

Discovering Your Voice By Experimenting

by Georgette Jones

Whenever I'm asked how I arrived at my current painting style, I'm at a loss for words because it was a gradually evolving technique, the result of constant exploration, discovery, re-working and experimentation. Rather than giving a drawn-out explanation, I usually just say, "I experimented a lot."



Within My Heart I Pray

Acrylic on canvas

That answer is by no means definitive because I believe the adventurous artist never stops exploring new ways to make a statement. For many artists I've met, experimenting is part of the art process. It is vital to growing, developing and evolving as an artist. It challenges the natural curiosity common to many artists, while satisfying on a deeper level, the need that art "speak to you" during the creative process. If you are listening, you will notice a connection between technique, materials and subject matter in revealing your own personal style.

Fortunately, this is what gradually happened to me when I decided to venture into new territory relative to medium



Within My Heart I Give Thanks

Acrylic on canvas

and discipline. When I first began painting, oil was my medium of choice. Over the years, however, I became impatient with its slow-drying properties. With my discipline now limited to colored pencil, I considered myself an illustrator rather than a painter.

I knew that I wanted to paint interesting subject matter, to capture and hold my viewer. However, I had not thought about how my choice of medium and discipline would effect the development of a style. I really didn't know what style I had in mind. Over a period of approximately three years, experimenting helped me discover a style of painting, as well as find my voice through my chosen subject matter.

In beginning to experiment with paint, I initially continued drawing with colored pencil while trying all water media: watercolor, gouache, and occasionally, acrylic.

I was afraid of acrylic, hesitant about using it for the opposite reason I had rejected oil color - it dried too fast.

By the same token, I admired many of the loosely rendered works of water media art I saw in books, several of which were painted in acrylics. So, I bought some watercolors, gouache and acrylic paints, using them all in different ways. I found acrylics the most difficult to work with, while admiring the substantive quality of the paint itself. Later, as I became more proficient with the medium, I likened this quality to the subject of spirituality, which soon became the continuing theme of my paintings.



Objects of Healing

Acrylic on 500 Series Strathmore® Aquarius II® Watercolor paper

In using all the water media in different ways, my completed paintings resulted in three differently-rendered styles. My watercolors were mostly mixed media works, figurative as well as semi-abstract. My gouache works were all figurative with flat, spare planes and forms. And finally, my acrylics were also mixed media, but limited in color. They were figurative with intricate black and white lines. The skin tones were rendered with colored pencil because I did not yet know how to render them in acrylics.

Eventually, after working this way for a year, I yearned to paint in only one medium. Colored pencil was fine for drawing in my sketchbook or for making completed fine art drawings, but I wanted to paint. I longed for the sensation of holding a brush during the entire painting process. I wanted to complete a work of art that had been painted with a brush.

Around this time, I was also beginning to grow weary of painting from models and photographs. I longed to paint

“raw” from head to hand to paper, but felt constricted in my vision on exactly how to do that. I felt that I had become dependent on models and photographs.



Denial

Acrylic on 500 Series Strathmore® Aquarius II® Watercolor paper

Parallel to my beginning to thumb-sketch painting ideas, I also continued to experiment with mixed media, especially collage and different decorative paper techniques. Almost all of these techniques were done on Aquarius II watercolor paper, which I had fallen in love with after trying many different kinds of supports. I enjoyed its absorbency, pliability and its lightweight handling.

A new book I was reading at the time kept me in a constant state of excitement over the possibilities of creating with paint and paper. Further, it contained painting techniques that I had not yet tried. Maxine Masterfield's book, *Painting the Spirit of Nature* opened new doors for me. As I began to outwardly define myself as a professional artist, I grew confident in trying my own new styles, as well as those in her book.

While reading Masterfield's book, I began experimenting with acrylic paint in an extremely aqueous manner, though not yet using it to complete entire paintings. The results of these experiments eventually led me to the concept of layering. As I began to like employing thinned acrylics in a layered manner, I gradually realized that this technique was perfectly suited to my life experiences of spiritual struggle, a reality I had never thought of including in my art. I was too busy living my struggles to see that they could become art.



Acceptance

Acrylic on 500 Series Strathmore® Aquarius II® Watercolor paper

Since my early thirties, I had consciously decided to better myself through daily practice of a lifestyle which I considered more spiritual than religious. Through self-awareness, I was able to be honest about the occasional struggles that such an endeavor might entail. By thinking deeply about what personal spirituality meant to me, I knew that I wanted my imagery to be neither pious nor static. By the same token, I wanted my paintings to be uplifting, inspiring and, at times, challenging. Other possible ways of painting came to me long before I committed my new visions to paper. Without completely realizing it, I had learned to first "paint in my head," before actually picking up a brush. By



Waiting for the Melody

Acrylic on paper

learning to do this on a regular basis, I had gradually taught myself to paint without models or photographs.

Would my theme have come to me had I not experimented with mixed media? I don't know. But I do intuitively feel there is a relationship to how all these painting concerns came together.

In finally painting exclusively with acrylics, from the beginning, my brush wanted to paint the themes close to my heart. Therefore, I began to paint my beliefs, thoughts and experiences. As my spiritual journey consists of many layers of learning, growing and sometimes struggling, the same has been true of the painting process of layering colors.

My decision to use acrylics in a manner similar to watercolors was based on my love of the soft beauty of the latter. Yet, I wanted to use a medium more in tune with my personality, more easily manipulated and having a more substantial look to it. Most of my acrylic paintings contain both transparent and opaque colors, often giving a velvety matte finish to the completed work, while still allowing the light to shine through. I find this appealing.



The Night Before Surgery

Acrylic on paper

Having light shine through my paintings is essential to the subject matter of my work. In a quite personal way, it relates to the many times my life has seemed infused with darkness. Layering several washes of thinned acrylics after each previous application has dried gives the impression of light in a painting process which flows this way:

When doing figurative work, I sketch in pencil an image either from my sketchbook or a thumbnail. All pencil lines are lightly erased from the imagery, leaving just enough visible lines to cover with thinned acrylic paint, brushed on in a color complementing the chosen palette, which consists of pastel and jewel tones.

After achieving a low level of opacity through mixing, a pastel color is quickly and randomly applied to a slightly wet 200-300 pound sheet of white watercolor paper, using a number 12 round acrylic brush. Some areas are left



Anger

Acrylic on paper

white. This process is repeated two or three times after each successive layer has dried. When the paper begins to curl at the edges, I usually wet the front completely with a large brush and allow it to dry, and then I do the same to the back. This will make the paper lie flat, and become more pleasing to paint on.

Successive layers are applied in the same way. However, at various points in the process, I alternate transparent and opaque colors based on the palette I have chosen. While I'm painting, I'm constantly pulling out colors and shapes in what looks like a random manner, but is simply my eye constructing and adjusting the design to match the vision in my head. But does it ever really match?

Throughout the process, I work loosely and quickly, occasionally dampening the paper with the brush. Near the painting's completion, I add detail and order, working more tightly. Large shapes, movement, pastel versus jewel tones and semi-abstract designs are hallmarks of my paintings. These are some of the important elements I seek to expand upon by experimenting. Once the painting process is over, I am soon at the beckoning hands of another idea.

My ideas are usually captured in a sketchbook as they come to me. For several years now, I have mentally carried images of how I want my paintings to look. As I now prepare to begin a new body of work, the challenge is to transform my visions once more onto paper or canvas. But in a more expanded version. I'm not sure if completed paintings ever truly match the visions in an artist's mind. However, I feel they often come close.

Regardless of whether your visions completely match what's in your head, the satisfaction is in continuing to paint and to evolve through experimenting. It's a journey which will reward you with many pleasant discoveries that always promise of more to come.

About the Artist

Currently living in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Georgette Jones has been painting professionally for over twenty years. She studied Art History, English and Journalism at Wayne State University in Detroit, and studied calligraphy at the College for Creative Studies in the same city. Despite her partially formal educational background, she considers herself largely self-taught, due mostly to having experimented with numerous materials, styles, techniques and mediums throughout her career. Her current style, which continues to develop, is the result of an evolving exploration to create a technique essential to her theme of basic spiritual struggle. Georgette also paints subjects based on her beliefs, thoughts and experiences.

Working primarily in acrylic on paper and canvas, Georgette's sub-themes include the spiritual aspect of



Georgette Jones

relationships, wellness, love, nature, peace, prayer and personal growth. These subjects are rendered in her calligraphy, poetry, collage and writing, as well as her paintings.

Georgette's work has been featured in magazines and on television and radio. Her awards include a Seagram's Gin Award, a Spirit of Detroit Award and a 100 Most Influential Detroit Women Award. Her work is in the collection of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History in Detroit and the Birmingham A&M University in Alabama. Her work is held by many serious local and national art collectors. She has shown locally at the former Del Gallery in Lathrup Village, MI., Dell Pryor Gallery, The Scarab Club, The NCA Gallery and the Nancy A. Fox Gallery in Novi.

Having recently begun a new body of work, which will include mostly landscapes and abstracts, Georgette now faces the challenge of applying her style to exciting new genres.

You may view more of the artist's work at getteartist.com or artsopotent.blogspot.com.

Featured Product

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Artwork by Sherie Sloane

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An Interview with Sequential Artist James Sturm



James Sturm (CCS Director) is an internationally recognized cartoonist, cofounder and Director of The Center for Cartoon Studies (www.cartoonstudies.org). His writings and illustrations have appeared in scores of national and regional publications including *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Onion*, *The New York Times* and on the cover of *The New Yorker*. He is also a co-founder of *The Stranger*, a Seattle arts and news weekly. His book, *The Golem's Mighty Swing*, was named the 2001 Comic of the Year by *Time Magazine*. His most recent books include *Satchel Paige: Striking Out Jim Crow*, *James Sturm's America*, and *Adventures in Cartooning*.

James Sturm Answers Our Questions

[SAP] Tell us about your process of making comics...

[JS] My approach to making comics is probably closest to that of a novelist except I am doodling my drafts using words and pictures as opposed to just words. My early

drafts are very loose and the drawings are little more than stick figures. Each subsequent draft allows me to become more intimate with the material.

[SAP] What are your essential tools?

[JS] To begin with paper and pencil. Early drafts are on just regular copy paper. The next draft is on drawing paper and the final pen and ink drawings are on bristol using various pen nibs. A lettering guide also comes in handy.

[SAP] What stock (brand, finish and size paper) do you use for your final inking art?

[JS] I've been using 2-ply Strathmore® 500 Series Bristol with a vellum finish for awhile now. I buy the large sheets and cut them into six pieces. The paper takes ink extremely well, never any bleeding. The 2-ply is sturdy enough to stand up to the eraser and thin enough so I can transfer drawings onto it via a light box.



how do
you see
green?

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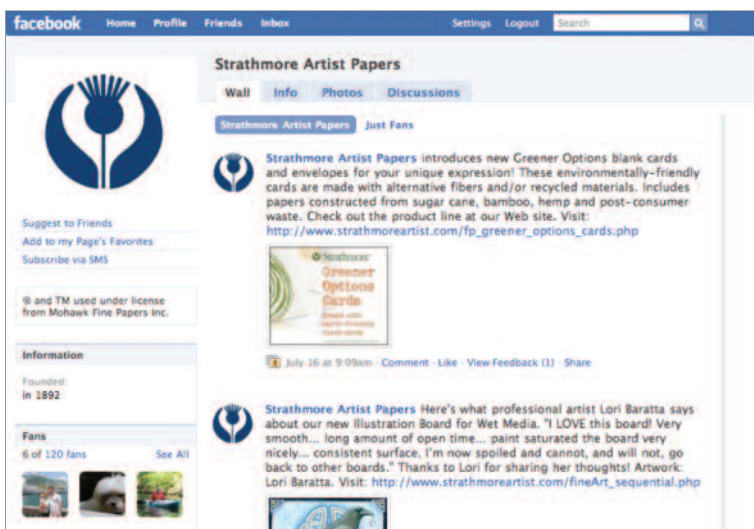
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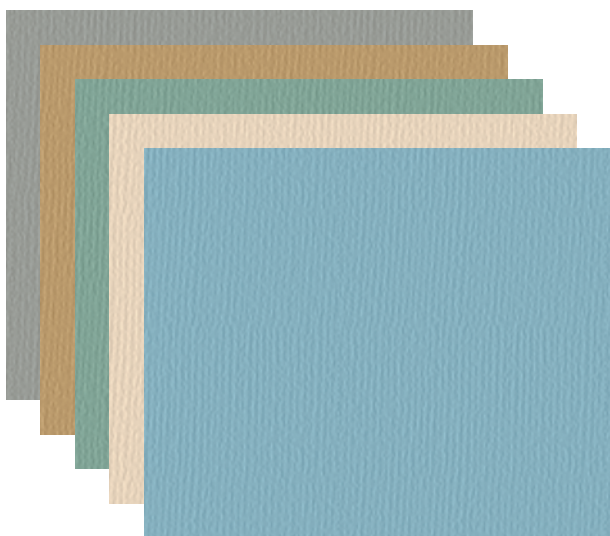
Questions From Our Website

Are colored papers made with pigments better than colored papers made with dyes?

It depends on what you are looking for in a paper. If your main concern is fade resistance, pigments are a better choice. But, if you are looking for color and surface consistency and have environmental concerns, dyes are better than pigments.

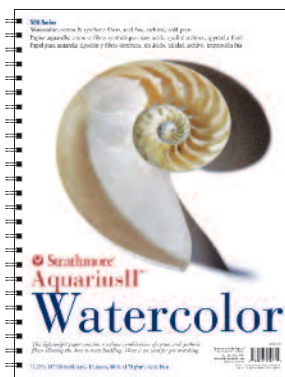
Pigments are more expensive than dyes. It is also difficult to achieve color consistency when they are added to pulp during the paper making process. Pigment sheets often have different colors on each side of the paper and quarter-sized “couch marks” on the wire side of the paper. Pigment sheets can also be prone to excessive color rub off.

Strathmore® offers two lines of colored archival papers: 500 Series Charcoal and 500 Series Pure Paper Tints. They both use dyes.



Strathmore 500 Series Charcoal sheets are superior quality papers excellent for dry media and craft projects.

I want to make my own watercolor sketchbook using conventional bookmaking techniques. I'm really looking forward to getting creative with it! What paper do you recommend using for this purpose?



Artists tell us they love using our 500 Series Aquarius II® Watercolor paper for bookmaking. This unique cotton/synthetic blend of watercolor paper resists buckling so it doesn't need to be stretched. It is also lighter weight (80 lb) compared to traditional watercolor sheets (140 lb) so it's easier to work with when cutting and binding books.

I notice that all of your drawing papers are acid free. Why is this?

Acid free papers are those with a neutral or basic pH (7.0 or slightly greater). Acidic papers break down more quickly than acid free papers, especially when exposed to light. If you are concerned about preserving your drawings be sure to look for papers that are acid free. Also, be sure to store your artwork in boxes or between boards that are acid free (such as our Museum Barrier Paper) and stay away from PVC plastics.