WHS Newsletter

Spring 2026

Watercolor U.S.A. Honor Society

*Still Life on Hand Tied Rug* (detail) by Laurin McCracken

# WHS President's Letter by WHS President Carole Hennessy

Carole Hennessy, WHS President

Greetings WHS Members,

I think it is spring, although Chicago weather can't seem to make up its mind! First we ping-ponged between winter days and spring days, and now it is very summery and people are at the beach. Having lived here almost all my life, I know that we could still see snow!

I had the pleasure of attending the opening reception for Watercolor NOW! at the historic Anderson Arts Center a few days ago. It was a nice day for the drive to Kenosha, and it was wonderful to see the work of our members showcased in such a beautiful venue. I enjoyed viewing the work along with Lisa Englander and was able to meet member Carlotta Miller too. Many thanks to Lisa and Beth Shadur for all the work they did to make this exhibit possible. And thanks also to the members who sent their work. I only wish more of you had been able to enter.

And now Watercolor USA is almost upon us! The list of the 46 WHS members accepted into the 2026 exhibit is included in this newsletter. Approximately half of all the accepted artists are WHS Members! Congratulations to all! Juror Carol Carter did the hard work of selection and will be deciding the museum awards soon. Our WHS members, Debora Reed and Jane Mooneyham, will be selecting our WHS Awards. Of course, we hope to see some new names become eligible for membership and well-deserved recognition for current members.

The opening reception will be on Friday, May 29 at the Spiva Center for the Arts in Joplin, and I know it will be another lovely and well-attended event. Spiva has proven to be an excellent host for Watercolor USA while the Springfield Art Museum continues the renovation process.

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Laurin McCracken will be honored that evening as our 2026 Lifetime Achievement Award recipient. Kelly's interview with Laurin is in this edition, and I think you will find it a fascinating recounting of Laurin's journey. One of his paintings will be featured in the exhibition, and he will be speaking about his work later in the evening.

As always, we take some time to recognize members who have passed since our last newsletter. You will see memorial articles for Reita Walker Miller and Susan Amstater Schwartz. I want to take an extra moment to remember long time board member and past president Sandra Schaffer who passed away just before Christmas. I think Sandra served in almost every position on the board, often covering multiple jobs to fill unexpected vacancies. She offered me the opportunity to join the board and was an inspiration to all who worked with her. Whenever there was a question, she had the answer.

Recently, you all received a ballot to vote for the slate of board members for the 2026-2028 term. Thank you to everyone who responded. The new board members will begin their service at the board meeting on May 30. Our departing members will be missed, and I thank them for their service as we look forward to working with our new and returning members. There is always plenty of work to be done, and we invite anyone who wants to help to contact me.

The Springfield Art Museum recently received significant new funding from the City of Springfield which will allow the renovation/construction plans to continue as planned. Other grants and private gifts continue to arrive. If you visit the museum website, you can see images and videos of the progress. When completed, the museum will be a remarkable new facility, an asset to the city, and a wonderful home for Watercolor USA and the collection of American watercolors it possesses.

The best part of being on the WHS Board, especially serving as president, has been the opportunity to get to know the members. Whether it's been through emails, phone calls, or meeting you in person, hearing your stories and learning about you is always the highlight of my work. I have met the nicest, most interesting, amazing, and creative people over the years, and I thank you all for your support of the WHS.

Thank you to Aaron Wilbers for his work on putting together the content Kelly Eddington sends him for the newsletter and also for helping me figure out the ways to deliver messages and the ballot to you these past months. We also appreciate webmaster Patrick Ripley for his continued work to update our website upon our request. And without my Board, none of this would get done, so my thanks to them.

Enjoy this newsletter, enjoy the summer, and I hope you get a chance to visit the Watercolor USA exhibition.

Best Wishes,

**Carole Hennessy**

*President, Watercolor USA Honor Society*

# Important Watercolor USA Dates

**May 29**.....Opening reception and awards

**May 30**.....Watercolor USA 2026 opens to public

**July 25**.....Exhibition closes, 5:00 PM

**July 28 – 29** ....Hand deliveries may be picked up between 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM

**July 28 – 29** ....Shipped artwork is packed and shipping in process.

Watercolor USA 2026 will be hosted at:
**The Spiva Center for the Arts**
212 W. 7th Street, Joplin, Missouri
417-623-0183
spiva@spivaarts.org.
Open Tuesday - Saturday from 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Closed Sundays and Mondays.

*March Lamb (Sunset)* by Rick Boschulte.

# Watercolor USA Honor Society Members' Exhibition

Watercolor Now! 2026 is the bi-annual exhibition of WHS members' works, and it appears every other year at various venues throughout the United States. This year's exhibition, running from April 12 - May 24, is currently on view at the beautiful Anderson Arts Center, 6603 Third Avenue in Kenosha WI. This outstanding venue is a lovely historic home with various rooms of exhibition space that highlight our work. Close to fifty of our members' works are in the exhibition and range from abstractions to still life, landscapes, and portraits, from the traditional to the experimental. The exhibition is a wonderful signifier of the great possibilities of watercolor.

The exhibition at Anderson Arts Center overlaps with the Transparent Watercolor Society exhibition at the nearby Kenosha Public Museum, and there will be an exhibition within the Arts Center of local children's works in watercolor. Kenosha, Wisconsin will be a wonderful place to visit during the months of these shows for those who love this medium.

Interview with

# LAURIN MCCRACKEN

by Kelly Eddington

Laurin McCracken

*Laurin McCracken is a living watercolor legend, and the Watercolor Honor Society will present him with its Lifetime Achievement award at Watercolor USA 2026. Laurin served as a WHS board member for twelve years and was president for four of them. He is currently an emeritus board member, and he continues to provide the WHS with his wisdom, guidance, and prestige. The recipient of countless honors over the course of two blockbuster careers, Laurin epitomizes the American dream. The artist graciously sat down for a wide-ranging conversation about his life.*

## Part 1: *"I just kept going."*

**In preparing for this interview, I read dozens of Laurin McCracken articles, but none of them delved into your backstory. Could you tell us about your childhood, family, and places you've lived?**

**[Note: Laurin is a born storyteller. I didn't cut in with lots of questions during this part of the interview, but please know that I was nodding appreciatively throughout, frequently saying things like, "Wow," and occasionally lifting my jaw off the floor. –K.E.]**

I was born in Meridian, Mississippi, where my mother's father and his brothers owned a chain of furniture stores. None of them had any education, but they were really good businessmen. Then they lost the stores during the Great Depression. So my grandfather became an accountant for the largest laundry in Meridian, and my grandmother ran the drapery and fabric department of a department store called Marks Rothenberg. I grew up very much in the lower-middle class in terms of education, but I also had an exposure to the upper-middle class.

My dad was a blue collar guy. His father died in a hunting accident when my dad was in the eighth grade and his brother was in the sixth grade. They had to drop out of school to support their mother. My dad was a voracious reader and nobody's dummy, and over the years, he became the parts manager for an automobile dealership. And every time somebody would offer him twenty-five cents more per hour, we'd move. So we moved at least every two years, and about every third move, we'd end up back in Meridian, Mississippi.

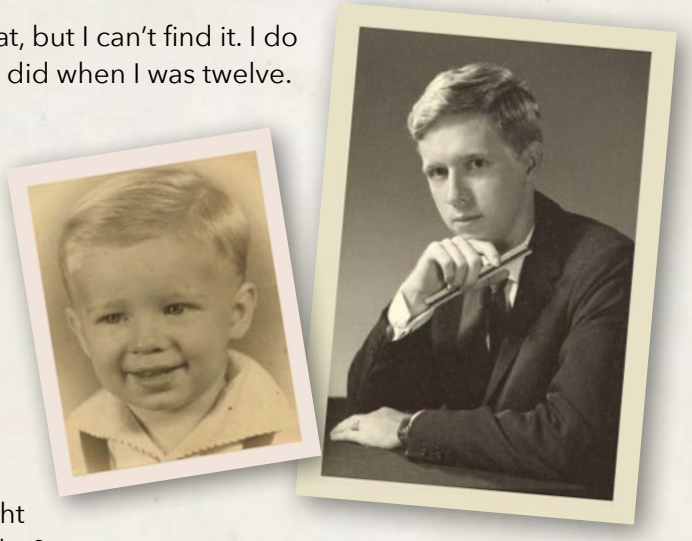
**Can you talk about your childhood experiences with art, and have you always been able to draw realistically?**

I've always drawn with a certain degree of realism, and I've always felt that my hand is not properly positioned if it doesn't have some instrument in it.

Somewhere in our family's archives is a horse pulling a cart with a man sitting in the driver's seat, and the sky is just a blue line across the top of the drawing. And there's a little sun with rays coming out of it. That's something I made

*I'm With You, Red Ryder.* 18x28.

when I was maybe four years old, and I would love to have that, but I can't find it. I do have some drawings from when I was ten and some oils that I did when I was twelve.



**Did education become important to your family as you grew up?**

I have a younger brother and a younger sister. Our family was committed to paying for four years of college for us. If we wanted to go on beyond that, we had to find a way to finance it. My dad had passed away by this time, and my mother was a high school English teacher. We existed on $4,000 a year. Somehow my mother and my grandparents scrimped enough money together, and I attended Auburn in Alabama where I studied architecture. Auburn was the only school I applied to. I didn't have a backup school. I just thought you applied to the school and you got in. How naive can you be?

I had four sterling years at Auburn: straight A's, head of the ROTC military and architecture honoraries. I worked my butt off because I had no other qualifications, but I figured that if I worked harder than anybody else in my class, I could at least maintain, and I did better than that.

**You also joined the army.**

I went into advanced ROTC because I could get fifty dollars a month, and that would pay for my art and architectural supplies. So I ended up in the army. Later I got into Rice University in Houston on a scholarship. Lucky, lucky guy. Once again, I didn't want to embarrass either this institution or myself by not being at least a middle-level achiever, if not the top achiever. I was thrown into a class at Rice with designers who went on to lead big architectural firms throughout the United States, so I had to find my niche. After Rice, during the height of the Vietnam War, the army sent me to Germany for three years.

While I was there, I visited museums and saw a lot of Dutch still life paintings. I reveled in the clarity of the objects in those huge paintings, and how those artists told complex stories through their seemingly straightforward subjects.

After my time in Germany, I received a two year scholarship to Princeton, where I had the most incredible experiences you can imagine. By this time, I'd gotten married and had a three year old. I assumed that once I had finished my schooling, I would just go back to Meridian, Mississippi and work for [local architect] Mr. Clopton and eventually take over his three man office.

But my first job out of Princeton was in midtown Manhattan, where I joined the New York office of the largest firm in the United States at the time. I was part of a small team who designed Manhattan Community College, which is a million square feet. It's five blocks long.

Then I just kept going. A few jobs later, I became a partner in the continuation of the office of Mies van der Rohe.

**Okay, wow!**

There I was, just a poor boy polio victim from Mississippi, right in the middle of all this.

**Wait. You had polio?**

Yes. I was in sixth grade, and the miracle of it is that two days after I was infected, my family physician had come back from the first polio conference ever held in the United States. He examined me, and he looked at my mother and said, "I can't believe this, but Laurin has polio." So he picked up the phone and called across the state to

Vicksburg, where the Sisters of Charity hospital was. That was the only place where they treated polio in the state of Mississippi. So the next morning, I was screaming in the back seat as my parents drove me to Vicksburg. The nuns immediately let me in, and four months later, I walked out.

*Six Reasons.* 20x24.

**Amazing. Oh my gosh.**

When I was in quarantine, the nurses told my mother that any toys I brought in with me would eventually have to be destroyed because they didn't know how contagious or non-contagious polio was. We didn't have money for toys in the first place, much less those that had to be destroyed, but my mother, sweet and smart lady that she was, bought a ream of typing paper, two #2 pencils, and a sharpener for me. I was in a small room by myself with a big window on one side. When my mother came to visit, we communicated through the glass. If I looked through that glass window into the next room, which was a great big bay, I saw fifteen iron lungs with people in them.

My cousins and I used to have a rainy day game where we drew cowboys and Indians, so that's what I did when I was in quarantine. My cousins got together and wrote to all of our cowboy movie heroes saying, "Our cousin Laurin has polio. Would you send him a picture?" So by the time I got out of there, I had a whole wall of pictures from Roy Rogers and other stars. All of them were signed to me. And of course, all of them were burned when I left.

**Oh no!**

Too bad.

**You went on to have a distinguished 40-year professional career as the head of marketing for architectural and engineering firms, and you traveled extensively for your work.**

I accumulated 6 million miles on American Airlines.

**This allowed you to see great art in the museums of the world, and eventually you took your first formal watercolor class at age 60. Could you describe some of the beginning projects Gwen Bragg had you work on at the Art League in Alexandria, Virginia?**

I was working in Washington, DC, just down the street from the Torpedo Factory. Torpedoes were manufactured there during the first and second world wars. It sat idle for a number of years, and then it was converted to an art center. I would go there quite often, and I would see these fabulous watercolors.

I attended a six-week Sunday evening class. Gwen Bragg created little five-by-six paintings, and her mix of beginners and intermediates duplicated them. There's waves, there's sky, and it was all very well thought out. The first words out of her mouth were, "If you've never taken a class from me, then you're a beginner." And I said, "Miss Bragg, I want you to take a look at my drawings. I think I'm competent enough to paint with your intermediate group." And she said, "You've never taken a class from me, but how about this? You can do both groups' projects." Years later, I went with her and a group of ladies to Greece for a week to do plein air painting, and when she looked at what I was doing, she said, "Now the student is teaching the teacher."

## Part 2: *"Talk about an opportunity."*

*Yellow Day Lily.* 20x28.

**You've said the elements that go into making good architecture also apply to good paintings. Did you have to un-learn anything from your architectural training in order to work with watercolors?**

No, because none of that involved brushes and water. It was all drawing, so everything from my architectural training was directly applicable to watercolor. The architectural drawings I did were very precise, so the only way I can paint is very precise. I've tried to paint loose, and my head just doesn't work that way. My doctors tell me that at some point my hand might start to tremor as I age, so maybe one day I'll become a cubist.

**Your earliest still life watercolors featured flowers. Later you wanted to incorporate silver and crystal into your paintings but couldn't find any instruction on how to paint these with watercolor. How long did it take to teach yourself?**

Well, I know this sounds really weird, but it didn't take any time. I could just envision it. In Gwen Bragg's class, when she'd show us that day's subject, I drew it in a third of the time of anybody else. And then she would say, "Well, Laurin, here's how to wet your brush, and here's how to fade that edge." And I could just do it, no questions asked. I also realized that the major myth in watercolor is that if you make a mistake, you can't correct it. There's nothing further from the truth. Once I found out that I could correct anything I did, I was free. I don't have to correct many things, but if I do something that is not right, I know how to fix it, so I'm just free and easy out there.

**Given your background, were you tempted to paint city scenes or interiors a la Vermeer during those early days?**

No. I decided that I would pick a subject that would teach me to paint difficult things I was not familiar with. I'm very familiar with straight lines. I can create the most elaborate perspectives and the most complex pen and ink drawings. I decided that curves were my challenge, so that's why I picked florals. I figured that if I could master painting shadows on petals and leaves and things like that, I could master anything.

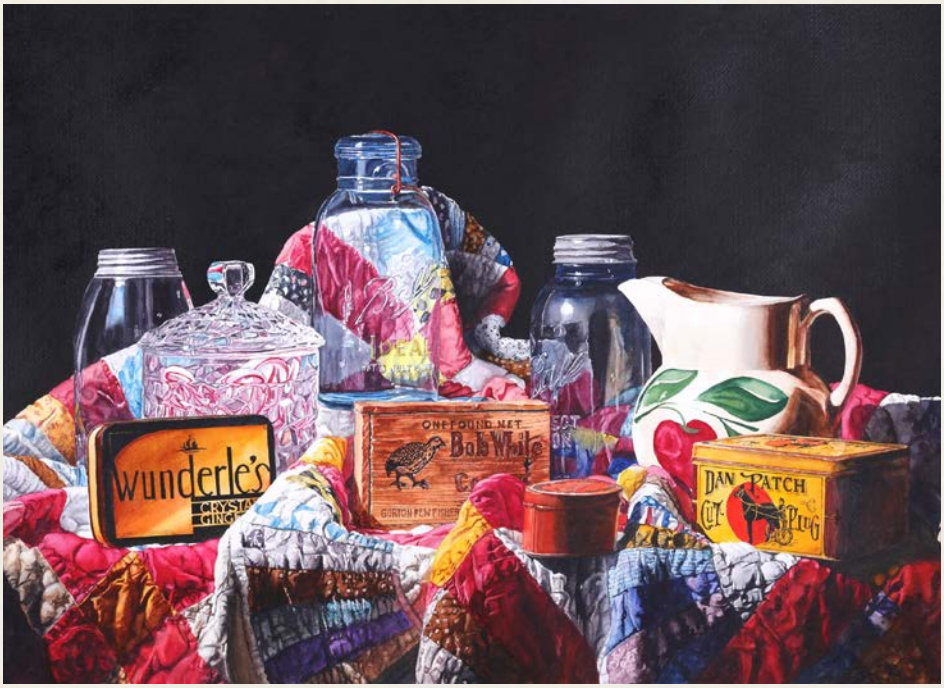
*Silver Service with Magnolia.* 20x26.

**You amassed a body of work before you began entering watercolor competitions, right?**

I eventually discovered that not only were there watercolor societies, but those watercolor societies had competitions, and if you were going to show people how good you were, that was the route you had to take. I had no idea there were over 263 watercolor societies.

I visit New Orleans every year or so, just to eat for a few days, and I became familiar with the work of Dean

Mitchell. He showed his paintings at the Blaine Gallery there. I bought one of his books, and his bio said that he was a signature member of sixteen watercolor societies. Well, that must be the standard, I thought, and I started entering competitions. The Tennessee Watercolor Society seemed like a good place to start. I entered two florals, and they both got in the show, even though only one was supposed to, and they jointly won first prize. Over the next four years, I didn't do anything but enter competitions, so that's how I ended up with sixteen signature memberships.




*Objects on a Quilt.* 21x29.

**Noticing that there was no shortage of floral watercolorists, you felt the need to find a unique subject to paint. You landed on subject matter inspired by the Dutch artists you admired during your time in Germany. And you asked yourself, "Is that level of realism possible with watercolor?"**

I was living in Mississippi at the time, and there was a lady friend. Everything involves the other sex, right? We hit it off. I moved down to live with her, and she had a rental house on her property. I used that as a studio. Her great grandparents and other relatives had come from Poland and places like that, and they had brought silver services, Chinese porcelains, and other beautiful objects. I started setting them up. I did one silver pot just to see if I could paint silver, and yeah, I could. And so the set ups became more and more complex. Then I started adding crystal because, you know, what can be more difficult than painting colors bouncing around in a cut crystal vase? And really, none of it was challenging. There's no two ways about it. I mean, I had to work hard at it, but it wasn't what I would call difficult.

**You also began submitting your work to American Artist and Watercolor Artist magazines and landed on their covers. Did you enter paintings in the magazines' various competitions, or did you pitch articles?**

One of the things I did for all of those architectural firms was to represent them to the press. And twice a year I went to New York and met with the senior editors of Architectural Record and other publications and showed them the projects we had coming down the pike. I knew how to talk to editors.

So I put together a portfolio of my florals and mailed them to Steve Doherty at American Artist. Of course, I didn't hear anything back. But three months later, I was in New York visiting those architectural magazine editors. It was coming up on lunchtime when I noticed that I was in the same building that housed American Artist magazine's headquarters. So I walked over to the secretary there, and I said, "Would you ask Mr. Doherty if he has a minute to see me?" And she got flustered, dialed his number, and handed me the phone. Talk about an opportunity. So I said, "Mr. Doherty, this is Laurin McCracken. I just had meetings with—" And I name-dropped two of the top editors of those architectural magazines, right? I'm not stupid.

And he said, "Laurin, you're not going to believe this. I've got your portfolio in the middle of my desk, and I've been studying it. But right now I have a meeting. In fact, I'm late." A moment later, he said, "I'm coming down." Two seconds later, he walked out of the elevator and said, "I really am late, late, late for a meeting. But I want to follow up, yes. I want to talk to you about an article." We shook hands and eventually ended up having a great telephone conversation. About two months later, I was back in New York. Steve and I went to lunch, and he

reached into his coat pocket, pulled out a roll of paper, and handed it to me. I took the rubber band off. It was an eight page article on me, and it was the cover story of the magazine.

**That's amazing.**

And this is what I keep telling people: you've just got to show up. You can't do it by letter. If you really want to get in somebody's mind, you've got to get in their face. Otherwise you're going to be just another person in the deck of cards that they're working with.

*Still Life on Hand Tied Rug.* 28x28.

**I don't think anyone can argue with your three basic things a painter needs: the ability to see in a fresh way, the realization that drawing is fundamental in all art, and the work involved to become a master of their craft. The last two things can be achieved with a certain amount of discipline, but the ability to see in a fresh way seems like something you either have or you don't. Do you agree with this?**

I believe that I was born with all of those things in my head because they've come to me so easily. I certainly believe that everything but inspiration can be learned. The problem is that most people are not willing to work hard and spend enough time to master their craft. They want to do it once or twice and say they've learned it. Then it becomes The Wreck of the Hesperus, and they can't figure out why they can't get from A to Z. That's because they went from A to B to F to Z.

**One of my favorite quotes from you is this: "Watercolor is a dance that involves the artist, the paint, the brush, and the paper. The artist must lead in this dance and hope that the very active elements of this medium will participate and enhance the effort. I enjoy the dance." When I look at your work, I see an artist who is in total control of this dance. Do you ever experience "happy accidents" when you paint? Do you ever allow your dance partner to lead for a while?**

Oh yeah, all the time. And they're little things. But I can spend all day on a drawing, put it on my painting table, and just immediately see three things that are wrong.

**You possess an enviable and some would say superhuman amount of energy. You show your paintings worldwide, and you're a sought-after juror and workshop instructor. I'm still astonished that you managed to bring Fabriano in Acquarello to Fort Worth in 2024, and I'm sure you did the lion's share of the work. Have you always been like this, or has your second career in art galvanized you in a special way?**

I have always been the guy who brings people together. I had a little rock band in high school, and later on I formed a Glenn Miller-style dance band. When I was in marketing, I invited the fifteen best marketers in the United States to come to a Holiday Inn in Florida and talk about how we market architectural engineering services.

And now, about every other month, I invite a group of artist friends to come to my house, and we talk about issues unique to watercolor and critique each other's work. I also have a Zoom group of a couple dozen artists who talk about what is happening in the art world today that's impacting either the business side of things or whatever is going on with us as a group.

## Part 3: *"It's about doing it in a better way."*

**You work on the tiniest and most complex details in your paintings, moving slowly and methodically while living inside these tiny worlds. Your paintings can take more than a hundred hours to complete. Can I ask you some questions as we walk through your process?**

Ask me anything.

**First you set up your still life arrangements and take photos. How long does this process last?**

Probably a couple of hours, I would say. This yields about 70 to 100 images, if I know what I'm looking for. If I go to somebody's house and they've got three or four things they want me to consider, I may come back with 300 or 400 images, but a lot of those are repeats or small adjustments.

**In recent years, you've started incorporating modern items.**

Oh yeah. That's what led me to work with aluminum foil. What could I paint that had today's product in it but also had a visual link to art history?

**Your pieces of fruit wrapped in plastic bags are at once humble and breathtaking.**

Exactly the same idea.

**After one lucky reference photo is selected, you use an LCD projector to trace the image onto your paper with a 2H mechanical pencil. When I first read that you work with a projector, I applauded. I feel like this is the equivalent of a movie star admitting to getting plastic surgery. Most of them do it, but they won't own up to it. And I'm guessing lots of artists use projectors, but I've only heard of a few of us who openly acknowledge this. Would you like to speak on that?**

*Four Pears on Foil.* 14x21.

*Pears In Plastic Bag.* 28x20.

Yes, and I have a good story. I did a step-by-step article for a watercolor magazine of one of my still lifes. In that article, I mentioned that I used a projector to create my paintings' preliminary drawings. After it was published, the editor called me and said, "Laurin, your use of projectors has produced more letters to the editor than anything I've ever seen at the magazine." And I asked, "Well, what are they saying?" She said, "The responses are about 50-50. Half of them are damning you, and half are saying, finally, somebody is willing to admit to this." So the reason she was calling was not only to report that, but she also said that she had been talking with other artists in other mediums who use projectors. So she selected six of us to do an article for The Artist's Magazine, and all of us told our projection stories. So for years, I walked around waving that article at people.

*Glassware and Silver on Granite.* 13x28.

**You begin painting the things that define the picture, such as clementines that will be seen reflected onto pewter objects in other parts of the painting. After that, do you have a system that tells you what objects to paint next?**

I work left to right. Overriding that, I paint the most difficult thing first. And if there's something in there that I've never painted before, I'll paint that first. Now, since I've done plenty of these foil things, I typically paint the objects that have multiple layers of color and work with wet-into-wet first. Then once they're absolutely dry, I can mask out that grouping and start on one edge of the foil and go around to the other. And I do the black background last.

**You cover your entire painting surface with lightweight tracing paper to protect it from splatter. Then you cut out openings where you will be painting that day "much as a surgeon drapes a patient for an operation." This is ingenious. When did you begin doing that?**

In architecture, when you're working on a huge drawing, you mask it with tracing paper so you don't smear the areas you've spent two weeks on. The tracing paper is sort of translucent, so you can always relate what's underneath it to what you're doing as a whole. I'm all about using any tool that will get me there, but it's not about speed. It's about doing it in a better way that makes the job easier and makes the painting process more enjoyable.

**What is your favorite part of the painting process?**

Oh, I love the whole thing. There's no one part. It's such a progression from the time I'm considering an object to the point where the painting is finished.

**Have you ever trashed a painting that just didn't work?**

No. Since I've been painting seriously, I've never started a painting that I didn't finish and wasn't pleased with.

**Do you work on multiple paintings at the same time?**

I almost always have three or four in progress. I typically have two drawn, so when I'm painting one, I'm not thinking about the other. But you know, if I'm driving or something, I might start thinking about the second painting. So by the time I start that second painting, mentally I'm already into it.

**You've said you like to work with warm water…?**

This is another thing I've learned. One day I was painting in the dead of winter. The tap water was cold as could be, and my paint was just not behaving itself. And so I said, let me try something. I went back to the sink and

let the water run until it was warm, filled my two containers, and took them back. Bingo. It was dead on. It's the second law of thermodynamics: things tend to go into solution faster the higher the temperature.

**Escoda created a set of three watercolor brushes selected by you (Versatil synthetic Kolinsky round brushes in sizes #4, #6, and #10). Do you use those brushes most of the time?**

Brushes are the biggest issue out there. There are good paints, and we have lots of papers to choose from, but finding the right brushes is a real problem, and they're very personal.

I happen to like Escoda brushes because they are the only people who still make them by hand. My view is that an Escoda brush has a soul.

While I use the Versatil brushes, most of the time I paint with their Chronos range. I typically use #4, #6, #8, and #10 round brushes, and for big areas, I use larger flats. Like every other artist, I probably have 400 brushes, and people like to send me stuff. I'll put those on the shelf, because nothing's going to compete with what I already use, and I'm not going to relearn what I know on a free brush just for their benefit.

In my workshops, if I see somebody who has potential, but they're struggling because they're using the wrong brush, I have the ability to give them an Escoda Versatil or two and say, "Why don't you try these?" What a difference that makes.

*Clementines with Pewter.* 21x24.

**What is an average painting day like for you?**

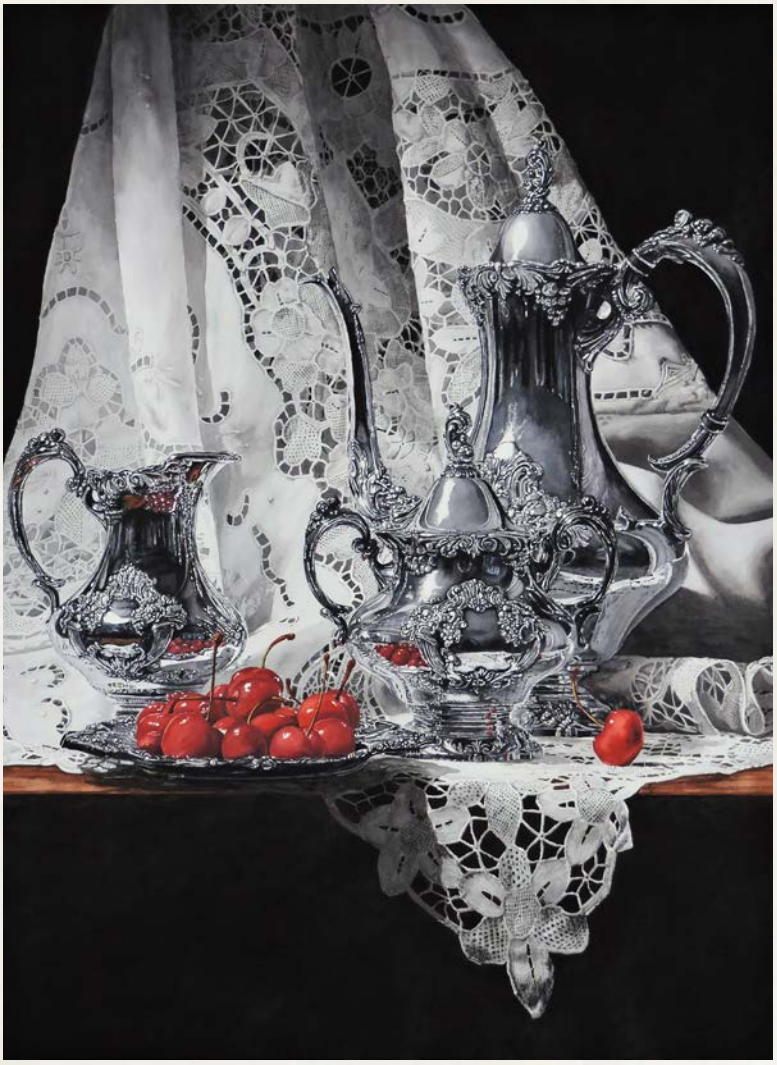
Every now and then I'll have an ideal day. By nine o'clock, I've had my coffee, I've looked at the emergency emails, and I'm in my studio. The water in my paint containers is warm and ready to paint with. I paint pretty continuously all morning without any interruptions except for changing my water, and I do that a lot.

I'll have a quick lunch for fifteen minutes. I mean, I eat for sustenance, and some days I don't eat lunch at all. I'll just drink a glass of water and try to lie down for about fifteen or twenty minutes. And then I'll work for two or three hours in the afternoon. If I'm really into something that's very detailed, like a lace tablecloth, I may continue to work on that. But if it's time to move on to a new section, I'll use the afternoon to get the painting ready for the next day. I don't ever start anything that's new and fresh in the afternoon, such as the next pear, for instance, or a new bit of foil. If I'm lost in an area of foil I've started, I can still continue, because my mind is already in that place.

And then at 4:30 or so, I'll stop and carefully clean the brushes I've used so they're ready for the next day. I'll make sure my materials are back where they're supposed to be. I'll put the the #6 back where I keep the #6, so the next day I won't have to wonder where it is. The place I paint is very small, and it's like the cockpit of an airplane. I know where that X-Acto blade is. I don't have to look around. All I have to do is lean back and pick it up. Some people might think I'm crazy in this regard, but for me it's about being efficient and being able to move forward at a pace that is comfortable.

At 5:00, I'll fix myself a scotch, get a small bowl of really fine mixed nuts, and sit and read for an hour and a half. And then I'll fix my little dinner.

## Part 4: *"What to call it?"*



*Black, White and Red.* 38x28.

**You're famous for your deep, velvety black backgrounds. A twenty minute video exists of you mixing different Daniel Smith watercolors to create just the right black to suit your needs.**

**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ztc6Xjmsccc**

**A few years after making that video, you partnered with the people at Daniel Smith to create "McCracken Black." What was that experience like?**

Oh, that was such a fun thing. Well, it evolved from a telephone call I got from [DS owner and CEO] John Cogley, and he's such a nice guy. He's the calmest person I've ever met. And he called me and said, "Laurin, I just read somewhere that you mix your black. We make five blacks, and one of them might work." I said, "Well, John, most blacks are made from dyes where the base is purple. What I found was that if I'm painting a silver picture, when I feather out that gray, it turns purple, and silver is not purple. I also found that your blacks are too opaque for me. I want to be able to layer things up." I told him that I was using eight or nine different DS colors to mix a black that worked for me.

About a month later, he called me and said, "I've been thinking about our conversation about black. How would you like to work with my two scientists? Let's develop a black that meets your criteria." And you know, I'm levitating off the floor. So for the next four or five months, those guys went to work. They would bring out some paints, add more colors, or take other colors away. About every other week, they'd send me a little jar of it, I'd test it and tell them what I thought about it, and they'd change it. And it was so much fun.

**It's almost like you were developing a perfume.**

Exactly, exactly. And these guys are such experts, and they're nice people. It was such a pleasure. And finally, I approved their black. Later on they were in a marketing meeting. What to call it? So they phoned me and said they had narrowed it down to Laurin Black or McCracken Black. Did I like either one of those, and which one did I prefer? So I immediately said I liked the sound of McCracken Black. And that was the one they liked, too. Since then, they've told me a couple of times that it's one of the largest selling colors in the Dan Smith line internationally.

**I was fascinated to learn that your black backgrounds begin with a colorful underpainting that echoes a color featured elsewhere in the picture. It's often difficult to perceive this when your work is printed in magazines or**

**shown in small reproductions online. In those formats, your backgrounds look like the darkest blacks imaginable. Can viewers pick up on your underpainting colors when they view your watercolors in real life?**

Even the finest papers in the world, which I think are Fabriano Artistico, have spots where, after they're run through that great big twenty-ton machine, the sizing doesn't catch. In one of those small indentions, even in soft press paper, there's going to be a granule of sizing that didn't completely dissolve and is caught in the paper. Early on, when I painted my black backgrounds, I'd see white pin holes. So how do you find and correct those pinholes before you paint an area black? Because it's very difficult to correct them later. So my solution was to put a quick wash of whatever I had in excess on my palette, and that helped me find the pinholes. If it was just a little well, I'd fill it with the tip of my brush. And if it was a case of a little too much sizing, I'd wiggle the tip of my brush and dissolve it. No big deal.

*Jars on Quilt.* 28x20.

Then I found out that the blacks I painted over those pinhole-finding layers were sort of translucent. When I held the painting up, I could not necessarily see, but I could feel the underpainting through the black. I experimented with that. With a silver still life, I used a phthalo blue as that underpainting. And when I put black on top of it, the silver looked more metallic. But if I had a flower or two that I wanted to enrich in a field of glass and silver, and the underpainting was an Aussie red, those flowers would just glow. And you can walk into a show of my paintings and never see that, but you can feel it, and when I point it out to you, you say, "Aha!"

**So many of us struggle to create flat, streak-free, dark backgrounds. Could you please explain your scumbling technique? Because when I watched you do this in the aforementioned video, your solution seemed positively revolutionary.**

Scumbling helps you create a texture like velvet, and nobody's ever heard of scumbling. It's a drawing technique from my architecture days. You use it to make gray backgrounds by moving the pencil in different directions every time you put it down on the paper. When people try to create a smooth gray background, most of them move the pencil in a single direction, but you can still see their pencil marks. And so what I'm trying to do with scumbling when I paint is to recreate that velvety texture where nothing lines up in the direction of the light. You know, it's tedious. It takes a lot of time. You have to be really patient, but it actually makes it easier to see the underpainting behind the black.

**What size of brush do you use with your scumbling technique?**

I use an old #10 round Kalinsky. Yet people try to do it with a hog brush or a stiff synthetic. No, you want a really soft brush.

**Does this technique result in backgrounds that are considered transparent by a certain watercolor society whose annual exhibitions are held in Kenosha, Wisconsin?**

Yes. I pretty consistently have had paintings that were good enough to be accepted for that show. Many times.

## Part 5: *"Some days it's so much fun to be me."*

**How has watercolor instruction and the community in general changed since you began painting? Would a 60 year-old Laurin have preferred to enter the world of watercolor in 2026?**

Well, you know, that's hard to imagine, because everything happened for me at just the right time and in the right place.

One of the things that I love about the watercolor community is that the artists are just so bloody generous. You'd think a guy like John Salminen, who is sort of the patriarch of of watercolor–

*Chair.* 25x20.

**He's a silverback.**

Yeah, very good! He's the silverback of all of us, although I'm a lot older. He's such a role model, and you might assume he'd be a crotchety guy. But he's just the sweetest big bear. If you see him at TWSA and say, "John, I really like that painting, but I have a question about the background. How did you handle that?" He'll say, "Well, I've got a minute here. Let me show you how to do that." No other group of artists shares secrets like that. It's really just watercolorists, and we do it universally. We do it in Pakistan, we do it in Italy, we do it in Belarus. We do it everywhere. And I think it's just magic, and that's one of the reasons why Fabriano in Acquarello has been so successful. You mix all of these people from so many different ethnicities and backgrounds and education levels, and it's a love fest. It's why you want to go to TWSA or Watercolor USA. Maybe you've got a picture in the show, or maybe you've won an award, but more than anything else, it's about a group of compadres getting together and sharing ideas and just seeing each other's faces.

**Would you like to share your thoughts about the future of watercolor?**

It's golden. It's absolutely golden.

The average woman who buys her first brush is in her late forties and early fifties. Her children are grown, and she's got time and is looking for something to do. The average man purchases his first brush at 63. The last three to four years after Covid have seen the highest sales of watercolors and watercolor-related art materials in history.

So there are a lot of people who cry that watercolor is a lost art. Nobody's painting anymore. But the fact is, it's the other way around. More people are painting with watercolor now than ever before.

**Your innovations were a giant step forward for watercolor realism, and your influence on watercolor still life painters is obvious and far-reaching. Are you flattered by your imitators? Or do you wish they'd find their own niche?**

Yeah. I wish they would think before they paint. My best story is about someone I ran into who had taken one of my workshops. And she was eager to show me that she had copied a painting of mine, and my only thought was, you know, Why didn't you take it to the next level? Why didn't you make a better Laurin McCracken and not just copy me? I didn't say that to her. I just said, "Oh, that's lovely," and walked away.

**How many paintings do you produce during a typical year?**

Well, I only paint about ten paintings per year, and that's only because some of them are quarter sheets. I've selected four shows I want to enter this year, so right this minute I'm working on four paintings for those shows. I'm always pleased just to get into a show, and if I win an award that's gravy on the mashed potatoes. I just need something to put in my CV every year.

So it's worth doing, and it keeps my name out there. If you're going to be a professional, you can't not do things like that. And this is what I stress to people in my classes and to my contemporaries: you're not going to win if you don't enter, right? And if you enter and don't get accepted, what can you learn from that?

**Do you feel pressured to continue to top yourself?**

Oh, to some degree, of course. It's part of being a professional, although every now and then I paint something just for the fun of it. I paint what I want to paint. And I think that's really important for every artist. If it's a burden, why are you doing it?

We had a Christmas party for the local watercolor society and had a white elephant gift exchange. I was sitting there with some people I know. This lady came and flopped down next to me, and she was a chatterbox, going on and on. She turned to me, and she asked, "Do you paint?" And I said, "Let me introduce myself. I'm Laurin McCracken." And she paused and said, "Oh my god."

**Well, you're the Beatles, you know.**

Don't say that.

**No, you are!**

Well, she jumped up, got her camera, and said, "I've got to have a selfie with you to show my husband!" That kind of overreacting? I don't like it, but I don't want to be in their faces about who I am. At the same time, I want

*Still Life with Silver.* 28x40.

*Moroccan Brass.* 20x25.

them to know that I'm participating in what they're doing. And that's why I try to go to all the demos and all the meetings of my local watercolor society, just to be there to support them.

And well, some days it's just so much fun to be me.

**That should be the headline for this interview. The Watercolor Honor Society will present you with its Lifetime Achievement award at Watercolor USA in late May. You've received so many accolades over the years—is this one special?**

Oh yes. You know it's a two-sided coin, of course. If you call it a Lifetime Achievement, does that mean this is the end? Because that's the implication. I am so flattered to be recognized, and I'm very appreciative of my peers on the board that I have spent so much time with since I joined them something like twelve years ago.

It's going to be interesting to see what I say when I get to the event, because right now I'm scratching my head. I think I'll just talk about my paintings, but we'll see.

**Thank you for all the work you did for the WHS in those years before I joined.**

That's why we do these things, you know. I don't do it for myself. I do it for other people. Because over the course of my entire life, I've been very lucky to have mentors who were so gracious to me. I feel this absolute need to pass that on, whether it's art, architecture, sharpening pencils, or whatever it is. I need to share that knowledge.

**About the author:** Kelly Eddington is a signature member of the American Watercolor Society, the National Watercolor Society, the Transparent Watercolor Society of America, the Southern Watercolor Society, the Illinois Watercolor Society, and the Watercolor Honor Society.

# An Invitation to Scale Up by Cynthia Kukla

My completed art installation, *Altar of Peace II (Ara Pacis) Or Mommy, Why Does Everybody Have a Gun?*

An extraordinary opportunity landed at my feet. Art curator Ena Nearon asked me to present my *Altar of Peace* painting and sculpture installation as a focal point in the major exhibit "Rooms of Grief" that ultimately featured fifty-six artists at the Kennedy Heights Arts Center here in Cincinnati. This installation consists of a faux-fireplace mantle I reconfigured as an altar. I silver-leafed and then painted a representation of one of the relief panels of the Altar of Peace (Ara Pacis) in Rome. I also gathered over 150 expired rose bouquets from various Kroger floral departments in my area. A key feature was a QR code linking to a spreadsheet on mass shootings in America since Columbine.

I did a site visit to meet with Ena and the Center's curator Mallory Feltz and pick a location for the *Altar* installation. There was space between two pillars above where the *Altar* would be, and they asked if I would like to utilize the space. Of course! I said I would make a watercolor painting connected to the theme of the *Altar*.

I decided to fill the entire space – seventy-seven by fifty-one inches - using Arches roll paper, which made this the largest individual watercolor I have ever painted. It was a glorious experience. I settled on a gentle photographic image I took at the temple site of Dion, Greece to complement the imagery and theme of my installation. I decided to use the revered English method of deploying indigo blue and Indian red. After one quick, small study, I jumped in, time being a factor! I chose the English Method to convey sadness, a memorial, and a reflection on lives lost. The only other English Method watercolor I've made was a postcard-sized study while we waited on the tarmac at O'Hare Airport. I can't explain why I wasn't more nervous to be working so large and with such a limited palette, but each time I applied a layer, I became more and more excited about how lush and disciplined the English method is. I also knew I would use collage. It is a common strategy with my watercolors to sometimes use laser-cut collage elements to give my paintings that feature figures from ancient Greek mythology a contemporary edge, both ancient and modern.

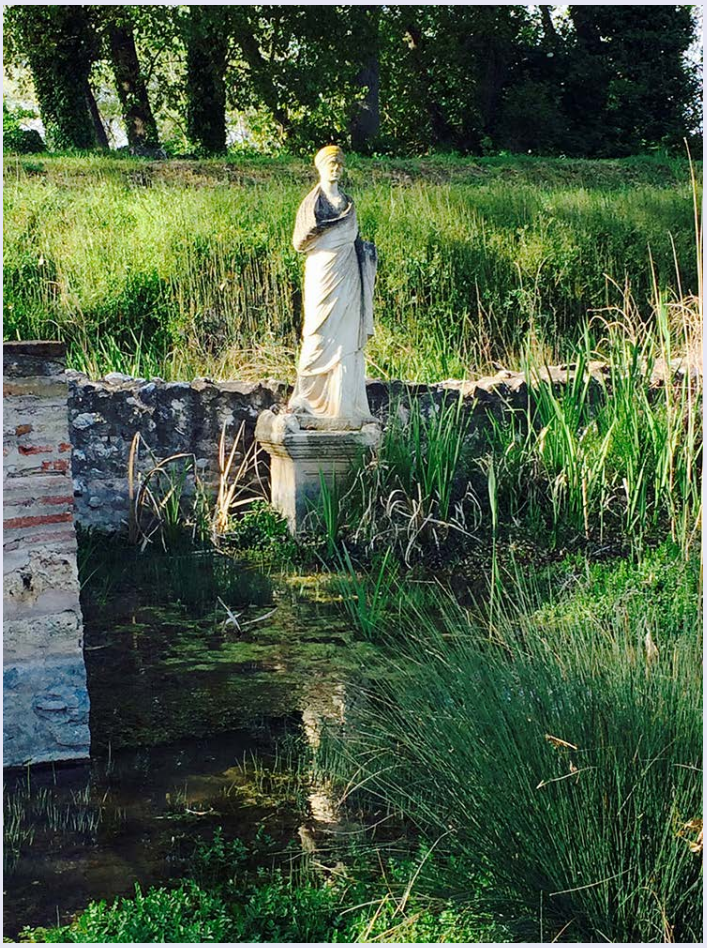
It is likely that my depiction of the Sanctuary of **Isis** Tyche and Aphrodite Hypolympiada at Dion offered up so much meaning and symbolism that the painting made itself. In these little temples at Dion, springs are still active. In the cult of Isis, water was given a sacred meaning that was tied to birth, and it also symbolizes the Nile River. When I was painting at Dion in person during a visiting professorship, frogs sang and gorgeous birds flew about. It was the most spiritual and mystical site I've painted at during my travels throughout Greece and Crete. Somehow these feelings and memories must have been carried into the present when I painted this large watercolor in my studio in Cincinnati.

Silver-leafing the altar in my studio

For a bit of technical information, I hung the huge piece unframed, rather like a tapestry would hang. I gessoed a strip on the top and bottom of the back of my painting and attached Velcro to the wall and the top and bottom of the back of the watercolor. This worked perfectly. The gesso acted as a neutral barrier so that no glue from the Velcro might migrate to the front of the painting. I plan on making more large watercolors that I will present in this way.

Curator Ena Nearon prepared a guide for viewers to familiarize them with the complexities of an installation such as mine. She wrote:

*Cynthia Kukla's work brings ancient history into direct conversation with the present moment. Drawing from classical architecture, myth, ritual, and symbolism, she creates contemporary spaces that invite reflection, mourning, and renewal. Her practice is rooted in the belief that the past and present are not separate, but woven together—each informing how we understand loss, responsibility, and hope today.*



A small part of the temple sanctuary showing the natural spring

The Altar of Peace *series emerged from a personal and moral imperative: to respond to collective trauma with an act of care. Following the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Kukla felt compelled to create a space that could hold grief, remembrance, and protest simultaneously. The altar became a visual and emotional offering—an invitation to pause, to witness, and to remember lives lost to violence.*

*Constructed from salvaged and reclaimed materials, each altar reflects Kukla's commitment to environmental responsibility and ethical making. Discarded architectural fragments, expired roses, and cast-off materials are transformed into sacred forms, suggesting that even what is overlooked or abandoned can carry meaning, beauty, and dignity.*

The finished 51 x 77" watercolor on Arches paper, the final component of the *Altar of Peace* installation

The Altar of Peace *draws inspiration from the ancient Roman Ara Pacis, a monument dedicated to peace and civic responsibility. Throughout history, altars have served as places of offering, remembrance, and transformation—sites where the personal and communal intersect. Kukla reimagines this tradition for our time, creating contemporary memorial spaces that respond to ongoing violence, public loss, and collective grief.*

*Roses play a central role in the work. In classical antiquity, roses were placed on graves during the Rosalia, a ritual honoring the dead and symbolizing renewal. Kukla incorporates hundreds of dried roses—many donated by local florists—forming rivers of color that reference mourning, memory, and the human impulse to bring flowers to places of loss. Viewers are invited to participate by leaving flowers or written messages, transforming the altar into a living, shared act of remembrance.*

*The beauty of the* Altar of Peace *is intentional.*

*By presenting materials associated with tragedy in a visually luminous and reverent form, Kukla creates a deliberate contrast—one that asks us to hold grief without surrendering to despair. The altar does not offer answers, but it offers space: a place to reflect, to honor, and to imagine peace as an active, ongoing responsibility.*

**About the author:** Cynthia Kukla, artist, art critic and watercolor educator, is serving as WHS Secretary for the second time. An emerita professor of art, she's the recipient of a writer's grant from Write-On in Door County, WI. She has had numerous visiting professorships in Europe and Asia.

# WHS MEMBERS ACCEPTED INTO WCUSA 2026

*Please join us in congratulating the WHS Members accepted into Watercolor USA 2026!*

SUZANNE ACCETTA
MARILYNNE BRADLEY
NEL DORN BYRD
KEN CLUBB
KATHLEEN CONOVER
GAIL DELGER
L S ELDRIDGE
ALICIA FARRIS
KAREN FREY
KATHLEEN GILES
BEV JOZWIAK
CINDY KOPENHAFER
HOWARD KUO
VICKY LILLA
LEA MAGRUDER
SANDY MEYER
ANN PEMBER
SUSAN PUELZ
MARGARET SCANLAN
BETH SHADUR
JENNIFER SOWDERS
MONTE TOON
LEE WALTER

MILES BATT 2
JESSICA BRYANT
LANA CEASE
RACHEL COLLINS
WAYNE CONYERS
KELLY EDDINGTON
LISA ENGLANDER
KRISTINE FRETHEIM
JANE FRITZ
MARY JANSEN
JOHN KEELING
CHRIS KRUPINSKI
ALEXIS LAVINE
NICK LONG
ANNI MATSICK
MARY JANE MOONEYHAM
TRISH POUPARD
DEBORA REED
FRED SCHOLLMEYER
ALISA SHEA
EILEEN SUDZINA
CARMELLA TULISZEWSKI
STEPHAN ZHANG

# Memorials

**Reita Walker Miller *1946-2024***

Arkansas artist Reita Walker Miller of Little Rock died peacefully on July 2, 2024, surrounded by family, following an unexpectedly short battle with cancer. Reita Ann Walker was born on August 12, 1946, in Springhill, LA., to Rosalie and Hewie Walker. From a young age, Reita was fascinated with colors, lines, and shapes. As one dear friend noted, "Reita was an artist before she was ever a painter." An English teacher at Mabelvale High School first recognized Reita's artistic inclination and "opened up the world of art" by introducing books on artists like Van Gogh and Matisse, but the Little Rock girl didn't see art as a practical career.

After earning a degree in deaf education from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, marrying, and starting a family, Reita took her first watercolor class from well-known watercolor artist Doris Mapes, who opened the gate to a life-long passion for painting. Reita's curiosity, passion for learning, and dedication to her craft earned her numerous awards and recognition from peers and collectors. She was an early signature member and past president of the Mid-Southern Watercolorists. She was a signature member of the American Watercolor Society, the Rocky Mountain Watercolor Society, the National Watercolor Society, and the Watercolor Honor Society. Though her paintings are included in over 350 museums and corporate and private collections, Reita said, "One of the most fulfilling things about my work is when it takes on a new life and becomes a part of a family."

Work by Reita Walker Miller

Reita was an educator, connector of people, and passionate supporter of unsung Arkansas artists. She was appointed the first Arkansas Art Coordinator for the Butler Center for the Arts (created to help protect and preserve the artistic heritage of the state). During her tenure, Reita helped facilitate a powerful exhibit of never-before-seen images of Arkansas photographer Paul Faris. These featured renowned Japanese-American artist Henry Sugimoto during his family's confinement at the Rohwer internment camp in southeast Arkansas.

Reita will be remembered for her deep empathy, loyal friendship, silliness, and great emotional investment in Razorback basketball.

**Sandra Sue Schaffer (Effertz) *1947-2025***

Sandra Sue Schaffer (Effertz) died of cancer on December 23, 2025. Sandy died as she had hoped: peacefully, without pain, and surrounded by family in a bed in the front room of the house she built and decorated 37 years ago. In the mornings, she watched the sunrise through the trees in her backyard. When the sun went down, she fell asleep to a fire burning in the fireplace. Sandy leaves her daughter, Kristen, her son, Scott, her brothers, Bob and Steve, her grandsons, Sergio and Ceasar, and her husband, Larry.

Born in 1947, Sandy was a much-revered school teacher, a nationally known watercolor artist, and, more importantly, a loving mom, grandmother, sister, and wife. She earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri at Columbia and a master's degree from Central Missouri State University.

Sandy was a signature member of twenty watercolor societies, including the National Watercolor Society, the Transparent Watercolor Society of America, and the Watercolor Honor Society, where she served as a board member and the newsletter editor for nine years and president for four years. Sandy was also a member of the Missouri Watercolor Society's board of directors.

She was the recipient of many honors and awards, including a purchase award from the Kansas Watercolor Society and a place in the Japan Watercolor Federation/WHS Exchange. She presented eleven one person shows throughout the United States. Her work was featured in several editions of *Splash*, she was a cover artist for the Daniel Smith art supply catalog, and Watercolor Magic Magazine named her one of "Sixteen of Today's Best Painters" in 2002. She was a popular juror of selection and awards at Watercolor USA and other exhibitions.

*Colors of Guatamala* by Sandra Sue Schaffer (Effertz)

Her paintings are in numerous private and public collections, including Koch Industries, the University of Kansas Medical Center, H&R Block, and the Overland Park Arts Commission. Her work was displayed in countless group exhibitions throughout the United States and in Tokyo, Japan, Seoul, Korea, and Fabriano, Italy.

Sandra Schaffer had this to say about her watercolors:

*I have always been a painter who emphasizes color, texture, detail, movement and the play of light on surfaces in my work. I love watercolor's ability to make a painting "glow" in a way so similar to the stained glass windows I once designed. I also appreciate the difficulties and challenges it provides, and I find the painting process with this medium to be both stimulating and satisfying. The goal in many of my paintings has been to translate the beautiful colors, textures and forms found in third world countries in Asia and South America into works of art. I'm often drawn to subjects that are "close to the earth" and display the dignity and beauty of these less-Westernized cultures. In technique my work tends to be very detailed with an emphasis on brilliant color, and my style is often described as hyperrealism. The challenge has always been to find clean color glazes that create vibrant effects and the illusion of dimension, depth, and intensity on a two dimensional surface. However, my ultimate goal is to reach beyond the subject matter to draw the viewer in emotionally.*

## Susan Jan Amstater Schwartz ***1941-2025***

Work by Susan Jan Amstater Schwartz

Susan Jan Amstater Schwartz passed away peacefully in her sleep with her family by her side on January 19, 2025. Susan was born in El Paso, Texas, on February 21,1941, to Joseph M. Amstater of El Paso and Olive Shirlee Zemansky Amstater of Los Angeles, California. Susan grew up in El Paso's Upper Valley, where she attended Zach White Elementary and El Paso High School. After high school, she moved to Boulder to attend the University of Colorado before relocating to Los Angeles, where she continued her art studies at UCLA and the Otis Art Institute, earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree.

After graduating, Susan returned to El Paso, where she married Irving Troutman "Mickey" Schwartz and had two sons, Scott and Doug. Susan's life revolved around her family, her love of horses (a passion shared with her mother), and her art, where she found a profound means of self-expression. Susan once wrote: "To me, painting is more than a language. It is a feeling. The essence of what I paint is color, shape, and value used to create symbolism and vibration."

Her art has been showcased in galleries, exhibitions, and collections across the United States, including Nedra Matteucci Fine Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the Texas Governor's Mansion, and the United States Pentagon, where one of her paintings was tragically destroyed in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Susan was also a signature member of the National Watercolor Society.

One of Susan's notable achievements was being the featured artist for the 1999 season poster of the Santa Fe Opera, a milestone she shared with artists who inspired her, such as Georgia O'Keeffe. She also co-created and illustrated three books with her dear friends Jacquelyn Stroud Spier, Connie Dillman, and Dorothy Ann Leach: *Desert Echo: Women Illuminate the Sacred, Yes, We Are Still Dancing,and As-Is*. After a walking and cooking tour of Italy, Susan published *Italy: A Joy Expressed*, a book of recipes and paintings.

She and her husband Mickey shared a love for travel, spending months on fly-fishing and trekking trips in Montana and New Zealand. They also visited the Kingdom of Bhutan as guests of the Bhutanese Royal Family, where they experienced the country before it opened to Western tourism. Susan generously volunteered her time to various El Paso organizations, including the Junior League of El Paso and the El Paso Zoo. She was inducted into the El Paso Artists' Hall of Fame in 2000, and her art was often donated to support fundraising efforts for many causes.

# Member Achievements

Annie Strack

**Annie Strack** was an invited Master Artist in the 7th Watercolor International Exhibition in Greece, and she won an honorable mention award in the Pennsylvania Watercolor Society Annual Member Exhibition. Her paintings were also juried into the Silk Road 11th Biennial International Exhibition in China, Northeast Watercolor Society 49th International Exhibition, Western Federation Watercolor Society 51st National Juried Exhibition, Philadelphia Watercolor Society 125th International Exhibition, Colorado Watercolor Society 34th National Juried Exhibition, 49th Southern Watercolor Society Exhibition, Georgia Watercolor Society Juried Member Exhibit, Southwest Watercolor Society 62nd Member Exhibition, Plein Air magazine, and Fine Art Connoisseur magazine. Additionally, Strack was judge of awards for the Philadelphia Watercolor Society's Annual Member Exhibition.

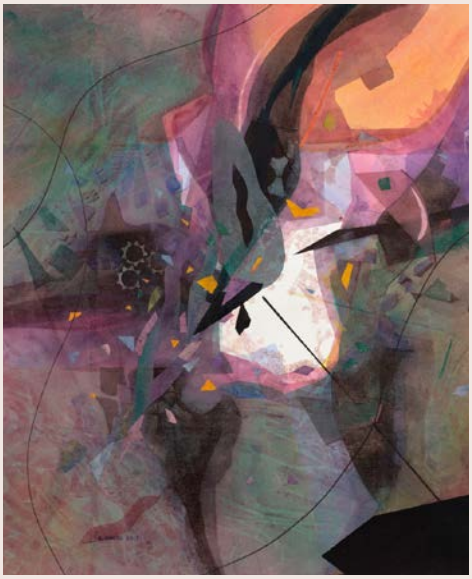
Christine Buth Furness

**Christine Buth Furness** received a bronze award in the 12th Artist Invitational at the Camelback Gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona. The exhibit runs through June. The painting is titled "*Storm Passing East*" and it's a transparent watercolor. Furness is also featured in the April 2026 issue of Wisconsin Visual Artists.

**Gary Johnson** was recently awarded the bronze award at the Mid-Southern Watercolorists 56th Annual Juried Exhibition for his painting titled *Fragmented*. Gary also won third place in the recently completed West Texas Watercolor Societies 3rd Annual Signature Show for *Ponder on It.* He was selected as a finalist in *Splash 27: The Best of Watercolor* for his painting titled *Graceful Flow Amid Chaos.*

Jennifer Sowders

**Jennifer Sowders** has a feature in the April/May 2026 Edition of International Artist Magazine: "On Location: Jennifer Sowders." (If you aren't a subscriber, you can view online by registering and then view 3 free articles a month: https://www.internationalartist.com/issues/168/On-Location)



Gary Johnson

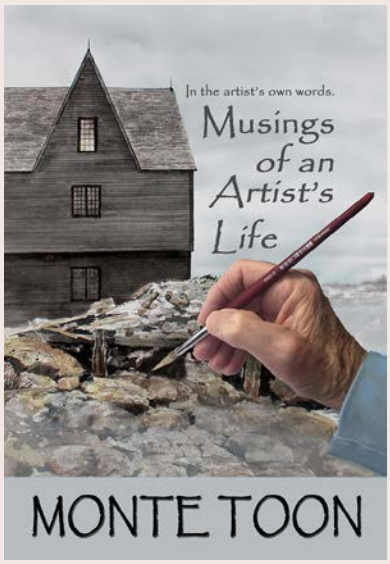
John Hewitt

Kelly Eddington

**John Hewitt** celebrated five successful years hosting a painting retreat on the Mendocino coast, and this year's event at a 24 room resort complex is sold out from August 9 - 14. John also won best of show at the 2024 Capitola Plein Air competition.

**Kelly Eddington** became a signature member of the American Watercolor Society. Her painting, *Visionary: Ann Miller Titus*, received the Lena Newcastle award at the annual AWS exhibition. Eddington also received the bronze award from the Southern Watercolor Society's 49th exhibition and a viewers' choice award at the Women In Watercolor members' online exhibition. Eddington's painting *Unsettled Fall* was accepted for the Transparent Watercolor Society of America's annual exhibition in Kenosha, Wisconsin. She was selected as a finalist in *Splash 27: The Best of Watercolor*. Her work can be seen this spring at Watercolor NOW!, also in Kenosha, Fabriano in Acquarello in Fabriano, Italy, International Watercolor Masters in Lilleshall Hall, Shropshire, United Kingdom, and Watercolor USA.

**Lisa Englander's** watercolor painting will be featured in *Golden Vision: Zolla/Lieberman Celebrates 50 Years*, May 1 - June 13, 2026 in Chicago, IL. Englander has just joined the gallery. Completing its 59th year, Watercolor Wisconsin 2025 was on display at the Racine Art Museum's Wustum Museum of Fine Arts from December 10, 2025 - April 18, 2026. This was Englander's 47th year in the annual competitive exhibition. Englander was showcased in *From the Archives: Recently Established Artists Archives at RAM*. She donated over 40 pieces dating from 1980 - 2025 to the Racine Art Museum's permanent collection.




Monte Toon

**Monte Toon** has written a book. *Musings of an Artist's Life* is intended for an audience interested in the world of art, especially those who might seek involvement in art in some capacity, either as an observer or participant. It also serves as a guide to the inner workings of art, the business of art, and artists...who-what-when-why-and-how. Narrowly focused, it is an informative and educational story. The objective of this book is to record the reality of the experiences, failures, successes, challenges, and diversity experienced in a career as an artist. The book is available on Amazon Books as a paperback.

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