

Whether the subject at hand is a snowy woodland or a bowl of eggs, painting white offers artists an unexpected opportunity for color excitement. White may not be considered a color in scientific terms, but—for the painter—capturing white has everything to do with color. We asked three artists—**Linda Gross Brown, Lisa Stauffer** and **Sally Strand**—to share their secrets for interpreting this “sum of all colors” in pastel.

BY ANNE HEVENER



EXCITE WITH WHITE



Clockwise from
opposite page:

Footsteps, No. 7
(19½x25½) by
Linda Gross Brown

Out on a Limb
(9x12) by Lisa
Stauffer

Eggs Trio (6½x8½)
by Sally Strand



ALL IS ILLUMINATED

SALLY STRAND



WHETHER SHE'S PAINTING FIGURES, FRUIT OR A RESTAURANT INTERIOR, Sally Strand's true subject is light. This captivation draws the Capistrano, California, artist to subjects that offer clear value contrast. Because white is the lightest value, she naturally finds many white subjects instantly eye-catching.

Strand remembers the moment when she first recognized the importance of contrast and value

Strand wanted to capture the warmth of the kitchen's stovetops and heat lamps in her pastel, *Cookworks* (30x40). "White picks up the color of the light, so my color choices were warm to pick up the color of the lights and ovens," she says. "To set off the light on the cooks' white jackets, I carefully considered the dark values surrounding the highest lights."

relationships. She was living in New York City at the time, and had been painting primarily with watercolor. "There were these eggs on a windowsill," she says. "I picked up my pastels, which I had only used in art school up to that point, and I started painting over my painting of the eggs in watercolor. The subsequent layers of color sparkled on those eggs, and I realized it was all done with mixed layers of color—not white—and the value relationships were the key to the illusion."

Strand's approach to any subject, then, begins with getting those value relationships right, particularly the values between the light and shadow sides of an object. "If the value of the shadow side



is lightened to retain the silhouette of the whole object, then there is a different emotional mood than when the shadow side of white is rendered darker, breaking the silhouette and creating a shaft of light," she says.

It's also important, the artist notes, to observe how white is influenced by the color of the light. "I always consider the light source, because it will direct me to choose colors—without using a white pastel—that reflect the feel of that light source," she says. "A white dress seen on the beach, when influenced by sunlight, has a different color and temperature than it would if painted indoors under a skylight, which reflects a cool blue sky."

With observation, Strand points out, an artist will also see how white picks up the colors of surrounding objects. "Very carefully, I reflect some of those surrounding colors into the shadow side of a white object," she says. "But I take care not to disrupt the values of the shadow by making the reflected colors too light."

The first thing Strand did when she started the pastel, *Eggs Underwater* (36x49), was to "key the white with the highest value of the specific color choice in the lightest area," she says. She then compared every other value in the light to that, asking whether the color leaned toward yellow or blue, warm or cool. In this case, she used a bluish palette, which added to the suggestion of water. "I then keyed the value of the darkest dark in the shadow side of white and compared all the dark values to that," she says. "Value considerations were first; color second."