

Make a Plan, Then Paint Like Mad

Ann Pember makes as many decisions as possible before she ever picks up a brush.

By

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“Opulence” (watercolor)

“Practice brings a certain amount of confidence and helps shape one’s style of working,” says watercolor artist Ann Pember. “Early on, my work was tight; the colors were pale and lacked depth. I realized that the light is what created the effects I hoped to achieve as I painted various subjects. As I practiced and studied, I began to see the importance of value change, edge quality, clarity of transparent pigment, paper, brush type, and so much more. Using the primaries to mix colors provided the most beautiful results for me. As a result, I rarely use mixed color, grays, or blacks from a tube, but mix them instead.

“My method is a simple one. There is a great deal of thinking and prep before painting. I figure out as much as possible before I begin. With a mental picture of the finished result in place, I work out a simple composition, sketch, or value study of the light pattern. Then I wet my paints and brushes and paint quickly.



“Irresistible Iris” (watercolor)

“If I lose concentration, or question what to do, I stop until I can ‘see it’ as I desire. Of course, sometimes changes happen as I paint and that can be a blessing, or a challenge. The creative and analytical parts of the mind are taking turns throughout the process. It becomes almost a meditation when things go well.

“Every part of the process helps me learn about the subject and how I will express it on paper. That connection with the subject begins with taking my own photos or making sketches. I need an emotional connection to it to give it that ‘something more’ than a photo.

WORKING FROM PHOTOS

“I only work from photos if the lighting excites me. I look for an interesting light pattern and grouping of shapes. If there is no light on a flower, I wait to take photos until there is. This is essential to what I want to paint.



“Heavenly Hibiscus” (watercolor)

“Sometimes I can push the effect with Photoshop to create more light, but I’d rather just see it. The light helps me ‘see’ where edges are hard or soft; and colors intense, neutral, or deep. Details may wash out in places, so my work is not as photorealistic as my early, tighter, hard-edged paintings were.

“I love backlighting for the wonderful effects it creates, especially for flowers. It can merge many small shapes together to form a larger shape. I often prefer a close-focus composition, rather than a traditional painting of a whole bouquet in a vase. I usually make the design go off the paper on a few sides to avoid the look of a floating subject. Even my landscapes are usually intimate compositions, rather than vistas.



“Exalted” (watercolor)

“I paint directly, mixing color wet-in-wet in sections on the surface of the paper, rather than glazing in many layers, which I gave up about 15 years ago. I wet a section, float in paint and let it mingle, charging in darks before the area dries. This helps me achieve clean, luminous color quickly and, to the viewer, perhaps effortlessly. Edges are softened as needed in the process. I use papers and boards that allow lifting and support this style of painting; Waterford, Fabriano, Lanaquarelle, illustration board and watercolor board, as well as YUPO and coated surfaces.”

See firsthand how Ann Pember paints by checking out her two video workshops, [Vibrant Orchid: Painting in the Flow of Watercolor](#), and [Painting in the Flow of Watercolor on High Plate Illustration Board](#).