

Carol Thompson

"Focusing On Florals"

When I began to paint, I wanted to paint EVERYTHING. There were thirty-six years of images trapped in my head. I had to learn the tools and techniques to bring those images forth. I tried oil, watercolor, and eventually pastel and gouache. I also had to decide which category of those images was the top priority. When I felt I had "mastered" the art of painting the sea, I was ready for the next adventure. I chose florals.

I had grown up with a deep abiding love for the beauty of nature that surrounded me. I had learned all the names of wild flowers that grew in the fields of my Wisconsin farm home. I knew by heart the lilacs and roses and apple blossoms. I could tell the subtle differences between the wild lily and the trillium. In my head, I had memorized the petals and stems of the columbines and hepaticas. I knew as a child that I wanted someday to capture those lovely blooms as paintings. As an adult, I took lessons in oil. I learned how to hold a brush, how to mix colors and when and where to apply the paint. I had painted oil portraits of people. I had achieved success with landscapes, farms, and animals. I had accomplished the technique of seascapes in oil. But I hadn't ever done a rose, a bouquet of lilacs, a bunch of white violets. What was holding me back?



I pondered that question seriously, and soon came to this conclusion: flowers are so delicate, so ephemeral, that when using the bulky impasto of oil, I could not do them justice. Still, the desire remained with me. Then I discovered watercolors. How fresh! How lighthearted the media seemed to be. I soon learned to manipulate the transitory blush of watercolor pigment to effect the result I was looking for. By carefully layering brush stroke upon brush stroke, the flowers emerged gradually, with the delicate translucency I had hoped for! I learned to control the amount of water to paint ratio, to

achieve deep vivid colors or softly glowing hues. And so, I painted flowers. I started with the things I knew best, the blooms in my suburban garden.

Over the years in my home in Olympia, Washington, I had grown many indigenous flora, including the rhododendrons and azaleas for which the Northwest is so well known. I established a flower garden in the front yard, enclosed it with a natural rock wall, and filled it with nutrient rich soil. The reward of the weeding, watering and nurturing was a burst of brilliant, beautiful blossoms. I had sunflowers ten feet tall with huge nodding heads. The hollyhocks reached toward the sky and bloomed profusely in red, yellow, pink and nearly black. In the Spring, the garden was crowded with daffodils and tulips, followed by clusters of elegant irises in many



different colors; a visual banquet. I observed. I sketched. I photographed. I painted. Late summer brought the joy of dahlias in a myriad of colors and shapes, followed by nodding autumn chrysanthemums of gold, bronze, yellow and white, contrasted by the fringed blossoms of blue Michaelmas daisies. As a bold border to the rainbow display, I cultivated as many different roses as I could cram into the rest of the yard. Interspersed in the nooks and crannies I placed pots of pansies, and encouraged the wild, wonderful johnny-jump-ups that unexpectedly delight the eye.

I discovered that watercolor painting was like a break from the demanding work of oil painting. It was easily transported and easy to clean up after I was finished. I could fit the watercolors into an otherwise short time span, and I did. The piece could be put aside and worked on at a later date, (although most of my florals were completed in one session). The first of the paintings of flowers were well received. Soon I was making laser prints of them to market at arts and crafts festivals and galleries all along the West coast. Recent advances in technology now allow me to print from my home computer; a process known as "giclee". (I no longer distribute laser images). These giclee prints have proven themselves and are accepted in the art world, from galleries to world class museums.