

March 13th:

Finally I am back to painting. The book is finished, not at the publisher until the end of the month, but finished. So now I am getting familiar with the brush again. Thinking in color rather than gray scale. I think the break was good, I enjoyed going back to the fundamentals of drawing and volume and form. But I did miss painting. When I was teaching a painting class recently students had to tell me to stop demonstrating, they had got the message and were eager to get on with their own work saying "It is time to put the brush down Katie!" as they gently, then rather forcefully removed the brush from my hand!

I am becoming more and more at ease with painting with acrylics. The change came when I stopped thinking of this as a new medium and just painted in my usual manner. I think the board I have settled on is important an part of this. I use the Pannelli A Gesso Smooth. While it is called smooth there is a slight texture to the surface, which seems to disappear after a few glazes of paint have been added. The surface is slightly absorbent permitting the thin glazes be sink into the surface rather than stay only on the surface. I like the complexity of color I can achieve. And the fact that I can change my mind and make corrections by adding layers of gesso makes this learning process much easier.

I am still using the same brushes, I like the softness of the Kolinski sable, this is quite likely because I am using such dilute glazes of paint. I have mostly used pure pigment glazes, mixing the browns for the small branches. I have not used any medium, retarders or glazing products so far.

The images below show my progress so far, the color on the detail is much closer to the original.

March 15th: I have begun painting the open winged turkey on the left. This is going to be an adventure, never having painted iridescence in acrylics before, but by the time I am done with all these turkeys I will certainly know how! Where the light hits most directly the color is yellow becoming more orange, as the body contour changes. The feathers then become more yellow/green iridescent. Finally where the light cannot reach they are brown. Most of the feathers have a dark brown/black edge. I have all the feathers drawn in, and have played with painting the color first then adding the line. But began to loose my drawing. I found adding the dark edge first helps to maintain the individual feathers. I made a mistake of adding the edge across the feather edge, that did not look as realistic as adding the dark using a mixed black in tiny hatches.

April 8th:

Well the best ideas do not always work.

I have found that working each feather individually simply too tedious for no good reason. I am a patient person, but not that patient! Rendering the dark edge first and filling in the individual feathers seemed like a good idea. The idea was that this would prevent me from losing my drawing, but I found the dark edges had to be reworked at least twice to keep the value as dark as I wanted. The color build up on each feather would have required HOURS of detail work.

I also found my drawing of the covert feathers on the right wing were not well drawn, I was not happy with the painted result. So I needed to begin again - I added two layers of gesso to the surface and completely reworked that area of the wing.

Before painting I redrew the feathers on tracing paper until I was happy with the result. I built the color of the whole area using multiple layers of orange red, green blue and orange yellow, keeping in mind where the colors would change due to light. I then freehand painted the dark edges - once with a mixed black, NOT a black directly from a tube!

I also worked on the rocks behind the turkey to be sure I had enough separation between the turkey and the wall.

I will not be adding more images for a week or so. I am going to England where I will attend the opening of the Shirley Sherwood Gallery at Kew Gardens.

The drawing book is delivered! It is in the hands of the editor at Sterling Publications! Such a relief, now all I can do is wait to see the proofs.





June 23rd.

I have been neglectful, and a little shocked to see how long it has been since I did a 'tip'.

The opening of the Shirley Sherwood Gallery was a spectacular event. In no small part due to the fact that there is now a gallery dedicated to displaying both contemporary and historical botanical art side-by-side.

For me the opening reception and dinner that followed had special meaning as I had an opportunity to see so many of my artist friends from all over the world. Amazing to think that I have to travel so far to see American artists!

Treasures of Botanical Art: Icons from the Shirley Sherwood and Kew Collections, the catalogue of the current exhibit is not yet available in this country, but is worth the wait.

Since being home I taught a Mammal Drawing class, I still am the happiest working with a graphite pencil. My senses relax and work instinctively. Pure meditation.

Then I spent a week teaching in Minneapolis – painting a variety of species of Crainsbill geraniums. We worked mostly on leaves, keeping the green pure, the surface contours clearly defined. Students came into class with their plant, their detailed draws ready to paint, as we only had three days (I had two three day classes back to back) it was important to lower expectations from a finished painting to a great learning experience – or would that be raise the expectations? I had everyone choose the most challenging leaf and flower and transfer them three times. Ideally these would be painted in different methods, but if one was not working it could be abandoned, but thought of as a good learning experience. The results were wonderful. This kept the classroom in a positive mode. As always I came away from this week of intense teaching with much more information than when I began.

While there Marilyn Garber and I made a commitment to each other to work together to create an on-line distant learning school. There is a lot of research to do, but we know how we want to proceed. So stay tuned!

The manuscript for my book has been accepted, I do not have a definitive date yet but generally it takes 12 months from manuscript acceptance to product in the store. The next step for me will be when I get the proofs. My only hope is their vision for the presentation of the book is even somewhat close to mine.

Then of course there is my new obsession, my garden. Gary has decided I need to go on a 12 step program as I am powerless of driving by a garden center without stopping and filling my car with goodies. But then he is enjoying the results both visually and at dinner with the fresh produce from the veggie garden! Right now poppies of every size and color surround me – these are my current favorite flower. Next month it will be something else.

Now some tips:

I have found another gesso board I really like. Made by an American company – you know I like that. Art Boards Gesso Panel. Not so easy to find yet in stores but when I called the company directly they could not have been more helpful. 800 546 7985 they will send you a price/size list or you can place your order directly. Custom sizes are also available. Web site: www.art-boards.com (The information for these boards is not on the site yet however).

I found a new lifting brush for water color or gouache, as this is natural bristle rather than synthetic it appears to hold its shape little longer:

Escoda 4625 #4 – this is a small flat brush great for getting into tight areas. The #6 is very nice also, but I do not think it is necessary to have both.

I have been having trouble transferring my drawings onto a gesso panel. When using graphite transfer paper the lines were too dark, no matter how lightly I pressed and which pencil I used. I think I have resolved the problem – for now anyway! I have gone back to the old way of retracing the lines on the back of the tracing paper, I used nothing softer than an HB, then I used a 9H to do the actual transferring. These lines lift or erase, if necessary, better.

How are the turkeys coming – slowly but it seems I am back into the rhythm of painting everyday now. I have three works in progress, which always seems to work better for me.













The painting of the Wild Turkeys is finished I have signed it. This usually means I do not return to a painting, but I may this time! The problem is this is a work that could be worked on for years.

I have learned a lot about painting with acrylics on board:

The surface can be reworked. advantage if you have not thought thru a composition well!

You can change your mind. This is wonderful, but it is hard to be satisfied, you continue to make changes because you can. But eventually you have to be done, learn and move on to another painting.

You can work light on dark or dark on light.

When working in watercolor or gouache once a color is neutralized/dull it can never be brightened again. That is not true with acrylics.

The first color laid on the white gesso remains the most dominant. This is true with watercolors and gouache, but even more so with acrylics. As long as the layers have completely dried each layer holds its individual personality - dried layers NEVER mix with the layer beneath or above.

I had every intention of uploading the painting thru all its stages, but I found that process of stopping to take photos at various stages too restrictive, there was so much I was working thru with techniques, and composition, I had to just paint as my own artist self and not think in teacher mode all the time. My apologies.

The biggest change I made was in the background. When I finished the posturing turkey on the right and stood back I could not see him, he was surrounded by rock walls completely obliterating the power of his posture. By taking the walls out he became what he was a proud posturing male in all his glory.

I struggled a bit with how to take the dark values of the walls out. I tried reapplying gesso to the surface, but that was too white, too thick, too textured. So I tried adding some color to the gesso, but that was not much better. I tried sanding the rocks off; this removed the paint all right, but changed the surface texture too much. I had more luck using 2 or 3 thin glazes of Titanium White with a little bit of color added. I let each layer dry before applying the next. Then slowly rebuilt the surface using single primaries. It made sense this would work best, I had after all created the surrounding area with multiple layers of single primaries. It was easy to match to colors as I used the same three primary palette. There was a time when it looked like there was a fog bank where the rock walls used to be! It took as long to remove the walls as it had to paint them in the first place.

Once the walls were replaced with background the trees needed to be changed/added and in some cases reduced in size.

Only then did I paint the remaining turkeys.

The last detail to be added was the indication of a light source, I did this by neutralizing the local color where the light would not be able to reach.

Lesson learned: Think thru the composition better. Not just the placement of subjects, but colors and values behind them also!

I continued to paint the turkeys as I had the posturing turkey. I created the body color, and then added the detail of the dark edges of individual feathers. Then went back in to brighten the feathers which caught the most light.

I was completely exhausted on finishing this painting, it had taken just over a year, of course I moved, and wrote a book in between, but it was the longest time I have ever spent thinking of only one painting. I am now anxious to move on to other ideas. None will have as detailed a background – anyway not for a while!

Next week I am teaching a class on acrylics, I am now ready to do that and look forward to how much I will learn!

