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# The Pastel Journal

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RAMSEY



MARTIN



PICARD



HEYWOOD



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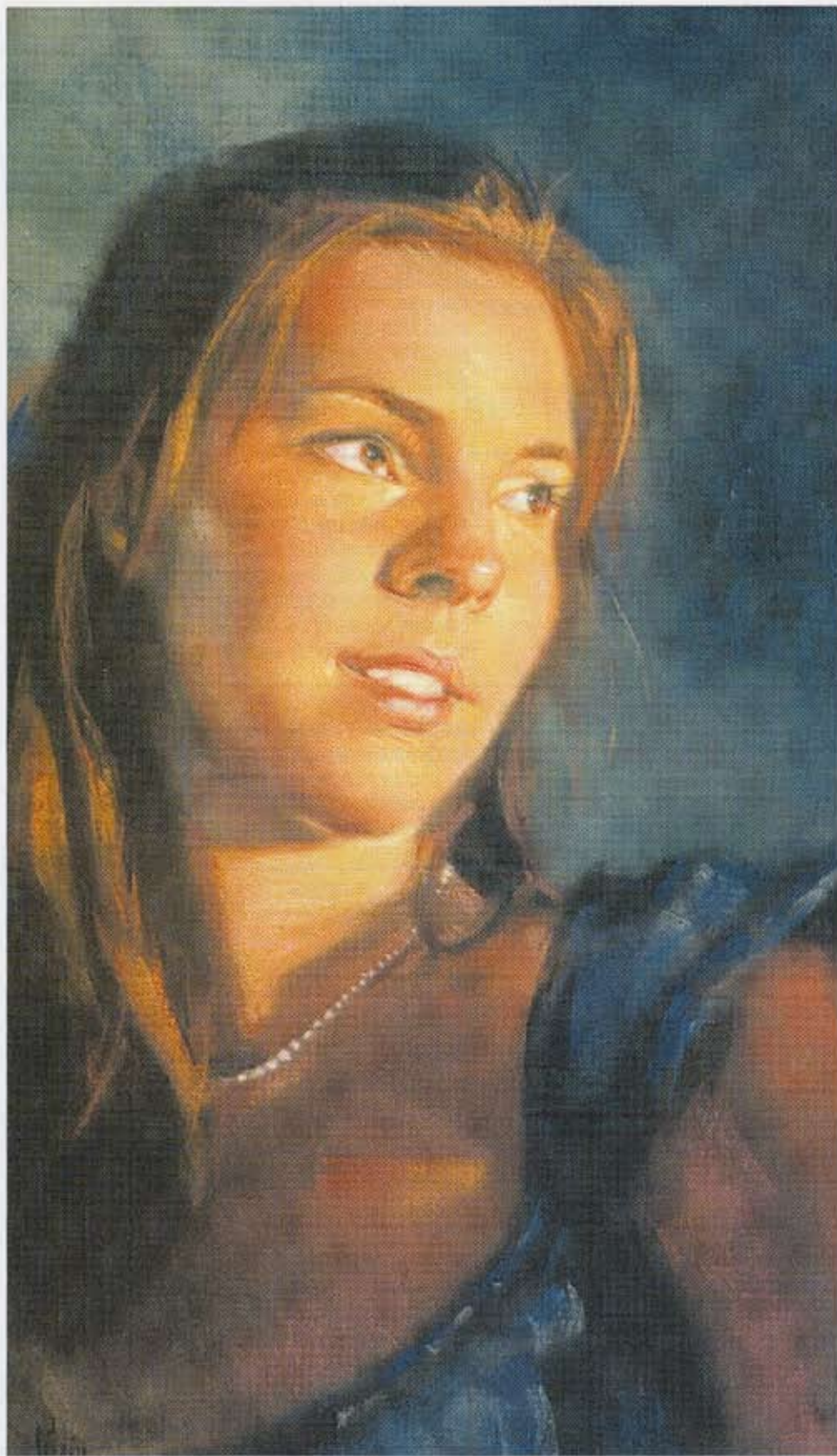
Lake Road, 12"x24" (detail) by Dale Martin

*Following the light leads Dale Martin to beautiful landscapes*  
**Sheri Ramsey uses plein air color studies to promote sales**  
*Pauline Howard creates exciting surfaces with crosshatching*  
**Alain Picard's direct approach to painting people and animals**

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*Radiance, 17"x9½"*

## ALAIN PICARD

### *Painting portraits of animals and humans is the ultimate challenge*

**BY ELIZABETH WILSON**

ALAIN J. PICARD graduated from Western Connecticut State University with a BA degree in illustration. He studied at the Art Students League and at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. He is a signature member of the Connecticut Pastel Society, and has exhibited in group and solo shows. He was a finalist in two categories in the Pastel 100 Competition in 2001 sponsored by The Pastel Journal.

Just a few years ago, Alain Picard's feet were planted squarely on a pitcher's mound. Art was something that tugged at him now and then, a talent apparent more to his parents, teachers and others around him than to him.

"I was always a doodler, but I was always playing baseball. Athletics was all I thought about for most of my life," the Connecticut native says. He was a southpaw who pitched his way through an associate degree at a community college in Waterbury, Connecticut. During this time, art electives began to take a more important role.

When he started working on his bachelor degree at a four-year college, Alain continued to play baseball—but soon he began to realize that in fact he did have a talent for art.

Instead of a baseball, he began swinging a paintbrush, his left hand aiming at a canvas or sketchpad rather than home plate. He graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree in illustration and after graduation did illustrations for local publishing houses and ad agencies.

Alain painted portraits of famous people like Yitzhak Rabin and Mother Theresa for his own pleasure, and as word spread he began getting requests to do portraits. For the past five years, his portrait commissions have been his livelihood and today, at the age of 28, he is making his living as an artist. He does portraits of people and animals and in the past year has, as he put it, "discovered the joy of landscape painting." Both his portraits and landscapes have won top awards at exhibits in the Northeast.

"I appreciate so much that I can work full time as an artist," Alain said. "Sometimes, though, I have to fight tooth and claw to do it." He attributes his success to his ability to connect with people. This is evident in the free and open way he communicates with others, and when he does demonstrations for art groups. "I love the feeling of connecting with the human spirit in my artwork. I appreciate the uniqueness of people, and my portraiture is a reflection of that," he says.

He started out working in oils but discovered he wasn't getting what he wanted out of the medium. He was introduced to pastel in a drawing class, and today the majority of his work is done in pastels.

"I had an immediate connection with pastel. It's fresh and direct. I can just pick up a color and attack the paper with it. I like the balance of painterly and soft subtle refinement you can accomplish with it."

Now when he does paint in oils, he finds he can achieve some of the same effects, like soft edges and texture, that come so easily with pastel. "Pastels liberated me," he says, explaining that he is now able to work in both mediums in a manner he calls "painterly realism."

"My approach to painting is very direct," he says. "It is a process of seeing and responding, and with the immediacy of pastels I am most effective in communicating a pure and exciting response to the subject. I love to capture that fleeting moment, whether it is



*Johan, 12 1/2"x19"*

a rare expression revealed by the sitter, or an elusive light flickering across the hillside."

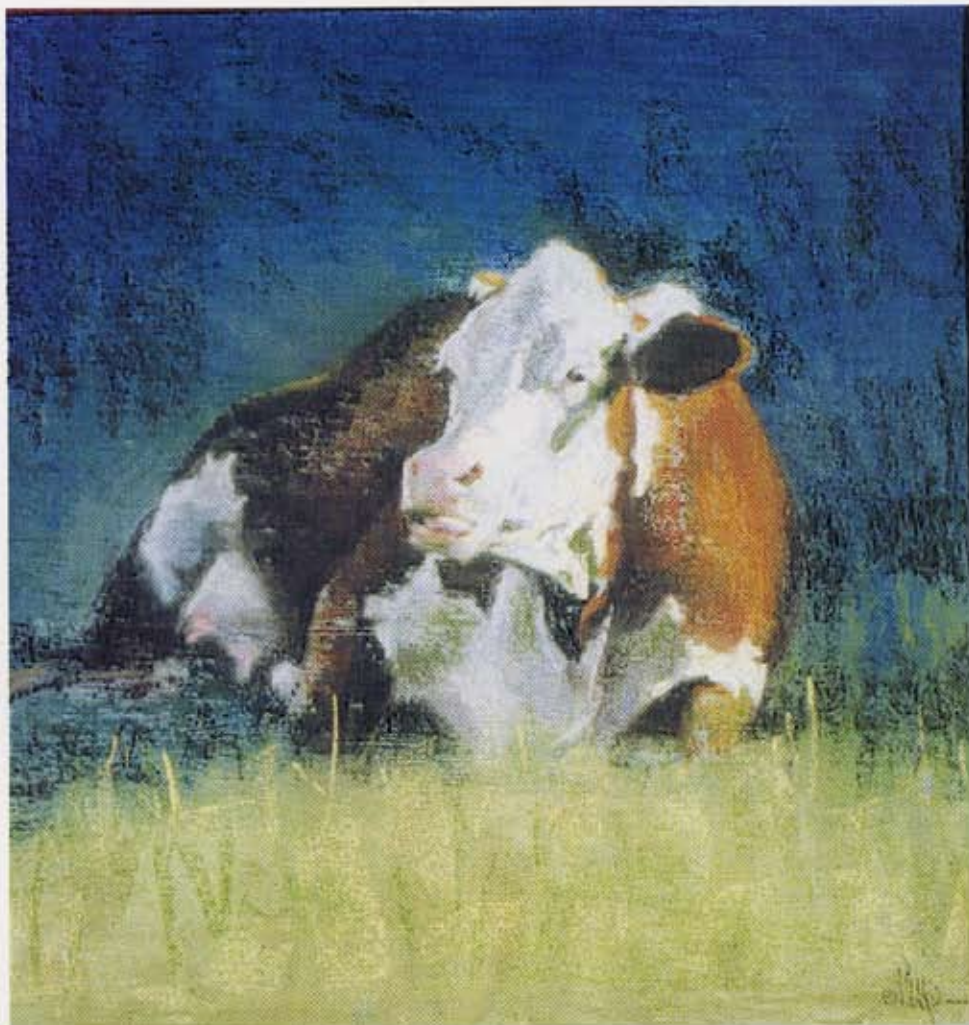
Alain calls painting portraits and the human figure the ultimate challenge. "My animal portraits are an extension of that. The same dynamics go into painting animals as in painting people. You have to consider anatomy, propor-

tion, features and gestures," he says, adding that animals, like humans, have individual characteristics, which is challenging to the artist.

Most of his animal studies are done on farms where he also frequently goes to paint landscapes. "There are many farms around me. There is serenity about the whole environment, and I



*Ethereal, 12"x12"*



Above, *Bovine in Repose*, 9"x9";  
below, *Integrity*, 17"x23"

want to connect with that serenity of farm life. I spend a lot of time there. It's very relaxing and peaceful."

As he began observing various animals on farms, Alain paid attention to the distinct characteristics of each. "I learned to appreciate the amazing uniqueness of the different animals. They each have a personality, and I try to capture that," he says. He often names his paintings according to the animal's character traits.

"When I paint farm animals, I want people to see past the animal and appreciate a characteristic that I feel this animal is conveying. The haughty rooster portrays arrogance, while the white horse with its trusting eyes portrays purity. I want to capture the simplicity of the bull and the humility of the sheep.

"It is an interesting way to approach painting an animal portrait. I think animals offer an amazing source of

character and personality to the observant artist."

He does some field sketches of animals, but for the most part works from photographs, which he takes with a 35mm camera he bought recently. "Most of the time I use photographic references. The animals move too much to paint them from life. I work out compositions in the studio from my photographs."

When using photographic references, he does not stick slavishly to the camera image. "I've spent a lot of time studying light and anatomy, so I'm not locked into merely recording what I see in a photograph."

Alain often paints from life to enhance his knowledge of form and color. "I paint plein-air landscapes in between commissions, as well as doing figure drawings. This helps me develop a stronger sense of color and work on developing my personal point of view."

Painting the model in life drawing class is also an essential growth process, he says. "Seeing the figure in full three-dimensional form, and being able to see around the head and body, help me understand and interpret the human form in a two-dimensional painting. Seeing true skin tone and shadows is important as well. All these tools brought to the studio can improve the artist's work done from photographs."

Alain considers photography a creative activity in itself. "One thing I try to do is work from photos taken in natural light. Shooting interesting compositions and capturing unique expressions and gestures are an important part of the process for me. When shooting portraits, I try to take intimate shots, getting right in on the subject and creating a composition of the head in the viewfinder."

He crops his photos carefully to improve the composition, and always works from an enlargement, usually 8"x10". "This makes the process feel more like painting from a model," he says. "I interpret everything I see in the photograph as I paint, but I'm aware of

camera 'lies' such as lens distortion and dead shadows. Highlights are often too light in photos. All this must be taken into account when trying to create a lifelike portrait from a photograph."

Whether he's painting from life or from photos, he follows the same process. He starts by drawing a loose sketch on his surface—usually a gray LaCarte paper mounted on foam board. He generally uses vine charcoal for his sketch, but occasionally draws with pastel. He is careful to get proportions accurate in the drawing stage.

"I concentrate on capturing the basic forms and establishing the pattern of lights and darks. I lay in shadow areas

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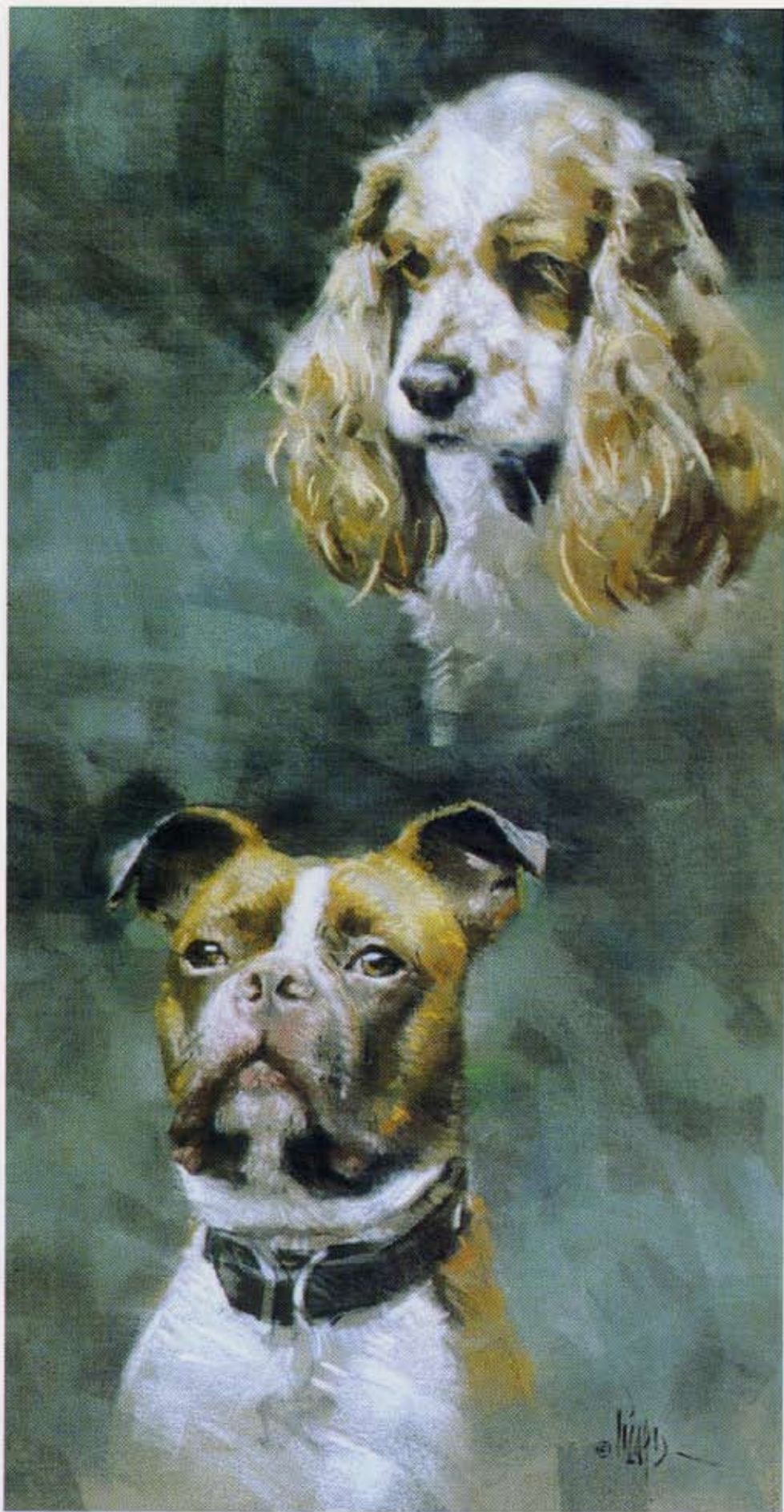
*"I like to combine soft, subtle areas next to rough-textured areas, using a variety of edges and directions of strokes. This creates interest in the painting and keeps it from simply emulating the photographic look."*

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with charcoal, and then move to soft pastels, working up the shadow areas and concentrating on establishing accurate tonal relationships."

He then works in the middle and light values with softer brands of pastel, covering the surface with a painterly layer of pastel. He works mostly with Schmincke pastels, broken into small pieces and dragged on their sides to make broad marks. "About 90 percent of my painting is done with very soft pastels," he says.

Alain sometimes uses a German brand called Jaxell, or Rembrandt pastels, but most of his work is done with Schmincke. "I love their buttery feel," he says. When the painting is nearly completed, he uses the tips of the pastels or hard pastels, such as NuPastels, to hone in on necessary details. He



Maggie and Bos, 27"x12"



Above, *Purity at Play*, 24"x9"; right, Alain Picard

occasionally uses pastel pencils for very fine work. He smudges with all sorts of tools like paper towels, large bristle brushes, his fingers, or kneaded erasers.

"I like to combine soft, subtle areas next to rough-textured areas, using a variety of edges and directions of strokes. This creates interest in the painting and keeps it from simply emulating the photographic look."

Alain prefers working on gray or ochre backgrounds. One animal series was done on a tobacco-colored ground for a monochromatic effect. "I love starting with the middle value. I use charcoal for the darks and pull out the lights with white and let the paper be the middle value."

Alain does not use fixative. He frames his finished pastels with a catch space in between the image and the mat or frame so the loose pastel can drop down without affecting the presentation. He experiments with different framing techniques. Some of his works are matted, some are double matted and others are under glass but framed without a mat like an oil painting.

He often retreats to area farms to paint landscapes, which he does quickly and spontaneously. "I love landscape painting now. My landscape paintings are always impressionistic. It has been my opportunity to be expressive, to be really free." Pastel is his medium of choice when he paints outdoors. "Pastel is a wonderful landscape medium," he says.



Although he works quickly outdoors, he uses plein-air painting as a means of improving his knowledge of form and color and to develop his personal point of view.

"Artists must be selective with what they choose to paint when working from nature. There's an overwhelming amount of information in front of your eyes when you paint a landscape. Deciding what will enter your picture, how it will be composed, and interpreting the colors you see are all parts of the decision-making process during a plein-air session."

Keeping his work fresh and loose are among Alain's goals, and he often sets time limits on his painting sessions. "That way I won't be seduced into including unnecessary information in my work. It requires that I maintain a sense of purpose in what I'm trying to say with each piece I create.

"I never start a painting until I understand why I am creating this piece. Is it to portray an emotional expression, or perhaps to celebrate a moment of beautiful light illuminating the subject? I have to know my purpose before starting, or else the painting will have no point of view and end up being vague and uninteresting. When I feel I have communicated what I've set out to say in my picture, I stop painting, so that the piece stays fresh and personal."

Newly married, Alain works in a studio in the apartment he and his wife, Mirjam, renovated in Bethel. His



*Hidden Pasture,*  
15"x15";  
*Below, Grace,*  
9"x26"

marriage this past year follows a three-and-a-half-year, long-distance courtship while Mirjam finished university studies in her native Germany. Alain's portrait of Mirjam has won top prizes in regional shows.

Alain often gives painting demonstrations to area arts organizations. He enjoys the demonstrations, and also enjoys promoting pastels as an art medium. "People respond to my pastels. They want portraits done in pastel, especially of children. They see the freshness of the medium."

Each portrait is a process of education, he says. "People ask a lot of questions about pastel. They want to know if it will last, if it will smudge. I like to give them information—I tell them how to frame the painting and how to care for it. I tell them where to hang it. I want to build a knowledge base with the public. I think pastel will soon become a highly recognized medium."

■ Elizabeth Wilson is an artist and writer, and a frequent contributor to *The Pastel Journal*.

