

Make the Most of a Small Studio: **6 QUICK TIPS**

PASTEL

Journal

**MAKE A
DIFFERENCE!**
Painting for
the Public
Good

p. 4

Landscape Inspirations

6 Artists
Share
Lessons
Learned

CALL OF THE WILD

How to Paint Both
Animal *and* Environment

FEBRUARY 2021

**A Perfect Pairing:
PASTELS ON SUEDE**

STROKES OF DISCOVERY

Laurinda Phakos O'Connor **paints expressive landscapes**
with plenty of paths for the eye to explore. BY AMY LEIBROCK





VIEWING ONE OF LAURINDA PHAKOS O'CONNOR'S

paintings is not a passive experience. Lines and marks move in opposing directions, and you can bounce between seeing the artist's every stroke and the scene as a whole in an endless loop without noticing the same detail twice.

"I hope viewers can look at the painting from a distance, then come closer and see something new or find a place in which they can get lost," says O'Connor. "I hope to create a mood or sense of time, a space in which people can imagine themselves."

The artist's finished paintings reflect the way she likes to work: fast and in the moment. "I stand at my easel, and my pastels fly," she says. She tries to let go of any reference photos and react to what's happening on the paper. If she finds herself working past two hours, she knows it's time to stop.

Sometimes, O'Connor will ask her nonagenarian mother, who's still a

ABOVE
After starting **Colors of Fall** (8x8), O'Connor didn't like where the painting was going, so she washed it off, leaving behind muted, earthy browns on the surface. She then played off of those colors—"the ghosts underneath," as she calls them—to complete the painting.

OPPOSITE
Rock Climbing (12x12)

working artist, what she thinks. They live next door to each other in Milton, Mass., and the artist works from the studio space in her mother's house. "She gives a good critique," O'Connor says.

THE FAMILY BUSINESS

Both of O'Connor's parents were working commercial artists while she was growing up. They both freelanced for greeting card companies. Her father also became an established watercolorist, and her mother painted figurative oils. "We always had art in the house, and I always liked to draw and paint," she says.

O'Connor's school had a good art department, but she also worked with her dad and watched him teach classes.

She took her own classes outside of school as well. Once she got into figure drawing in her teens, things really started to click, and she felt she was improving. After high school, she decided to pursue a fine art degree, even though her father wanted her to go into computers. In college, she explored printmaking before focusing on figurative drawing and oil painting.

O'Connor got an illustration job in a merchandising department after college, went back to school to study graphic design, then went to work in publishing.

Fine art eventually took a back seat to career and raising a family, but it was waiting for her when she got laid off from a job about a decade ago and found herself with more free time. Her mother told her about an atelier class taught by landscape pastelist Donna Rossetti-Bailey,



RIGHT
On a Fall Day
(20x16)

BELOW
Signs of Spring
(18x24)



so O'Connor signed up. Both the medium and the subject matter were learning curves for her, but she enjoyed the challenges and has been painting with pastel ever since.

"I liked the stroke of a pastel and the immediacy," says O'Connor. "The color was so vibrant, and I felt I could create brushstrokes with it. I was clueless, though, as to what the medium could really do."

The pastel group had been painting together for a while, so O'Connor learned valuable lessons from her classmates. She also continued to take other classes, soaking up information about pastel materials and techniques. As she gained experience, she started to enter art shows at community festivals. With a group of fellow painters, she started a "Painters for a Purpose" group that would put on exhibits to raise money for charity. Eventually she started entering paintings in pastel society competitions, in which she has won a number of awards.



LEFT
O'Connor says the moody purples and greens in **Tides Rising** (10x10) were inspired by feelings of being trapped due to the pandemic.

BELOW LEFT
Summer's End (14x11)

BELOW RIGHT
Through the Woods (20x16)



THE PATH TO A PAINTING

Depth is one of the most important considerations for O'Connor when deciding on what to paint. "I like the feeling of walking in and around places. I'm really drawn to a tucked-away focal point. I like a scene that I can root in and around," she says.

She finds inspiration on walks in nature with her dog. On their excursions, she takes a slew of photographs, but it's usually just a little piece of a picture that will inspire her to build a painting. "I'm looking for my verticals and horizontals, and then diagonals in and around. I also like to look at the contrasts," she says. "Let's face it, it's very mood-based. I can be in a certain frame of mind, and that will steer me in one direction or another." In *Tides Rising* (above), for example, the original scene was a misty day on Cape Cod, but the finished painting is a real stretch from the photo she took that day.

Once O'Connor finds a kernel of interest, she grabs her sketchpad and starts working out a composition with vine charcoal or a Tombow marker. She'll start with five to seven lines to feel her way around and break up the space

with a variety of shapes. Although her paintings end up somewhat realistic, the early thumbnail sketches are influenced by abstract artists like Piet Mondrian and Franz Kline.

"I look to those simple lines just to see how the layout of my composition is going to be," she says. "Then I look at the gesture underneath the landscape and ask myself the following questions: How am I going to take the viewer into my focal point? How am I getting into the painting—from the top, from the sides or from the bottom?"

O'Connor will often do a color study—sometimes over a wash of ink—which will be more representative of the scene. This helps her work out her color palette, as well as her strokes, contrasts and directions.

“I’m always trying to create a flow that will help the viewer’s eye get into and around the painting.”

— LAURINDA PHAKOS O’CONNOR

MOVING FAST

When she starts a painting, O’Connor will paint in some of the darker shapes with a loose ink wash on PastelMat paper. “Sometimes, I get a little carried away, and my paper is almost completely black with only a few little areas of white that give me just enough to remember what’s going on,” she says. “I love how the ink drips. It’s so quick and immediate, and it provides a base.”

Once that ink base is dry, her application of color is fast. “I’m not laboring over anything, and I’m trying not to get glued to the photo. I refer to it for my lights and my structures, but I’m reacting a lot to the ink and what’s happening between it and the pastel,” she says.

O’Connor will start by following and playing off the drips within the underpainting, which are often still visible in her finished works. (See *End of Day* and *The Field* on pages 32 and 33, respectively. From there, sometimes she’ll work dark to light, but not always.

“Sometimes I’ll start in the background, before I get into the foreground, but sometimes I like to get some of my strokes into the foreground or get some of my lights to chip into some of the ink,” says O’Connor. “I try to go for



demonstration

Starting With Ink



End of Day (12x12)

Step 1: I'm most happy when I take a brush of ink to my paper, letting the drips and expressive quality of the fluid stroke take over. I also love the darkness of the ink as well as the subtle shades of gray that inevitably come out.

Step 2: Once dry, I begin painting with pastels. I start mostly with the darks.

Step 3: As I continue to work the other values, I lay in strokes of color, paint negatively and build up shapes. My strokes are gestural and quick in order to create a sense of direction and movement within and around the scene.



The ink drips in O'Connor's underpainting for **The Field** (18x24) are still visible in the finished work.

big broad strokes before I get into smaller detail. If I find myself getting too detailed, I back off. Sometimes I have to go hunting around for the crumbs, but I try to hold on.”

O'Connor steps back and forth from the easel constantly as she works out the interplay of stroke and color.

Her approach to color is minimalistic, staying within a small family of colors with little sparks of other hues for accents. She likes the softer pastels; her collection is a combination of Terry Ludwig, Blue Earth, Unison, Diane Townsend and Great American.

As she paints, O'Connor thinks a lot about varying her strokes, so some become lines and others are big areas of color. Movement is also important. “I’m very focused on coming in from the right, coming up from the bottom and down from the top. I’m always trying to create a flow that will help the viewer’s eye get into and around the painting.”

Similar to the way she approaches a painting, O'Connor likes to keep a good flow going on in her life. She also does part-time graphic design work and teaches art to elementary school and adult students. “What I like most about teaching art is that it’s a community. It keeps me always thinking about my next step, and it helps me improve as an artist,” she says.

Judging from her family, O'Connor’s enthusiasm for art will keep her busy for years to come. “I’ll consider myself lucky if I can still be doing this at my mother’s age,” she says. **PJ**

Laurinda Phakos O'Connor

(laurindaconnor.com), award-winning artist and educator, is a Signature Member of the Pastel Society of America and Pastel Painters



Society of Cape Cod, a member of the Copley Society of Boston, a Gallery Artist at the South Shore Art Center, in Cohasset,

Mass., and a member of several other local art associations. She teaches pastels to adults at the South Shore Art Center, Milton Art Center, in Milton, Mass., and North River Art Society, in Marshfield, Mass. She’s also the art teacher at St. Mary of the Hills School, in Milton, Mass. O'Connor holds one-day workshops throughout the New England area and is represented by several galleries.

Amy Leibrock is a Cincinnati-based writer and content manager.