

The WOW Factor

Our **five distinguished Pastel 100 jurors** offer insights on what makes a particular painting stand out in a field of thousands.

BY ANNE HEVENER



BOLD. CAPTIVATING. STUNNING. ENTHRALLING. EXQUISITE. These are just a few of the descriptors used by the jurors in this year's Pastel 100 to describe their prizewinning selections. They also mentioned expected attributes such as strong design, textural qualities, and a fine handling of values, movement and color. Once an entry has met these criteria, however, the jurors have to turn to a more intangible measurement—the "wow factor."

The jurors noted an impressive range of styles and quality in every category and lamented the

difficulty in narrowing down the field to only a handful of pastels. "At a certain point," says Landscape & Interior juror Liz Haywood-Sullivan, "it can be very hard to place one entry higher than another. In that sense, truly everyone who makes the top 100 is a winner."

Emotionally Rich

Nailing the essential formal qualities (solid drawing, skilled handling of edges, strong shapes, color harmony, etc.) is vital, but just as one small but glaring technical error can bring down

City 7 (16x22)
by Jennifer
Gardner

MEET THE JURORS



Landscape & Interior: Liz Haywood-Sullivan
Massachusetts artist Liz Haywood-Sullivan (www.lizhaywoodsullivan.com) finds inspiration for her landscape paintings wherever she travels and teaches workshops. The award-winning painter is a signature member of the Pastel Society of America (PSA), the Connecticut Pastel Society and the Pastel Painters Society of Cape Cod. Her new book, *Painting Brilliant Skies and Water in Pastel*, is due for release in April from North Light Books (pre-orders are available now at www.northlightshop.com). She currently serves as vice president of the International Association of Pastel Societies (IAPS) and is also the IAPS representative to American Society of Testing and Materials (ASTM). Her artwork is represented by Vose Galleries of Boston and Montana Trails Gallery in Bozeman, Mont.



Portrait & Figure: Alain Picard
Alain Picard (www.picardstudio.com) earned a B.A. in illustration from Western Connecticut State University and went on to study at the Art Students League in New York City. His paintings, in both pastel and oil, have been featured in *Pastel Journal* and *The Artist's Magazine*. His work has garnered top awards in exhibitions with the PSA, the Portrait Society of America and the Connecticut Pastel Society, for which he currently serves as President. In 2009, he won Best Portfolio Award at the Portrait Society of America conference in Washington, D.C. Picard is a frequent workshop instructor and demonstrator for art associations, schools, galleries and museums. He lives with his wife and two sons in Southbury, Conn.



Still Life & Floral: Anne McGrory
Award-winning painter Anne McGrory (www.anne.mcgrory.com) is a signature member of the PSA. Her work has been shown in numerous venues, including exhibitions with the PSA, the American Artists Professional League and Art Renewal Center's Annual ARC Salon. She received the Herman Margulies Award for Excellence in the PSA's 38th annual exhibition, the Flora Giffuni Memorial Award for Pastel from the American Artists Professional League in 2011, and has twice been a finalist in Blossom—Art of Flowers, an international art competition that includes a two-year national museum exhibit and tour. Her still life paintings have been featured in *Pastel Journal* and in *American Artist* as a cover competition finalist. The artist lives in Nashua, N.H. Her work is represented by Galerie d'Orsay in Boston.



Animal & Wildlife: Sandy Byers
Sandy Byers (www.sandybyers.com) has enjoyed art throughout her life, but in 2002, she retired from a career in the software industry and started to pursue painting full time with a particular focus on pastel. She won her first awards in 2004 in the Pastel 100 and continues to gain acceptance and win awards in national juried shows. Her work has been published in fine art magazines, including *Pastel Journal* and *The Artist's Magazine*, and books. Byers is a signature member of the PSA, the Pastel Society of the West Coast and the Northwest Pastel Society. She's known for her paintings of the local landscape on Whidbey Island in Washington State, as well as her expressive paintings of animals—a subject she's also dedicated to protecting through animal welfare organizations.



Abstract & Non-Objective: Jennifer Gardner
Jennifer Gardner (<http://jennifergardner.com>) was born and raised in England. When she moved to the United States in 1999, she also quit a legal career to move into painting full time. She's a signature member of the PSA. The Sarasota, Fla., artist draws inspiration for her landscapes, seascapes and cityscapes—rendered in both abstract and representational styles—from frequent travels in Europe, the United States, the Caribbean and the Far East. Her work has been published in *Pastel Journal*, *The Artist's Magazine* and other fine art publications, and has frequently been shown in national juried exhibitions and regional art shows. Her work is represented by galleries in Acton and Newburyport, Mass., and Bald Head Island, N.C.



Beautiful (36x24) by Alain Picard

an otherwise appealing painting, a piece that demonstrates masterful technique can fall flat on an emotional level. "My final consideration," says Portrait & Figure juror Alain Picard, "is the emotional impact of the piece."

An award-winning pastel, then, is the one that offers the whole package—the one in which all the pieces come together. "My top picks were paintings that grabbed me on every level," says Still Life & Floral juror Anne McGrory. "These were the paintings that kept pulling me back to look at them again and again, and each time, I found something new to love about them."

For Animal & Wildlife juror Sandy Byers it was also important to see evidence of an artist's creative engagement with a piece: "Does it show originality?" poses Byers. "An exceptional composition, original subject or creative application of line, color and style?" Haywood-Sullivan put it this way: "I'm looking for something that stands out—something I haven't seen before."

Categorically Speaking

Because the jurors in the Pastel 100 are working specifically within a single category, some of the judging criteria is specific to a genre. Abstract & Non-Objective juror Jennifer Gardner, for instance, found that the entries in that category reflected a broad interpretation of the definitions of abstract and non-objective. "Some of the images submitted—while technically good and



Hydrangea & Lilies (24x19) by Anne McGrory

aesthetically appealing—seemed better suited for other categories,” she says. “like landscape or floral.” Gardner suggests that artists may want to consider more carefully the category into which they submit an entry. To be considered an abstract, she proposes an artist ask: “Does it offer a unique viewpoint or unusual interpretation of a real form where the elements of the subject are distorted or reduced to simplified detail from the more complicated whole? Or, is it non-objective? That is, a truly expressive, non-representational image with no basis in reality?”

In the Animal & Wildlife category, Byers says she is not only looking for solid drawing skills and an engaging composition, but also asking: “Does it imbue the essence of the animal? Does the animal look natural? If it’s in a setting, does the setting seem appropriate for the story? If there’s a setting, is the depth of field expertly handled?”

Jurors Are People

Of course, there’s an element of subjectivity in the jurying process, which feels right. The experience of art is highly personal, after all, and so it’s only natural that this be part of the jurying experience as well. Given this subjectivity, Byers offers a reminder: “If your work wasn’t selected, understand that it may have passed with a different group of jurors.”

Plenty of artists can testify to having paintings rejected in one arena that were honored in



Diligence (16x20) by Sandy Byers



Fireflies (24x24) by Liz Haywood-Sullivan

another. The lesson being this: Don’t let rejection discourage you. Instead, use it as a productive call to action. “Let it be a catalyst,” Byers adds, “to look honestly and openly for ways to push your work up a notch.” ■

ANNE HEVENER, a writer and editor for more than 20 years, has been the editor of *Pastel Journal* since 2006.

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