

The Artist's

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M A G A Z I N E



**MONOTYPES—
THE PAINTER'S WAY
TO MAKE PRINTS**

**BONUS:
THE BASICS
OF LANDSCAPE
PAINTING**

Yellow Daffodils, by Gary Bukovnik, monotype, 41 X 29 1/2.



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Impressionistic Landscapes That Glow

Soft pastels and a dark, rough ground add up to vivid color.

BY HERMAN MARGULIES

When I walk through the Connecticut countryside near where I live, I respond to it emotionally.

The hillsides, grasses and trees all take on a richness in sunlight that makes me want to capture them with pastel. Like the impressionists, I'm interested mainly in the color and light of a scene, rather than detail and hard edges. Hence, for me, pastel is the perfect medium—I can work directly and see results quickly without having to fuss with brushes or other tools. And when used on a toned, deeply textured surface, the pastels reflect powerful color.

Instead of mixing colors before they're applied or blending them on canvas, impressionists such as myself make strokes of fairly strong colors close together. The effect that you see is actually light reflected from many pure sparkling hues that have a vibrant, optical effect on the eye, such as in *Spring Impressions 11*. The landscape evolves when these colors are placed in masses that create pattern, rhythm, balance and form.

Pastels by their very nature are excellent for this technique. Although they can be blended, I prefer not to use them that way. Pastels are made up of pure pigment (only a little gum tragacanth and water holds them together), and their brilliance adds to the impressionistic effect. In fact, few media compare to the color purity of pastels. With oils or watercolors, for instance, their liquid binders diffuse and weaken the colors a bit—either a cocoon of oil diminishes the pigment, or water permits it to be absorbed into the paper. Mixing these colors also tends to

reduce their intensity.

In addition, painting with sticks of pure pigment doesn't inhibit my direct, spontaneous approach. I can build color and tone as quickly and directly as making a mark with pencil.

I prefer to use Sennelier pastels from France because they are soft and transfer onto the paper easily, and the colors are rich and powerful. I have a wide range of colors—at least 500 different hues. Of course, I don't use most of them in one painting, but for *Abandoned-24* (page 52) I did use about 70 of them.

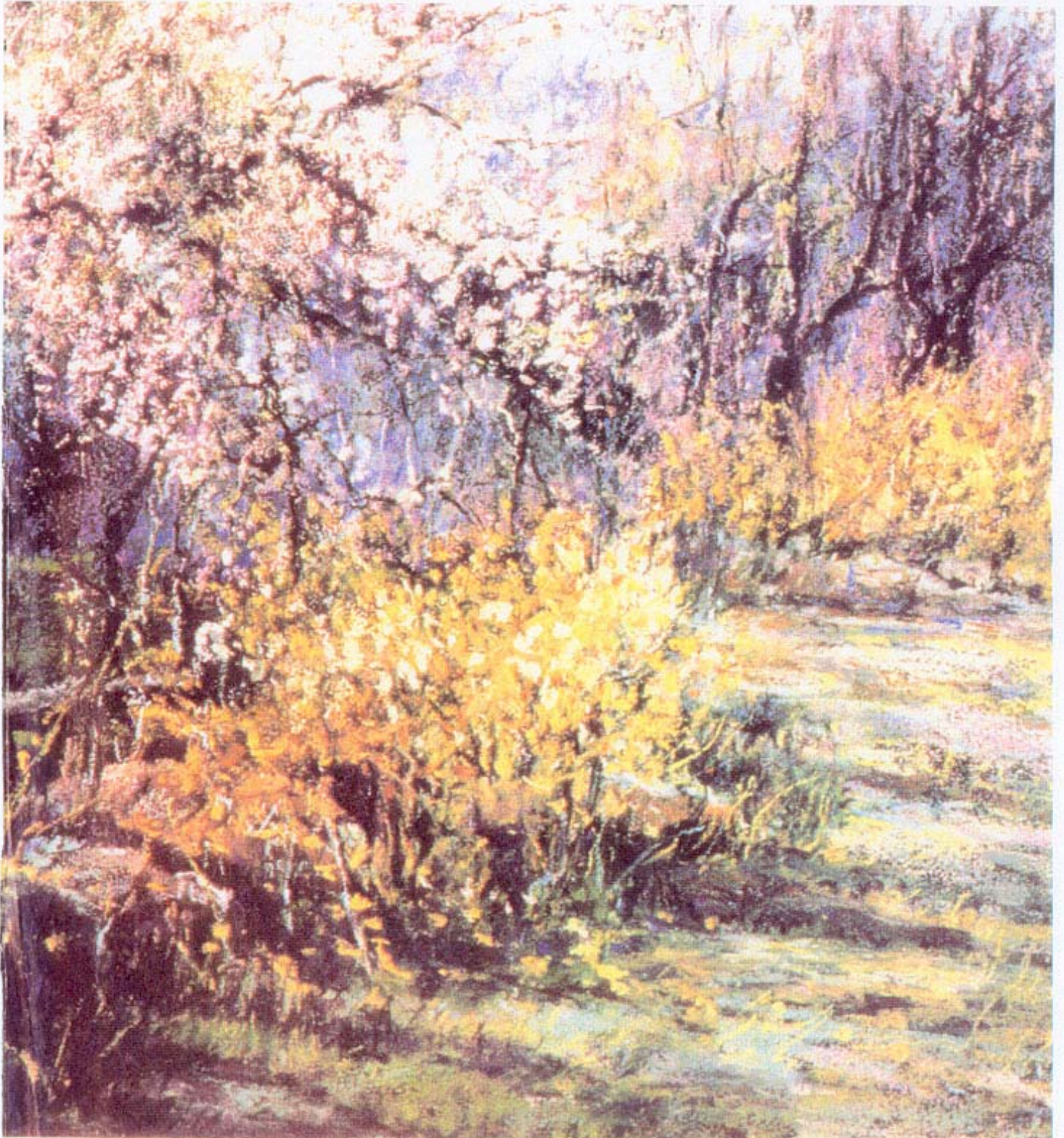
The pastel surface that I make enhances the rich color of this medium. The rougher the surface, the more pastel will cling to it. I worked on pastel paper when I started, but found that the thin surface grain did not hold enough pigment for my strong, bold strokes. I looked in the commercial market and at other artists' formulas, but still couldn't get the effect that I was looking for. So I worked for a year adjusting the proportions of gesso, pumice and acrylic pigments until I finally came up with a tooth that could hold a maximum amount of pastel and that had a warm tone (see "Preparing the Boards," page 54). The deep tooth shows each stroke as brilliant as I've intended it to be. Such a surface is essential in my paintings because it breaks the strokes into the particles of color that are so distinctive in the impressionistic technique.

The warm, gray color of the surface also enhances the medium. I've found that light-colored grounds make the pigments appear weaker and duller. You can test this yourself by placing one stroke of pastel on a dark surface and one on a light surface. The dark, you'll find, produces the most power and luminosity.



The Sparkle of Spring

Rendering a landscape full of flowers can be a problem if you attempt to do so too literally. In Spring Impressions—11 (27x35), I used an impressionistic approach, making random strokes of color to represent the light and shadows in the masses of flowers. The eye blends the colors, thus creating the illusion of spring.



Step 1: A Quick Sketch

I first make a rapid, light charcoal sketch that combines elements from the many slides I've taken of a scene. Here, I changed the ground level for more drama, and created a sharp highlight for the focal point. I placed the wood pile so it would draw the eye toward that focal point.



Step 4: Add Brilliance With Highlights

The right juxtapositions of color add "zing" to the painting—red against green, yellow against violet, etc. I indicate the foliage with color masses and spots. I haven't drawn a single leaf here, yet they're recognizable by the effects of light on them. With the last few light colors applied, Abandoned-24 is finished.



Photographing the Scene

When I photograph a scene, I make sure that I capture it from all angles so I have a variety of material to work with in my studio. These slides of the barn that inspired Abandoned-24 (see demonstration at right) were taken from three different distances. I chose the top slide for its strong statement, but used elements from the other two for a complete composition.

As many impressionists have done, I work from nature. I don't, however, work directly at the scene because I find that the light keeps changing, and there are too many distractions. Instead, I travel the countryside photographing the spots that appeal to me—particularly old barns and trees. Usually I take the photos in afternoon light because it has the same kind of glow that I want in my paintings. I take the pictures from many angles so when I return to my studio, I can combine them for the best composition.

Slides are best to paint from because prints are much too flat-looking. Also, I can project the slides on the studio wall in front of me and refer to them as I paint, choosing highlights and angles, and eliminating or adding elements. I never "copy" a slide directly. For example, Abandoned-24 was in need of a focal point, so I added a ladder to guide and direct the viewer's eye.

I spend many hours, sometimes days, thinking about the painting that I'm going to do. I visualize the total painting in my mind before I begin, combining memories of the photography trip with the actual slides, and whatever other elements I might include. Then I know the shape I want the painting to take and can execute it with quickness and gusto. The careful preparation and quick action of my work is rather like a performance, and is usually finished in three hours.

THE FIVE-STEP PROCESS

No matter how quickly the painting goes, I always develop it in five basic steps:

Step 1: Make a preliminary charcoal sketch. I sketch only the basic outlines very sparingly and lightly with charcoal so

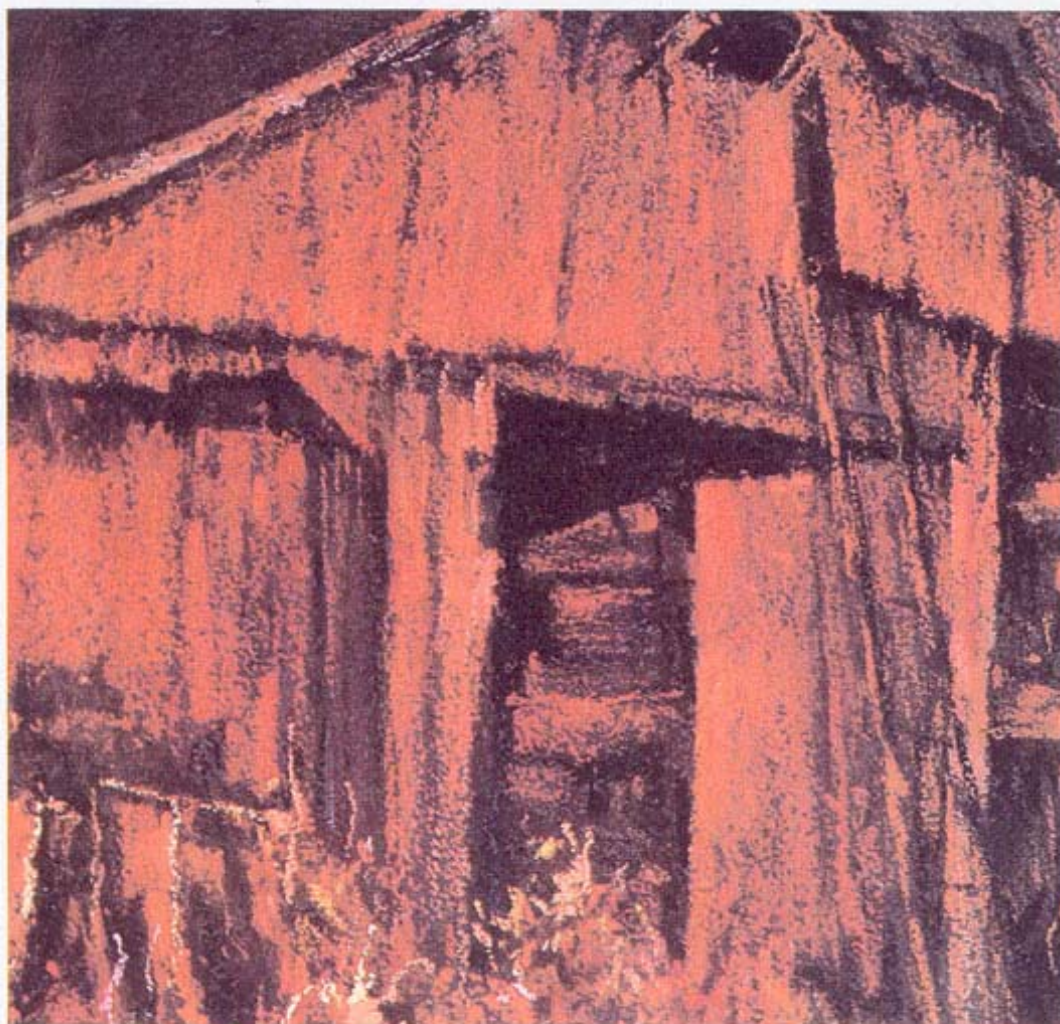
Step 2: Block in the Darks

With pastels, it's necessary to work from dark to light. Since the darkest masses here are the shadows on the left, I blocked those in first with loose, random strokes of warm, dark blacks and browns, dark burnt umber and dark and brown-purples. I indicated the point of strongest highlight with a light stroke so that I would not apply dark colors here.



Step 3: Apply Medium Values

I used warm red-browns, ochres and alizarin to block in the warm tones of the barn wood reflecting the sunlight. I deepened and warmed the shadows with greens and umbers, but was careful to let some of the ground show through for sparkle. I don't build color with crosshatching; rather, I use vigorous strokes of color next to and on top of each other.



Detail

Here, the randomness of my strokes is obvious—they vary in size and shape, some are overlapped, some edge-to-edge—and all are freely done. I use a variety of pressures, too. Note also that I don't blend the colors with stumps or my fingers, but I allow the eye to do the blending.

that I know the relationships between the shapes. I also don't want the charcoal to show through or confine the shape of the painting. I don't belabor the drawing since my paintings are made up of color masses rather than sketched shapes filled in with color. This step shouldn't take more than 15 minutes.

Step 2: Block in the darkest masses. First, I squint my eyes to determine the color values that appear dark, medium and light. Usually the shadows are the darkest elements, and I start by working those into the drawing first. Sometimes I use broader strokes to block in the large areas, and using the side of the pastel is often the quickest way to define the areas. But I don't always do it that way—it varies according to the subject I'm painting. It's important that the pastel is not applied in a regulated way, but rather with a variety of strokes.

With pastels, it's necessary to work from dark to light, since light colors can be applied over dark ones, but not the reverse. I usually use dark browns, blacks and purples to begin.

Step 3: Add the medium values. While adding the middle values—warm reds and ochres—in *Abandoned-24*, for instance, I was careful to allow areas of the ground to show through. This created additional sparkle and luminosity.

When applying any of the color values, I use the same random, open strokes. Often, pastelists will use careful crosshatching or overlapping of colors to build up tones. But for the look I seek, I vary the application of the pastels—I use the sides and ends of the pastel, and the strokes can be flat, linear, edge-to-edge, overlaid or whatever is appropriate. For even more variety, I use different pressures—light and

The Forest as a Unit

In Winter Impressions-15 (26x37), the confusion of interlocking branches becomes coherent with a simple warm palette of pastels—browns, greens, violets and off-whites—and no cool blues. I also created order in the scene by rendering the branches as a mass rather than a maze. Motion and mood are created by the rhythm of strokes, and the patterns of exposed ground make interesting shapes in the foreground.



A Frozen Glow

The dynamics of Winter Impressions-3 (24x30) are created by using vertical strokes against the horizontal rhythm of the land. This, plus a few sparkling off-white highlights, creates movement through the painting in the absence of objects. I wanted to paint the chill of the cold air flowing over the land, so I used a variety of blues. Then I strategically placed warm ochres, greens and violets against the blues to make them more intense.

heavy, twisted, straight, broken or punctured.

I never use a blending stick or touch the pastel with my fingers because this makes it look muddy. I like the individual strokes to show because I think that an artist's stroke is like his handwriting—very personal and revealing—and should be strong and visible.

Step 4: Add the highlights. Here's where the brilliance is really added. I indicate highlights by strokes of color, not by drawing detail. Again, I'm careful to let some of the ground still show through.

I add these lightest and brightest colors in integral spots. A light color against its complement can really put richness into the work. Not only do I put highlights next to dark areas, but also put them right on top of darker marks. This makes the light spots appear to

come forward from the surface and really sparkle.

Step 5: Frame the work. When I'm satisfied that the painting is finished, and before I put it in the frame, I put it on the floor, slightly tilted forward from vertical, and gently hit the back several times to release the excess pastel. After that, powder will not drop off.

I don't use fixative because the rough surface of the boards grips the pastel pigment forever. I also find that the spray dulls the colors.

I frame the painting right away, using acid-free tape on the back. With proper framing, pastel is one of the most permanent media—it won't fade, crack or peel as time goes on.

The end result is like my personal signature. I hope the works truly describe the excitement and vivacity that I see in a landscape. ■

About the Artist



Throughout his childhood in Poland and trying times in a World War II concentration camp, Herman Margulies held onto his desire to be an artist.

When liberated from slave labor in 1945, he went to Belgium, filling up on courses at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, and supporting himself by working in a coal mine and leather factory. Six years later, he came to the United States, and proceeded to invent many devices related to the pharmaceutical, medical and consumer product fields. Painting was still a part-time pursuit.

It wasn't until 1979 that he made the permanent switch to pastels. Since his first one-man show in 1981, Margulies has won more than 60 awards for his landscapes. He is represented by several galleries in New York and Connecticut, and his work is part of many corporate collections.

Margulies is a "Master Pastelist" of the Pastel Society of America, the President of Knickerbocker Artists of New York, and a director of the Hudson Valley Art Association.

He devotes full time to painting and teaching from his Connecticut studio.