

Urania Christy Tarbet, PSA, KA
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Review by Adele Greenfield

"You can't be afraid of color because that's what pastel is all about!" says Urania. After showing us a gallery of her (yes, very colorful) paintings, she talks about the pastels she uses and the limitless array of palettes, each consisting of rich colors for specific subjects like landscapes.

In this video, she paints a relaxing scene from Claude Monet's garden with lily pads and a background of majestic weeping willows. Artists from all over the world have the opportunity to visit these gardens. While her reference photo is rectangular, she chooses a square surface. This shape is perfect for any painting because she says, "the composition will always come out . . . well balanced."

Working on an ampersand board, a wonderful sandy-feeling surface with just the right "grip" for pastels, she applies Holbein gouache as a ground. Gouache works well for this purpose and she uses two different vibrant blues so some of the color will come through and help tie the piece together. Then, when the surface is completely dry, making sure she is not dead center, she starts to draw with vine charcoal, a medium compatible with pastel.

First, she blocks in light colors with delicate pressure and then she will go back with darker colors to establish the values. Highlights come later. Wiping each pastel clean before using it so her colors are clear, she uses mostly broad strokes in the beginning. She demonstrates the different strokes.

The rough surface allows the pastel to skip over some of the bumps, especially if you have a light touch. This lets a little of the underpainting show through and the lighter colors over the darks make it come alive. As you overlap, she shows us that if you do not push too hard, it can be quite transparent and when the colors from underneath come through, it gives you a variegated effect. Applying thin layers of light opaque color, pushing colors together very gently results in a richly textured surface with a lot of depth. This gentle pushing of colors is called "scumbling."

Urania says that it's important to work with at least three values. Pastel is so versatile, you can go from dark to light, light to dark, and light again. It's a very forgiving medium. You can control it and change it when you want.

Not totally tied to the photograph, it is a roadmap to determine value and use colors that coordinate with one another. Once everything is blocked in, she sees that her painting is quite cool so she adds warms. Contrast puts sparkle into the piece.

Urania advises us to search for balance in our paintings. You can balance up and down, diagonally, and side to side. This gives you continuity.

When she backs away from the piece and evaluates what she likes and what she doesn't, she notices that the weeping willows look a bit like haystacks. Moving her strokes in the same direction as the branches fall, she defines the tree and carves into them painting "bird holes" that create more depth and variety. Now the trees look more like weeping willows.

Then she goes to the lily pads and cuts into them with negative space in dark green. After that, you'll see her mixing darker greens with a lighter green.

In the section on bouncing color, Urania paints with gold to bounce around in several different spots creating luminosity. Then she uses blue to make some of the colors recede. "Don't call attention to a specific color," she warns.

She shares her "little tricks" including:

- when depicting water, how to keep the viewer's eye in the painting and prevent the illusion of the water running down and out
- the value of reflections compared to the object casting the reflections

- what to do when the surface loses its tooth (you can get it back so it grabs the color again)
- how to anchor the lily pads so they sit down into the water instead of looking like they are coming up off the surface

When you're finished, spraying will dull the pastel, so to keep the luminosity, don't spray. Getting rid of loose particles is a challenge, however, and she shows you how to "slap" it on the back so they come off. And you'll see how to sign your name with pastel pencils —where and what color.

If you love layers of luscious colors in pastel, you will enjoy working along with Urania.

Adele Greenfield, an artist as well as workshop leader who spent years on the international lecture circuit, is author of over 100 articles published in magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Woman's Day*, and *The Writer*. Also author of a downloadable handbook, *Unleash Your Creative Genius*, and several recorded programs, her current work as a consultant/coach supports people in two areas:

- meditations for artists: coping with stress and ways to relax, renew, and re-energize the creative spirit
- image and communication: writing a bio or promotional piece and/or speaking before an audience (whether it's a demo for artists, a video, or a presentation to buyers)

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