

The **International Association of Pastel Societies** had a lot to celebrate at its 2021 juried gallery exhibition.

First, there were the 175 knockout pastels to wow and amaze. Secondly, the show was open to visitors who were able to encounter the work live and in-person, in a great space.

BIG WINS in the WINDY CITY

By Anne Hevener

BETWEEN THE VERDANT GROUNDS OF GRANT PARK, the blue hues of Lake Michigan and the fleet of bright yellow water taxis, Chicago is always a vibrant place in summer, but things got even more colorful last June when the International Association of Pastel Societies (IAPS) came to town. The IAPS 2021 Juried Gallery Exhibition, on view at the Zhou B Art Center in downtown Chicago from June 18 through July 19, showcased a total of 175 exceptional pastels in two divisions—the 6th Master Circle and the 38th Juried Open. As jurors of selection, celebrated artists Jimmy Wright, Halla Shafey and Ray Hassard chose the featured paintings from more than 1,000 entries received from pastel artists around the world, and IAPS Eminent Pastelist Frederick D. Somers served as the judge of awards. Here, we'll share a selection of pastels from the show, some of Somers' remarks, as well as comments from the artists about the inspiration behind their work and the creative muscle that went into making it.



“This painting asks you to put your ear close and to listen.”

—Frederick D. Somers

JULIE FREEMAN

PASTEL ARTISTS OF NEW ZEALAND

“I set up this still life based on a dream I’d had the night before. Sounds odd, I know, but I felt a need to do it. I’d seen the light pouring in between the blinds and creating shadows on the bedspread. I set up my selected objects in various positions and took photos from different viewpoints.

“The ceramic cup, saucer and sugar bowl are a Japanese Sakura design. I love the clean lines and matte finish and the feeling of ceremony. I added the meditation stone to emphasize the quiet serenity of the composition.

“The repetition of circular elements brought it all together. I added the napkin to introduce another color. The addition of the bunny tail grasses—as a soft, organic element—supplied some contrast. I liked the idea of placing one on the diagonal that follows the shadow, which helps move the eye into and across the painting.”

The Art of Zen
(pastel on paper,
10½x15½)



Elena Degenhardt

PASTEL GUILD OF EUROPE

"Inheritance is a piece from my Pandemic Kids series, in which I explore the impact of this pandemic on the emotional, mental and physical well-being of children. As a mother of two, the topic is close to my heart. This portrait was done from life, on archival sketching paper, with my daughter as the sitter. I enjoy working in pastel experimentally. Here, I drew the face using a traditional dry application, and then washed it off to emphasize a child's vulnerability and a sense of loss. I continued, working on the hair and background while the paper was still wet and making expressive marks. I loved how the ripped-off paper bits created an illusion of a starry sky, and the veil around the face added to a dream-like feeling of isolation."

Inheritance, Pandemic Kids Series (pastel on paper, 8x8)

"The artist is pushing into a new powerful boundary."

—Frederick D. Somers

SILJA SALMISTU

PASTEL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

"Sunflowers are one of those flowers that I just want to paint every year. They attract me with their majestic simple forms and glowing warm colors. Pastel is quick to work with—with no waiting for drying between layers, unless I implement wet techniques. I paint from life, so the medium is well-suited for capturing the ever-changing movement of flowers. I always want the background to be an active part of the picture space, supporting and interacting with the subject. In this painting, I created the textures in the background by scribbling into wet layers of muted purples and light blues to suggest the sky and soil."

Sunflowers 2 (pastel on paper, 15x18)



"I like the warm center of the flower, and the cooler bottom shadow area makes for a wonderful pop."

—Frederick D. Somers

THE BEST ADVICE I EVER GOT

Getting juried into a preeminent exhibition is a major accomplishment that requires not only talent but plenty of effort, a commitment to growth and persistence. So, we asked these artists to share a piece of advice that has contributed to their success.

Go your own way. "The best advice I've been given is to be true to myself and do what I love. I have a passion for realism and detail, and continue on that path. I've come to realize that, as individuals, we have our own unique way of creating that makes us happy and fulfilled. There are no rules in terms of style. No genre is better than another. You'll have a much healthier relationship with your art if you do what you love." —JULIE FREEMAN

Don't be timid. "Paint what scares you. I feel that's the best advice to grow and learn." —NANCIE KING MERTZ

Think first. "One of my drawing teachers once said, 'First the head, then the hands,' meaning we need to think first and analyze what we're going to do and how we're going to do it—and not scratch it out, just like that. When he stood behind me in class, I felt stressed, because he'd ask me what I was doing and why. Since then, however, it has become habit to first understand my intent, and I'm very grateful to the professor." —ELENA PRUDNIKOVA

Go bold. "I've always appreciated this advice from artist Steven Aimone: 'When you don't know what to do, do the boldest thing.'" —DEBORA STEWART

Stop and listen. "I want my paintings to be suggestive, to invite the viewer to complete the object in his or her own imagination. To do this, an artist needs to remember to stop before a piece becomes overworked. The advice I return to time and again is to back away as you approach completion and let the piece sit for a bit. It will tell you what it needs." —CINDY CRIMMIN

Keep it loose. "Something I learned years ago that has stuck with me is to keep a composition as loose and abstract as possible for as long as possible during the painting process. Even though my end goal is a representational landscape painting, taking this approach allows for a more lyrical, poetic quality. By delaying and limiting the tight, delicate marks and details toward the finish, I'm able to maintain a strong underlying abstract foundation." —BARBARA JAENICKE

Paint small and often. "In artist Carole Marine's book, *Daily Painting*, she suggests painting small and often, arguing that you learn just as much about composition from a small painting as you do from a large one. This practice has led to several breakthroughs in my own process, because I felt freer to experiment in these smaller works." —BETH WILLIAMS

Be selective. "I learned from a good friend and teacher to be selective. There's no need to describe every single detail. Paint a poem, not a protocol!" —SILJA SALMISTU



Elena Prudnikova

PASTEL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

"Last year I visited the city of Chita, in Eastern Russia, where I was born. I stayed with my mother in her tenth-floor apartment, which has inspiring panoramic views of a neighborhood that's comprised of both old buildings and modern structures. I found it interesting to watch the life of the inhabitants below, as if I were falling into the past. It touched me, and I wanted to keep that quality in my work. After all, soon these old houses will be demolished, and new buildings will replace them."

Morning, Chita
(pastel on paper,
15½x14)

CINDY CRIMMIN

PASTEL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

"*Birthday Gifts* is part of a recent series of floral paintings inspired by the work of Joaquin Sorolla. My favorite part of Sorolla's landscapes, including his florals, is the way that the shadows cast by all objects are major players in the composition. Adding the loose, creative play that shadows allow to the wonderful layering effects of pastel seems to me to be where the magic is."

Birthday Gifts
(pastel on paper,
24x18)



AND THE AWARDS GO TO ...

Award winners in the
**6th Master Circle
Exhibition** included:

Prix de Pastel—Julie Freeman, *The Art of Zen*

Gold—Jeanne Rosier Smith, *Intimate Ocean*

Silver (in honor of Elizabeth Mowry)—Barbara Jaenicke, *Winter's Coat*

Bronze—Mary Sullivan, *His Favorite Flannel*

Award of Excellence—Michael Freeman, *Lockdownunder*

Award of Excellence—Nancie King Mertz *The Provider*

Award of Excellence—Tara Will, *Canyon Lace*

Award of Excellence—Tony Allain, *Nelson Yacht Club*

Award winners in the
**38th Open Juried
Exhibition** included:

Best of Show—Elena Degenhardt, *Inheritance, Pandemic Kids Series*

First Place (in honor of Urania Christy Tarbet)—Silja Salmistu, *Sunflowers 2*

Second Place (in honor of Maggie Price)—Michele Ashby, *How Much Longer ...?*

Third Place—Laura Mocnik, *Refreshing*

Award of Merit—Cory Goulet, *Retreat of the Mangroves*

Award of Merit—Beth Williams, *Winter Thaw*

Award of Merit—Vladislav Tatarinov, *Light Shades of Winter*

Award of Merit—Karen Stombaugh, *The Color of Water, Dreamscape Series #9*

“It takes such mark-making grace to make [the cool blue shadows] work and express the beauty of this piece.”

—Frederick D. Somers



BETH WILLIAMS

PASTEL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

“My inspiration for this piece came from evenings spent around a fire pit at my home on South Carolina’s Edisto Island. I was intrigued by the movement, warmth and mysterious effects of its rising smoke against a wooded backdrop. The cool shadows on the snow contrasted with the warmth and movement of an upward roaring fire. My eye is drawn to subjects that hold my gaze and thoughts during a moment of awe.”

Winter Thaw
(pastel on
paper, 9x11)

Mary Sullivan

CHICAGO PASTEL PAINTERS

“The photo reference for this image was captured on the day after Christmas, in 2018, when my husband and I were both tired from all the holiday activity. The house was finally empty; the eleven grandchildren had all gone home to their own celebrations. I was admiring the afternoon winter light coming through the window and highlighting the white areas on my husband’s flannel shirt. Without moving from my own chair, I pulled out my phone and started taking pictures of him from different angles. The Christmas tree in the background became unimportant as I studied the folds and shadows of his shirt. I returned to this image numerous times over the next couple of years and finally couldn’t resist any longer. I was passionate about painting that shirt and all its complexity.”

His Favorite
Flannel (pastel
on paper, 7x7)



“It has a Rembrandt light.”

—Frederick D. Somers

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE PASTEL KIND

The IAPS exhibition took place at Zhou B Art Center, a venue located in Chicago’s historic Bridgeport neighborhood that provides 10,000 square feet of gallery space as well as studios for 50 resident artists. The center’s curatorial staff worked with the IAPS exhibition team and members of Chicago Pastel Painters (CPP) to organize and hang a show that allowed visitors to experience up close the full power and brilliance of the pastel medium. **“Quote here quote here quote here [Tatijana: Please provide a brief comment about your impression of the show. Thanks!],”** says Tatijana Jacenkiw, CPP President.

PHOTO BY JACK B. SIEGEL.



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Zhou B Art Center curatorial intern [name??] was part of the planning for the exhibition, helping to arrange groupings of pastels for optimal viewing and engagement. [Tatijana: I’m also wondering if you would be able to help me get the name of the intern pictured in the photo, and his contact info, so I can be sure we have his permission to publish his image??]

“The shadows and the sunlight are full of dancing colors.”

—Frederick D. Somers



BARBARA JAENICKE

PASTEL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

“Although I love painting the stunning mountain views near my home, many of my favorite painting subjects have been the intimate little nooks and crannies within the landscape. I noticed this spot right in my own neighborhood while I was out walking my dog. The snow was melting quickly, so I took some reference photos for use later in the studio. The melting snow provided great patterns to work with and lots of contrast in the edges and in the values. The light was also just right for supplying ideal temperature contrast.”

Winter's Coat (pastel on paper, 12x16)



“The quality of the abstract shapes of the light is fantastic.”

—Frederick D. Somers

Nancie King Mertz

CHICAGO PASTEL PAINTERS

“This piece is dedicated to my dad who worked hard to put his three kids through college and provide a wonderful home for our family. He owned three grain elevators with my uncle and grandfather, and on Saturdays we'd go with him to 'help' weigh grain and climb on the ladders. This painting honors this memory and the special time we spent together.”

The Provider (pastel on paper, 33½x45½)

To see images of all of the accepted paintings in the 2021 IAPS Juried Gallery Exhibition, visit iapspastel.org. **PJ**

Anne Hevener, of Cincinnati, is the editor-in-chief of *Pastel Journal*, *Watercolor Artist* and *Artists Magazine*.



DEBORA STEWART

PASTEL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

“I created *Intensity* towards the end of last winter. It was actually a very emotional piece as it came at the end of a period of lockdown and I had a lot of internal energy and pent-up emotions that I needed to express. I wanted something dark, so I used black fluid acrylic for the underpainting contrasted with a wash of red acrylic. The colors represented the conflict and suppression of emotions and energy I was experiencing. I had already begun to experiment with different ways to use my flower drawings and this is one in a series. My current direction is to use the drawings within my abstracts, so I often hide them and overlap them in certain areas of the work.”

Intensity (pastel on paper, 22x22)