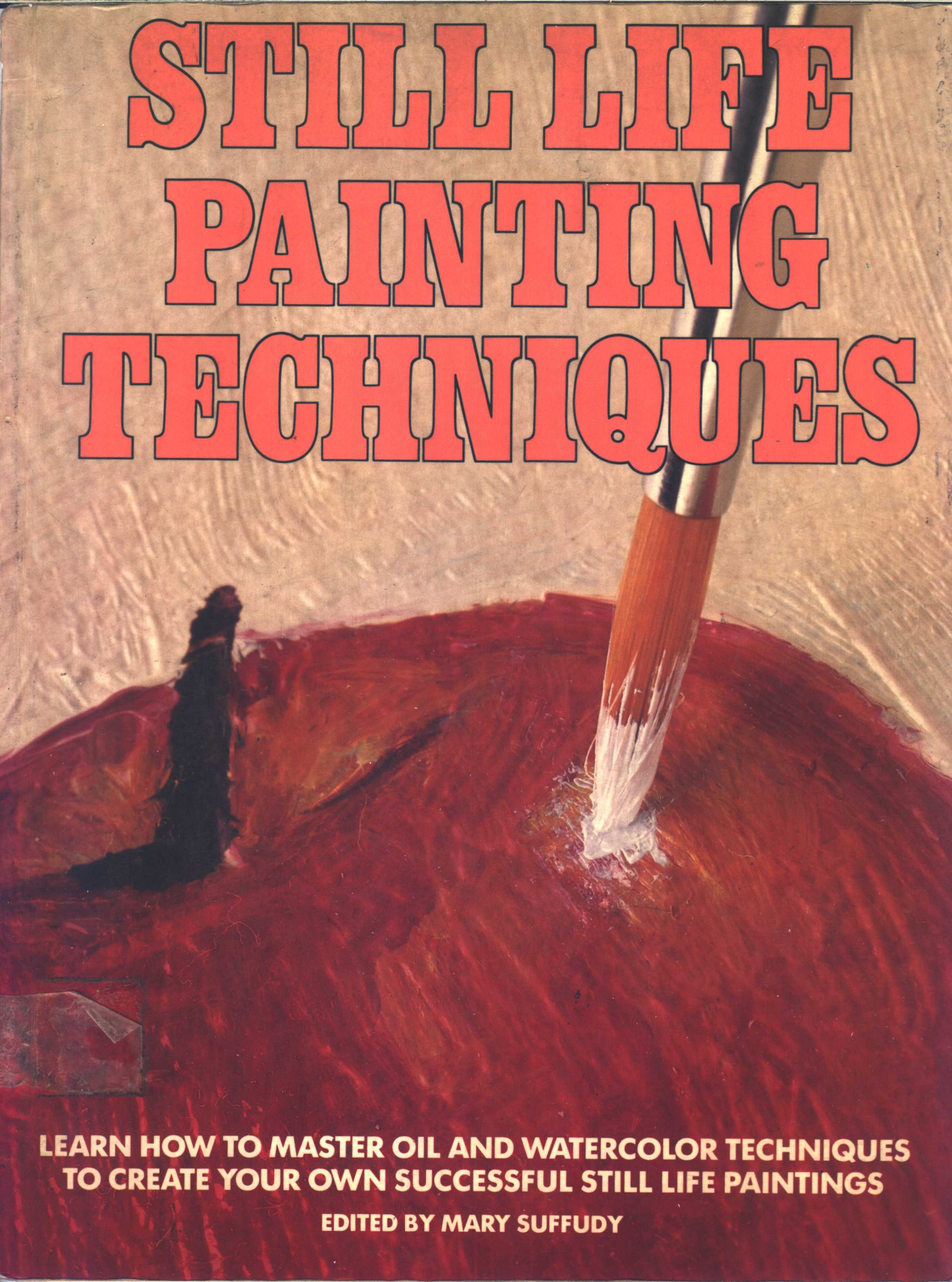
STILL LIFE PAINTING TECHNIQUES



LEARN HOW TO MASTER OIL AND WATERCOLOR TECHNIQUES TO CREATE YOUR OWN SUCCESSFUL STILL LIFE PAINTINGS

EDITED BY MARY SUFFUDY

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The artists whose work and teaching are included in this book deserve particular recognition and thanks. Because of their generosity and willingness to be involved in this project, *Still Life Painting Techniques* contains the finest instruction Watson-Guptill has to offer.
I would also like to offer special thanks to Betty Vera and Jay Anning for their invaluable contributions to this book.
Mary Suffudy

Introduction

The editors at Watson-Guptill have heard time and time again that you, our readers, want more books that show how—not just one—but a *variety* of successful artists work. And so we have responded with an entire series of books that includes *Watercolor Painting Techniques*, *Oil Painting Techniques*, *Pencil Drawing Techniques*, and *Landscape Painting Techniques*—each book packed with selected teachings from some of our very best artists and instructors. It is with great pleasure that we now introduce you to *Still Life Painting Techniques*.

Having even one great art teacher can be inspiring. Having benefit of six great teachers is rare inspiration indeed. By studying the paintings and techniques of this distinguished group of instructors, you can extend your ability to perceive and to create polished works of art that reflect your own personal point of view. In short, this book is really several painting courses rolled into one.

Here is a bit of information about the artists and the books on which *Still Life Painting Techniques* is based.

Charles Reid is an extraordinarily popular artist who does everything well—flowers, still lifes, landscapes, portraits, and figures. Students from across the country flock to his painting workshops. In *Still Life Painting Techniques*, Reid shares his special expertise in painting flowers. Included are passages from *Flower Painting in Watercolor* and *Flower Painting in Oil*. His other books are *Painting What You Want to See*, *Figure Painting in Watercolor*, *Portrait Painting in Watercolor*, and *Pulling Your Paintings Together*.

David Lyle Millard is the author of two of Watson-Guptill's most celebrated books, *The Joy of Watercolor* and *More Joy of Watercolor*. Both books are superb references for the watercolorist who wants to learn how to use color imaginatively and how to paint a variety of subjects with feeling. Excerpts from the books provide instruction on composing still life paintings, creating effective backgrounds, and using color and light.

David A. Leffel paints in a classic, twentieth-century old master style, and for more than a decade he has taught crowded classes at the Art Students League in New York. Excerpts from *Oil Painting Secrets from a Master* (based on notes by his student Linda Cateura) provide insights into handling light and shadow, mastering edges, and choosing different backgrounds.

Georg Shook has won national recognition as an artist, teacher, and lecturer. In *Sharp Focus Watercolor Painting*, which he co-authored with Gary Witt, Shook introduced readers to painting watercolor on the hot-pressed surface. Excerpts that appear in *Still Life Painting Techniques* show how this extremely smooth surface makes it possible for the watercolorist to have ultimate control of textural effects.

Passages from *Painting Watercolors from Photographs*, also co-authored by Witt, provide valuable tips on using photographs as valuable aids to creating successful paintings.

Arthur Stern believes that color is the key to painting what you actually see. Passages from his highly regarded, and revolutionary, *How To See Color and Paint It* demonstrate how to observe, identify, mix, match, and paint the colors of the world with remarkable accuracy. The projects shown in *Still Life Painting Techniques* were executed by his students and show how you can learn from an inspiring teacher.

Joseph Dawley is widely respected for his ability to create beautiful realistic images of difficult subjects. Selections from *The Painter's Problem Book* show you how to paint still life subjects as diverse as lettuce, potatoes, oranges, glass, silver, china, and fabric. You'll learn how to handle the problems of textures that are rough, smooth, transparent, and shiny.

This book does indeed provide an invigorating sampling of the ideas and techniques of some of today's best artist/instructors. You will find a variety of painting styles in both watercolor and oil. We at Watson-Guptill hope that *Still Life Painting Techniques* will encourage you to explore the work of these artists in even greater detail, and that you will continue to develop and grow as an artist with a style and philosophy all your own.

PAINTING STILL LIFES IN WATERCOLOR AND OIL

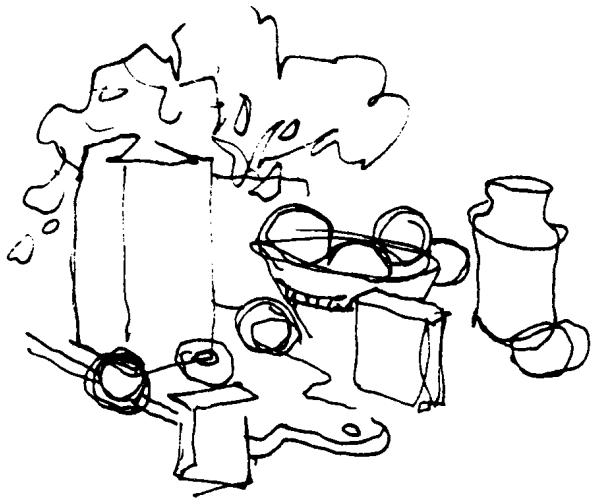
Creative planning is essential to making successful paintings. In this section of the book, David Lyle Millard shows you how to get the best angle on a still life, how to decide what objects to include, how to compose with geometric shapes, and how to compose with color.

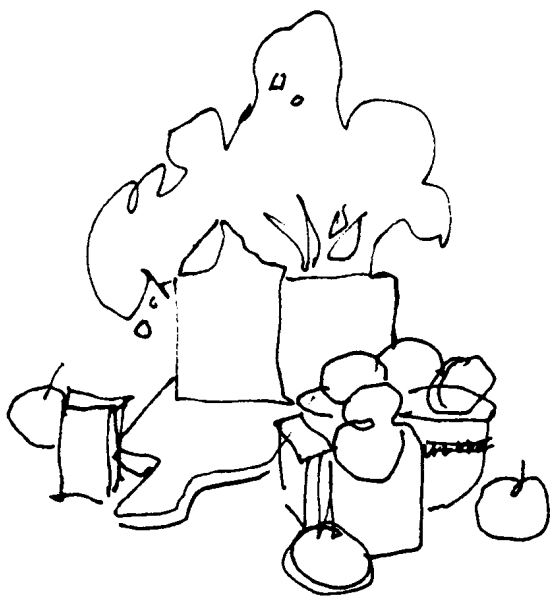
From Arthur Stern you'll learn how space influences color and how to see light and shade as colors. What is the best way to handle white shapes, create vibrant darks, mass forms, master edges, create effective backgrounds? David Lyle Millard and David Leffel show you.

Finally, Georg Shook demonstrates how working from photographs can help you make better paintings.

Searching for Form and Pattern

Getting the Best Angle. Look for design when you begin a still life, just as you would when painting a street scene or landscape. Walk around the motif and draw several compositions from different angles first. Here the artist has sketched the same still life from five different points of view (to orient yourself, look at the position of the cutting board in each one). After you've done five sketches like these, try painting watercolors of your best compositions, making each new angle work as a painting. Paint each one in a different watercolor technique—wet over dry washes, wet-in-wet, and so on—using a different combination of colors. Dare to invent and experiment.

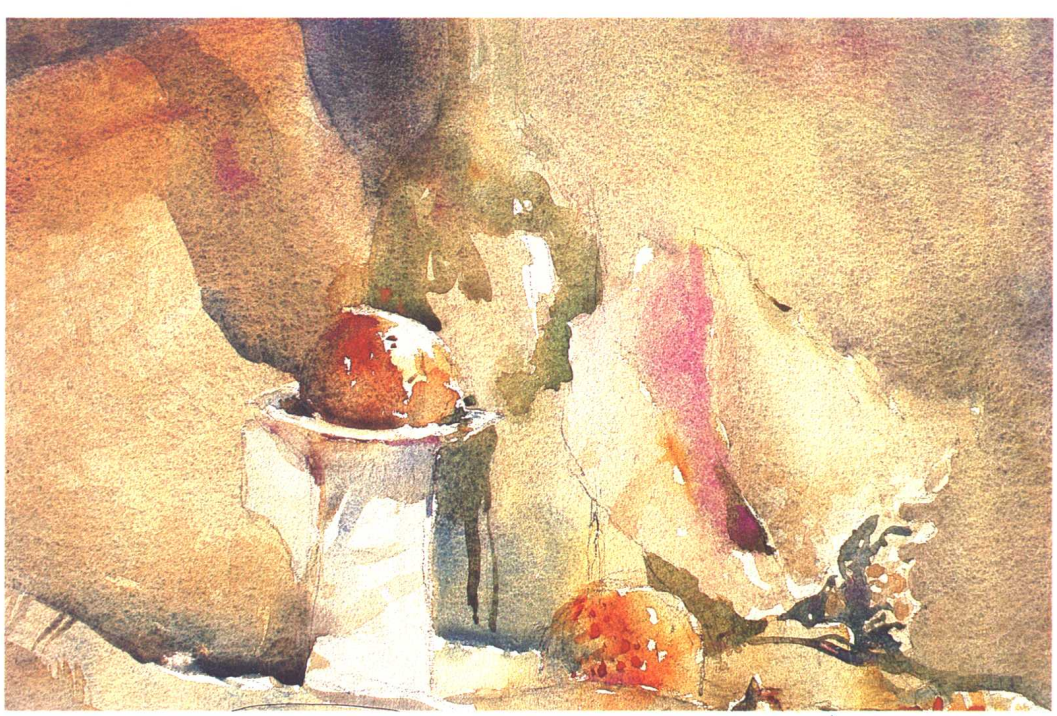




Developing Three-Dimensional Form. In this watercolor sketch, Mr. Millard laid in the background first. Then he started his move from two dimensions to three by painting the shadow side of the objects only. Note the subtle changes where color has been dropped into the monotone wash. Note, also, how the intensity or relative brightness of the color affects its apparent position within the depth of the picture plane: The brighter the color, the closer it appears.

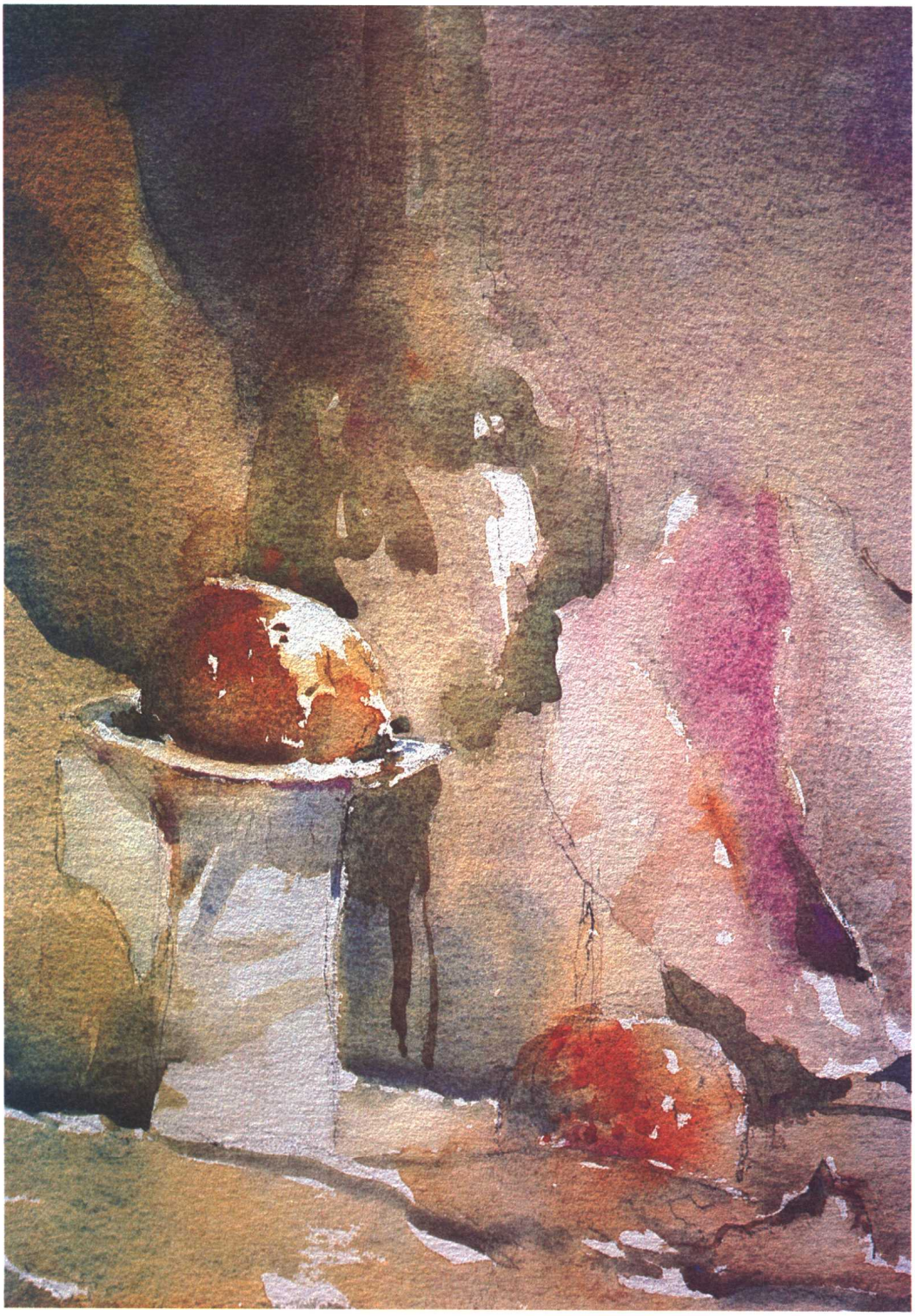
Enhancing Form with Color. Here the artist started with very loose washes and then, after the painting was bone dry, he enhanced the forms with touches of pastel for the sheer brilliance of pure pigment. He added just enough pastel to cause a color vibration, a shimmer, where pure color hits more subdued tone, but he has let the previous color show through.

Deciding How Much to Include



Creating a Geometric Understructure. In these three compositions from the same painting, artist David Millard was determining his emotional response to the setup and deciding how he wanted to emotionally affect the viewer, too. The top illustration shows Mr. Millard's actual painting. Triangular structures form its foundation: A triangle within a triangle within a triangle, so to speak, gives a rhythm to this composition. This is a classical arrangement, with the objects moved back from the edge of the table.

Studying the Finished Painting. Would you crop the painting to this format at right? It definitely has a different feeling. Do you think this "dropped-down" composition creates more excitement?



Getting Close. This close to the setup, your viewer participates in your painting in a personal way, detecting techniques, noting that the background wash goes over everything except the selected whites, seeing soft and hard edges and color dropped in wet-in-wet. Look at the way accents are "biting in"—above and below the orange, beside the vase. Note that there are grainy deposits. This format allows the viewer to focus on complementary colors. The design here is quite evident. Do you like a painting that is this intimate?

Composing with Geometric Shapes

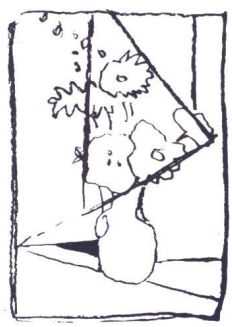
Triangles. You can create an excitement with shapes, just as you can with brilliant colors. These ordinary wildflowers in a common glass jar have been depicted with understated color, in keeping with their simplicity. But this simple floral is dramatic because of the triangles and diagonals: The main group of flowers forms a major rectangle, the white panel at the top left is a major triangle, and there are several small "supporting" triangles. This "invisible structure" allowed the artist to cut loose with a zingy, free wash.

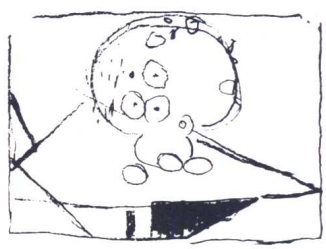
As you arrange flowers for your own still life, think out your composition of accents and angles first. Don't get too stiff or "organized." Be subtle. Only *you* should know where these geometric shapes occur. Take the time to move or rotate the vase, looking at it from all angles with an eye to selecting the best "pose." Also think about where you want to place the white shapes—and plan light direction before you put in the first wash.

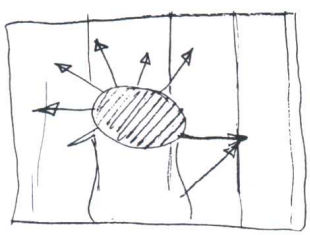
Circles. This floral still life is moving into color but has a limited palette—just browns, blues, and greens. The composition uses a series of circular shapes: The entire bouquet is a circle, as are the centers and rims of the flowers, the pitcher, the pitcher's handle, the eggs, and the dots for the baby's breath. (Here the artist felt it was desirable to block out these tiny areas with masking fluid before applying the varied wet-in-wet wash behind the dots.)

Although this floral is set on a square bridge table, Mr. Millard created more visual excitement by changing the square to a triangular wedge for the top. This in turn encouraged his mind's eye to "see" or invent other wedges or triangles and weave them into the composition along with the circular shapes.

There is a considerable amount of visual motion created by the S-sweep of the backdrop cloth, which moves the eye across the tabletop and down toward the base. This gives a definite feeling that "space" exists behind and around the flowers. The various triangles (indicated in the diagram) serve to give contrast to all of the circles, as well as to direct the eye. The white shape on the left-hand side, where light seems to be entering, was an intuitive choice on the part of the artist. The composition might have worked equally well without it.







Radiating "Spokes." This floral painting is moving into even more color, with small areas of pinks, reds, yellow, and green in the blossoms. They present a loose appearance and may seem haphazard or straggly at first glance, but in fact you can see that they are quite controlled when you study the underlying geometry. As shown in the diagram, the rich blue tones on the pitcher serve as a dark central core from which color is discharged outward in various directions, like the spokes of a wagon wheel. Even the handle of the pitcher seems to duplicate this radiation of the colored blossoms.

The asymmetrical splay of flowers is complemented and steadied by the three rectangular panels of the background, which, in turn, are graded in tonal value from light on the left to darkest on the right side. This indicates the direction or source of illumination.

The graded tones of the rectangle present a strong contrast to the delicate flowers—not by strength of color, but by the difference in shape. Remember, you can compose with shapes not only *within* the florals but also, at the same time, with the shapes *surrounding* the subject. Composing with shapes need not be a constant discipline in the use of geometrics, but it should make you more aware of shapes when you paint still lifes. Always be on the lookout for any visual device that will make your painting better and thereby make you a better artist.

Composing with Panels and Bands

Horizontal Bands. The artist liked the way the brilliantly colored blossoms, with their "bloopy" stems, were grouped on one side of this bouquet, with the four white daisies on the other. This made an unusual vertical division of color. He also liked the "lazy S" shape formed by the flowers. Against this combination, it seemed natural to use horizontal bands at the base—where the wired bottle sat on a multicolored shelf of browns, red, and lavenders—and at the top, where it seemed most appropriate to contrast midnight blue against the yellow panel.

The blue band was painted in *after* the floral was completed. The artist worked this color around the white daisy and then around the imaginary small floral shapes and the red and pink flowers, to make very interesting negative design shapes.

When you do an exercise like this yourself, Mr. Millard suggests following the same order. Do the floral first and complete the painting without the strong horizontal band. Then live with the painting propped up where you can see it for a week. After that you can brush in the band if you still think the painting needs it. Make the color very deep and rich, and paint it in a single wash. The reason for looking at the panel for a week, and then adding the panel, is so that you can develop some emotional response to what is happening in your composition. You will see a great deal of difference between the two versions—in the amount of impact or softness.

Vertical Band. You can't always just paint what you plop into a jar. This cluster of daisies, cosmos, a marigold, and a bachelor's button was set into a long-necked white vase resting on a brown table. Artist David Millard felt the still life needed more enthusiasm, and so he used his imagination to help raise his watercolor painting from the ordinary. He finds that still lifes are easy to shift around and recompose, and he advises taking inspiration from the great French pastel artist Odilon Redon, who was good with color and composition and was also not above inventing blossoms that existed only in his mind's eye. And that's what is going on here: The top two daisies start white, where they are in the light, and then turn pale blue. The next several daisies below it become pink and the next several to the left, a stronger blue. These colors were invented by the artist. He also invented the needlelike sprigs fanning out from the top of the vase. These pine needles were not painted in the first session, but were added later after the artist thought the painting was finished. The white table was invented.

When the flowers were completed in the first session, Mr. Millard set the sketch aside for a couple of weeks, studying it from time to time. Then he decided to try a vertical panel to give the flowers some punch; they seemed too weak. He decided to try painting in some "fake" pine "needles," the panel "behind" the edge of the flowers, and several dozen negative shapes to see what happened. And it worked!