GOLDEN HOUR

Winners of the 17th Annual Over 60 Competition

The collection of memories and adventures that make up a lifetime is inspiration for many artists, and none more than those in their later decades. When it comes to the winners of the 17th Annual Over 60 Competition, nothing has deepened the connection between creativity and the canvas more than this storage bank of experiences. We asked our top 10 winners about their winning art—and what fuels their artistic growth through the years—and their answers may surprise you.

Edited by Doreen Manning

Sally Cooper

PARKLAND, FLORIDA

Island Flora (acrylic on canvas, 51x48)



Since seeing a Joan Mitchell retrospective in Baltimore, in 2022, I've wanted to create an abstract floral painting. In Florida, where I live, there are many beautiful bougainvillea plants. I was inspired by their amazing magenta shades. Typically, I begin by activating the surface with mark-making, using acrylic paint, graphite pencils and water-soluble Stabilo 3 in 1 pencils. Normally, I work in a triad of colors—plus black, white and raw umber. For this painting, however, I decided on a variety of reds, magentas, pinks, purples, greens and blues—plus black, white and raw umber. I used some pure color and mixed some colors for harmony. One of my biggest challenges in painting abstract florals is to make the florals not read too "flowery." This was something I had noticed in Mitchell's work, specifically with her sunflowers. I also wanted to keep the painting light and airy, so I allowed for some large, negative neutral space. My favorite part of the artistic process is applying spontaneous mark-making throughout the piece.

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MY ART STORY

In 2004, I won first place in the *Artists Magazine* Annual Competition. I've won other prestigious awards since that time—most recently Award III in the National Watercolor Society's 103rd International Open Exhibition, in 2023. I've had the honor of teaching abstract art at the Coral Springs Museum of Art, as well as at the Creative Arts School, in Delray Beach, Fla. When COVID hit in 2020, I started teaching abstract painting classes via Zoom.

GOOD ADVICE

The best piece of advice I can give is to just keep practicing. You have to do the work.





"I FIND GREAT ENJOYMENT IN TRANSFERRING COLOR, TONE AND LIGHT ONTO THE CANVAS TO CREATE SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL AND TRUE."

Alison Gilmour

BIRKENHEAD, AUCKLAND. NEW ZEALAND

In the Conservatory (oil on Berge linen, 48x60)

For this commission, the client wanted a painting of pink peonies and blue hydrangeas to hang in her conservatory. Those particular blooms weren't in season at that time, however, so after trying several avenues to find the flowers, I reached out to some friends in the events business in the U.K. They put me in touch with their colleague, who was Creative Director at the time for Pulbrook and Gould, a renowned florist in London. After a quick briefing via Zoom, he photographed a stunning arrangement that was perfect for the situation.

I sent the photos to my client, and she chose the ones she liked best. I laid out a composition in Photoshop, then projected several sizes proportionately onto the wall, where the painting was to hang, in order to determine the best size. This way, the client could also clearly see which size and placement would work best.

Next, I penciled the layout onto stretched Berge linen. When the client questioned whether the painting should have a white background instead of black, I printed the composition out to size with both backgrounds and then placed the mock-ups on the wall where we were able to see that the white background did indeed work best for the room. My clients are always very impressed and reassured by this process of sizing and laying things out. They know my style, so they know exactly what they're getting.

My favorite part of the creative process, once I've come up with the concept, is the actual technique of painting. I find such joy in transferring color, tone and light onto the canvas to create something beautiful and true.

GOOD ADVICE

One of the most important pieces of advice I can give was given to me by my gallery dealer and mentor, the renowned late Tim Wilson: "Keep on painting, and it will all become clear. When you keep painting, not only do your skills improve with practice, but you also discover things about yourself and your work that move you forward. This can produce amazing results."

VISIT ALISONGILMOUR.CO.NZ.



MY ART STORY

I've always had an interest in art, starting from when I could hold a pencil. I've always been drawn to the process of transferring what's in my head onto media. In my younger years, I took art classes after school and during breaks. When it was time to attend college, I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to do, but I applied to a graphic design school. I got accepted and that set me on a path that has led me to where I am today. In late 2000, I took some evening drawing classes with a friend—mostly for something fun to do. While in those classes I began experimenting with acrylic paint. These results looked pretty good to me, so I just kept going. Eventually I approached a gallery—and they were keen to show my work. My first solo show in a gallery took place in September 2003. It was a sellout, as were subsequent shows at various galleries over the next seven years.

Ken Graning

HOLLY, MICHIGAN

Schaiwassee River

(gouache on Canson illustration board, 18x24)

The inspiration for my winning piece was the vibrancy of a northern Michigan forest in October. I live in Michigan, and the fall color displays of the trees and forests are breathtaking.

I paint primarily with gouache because I like the versatility of that medium. I believe that design and composition are the keys to a successful painting, so I often do small preliminary tonal sketches to find a composition that will work for the image I have in mind. Once I've done that, I may do a small color version to determine the color palette I want to use. The last step before painting is to roughly sketch onto my surface in pencil. I paint mostly on Arches watercolor paper, though I sometimes work on Canson cold-pressed board. When I'm painting en plein air, however, my process is much different. I just set up my paint box and roughly sketch a composition on my surface, then have at it.

For this painting, I was experimenting with a play of warm versus cool colors. I believe that playing warms and cools in close proximity creates vibrancy and energy, but the amount of each color used is key to combining these two elements to achieve the right balance. There's always uncertainty at the beginning of any painting. Then, once I reach a point where I know the painting is going to succeed, I enter a zone where the piece starts to paint itself. I love that feeling. It's like I'm on cruise control. I'm just the artist attached to the brush.



MY ART STORY

I began my artist career as an illustrator after graduating from Chouinard Art Institute (now known as California Institute of the Arts), in Los Angeles, in 1966. I worked as a studio Illustrator in a Detroit art studio for about 10 years, at which point I decided to become a freelancer and worked out of my home studio for the next 20 years. I retired from illustration in 1995 and began painting the things I wanted to paint—without commercial constraints. I'm now about 25 years into my career as a full-time painter. I paint a wide variety of scenes and subjects, but am most comfortable with landscape painting. I exhibit my work in galleries and competitions, both local and international. I'm an Associate Member of the American Watercolor Society as well as a few local art organizations.



GOOD ADVICE

If you are a realist painter, learn to draw. This is a fundamental foundational skill that must be mastered. When I was in art school, for the first two years we were required to draw from the human figure in life-drawing classes at least twice a week, along with other classes in design, color theory, painting techniques and various other courses required for a B.F.A. I drew a lot of naked people in my four years at Chouinard Art Institute!

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Eileen Nistler

UPTON, WYOMING

Lovingly (colored pencil on museum board, 21x18)



My love of peonies is a big inspiration for my still life pieces. I have around 40 peony bushes in my gardens. This one was my first and my favorite. I call it Sarah Bernhardt. The plant was given to me by my mother when we first moved to our ranch. It usually has around 60 blooms per year.

For my process, I layer colored pencils on museum board, blending the colors until I'm satisfied. I like to fully saturate the board with color. When I'm finished, I spray many layers of archival varnish. Since I use only lightfast pencils, I'm severely limited when it comes to pink and purple, as those hues are notorious for being fugitive colors. I love the creative process and I can't wait to start my next piece—and the one after that!

VISIT EILEENNISTLER.COM.

MY ART STORY

After graduating from Louisiana Tech University with two degrees in architecture and a minor in art, I worked as an architect for a number of years. When I became a mother, I decided to stay home with my kids. I still needed a creative outlet, however, so I pulled out my architecture pencils and read every book on colored-pencil art that I could find. My technical drawing experience gave me a leg up when it came to fine drawing, and it wasn't long before I was winning awards. Twenty years later, I'm still loving this medium.

GOOD ADVICE

I believe that time and dedication are what it takes to succeed. I follow the methods outlined in the book *Atomic Habits*. I work at it every single day. Here's a quote from James Clear, the book's author, that I keep on my drawing board: "Winners and losers have the same goals. You don't rise to the level of your goals; you fall to the level of your systems."

"I LOVE THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND I CAN'T WAIT TO START MY NEXT PIECE—AND THE ONE AFTER THAT!"

Susan Perrish

LIVONIA, MICHIGAN

Delilah (oil on linen panel, 17x31)



I endeavored to explore color, contrast, harmony and story in this painting. There were so many different elements, textures and colors, I wanted to be sure that the subject's profile remained the focal point. I took quite a few photos at the end of a live three-hour painting session and combined a few in Photoshop to compose the piece so that one's gaze circles back to her face. My model is the wonderful and talented Elyse, who loves to get into character.

I did the initial drawing with a light-colored pastel pencil directly on an oil-primed linen panel. I got detailed with the face and then blocked in the rest to be sure everything fit properly. With the first layer, I established local color and basic value. Once that dried, I applied the second layer, still focusing on the face and making adjustments until I was happy with the likeness and expression.

The next stage involved painting with the panel positioned upside-down for a while; it helps me to find my way and see color and shape more clearly. I painted quite a few more layers after that, building up light and color with glazes in between. Then I put the painting away so that I could look at it again with fresh eyes after a few days. As is always the case, the challenge for me is deciding when to stop.

I experimented with a few different mixtures for the black background of this painting and ended up using phthalo green (blue shade) and permanent alizarin crimson with stand oil to minimize texture from brushstrokes, as they tend to catch the light on such a dark background.

My favorite part of the artistic process is the idea stage, closely followed by putting together costume and pose to realize my inspiration.

GOOD ADVICE

I think the most important thing you can do as a portrait/figurative artist is to draw and paint from life. All of my instruction has been with live models, and I feel it's by far the best way to learn. Also—draw! Draftsmanship skills are a must, especially in portraiture.

MY ART STORY

I began drawing at the age of 59—a late start! I studied portrait and figure drawing with Amy Foster at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association and subsequently at the Atelier School of Art, in Royal Oak, Mich. Since 2016, I've been a member of the Delavie Studio, where I regularly paint and draw from life. I've exhibited in many shows around the country, including the International Guild of Realism, where I recently received the John Singleton Copley Award of Excellence. I was also a finalist in the 14th and 16th Art Renewal Center International salons, and a semifinalist in the 15th Salon. My paintings have been accepted into numerous Oil Painters of America and National Oil & Acrylic Society (NOAPS) competitions, with one work recently receiving an Award of Excellence in the NOAPS Best of America Exhibition. Currently my artist husband and I are preparing for a joint exhibit at the Crooked Tree Arts Center, in Petoskey, Mich.

VISIT SUSANPERRISH.COM.



"MY FAVORITE PART OF THE ARTISTIC PROCESS IS THE IDEA STAGE, CLOSELY FOLLOWED BY PUTTING TOGETHER COSTUME AND POSE TO REALIZE MY INSPIRATION."



Ann Ranlett

NEWCASTLE, CALIFORNIA

Heart of San Pedro (scratchboard with watercolor, 8x8)



My husband and I are birders and, while spending time in Arizona a number of years ago, we visited the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area. Near the visitors center is a tree with a cavity in which a Western screech owl is known to spend time. We were fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of the owl and take a number of photos. The creature was engaging, the textures of the tree were interesting and eye-catching—and I just knew that one of those photos would become a scratchboard piece someday.

Working in scratchboard is a subtractive process, using a knife to remove the black ink from the surface to reveal the white clay underneath. After the initial pass of scratching, I go back in and add ink with a technical pen to create additional detail and values where needed. That ink is then scratched to further refine the detail and values. I used this add/subtract method to create some of the fine crevices and texture seen in the wood and bark. Once the scratching of the entire drawing is about as far as I can take it, I add color with watercolor. Once the color is dry, I scratch selectively to fine-tune here and there.

I really enjoyed the process of creating the various textures in this drawing. I didn't make any amazing process discoveries during its creation, but I did realize—after it was finished and scanned—that there's a second heart in the shadow shape to the left of the owl. That was not planned.

GOOD ADVICE

Create from what you love. Whether that be a certain subject matter or medium, or both—you have to enjoy what you're doing. I have a theory: If I like something, I can't be the only other person who's attracted to it. The challenge (and it's no small one) is to get the right eyes on your work. Explore media and techniques to find what suits you. There's no right or wrong way to approach art, but if you're going to break the "traditional rules," you should understand those rules before you break them. Create a consistent body of work once you figure out what it is you enjoy. You can always choose another path and create a new body of work, but having a hodgepodge of art styles isn't necessarily beneficial. None of this happens overnight, but drive and dedication are key.

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MY ART STORY

As is true with many artists, I've been drawing since I could hold a crayon. My parents fostered that creative streak in me, along with a love of animals. Growing up, I wanted to go to veterinary school. As I got older, I realized that would require a lot of schooling, so I chose to pursue a B.S. in biology. I worked in retail and in the administration department at a local zoo. Eventually I began working for environmental consulting firms, where I made maps and graphics and analyzed field data. Throughout those years, art was a hobby. It wasn't until I started creating pet portraits that I realized there might actually be enough of a market to make art my profession. With the support of my husband, I quit my job and focused on my artwork. That was more than 20 years ago, and I'm still creating pet portraits today, among other art. I'm mostly self-taught, with a few art classes along the way. My light-bulb moment was taking a scratchboard workshop at an illustrator's conference in the late 1990s. The instructor was using a professional-quality scratchboard, and she created the most amazing compositions. That's how I learned that scratchboard is far more forgiving than I expected. I'm honored to be a Signature Member of American Women Artists and the Society of Animal Artists, a Master Member of the International Society of Scratchboard Artists and an Ampersand Artist Ambassador.

Anda Styler

SANDY HOOK, CONNECTICUT

Spring Light (acrylic on aluminum, 18x24)



Emotional connection is what always drives my creative process. The scene in *Spring Light* depicts an old farm near my house. I taught plein air classes there many times. Last spring, as I was driving home one afternoon, I saw this powerful play of light and shadow as it fell across the barn and nearby forsythia, which happened to be in full bloom. I loved how the burst of color cropped out part of the barn. I didn't have my painting equipment with me, and I knew I had only minutes before the light would change, so I parked my car and started taking photos. It was only a brief moment in time, but the memory stayed with me.

I begin every painting with a sketch, or several sketches, to feel out the composition. Then I do a value study, using phthalo blue, transparent red oxide, ultramarine blue, permanent maroon and white. This way, I can lay out the composition and tweak the drama before adding colors. For this piece, the roof, in particular, presented a challenge. It wasn't easy selecting interesting colors that would also reflect the structure's age. The tree branches coming in from the left were in front of the barn, and the shadows on the ground were coming from unseen trees from the right. Behind the barn it was backlit, but the building was also bathed in light and shadow. Capturing it all was quite a challenge!

MY ART STORY

I graduated from Parsons School of Design with a B.A., in 1983. After spending many hours at The Metropolitan Museum of Art writing papers for art history class, my goal became to show my work there one day, no matter how far-fetched it seemed. I was so inspired by the Impressionist artists; their work really moved me. I wanted my paintings to touch others the same way that paintings of the past had touched me. I see my style as ever evolving, changing as I change. I've had many great successes with one-person shows, awards, commissioned art for both public and private spaces, great gallery representation, and teaching. My goal now is to continue evolving, brushstroke by brushstroke, and, hopefully, help others to do the same through teaching.

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GOOD ADVICE

Don't copy. Be who you are. Be original. Be inspired. Look at the artists you admire and see how they went beyond. Study what inspires you. Draw, draw, draw. Draw everything. It will teach you to see. Study the light and how light follows form to create shadows. Notice how the wind changes the clouds, the temperature, the time of day, the time of year. It all changes what you're painting. Watch yourself evolve. Allow for change. Experiment with color. See what resonates with you. We each have an internal palette and unique painting style. Find yours. And, lastly, use more paint!



"EMOTIONAL CONNECTION IS WHAT ALWAYS DRIVES MY CREATIVE PROCESS."



"I ENJOY EVERY PART OF THE PAINTING PROCESS … I CAN JUST LOSE MYSELF IN THE WORK, ESPECIALLY WHEN I'M WORKING ON SOMETHING NEW AND EXPERIMENTAL."

James Turner

MINNETRISTA, MINNESOTA

You Looking at Me? (watercolor on YUPO, 20x26)



This portrait depicts an iguana that lives in our backyard in Puerto Rico. He spends most of his time at the top of a palm tree, but often comes down in the afternoons. He's totally unafraid of us. Once, when we were working in the yard, he came down and sat on a pile of lumber, refusing to move even when we tried to scare him off the boards. I wanted to capture his personality in watercolor.

I work on both traditional watercolor paper and YUPO, though I seem to get the most attention for my YUPO pieces. I created this piece for a YUPO workshop last spring because I wanted to demonstrate the ease of lifting watercolor paint on this surface. The entire painting was done by lifting the subject out of a dark background. That's not typical of my work with YUPO, as my process usually involves many other techniques. This piece turned out so well, however, that I've since applied the same technique to other subject matter.

I enjoy every stage of the painting process—from exploring a wide variety of subject matter, to working out how to best express what I want to say, to the painting itself. I can just lose myself in the work, especially when I'm working on something new and experimental.

GOOD ADVICE

After teaching on-and-off for 10 years, the advice I would have for all skill levels is pretty simple: The only way to get better at painting is to paint—a lot. Take classes, pick the brains of good painters, look at good art in books, magazines and galleries. Then make a *lot* of paintings. Expect that most of them won't be very good at first, especially if you're attempting techniques you don't have much practice with. Don't let anything discourage you.

MY ART STORY

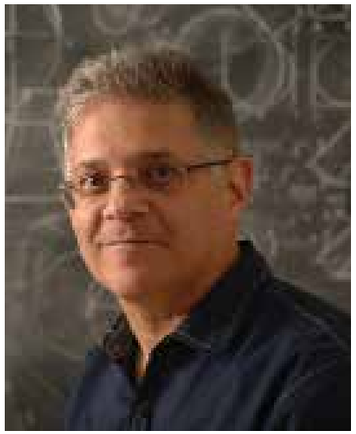
I've always loved drawing and have dabbled in printmaking, photography, sculpture and stained-glass work. About 28 years ago, I decided that I wanted to tackle watercolor, having loved the medium for years. I took workshops with great painters once or twice a year and painted as much as I could, while working full time as a physician and raising a family. I joined local watercolor societies, formed friendships with fellow artists and took up plein air painting. I've been competing in plein air events for the last 15 years, consistently winning awards, making new friends and having wonderful experiences. Since retiring from medicine five years ago, I've had a lot more time to paint and have had some success in regional shows. A long-time goal was to have my work exhibited in the American Watercolor Society's national show. After entering several times, I was accepted in 2020, and again in 2021. In 2022, I gained Signature Member status and won an award—all for YUPO pieces. I currently teach workshops in YUPO techniques, plein air painting and journaling. My goals at this point in life are to continue to paint, to improve, to grow in unexpected directions—and to have as much fun as possible.

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Thomas Valenti

TOWNSHIP OF WASHINGTON, NEW JERSEY

Fifth Avenue and 14th Street (watercolor on Arches cold-pressed paper, 40x25)



The inspiration for this piece struck me as I was peering out of a window from the fifth floor of the Parsons School of Design, in New York City. I was immediately drawn to the perspective of a scene viewed from above rather than the usual street-level vantage point.

As is my usual process, when I was satisfied with my reference material, I did a full-size drawing of the scene on illustration board. This method allows me to make as many corrections as needed, and I avoid marring or scuffing up the watercolor paper. Once the drawing was complete in every detail, I transferred it to tracing paper and then traced it again backwards. This put the graphite on the reverse side of the tracing paper, which I then attached to the watercolor paper with a few bits of masking tape. Then I drew over those lines to transfer them to the watercolor paper.

I began the painting process by mixing a variety of reds, yellows and blues to create a few mid-tone grays. With a 1-inch sable brush on dry paper, I laid in broad areas of neutral grays using diluted washes of paint, taking care to paint around the lights. Once dry, I applied another layer of grayish tones with varied amounts of blues and browns added to the mix. At this stage, the paint wasn't as diluted as in the initial application. I allowed the painting to sit for some time before going back in with drybrush and scumbling techniques to create the textures of the stone building. I laid in local color where needed, then painted the figures and final details.

GOOD ADVICE

Never give up. Don't allow criticism to sway you from the vision you see in your soul. Keep moving forward in the face of any and all adversity. Don't be afraid to fail. When you do fail—and you will—learn how to recover rather than getting bogged down in a pool of self-loathing. Don't take anything for granted.

MY ART STORY

From a very early age, I knew I'd be an artist, but my first art class didn't come until my junior year of high school. Prior to that, I drew and did a little bit of painting on my own. After graduation, I attended Newark School of Fine and Industrial Art, graduating with a Certificate of Fine Art. With a deep-seated desire for learning, I worked hard to learn all there was to know about the two media I love the most—watercolor and oil. I began showing and selling my work while in my second year of art school and have continued to do so throughout the last 50 years. I've had a good number of accomplishments over the decades. Serving as president of Allied Artists of America for 11 years, from 2006–17, was an amazing experience. Another highlight is being one of the four founding members of the former America China Oil Painting League (ACOPAL). I've written articles for leading art publications, including *Artists Magazine*. And I was featured in the *American Artist* 70th anniversary issue, in an article written by the late Stephen Dougherty. One of my goals is to finish the autobiography I started earlier this year. I also hope to write an instructional book about watercolor. I'm currently in the process of producing a series of YouTube videos based on the 10-session beginner watercolor course I've taught for 40 years.

VISIT THOMASVALENTI.NET.



Soon Warren

FORT WORTH, TEXAS

Fall Pond (oil on canvas, 36x72)

Nature was the inspiration for my painting. Fall Pond is the place where I go to rest and calm myself from my busy daily life. The calm water gives me a feeling of quiet, peace and serenity.

When starting a painting, I begin with a drawing to work out the overall composition. I typically paint the subject, then fill in the background. For this piece, however, I painted the water in the background first. The way I saw it, the water was my subject matter. Next, I added the tree branches, little by little.

My favorite thing about the painting process is the way it refreshes my mind. My head often becomes cluttered with the minutiae of everyday life. That's when I go looking for a creative outlet to release my stress. The excitement and sense of adventure I feel when starting a new work of art recharges my heart and soul.

I breathe the fresh air and observe nature in different settings to kick-start each new creative journey. I enjoy taking in new surroundings and am always looking for my next subject, taking note of the composition in the places I visit or rearranging things with my artistic vision to create new compositions. In this way, my mind is constantly vigilant. Wherever I am, there's never a quiet moment—and I love it.



For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a painter when I grew up. All images were fascinating and magical in my eyes, and I wanted to be part of that magic. Growing up in South Korea, in the aftermath of the Korean War, my family wasn't affluent. The opportunity to study at college wasn't an option. Instead, I hung out around the studios of working artists, helping out where I could and picking up color-mixing and brushwork skills in the process. I could already draw instinctively, so I focused on learning painting techniques from those artists. After I moved to the U.S., I enrolled in college to get an associate degree in commercial art. That experience boosted my self-confidence, and I started to paint full time when I moved to Texas, in 1999. I channeled my positive attitude and energy into watercolor, and found community in a group called the Society of Watercolor Artists. Since then, I've published two watercolor instructional books and filmed seven videos. I've won many awards and am a Signature Member of the American Watercolor Society and the National Watercolor Society.

VISIT SOONWARREN.COM.



GOOD ADVICE

If you make painting a priority in your life, you'll see growth in your skills and improvement in your technique, and you'll start to see your own work more critically. When painting becomes your life—and you're having fun with this passion—your work will make you proud and happy. When I started painting full time, I knew my dream had come true. I painted every moment that I could, and my skills improved greatly. Another way to take your skills to the next level is to teach art. In order to teach something, one has to understand how it works.