



Mary Ann Beckwith demonstrates an experimental technique that's bursting with texture, color, symbols . . . and cobwebs.

Experimenting with texture and media

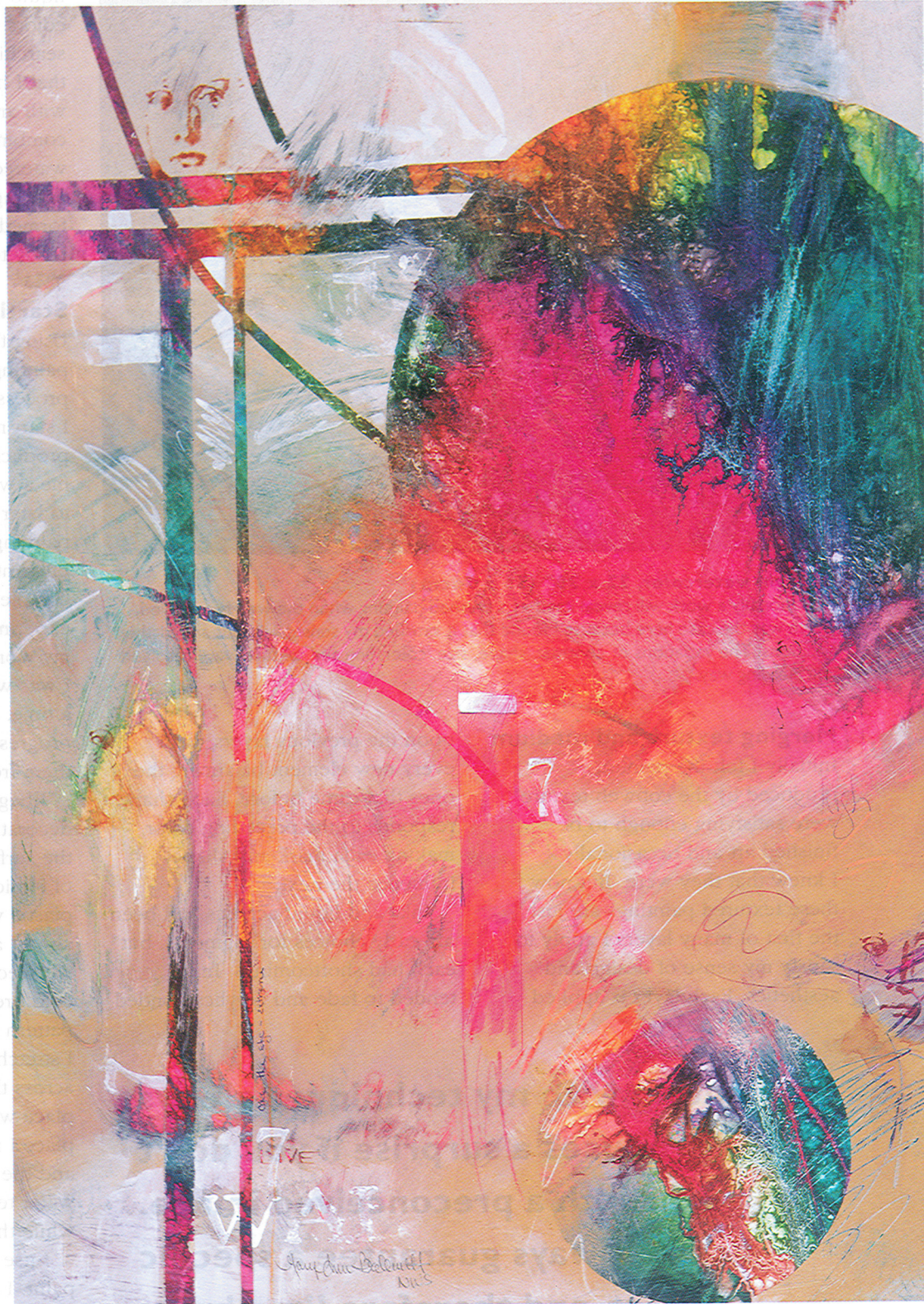


Tangles of roots. Thread. Treetops. Frost on a window. Regardless of the kind of texture, I'm intrigued by it, and that love of texture has often been the basis of my paintings. In fact, years ago during a Maxine Masterfield workshop I was greatly inspired by poured pigments and sprayed inks, along with impressions of leaves, shells and cheesecloth. Many of the artists in this workshop felt the same way.

A good friend, Incha Lee, loved the cheesecloth effect, but was dismayed by the regularity of the pattern. While many of us tried to find a way to create a lush and varied pattern, she found it with decorative Halloween cobweb. It was the new tool of choice for creating a rich, tangled pattern, and I found that it provided the richly textured surface I craved. The web could be pulled taut for geometric patterns or loosely curved for soft organic effects. It could be used to cover an entire surface or just select areas. The colors used could be rich neutrals or bright and spirited primary colors.

Next Dance, watercolor, 40 x 26" (102 x 66cm)

I'm always searching for new and exciting ways to approach my design. Last winter I saw a kite festival on a frozen lake and the impression was lasting. I reflected upon the experience in my journal and this design was the result.



**Seventh Heaven,
watercolor,
30 x 22" (76 x 56cm)**

Words, numbers and shapes taken from sketchbooks were my inspiration for this painting.



Enough, watercolor, 22 x 30" (56 x 76cm)

Occasionally a work will reveal itself as a finished painting when the web is removed, which was the case here because I found that it satisfied my senses without any further additions. The variations of contrast, shape, size, color, line and texture were resolved in a pleasing way.

Merging texture and medium

Initially I felt the paintings produced by the cobweb texture were satisfying enough to be finished art and occasionally I knew that they were. But now these textured paintings are just the first of many layers I apply to satisfy my sense of design and aesthetics. Each layer is applied

upon the previous layers, with every new element balancing the ones that came before. Each shape responds to the preceding color, making each mark and shape influence the next.

Inks and liquid acrylics had been my early choices for pigments, but each had shortcomings. Inks tended to fade and acrylics bonded

“Painting with my techniques always produces a surprise if you don’t begin with a preconceived image. I can’t always guarantee a specific effect, and therefore I’m always experimenting with textures and materials to see what visually stimulating effects I can create.”

the webbing to the paper, creating results I didn’t want. Then I tried liquid watercolors — the vibrant colors were exactly what I was searching for. They had an intensity that I hadn’t experienced before with any medium. It was time to combine the webs and the liquid watercolors and the results were exciting. Lively color and patterns formed the foundation that I was ready to build my designs upon.

Starting the experiment

Using this technique to create paintings can be a very messy process. When I begin working I start many paintings because producing several at once gives me a wealth of textured “starts” to later develop into finished paintings. I often have dozens of paintings in various stages of completion. This allows me to experiment and take chances in my work that I might not try if I was working on one painting at a time. Having many paintings in progress keeps me free and keeps them from becoming too precious.

I begin by spreading a layer of decorative Halloween cobweb on the surface of the paper. My papers of choice are Yupo, which is a plastic watercolor paper, and almost any hot press paper. The web technique will also work on cold press paper, but the web pattern image won’t be as precise. I stretch the web as finely as I can across the surface and hold it in place with pushpins. Once it’s in place I moisten the entire surface and the web layers with water. The water tension holds them in place while the paint is being applied.

I use spray bottles to apply the paint. I create a distilled solution of liquid watercolors and distilled water that’s still strong enough to provide the intense color I love. I always shake the bottle well before spraying, holding the bottle in an upright position to spray it. I continue spraying until the color



has the intensity I want, rinsing the spray top after using. The color dries lighter than it appears when wet, so I must anticipate that loss of color. While the color is still wet, I tilt the board to encourage the pigment to move along the webbing and blend the color on the surface. When the painting is completely dry, I remove the webbing.

Assessing for design

Next I study the dried painting, search for areas that intrigue me and consider how to design the next paint application. I preserve the most interesting webbed areas by placing stencils or plastic shapes on the surface, protecting the areas underneath from the spray of white paint. I allow this layer of spray to

Seeking Peace, watercolor, 20 x 26" (51 x 66cm)

I determined which areas were enticing to me and masked with contact paper and tape. Then I mixed a soft neutral opaque acrylic and rolled it on the surface. Stamped type, pencil marks and painted areas completed it.

dry and then lift the stencils. I check the composition and may choose to add more layers of colorful paint or white spray. I study the painting for any adjustments that the composition might demand.

Careful and thoughtful additions, changes, or embellishments are the last part of the process, the most important and the most time consuming. I'm often enthralled and excited with the process. What must be remembered is that the real challenge is the final design and the compositional choices one makes. Is the design exciting? Does

it have a successful combination of shapes, contrast, lines, color, texture and pattern?

Finding the meaning

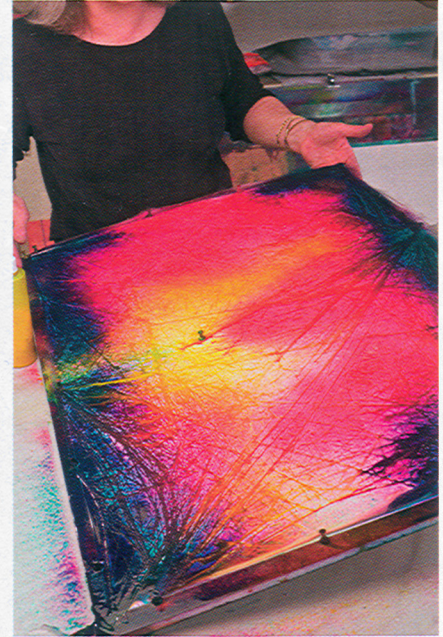
Years ago I was confronted with the challenge of considering the content of my art; I realized the need to analyze the real meaning of my work. I found that the textures seemed to reflect organic elements in my art, and that I also used geometric elements of lines, rectangles and especially circles. Since my childhood all types of circles have amazed and fascinated me: the sun, moon, stars, →



1 Applying the decorative web
I stretched decorative cobwebs carefully over the surface of hot press watercolor paper, securing the web with pushpins. Next, I evenly wet the entire painting surface with a large garden sprayer to get even wetness with no puddles.



2 Spraying color on the surface
I mixed a lot of color before I started. Then I began spraying the color on the surface using the spray bottles. I let the web move while the paint was wet, but made certain that the web remained in contact with the paper.



3 Tilting the surface
I tilted and rotated the board to blend the colors as they ran along the web. I allowed the color to dry completely. When I removed the web its impressions remained on the paper surface.

Materials I used

Support

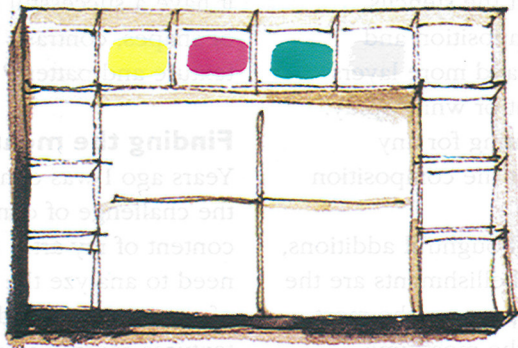
Hot press watercolor paper

Other materials

Decorative Halloween cobweb
Spray bottles
Watercolor pencils
Stencils

Artist's quality liquid watercolors

AZO QUINACRIDONE PHTHALO TITANIUM
YELLOW MAGENTA TURQUOISE WHITE



HINT

It's very important that the web be stretched thinly because if the web is too thick the paint won't reach the surface of the paper. The web will be barely visible in many places, but the water tension holds the web in place.



6 Removing the masking

I removed the masking and assessed the design, spraying again as I felt necessary. I applied a final layer of spray through a bird stencil and allowed all sprayed layers to dry.



4 Using stencils

I covered areas of the painting with stencils, considering which parts I wanted to preserve because I'm selective and always considering design. I used stencils made of Yupo paper because they don't absorb moisture and can be used many times.



5 Spraying Titanium White

With the stencils in position I sprayed the surface with Titanium White. I let the painting dry, then placed more stencil masking for the design and spray.

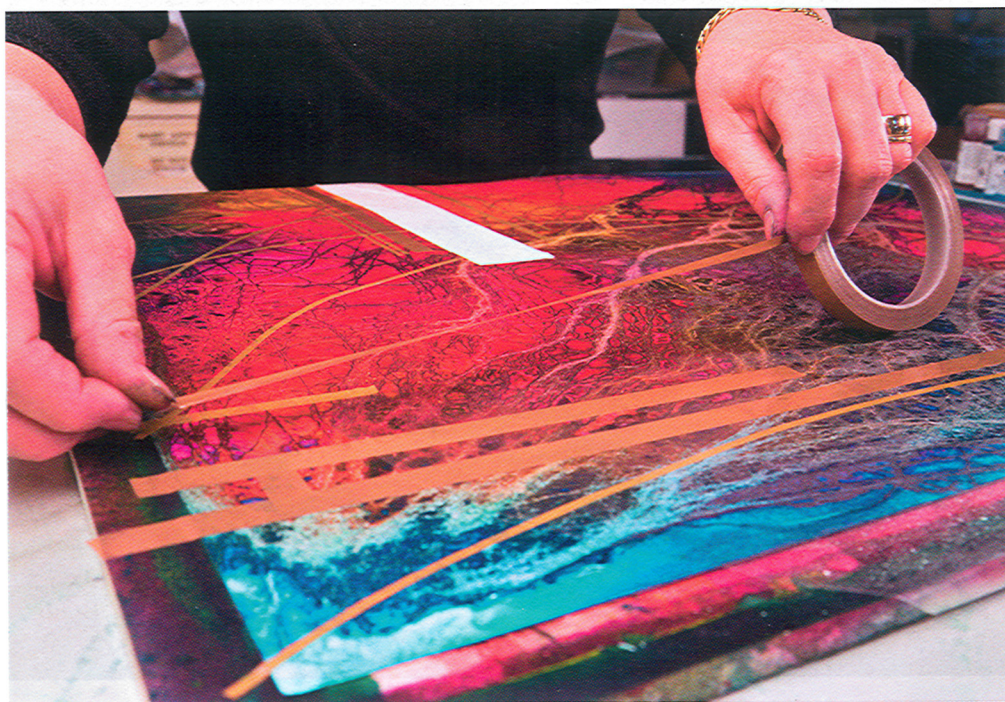


7 Adjusting with pencil

I adjusted the surface colors using layers of watercolor pencil, which allowed me to make very subtle adjustments to the color and contrast. Color can be shifted using multiple layers of the pencil.



Enjoying the result! *Ever Free*, watercolor, 30 x 22" (76 x 56cm)



1 Masking the support

I masked off select areas of a Yupo support using tape and contact paper, preserving the most interesting areas for the design.



2 Rolling on acrylic paint

Next I rolled a neutral gray mixture of Titanium White, Burnt Sienna and Ultramarine Blue acrylic paint over the surface. The roller provided an interesting texture that couldn't be achieved with brushes.

Materials I used

Support

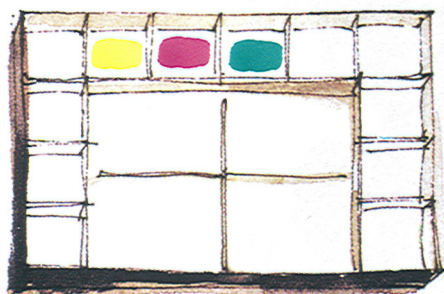
Yupo paper

Other materials

Decorative Halloween cobweb
 Spray bottles
 Narrow width paint roller
 Contact paper
 Masking tape
 Scissors
 Alphabet stamps
 Paper towels
 Watercolor pencils

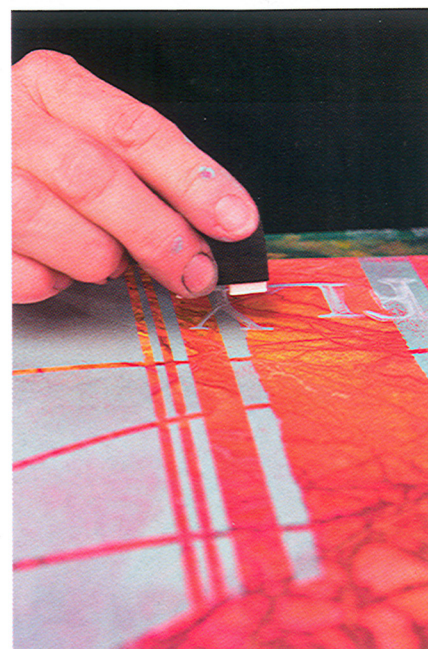
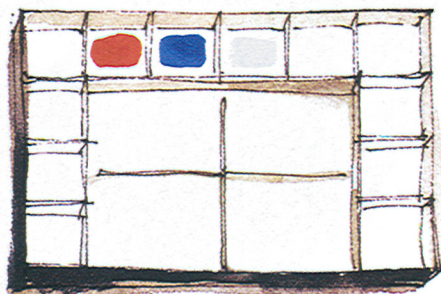
Artist's quality liquid watercolors

AZO QUINACRIDONE PHTHALO
 YELLOW MAGENTA TURQUOISE



Artist's quality acrylics

BURNT ULTRAMARINE TITANIUM
 SIENNA BLUE WHITE



5 Embellishing the work

I embellished the piece stamping in words and images, cutting my own stamps for originality. I also embellished with calligraphic pencil lines and marks and by scraping out paint and rubbing color into certain areas.



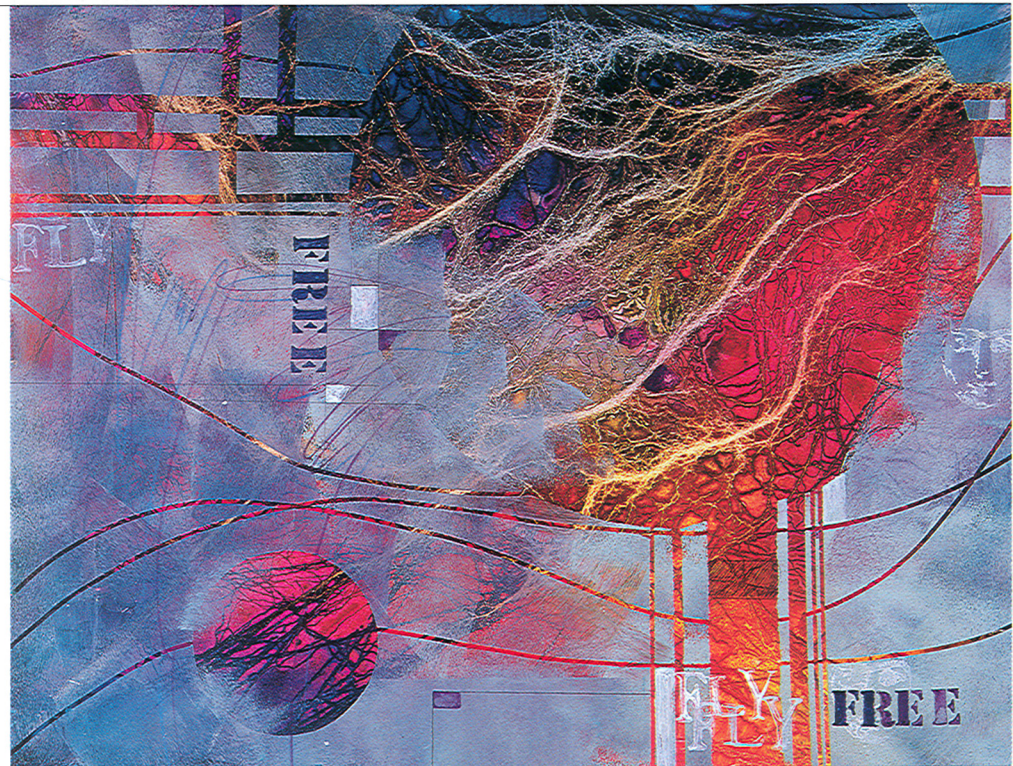
3 Removing the masking
Before the paint dried, I lifted off the layers of tape and contact paper.



4 Applying more acrylic paint
I softened some of the edges of the masked areas by applying additional layers of diluted opaque acrylics with the roller. I rubbed out some areas of acrylic with the paper toweling.



6 Adjusting the composition
I made final compositional concerns and adjustments by drawing a grid and adding opaque painted areas.



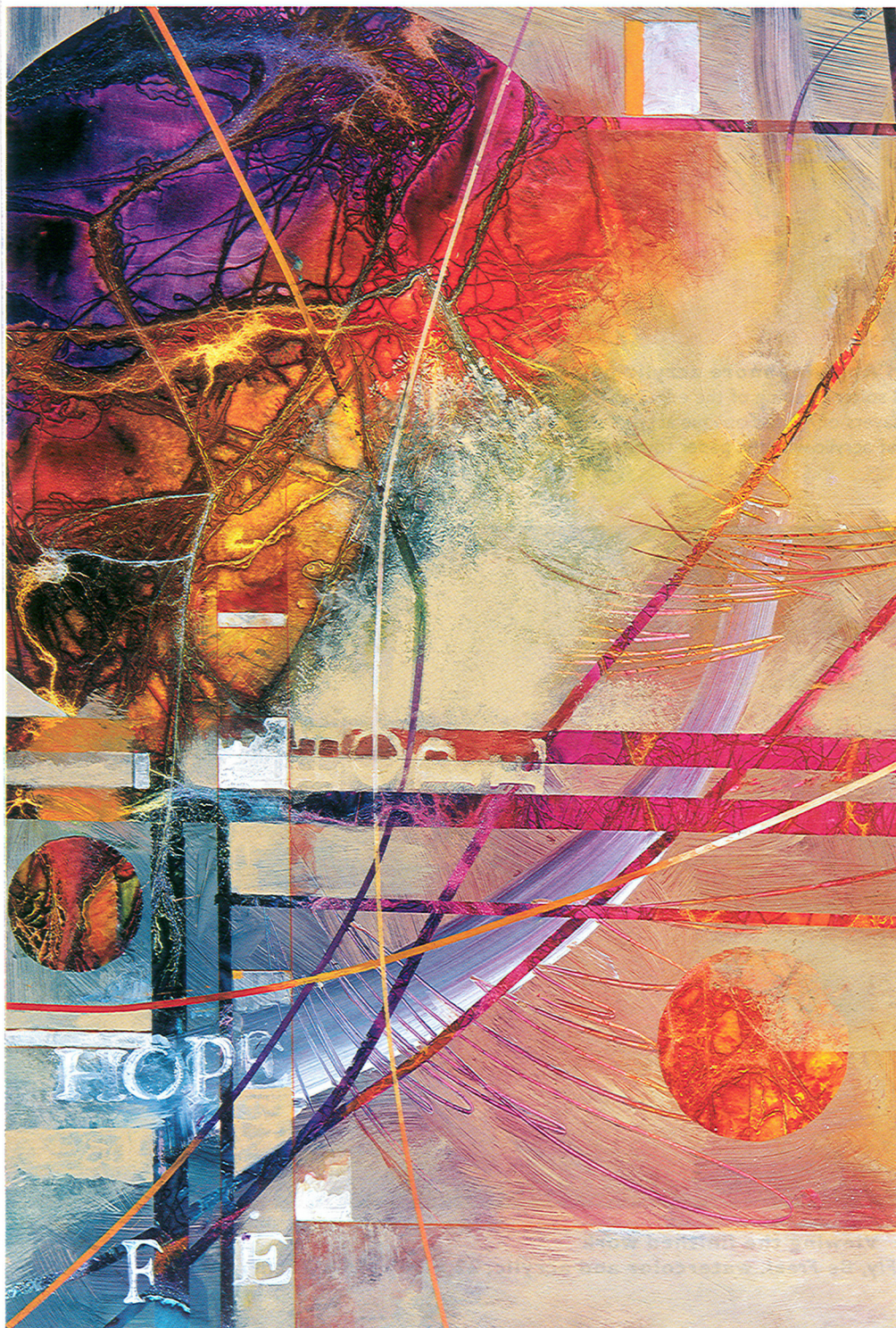
7 Viewing the finished work
Fly, Be Free!, watercolor and acrylic, 22 x 30" (56 x 76cm)

How to dilute watercolor

I use a primary triad using Quina Magenta, Azo Yellow Medium and Phthalo Turquoise. I recommend that each artist experiment with a wide range of colors to see which palette satisfies their individual aesthetics. While I dilute liquid watercolors, any tube of watercolor can be diluted in the same fashion. Dilute the paint in a spray bottle with an equal portion of distilled water and shake well. I always start with less water and then add more as needed.

Hope For the Future, watercolor, 29 x 20" (74 x 51cm)

This started as a workshop demo, only to be taken home and finished. The energy generated by a class is often apparent in the finished work. The class even titled it.

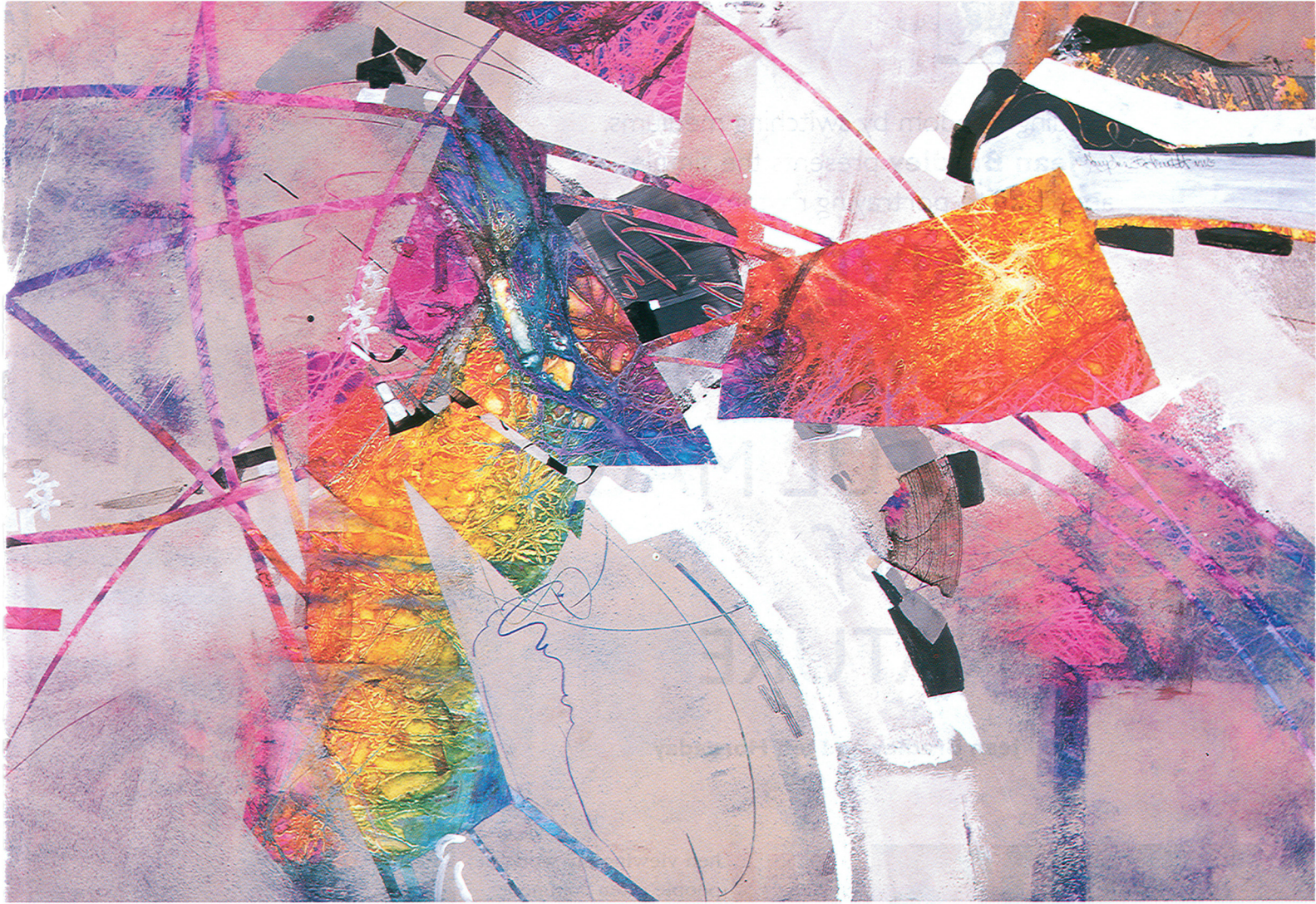


→ celestial symbols, bubbles blowing in a spring breeze and concentric ripples in a pond. I was also using symbols of peace and ascension like butterflies, symbols of transcendence and birds that always soared toward the heavens. I realized that I wanted the impact of my work to be positive. The symbols must always be uplifting and represent man's highest motives. I wanted my work to ascend, improve or soar above the average. I concluded that concepts of peace, honor, honesty, integrity, freedom and hope are issues important to my work.

It's very important that every artist reflect upon his or her beliefs and experiences to find their personal symbols. Thousands of symbols exist and can be found in our dreams, collections, interests and history. Astrological symbols, religious symbols and those of ancient cultures are just a few possibilities with which to start.

Painting with abandon

Painting with my techniques can always produce surprises because I never begin my work with a preconceived image. I can't always guarantee a specific effect, and therefore I'm always experimenting with textures and materials to see what visually stimulating effects I can create. I love the textured patterns and fluid washes of watercolor, juxtapositions of color, pattern, opaque areas and the process of design. I enjoy the unanticipated effects and delight in the random happenings of painting, and I'm thrilled when confronted with the challenge to resolve these seemingly accidental starts. The satisfaction is that you aren't replicating reality, but creating a new reality. □



Longing, watercolor, 22 x 30" (56 x 76cm)

Balanced geometric design has always been an important part of my work, but now I love the challenge of the dynamic trapezoidal shapes.

About the Artist

Mary Ann Beckwith is equally a painter and teacher. She is a 35-year resident of the rugged and scenic Upper Peninsula of Michigan, from which she derives much inspiration. As a professor of art at Michigan Technological University, she brings the arts to engineering and science students. Mary Ann has twice been the recipient of the university's Distinguished Teaching Award.

Mary Ann is a signature member of the National Watercolor Society, International Society of Experimental Artists (Nautilus Fellow), Society of Layerists in Multimedia, Transparent Watercolor Society of America, as well as the Alabama, Georgia and the Louisiana Watercolor Societies.

As author of "Creative Watercolor: A Step-by-Step Guide and Showcase" (1995), published in English and Japanese, Mary Ann's influence in experimental watercolor is international. She has been featured in numerous watercolor books, and her work has been exhibited with the American Watercolor Society, Allied Artists of America and Watercolor USA, among others.

Mary Ann conducts workshops and classes on experimental watercolor techniques and collage, and she has served as a judge in shows around the country. Visit her website at www.fa.mtu.edu/~mabeckwi.





Finding freedom by switching mediums,
Jean Bradley presents the simple
approach to portraying rhythm and light.

CONVEYING *the* COLORFUL MAGIC *of* NATURE

By Jean Bradley and Jeff Hornaday



When viewing my work, people often comment that they feel the life force and energy in the vibrant colors and movement. It's my expression of the magic in nature. Living in Kauai for ten years, I was fascinated by the effect of sunlight on palm fronds and the constant movement of palm trees in the trade winds. I remember lying under a coconut tree on the south shore of the island, gazing up through the leaves. Shafts of sunlight and ribbons of color surrounded me, and I wanted to paint it all. That's where the Rhythm and Light series all began.

