masonry,” Hoekstra explains. “Hydro-Sealer is a consolidant for old masonry, but it is also recommended by Lascaux to prepare surfaces before applying the company’s mural primer. Because it is transparent, the natural color of the masonry remains visible, and I often use that as the half-tone value in the mural. If I have to block out some or all of the original color of the wall, I use a translucent white primer thinned with water.”

Hoekstra’s experience using traditional fresco techniques made it easy for him to switch to using modern acrylic resins. “When the halftone is established on the wall, I lay in the darks transparently, using raw pigments mixed with acrylic binder,” he explains. “I make a paste of the pigments and distilled water, and then I add an equal volume of acrylic color. This mixture can then be thinned with water, although the pigment tends to sink to the bottom of the paint bucket and must be stirred with the brush each time I dip into it. With a little practice, I learned to control the concentration of the pigment in the brush according to the amount of swishing and the rate of settling.

“After I have laid in the darks, I paint the light-valued shapes with translucent to opaque matte white acrylic,” Hoekstra adds. “Then I finish the mural with



thin glazes that add color to the lights, develop the halftones, and deepen the darks. I operate on the assumption that if the paint is allowed to soak into the masonry (rather than sit on the surface) it will be less likely to peel. For a final varnish, I follow the specifications provided by Golden Artist Colors and apply an isolating coat of soft gel and a UV-resistant clear varnish.”

For more information on Hoekstra, visit his website at [www.hoekstrastudio.com](http://www.hoekstrastudio.com).

### **La Quintera Mural**

by Daan Hoekstra, 2008, acrylic, 18' x 40'. Courtesy the Municipal Cultural Development Program, Sonora, Mexico.



**Jewel**

by Jeanine LeClaire  
2008, acrylic, 32 x 24.  
Private collection.

## JEANINE LECLAIRE

Philadelphia artist Jeanine LeClaire chose acrylic paints and mediums because she wanted to have complete flexibility in designing her pictures and expressing her concepts.

Like many artists, Jeanine LeClaire works from photographs but doesn't allow them to define her final work. "The end results have to stand as works of art without regards to the photographic sources," she says. "I focus on everyday moments, with an emphasis on those that conjure emotional

**Fragile**

by Jeanine Leclaire  
2009, acrylic, 6 x 5.  
Collection the artist.

responses. I often paint my husband, friends, and their surroundings because those make up my life. I keep my camera handy and photograph people and places without telling people how to pose or what objects to have in the shots. As I am taking the photographs I consider composition and content, but I do so with the knowledge that I can alter anything I want when I'm painting. The final decision for what I use is made after I print the photos. I'll lay them all out and choose the ones that 'speak' to me. I'll also use other photos to add to the one I've chosen, and sometimes even bits from the media, and my imagination will make its way into my paintings.

"After I decide what I will paint, I draw directly onto the gessoed wood panel and establish the foundations for the composition," Leclaire goes on to explain. "After I start painting, I remain flexible and move things around because some aspects of the picture won't reveal themselves until I am halfway through the painting process. Next, I block in the shadows with black, add



the highlights with white or light colors, and then move the paint around until it looks right to me. Decisions are made as much in response to my feelings as to anything else." Leclaire uses a palette of professional-grade Utrecht acrylics that includes cadmium red extra deep, cadmium red medium, cadmium yellow, ultramarine blue, brilliant blue, ivory black, and titanium white. ■

For more information on Leclaire, visit her website at [www.jeanineleclaire.com](http://www.jeanineleclaire.com).



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