

AMERICAN ARTIST

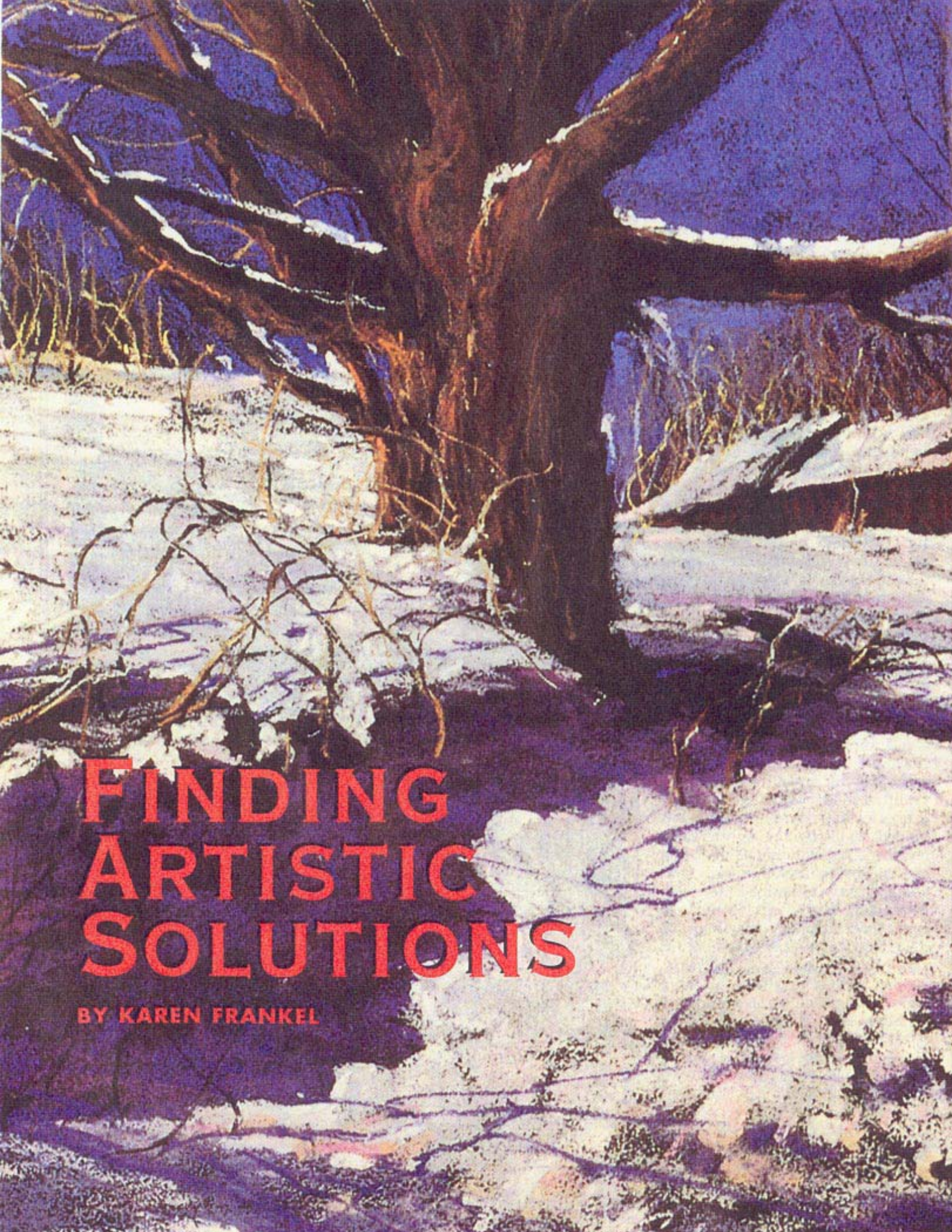
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Demonstrations Of
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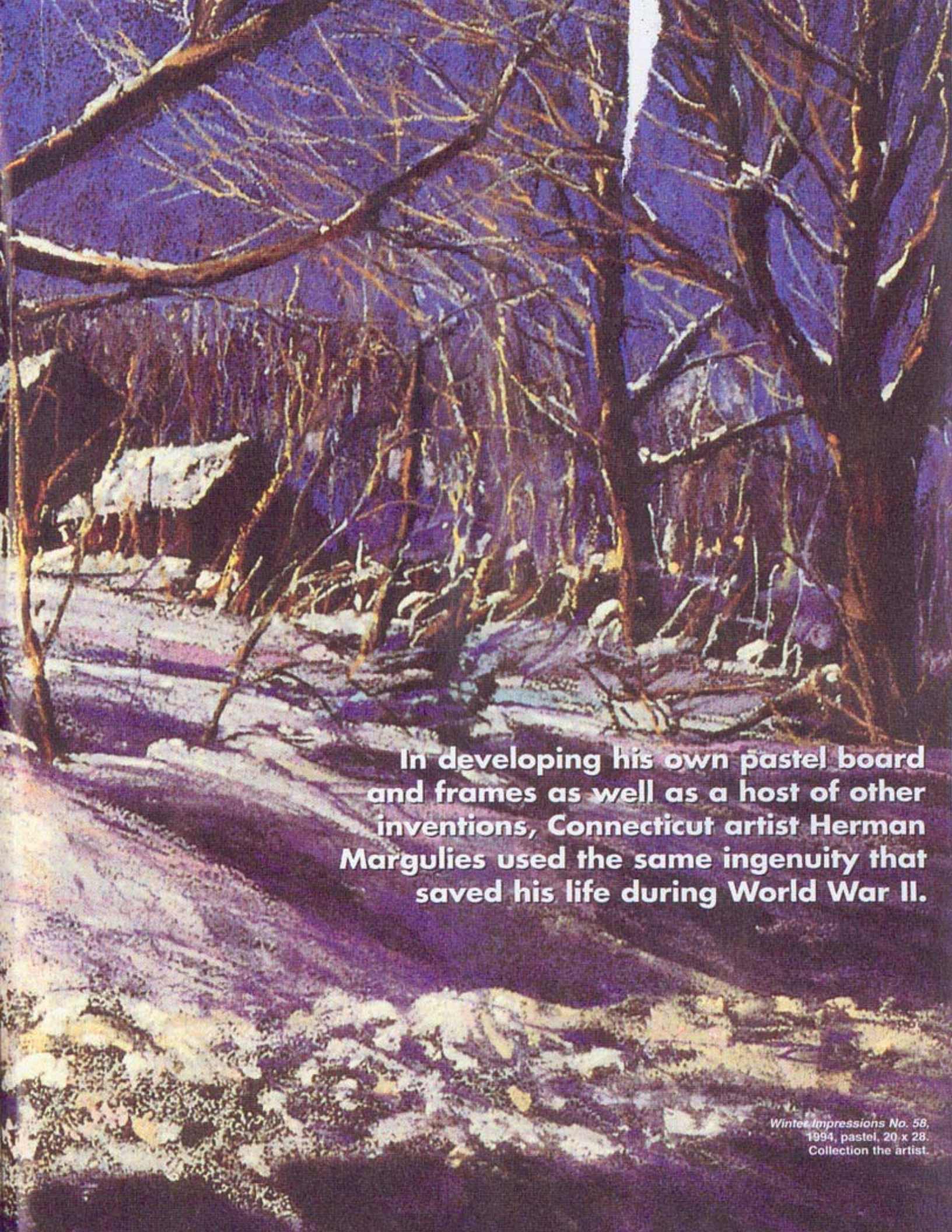


COVER: *THE LITTLE STREET*, BY JOHANNES VERMEER (1632-1675)



FINDING ARTISTIC SOLUTIONS

BY KAREN FRANKEL

A pastel painting of a winter landscape. The scene is dominated by bare, dark trees with intricate branch structures, set against a deep, dark blue sky. A path or road, covered in snow and shadows, winds through the foreground and middle ground. The ground is rendered with various shades of blue, purple, and white, suggesting snow and shadows. The overall mood is quiet and somber.

In developing his own pastel board and frames as well as a host of other inventions, Connecticut artist Herman Margulies used the same ingenuity that saved his life during World War II.

*Winter Impressions No. 58,
1994, pastel, 20 x 28.
Collection the artist.*

DEMONSTRATION:
ABANDONED NO. 56



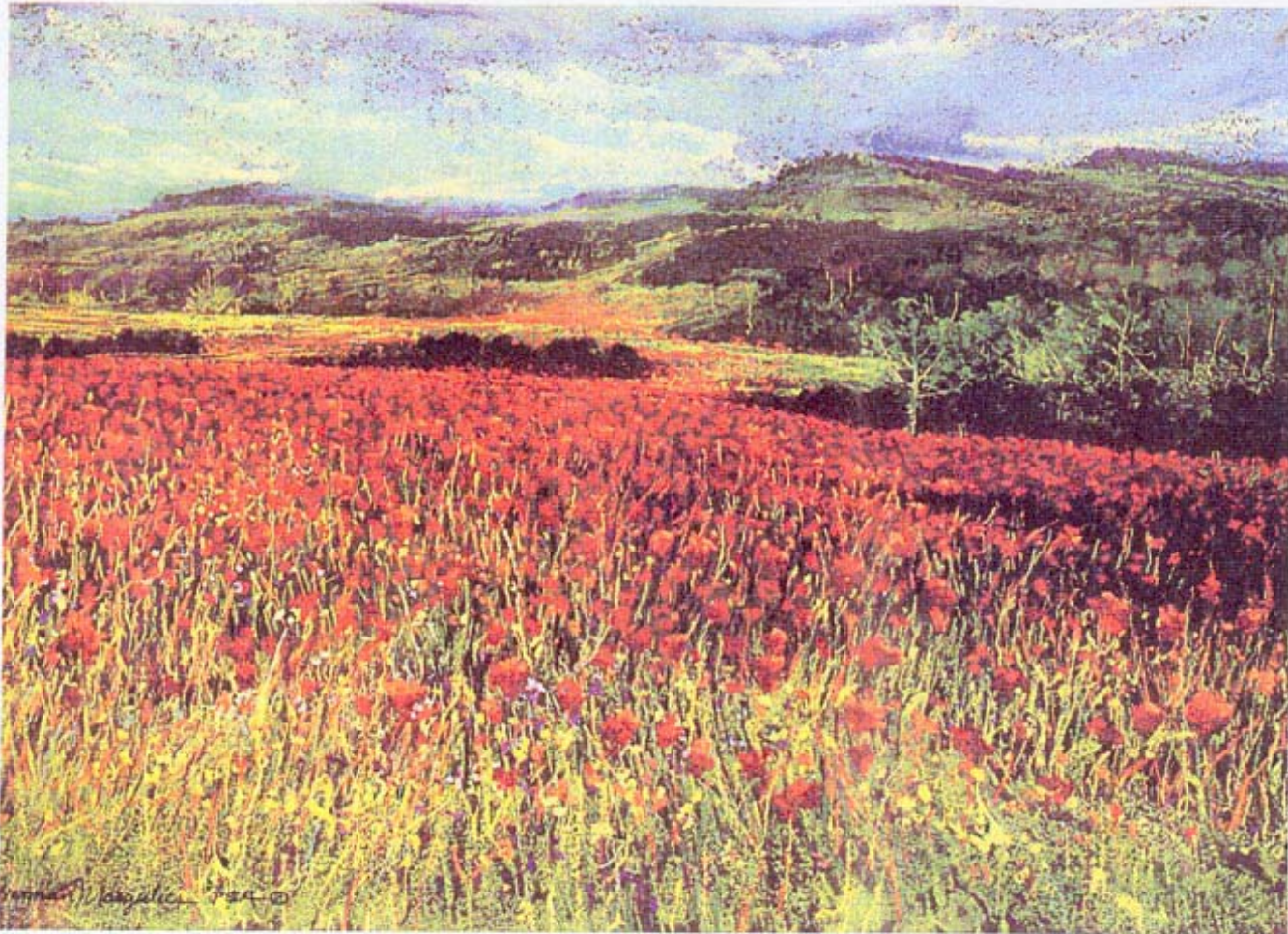
Step 1. Margulies begins with a loose charcoal sketch. "I don't draw with the charcoal—I put lines down to indicate basic shapes," he says. "For me, the drawing is spontaneous, an extension of my emotions, and each stroke has to convey this."



Step 2. Margulies applies the pastel with different strokes—some are broad, others simply squiggles that float over the canvas. Rather than blend colors with a stick or a swab, he uses many loose, isolated strokes. He even employs this technique to produce masses. "This may look like a form of blending," he explains, "but it's not; these strokes are my way of giving the painting definition. If you blend the colors with your finger or an implement, it looks as if you wrote something and then erased it."



The completed painting: *Abandoned No. 56*, 1995, pastel, 16 x 22. Collection the artist.

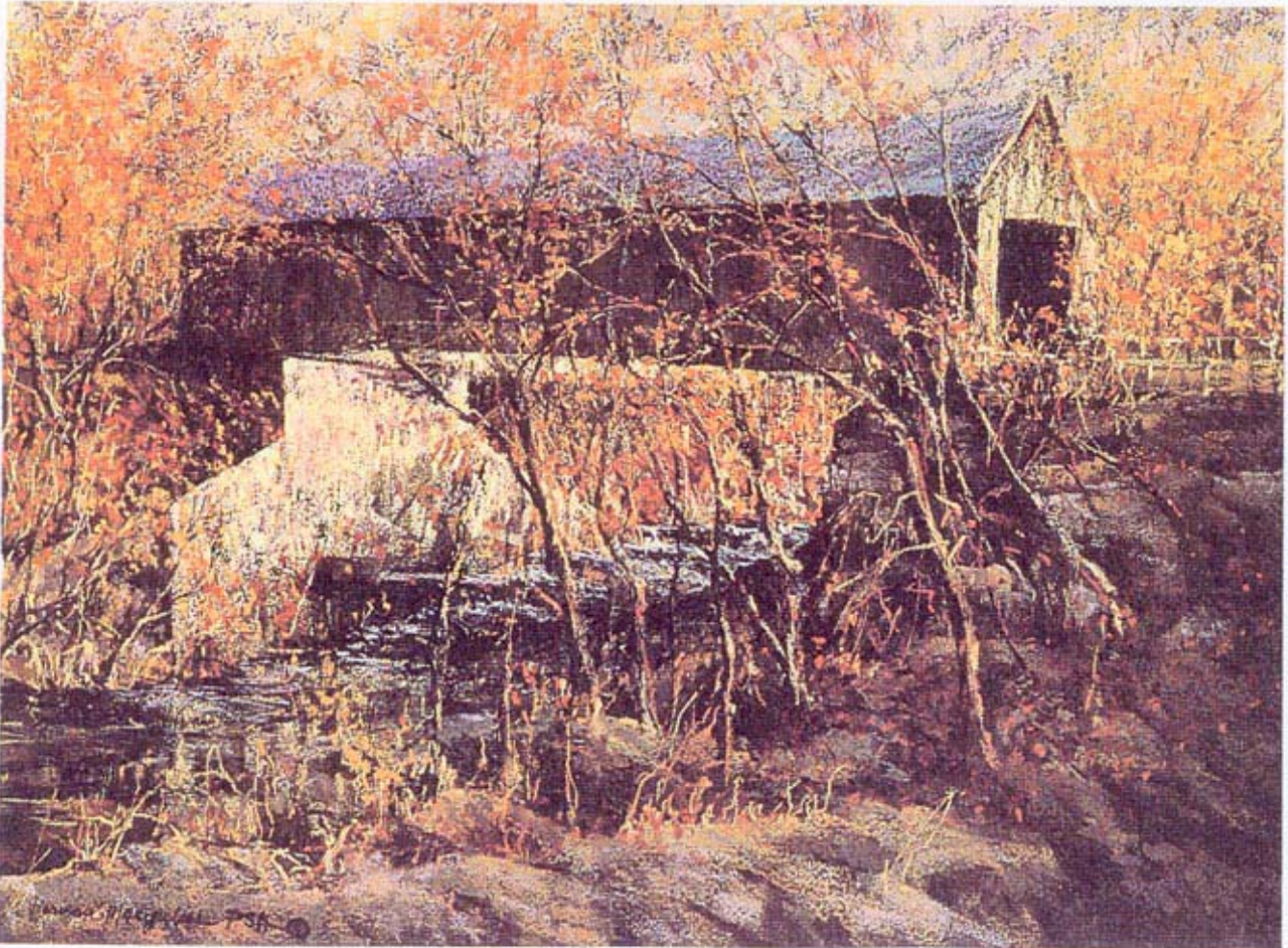


Left: *Summer Impressions No. 68*, 1994, pastel, 20 x 28. Collection the artist.

Below: *Bull's Bridge No. 2*, 1989, pastel, 24 x 32. Collection Donald and Mona Kegan.

Opposite page, above: *Winter Impressions No. 65—Scottish Highlanders*, 1995, pastel, 12 x 16. Collection the artist.

Opposite page, below: *Spring Impressions No. 20*, 1994, pastel, 32 x 14. Collection Mr. and Mrs. Harold Meyers.



says, "but art has always been the backbone of my life."

Born in Poland, Margulies used his artistic talents to help him survive the concentration camps of World War II. He falsified official documents for fellow Jews, worked in Oscar Schindler's enamel factory, and did portraits of Nazi soldiers in the Krakow-Plaszow concentration camp for extra bread or soup. Today, Margulies lives and works in Litchfield County, Connecticut, with its rolling hills, winding back roads, and picturesque New England towns and farms.

His studio has high ceilings, skylights, and a bedroom loft for his students (he runs weeklong workshops for two students at a time). It's a completely professional setup, with framing tables, a projection cubicle, and storage space for paintings and supplies. His Sennelier pastels are kept in individual drawers, each labeled with a number. Bits and pieces of the sticks are in aluminum-foil pans filled with rice that keep the sticks clean. In some of the pans, the rice has acquired a faint coloring of its own—a tinge of blue or an aura of mauve-beige—from the pastel dust.

Before starting a painting, Margulies approaches his frame closet (he orders his frames and mats by the dozens in ten different sizes). "Many times you'll do a painting and it won't fit a frame," he says. "What do you do?" He raises his voice slightly to make the point. "So I decide everything before I begin, including the size of the painting—I make sure it fits one of my frames." With the size determined, he cuts his board and selects mats.

Margulies uses wooden mats for paintings larger than 24" x 32", although they're expensive. These wooden mats are coated with an enamel finish that can be wiped clean of pastel dust with a wet sponge. But to reduce the cost of framing, he recently developed—in collaboration with a framer—a mat sealed with a low-gloss lamination. The laminated surface can be wiped clean like the wood. "When working with this mat, I have a different method," the artist explains. "I actually use two mats, both placed over the painting. The coated top mat has

Continued on page 72

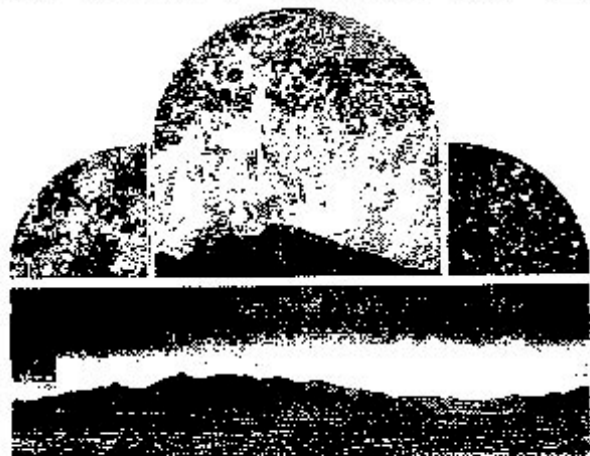


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Don Eddy, *Theoria Physica*, 1995, (61"x74"), acrylic on canvas

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mixtures.

The palette I chose for *Portrait of a Poet* is a variant of the primary triad of red, yellow, and blue: alizarin crimson, cadmium yellow light, ultramarine blue, Cremnitz white, and ivory black. Figure 10 shows the painting in what I believed was an unfinished state. After thinking it over, however, I decided to leave it alone, feeling that it struck the right balance between being an accurate resemblance and an exciting, formally resolved painting. Nevertheless, I was concerned that the rough, impetuous look of the paint handling would not satisfy the patron. In portrait painting, the feelings of the patron are bound to be a consideration. In this instance, the patron's response was positive. This respect for the portraitist's ideas and vision is paramount if the work is to be anything more than a dutiful, impersonal rendering of a mask. ■

Domenic Cretara was born in Boston and attended Boston University School of Fine Arts, where he earned his B.F.A. degree in 1968 and his M.F.A. in 1970. He received a Fulbright scholarship to Italy in 1974, studying painting in Rome and Florence; and in the late 1970s, he was artist-in-residence at the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France. In 1984, the artist returned to Italy to study the works of Giotto and the Venetian Old Masters.

Cretara has had numerous solo exhibitions in New York City, Boston, and Los Angeles and has participated in many national and international group shows. His paintings are in the Twentieth Century Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and The Triton Art Museum in Santa Clara, California, as well as in a number of private collections. Cretara has written many articles on drawing and painting and is currently a professor of art at California State University at Long Beach. He is represented by the Brenda Taylor Gallery in New York City, where a solo exhibition of his work is on view through February.

MARGULIES

Continued from page 27

a slightly smaller opening ($1/16$ " smaller) than the acid-free mat I put over the painting first. A gutter is created between the two mats to catch the excess pastel dust."

With this preparation done, Margulies goes to his easel, on which a large piece of homosote, covered with black polyester material, is mounted. He tacks his pastel board to the material (he photographs his work, both in progress and when complete, and the black background makes his slides more professional looking and isn't distracting). The easel sits next to the projection booth, where his students can use two projectors to choose individual slides to work from.

Margulies does a daily demonstration for his students that is both a way of teaching and a performance. He begins by flipping through slides culled from a collection of thousands he has taken himself and chooses a subject; at this session, it's a barn he has painted several times before. "Every painting is an innovation, an invention," he says. "I may use the same barn for five

paintings, but I do the work in five different ways—different perspectives, different compositions, and therefore different paintings.”

Margulies begins by sketching in broad sections with charcoal. “I don’t draw with the charcoal—I put lines down to indicate basic shapes,” he explains. “For me, the drawing is spontaneous, an extension of my emotions, and each stroke has to convey this. If there is no emotion, there is no painting.”

After the charcoal is down, Margulies begins with the color. Bits and pieces of pastel lie on the easel shelf and in the rice pans close at hand. Margulies paces back and forth, his glance going from the slide to the painting. He tells his students to move back from their pictures as often as possible and to look at them in a mirror to check for errors. “You should think before you do anything,” he instructs. “Sometimes you do more thinking than other times, and sometimes you follow your instincts.”

Rather than blend colors with a stick or a swab, the artist employs many loose, separate, and isolated strokes. He even uses this technique to produce masses. “This may look like a form of blending,” he says, “but it’s not; these many strokes are my way of giving the painting definition. If you blend the colors with your finger or an implement, it looks as if you wrote something and then erased it. So I leave the strokes alone.”

After an hour and an half, Margulies takes a break—an intermission of sorts. “When I was visiting Giverny, Monet’s gardens in France, I did some painting,” he recalls. “It was a sunny day, and because of the sun’s glare, I couldn’t see the colors clearly. The glare kills them; it flattens them out. Also, the light made the canvas blinding. That’s why I’ve developed a system for painting in a studio.” He says he establishes his initial composition while he’s taking slides with his camera, but the actual photograph is used merely as a reference.

After lunch, Margulies is ready to continue. He goes back into sections of the painting repeatedly, intensifying the color—warming it in some areas and cooling it in others. When he’s finished, he taps the back of the pastel board a few times to remove the excess pastel and shoots several slides of the work for his records.

With all the components readily at hand, framing takes a relatively short time. He cleans the glass and gives the pastel board a final tap to remove any further loose dust. He stamps the back of each painting with the work’s title, date, and size plus his biography, then backs it with acid-free foam board cut to the size of the frame. The hooks and hanging wire are attached before the painting is set in the frame to prevent pastel dust from dropping onto the glass, which could happen if the picture were put into the frame first. He then takes out the loose-leaf notebook in which he keeps records of all his work. On each page, there is a space for several slides of a painting, along with its title, the date, and the location where it was painted. The work produced in this demonstration is called *Abandoned No. 56*.

“Art isn’t a mystery,” Margulies says. “It’s about how you feel, what you’re about, and how to express that emotionally.” His subjects range from ballet dancers to flowers, seascapes, and a variety of landscapes. Margulies says he has to have an emotional connection with a subject in order to paint it. “I have dozens of paint-

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ings of sheep, and the black sheep is me," he says. "I identify with sheep, with cows, and even with barns—everything that comes and goes as we do. We are very seasonal, and my work is about the seasons.

"During the war, I used to hide in barns, and they were instrumental in saving my life," he continues. "Today, you see them decaying, left to the elements. Soon, you'll never know that a barn existed in a specific spot. I hate to see them go. I have many childhood memories of barns, and they're a link to the past. And what do you see now instead?" He holds out his hands. "Banks, shopping malls. In my paintings, I'm recording history so that future generations know their beginnings—that the barn was once the cornerstone of American life."

Margulies has sold around two hundred paintings and won more than one hundred fifty awards. "My most expensive painting is \$5,000," he says. "and that's as high as I want to go. I want my works to be affordable. When I die, I don't care what they're sold for—my concern is leaving enough of them behind. My legacy is going to be the name I write in the bottom, left-hand corner of each painting to defy the Nazis who wanted to erase it during the Holocaust."

Margulies is an elected member and a Master Pastelist of the Pastel Society of America. He is also an elected member of Knickerbocker Artists, Allied Artists of America, Audubon Artists, The National Arts Club, the Salmagundi Club, and the Hudson Valley Art Association. He is listed in *Who's Who in American Art* and is represented in Connecticut by the PS Gallery in Litchfield, Clapp and Tuttle in Woodbury, and Isabel Trimper of Art Services International in Westport. His mats and frames are made by Greg Haas of The Frame Cellar Gallery at 1004 Old Bethlehem Pike, Springhouse, PA 19477. For information about his workshops, pastel board, or paintings, write to the artist at 32 Revere Road, Washington, CT 06793; or call: (203) 868-0496. ■

Karen Frankel is an award-winning writer-producer of corporate videos and a corporate speech writer. She lives in New York City.

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