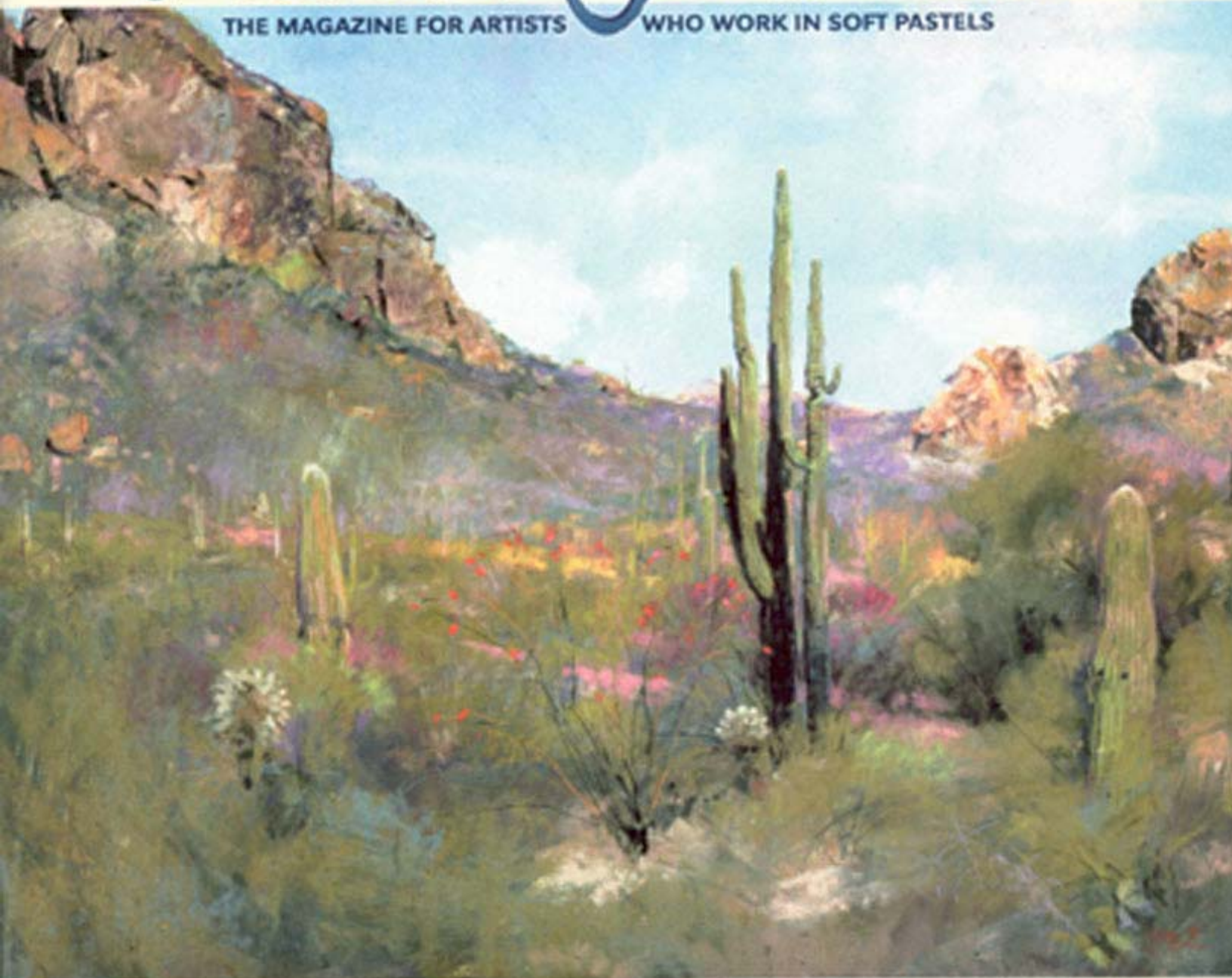


SPECIAL IN THIS ISSUE: 103 IMAGES FROM THE SECOND ANNUAL PASTEL 100 COMPETITION

ISSUE #13 • MARCH/APRIL 2001

# The Pastel Journal

THE MAGAZINE FOR ARTISTS WHO WORK IN SOFT PASTELS



**IN THIS ISSUE:**

**Bill Hosner, Winner of Grand Prize & First Place in Portraits**  
**First Place Winners: Landscape, Cindy House; Still Life, Jean Junkala;**  
**Animal, Mary Lang Killilea; Abstract, Edith Cohenno Bryant**

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# DIANNE B. BERNHARD

*Artist, Teacher, Arts Advocate and Art Patron*

BY ELIZABETH WILSON

As Dianne Barbee Bernhard reflects on her long-standing love affair with art, she says she can't envision a world without art. Throughout her life, she has been an artist, art teacher, arts advocate and volunteer. Her commitment increases as years go by, and she notes that her present role as an arts patron is the highlight of her career. In this capacity, she is able to support and promote the careers of other artists.

"One of the greatest pleasures in my life has happened over the last few years," she says. "I have been able to participate in giving substantial money awards to living, deserving artists. My goal is to help artists be recognized and paid during their lifetime."

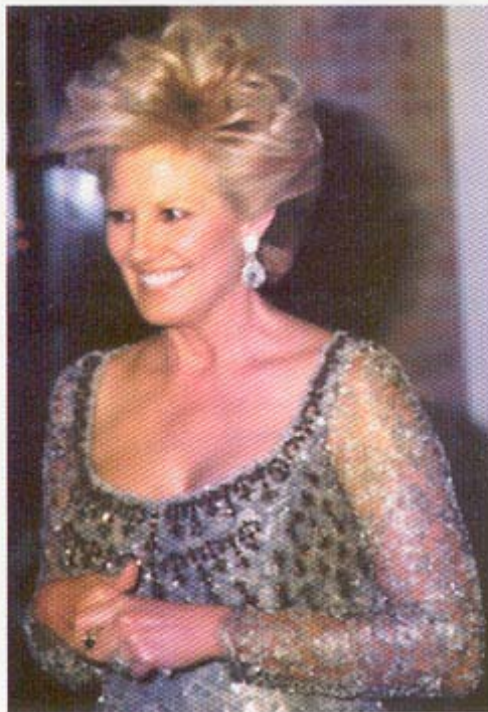
To achieve this goal, Dianne has established the Art Spirit Foundation through which she is able to present monetary awards and medals to outstanding artists entering national competitions. Her awards, earmarked exclusively for pastel artists, have been given at competitions sponsored by Pastel Society of America, Audubon Artists, National Arts Club, Salmagundi Club and Allied Artists of America.

*The Pastel Journal* was added to the list this year. Receiving the first Dianne B. Bernhard Gold Medal for Excellence with a \$1,500 stipend was Ron Monsma, of Mishawaka, Indiana; the Dianne B. Bernhard Silver Medal with \$1,000 went to Rainie Crawford, of New Milford, Connecticut. [See features on pages 20 and 24.]



*The Gold Medal, designed by Dianne Bernhard*

Dianne's love affair with art began innocently enough. As a young bride with a new house to furnish in her home state of Texas, she visited Houston-area art galleries in search of paintings to hang on her walls. At that point, she says, her taste exceeded her budget,



*Dianne B. Bernhard*

so she decided that she would have to create her own artwork. She found a teacher and studied with her for a year. She painted daily and, she says, "I got better and better."

Art lessons changed her life. "I took to painting immediately," Dianne says. "From the time I picked up the brush I knew I was expressing something deep inside me. A new person emerged once I smelled the turpentine and oil paints. I didn't feel lonely anymore."

She was attracted to florals, which have remained a specialty throughout her art career. The short-lived beauty of flowers offer many challenges, she explains. In the study of flowers, one must work with tones, textures, light and shadow, distance and perspective; in short, all the elements of classical painting.

Her main goal during her early years of painting was to fill her house with art. During this time, she viewed art as a delightful hobby. Soon, however, art would play a different role in her life. Her husband died suddenly in 1974 and she needed to find a way to support herself and her children. Dianne began teaching art to a small group of women, in rented space arranged and encouraged by her sister. These first ten students helped launch a teaching career that spanned over 20 years.

"I loved teaching," she says. She told her students that she painted out of compulsion and taught out of pleasure. Through the years, she continued her training. She studied at the University of Houston and Yale, and in Italy,

France and South America. "I passed along everything I learned," she says. Teaching by the concept of paint-along workshops, she shared her talents with thousands of students around the country. Part of the pleasure was watching them proudly take home a frameable piece of work each day. She also lectured at organizations and universities across the country.

She continued teaching after she moved to Trumbull, Connecticut in 1981. The town was perfect for art, she said, located as it was halfway between New York City and Boston. She painted and maintained a studio and became active in many arts organizations. She served as president of Connecticut Classic Artists for several years overseeing the planning and jurying of shows. She coordinated arts events around the state and helped organize charitable art sales.

"Any time I could find a place to show artists' work, I did it," she says. "What I always tried to do was to educate artists in the business aspects of their careers," she says. "I knew how hard it was to make a living as an artist. I was doing it."

She says she tried to discourage artists from buying into the "struggling artist syndrome."

"That's a cliché artists buy into," she says. "You have to be creative to make a living at art. If you work at being good at what you do, you can make a living at it." Teaching was her way of making a living at art but she says artists must find their own niche. "I had to make a decision about whether to show in galleries or to teach. I had to have a steady income so I chose teaching."

More significant changes in her life and her art then occurred. While she was jurying art shows in Connecticut, she kept coming across the works of pastel artist Herman Margulies. The vibrant colors and obvious spontaneity attracted her and she began taking lessons with him. "I always loved a teacher who taught with a passion," she says.

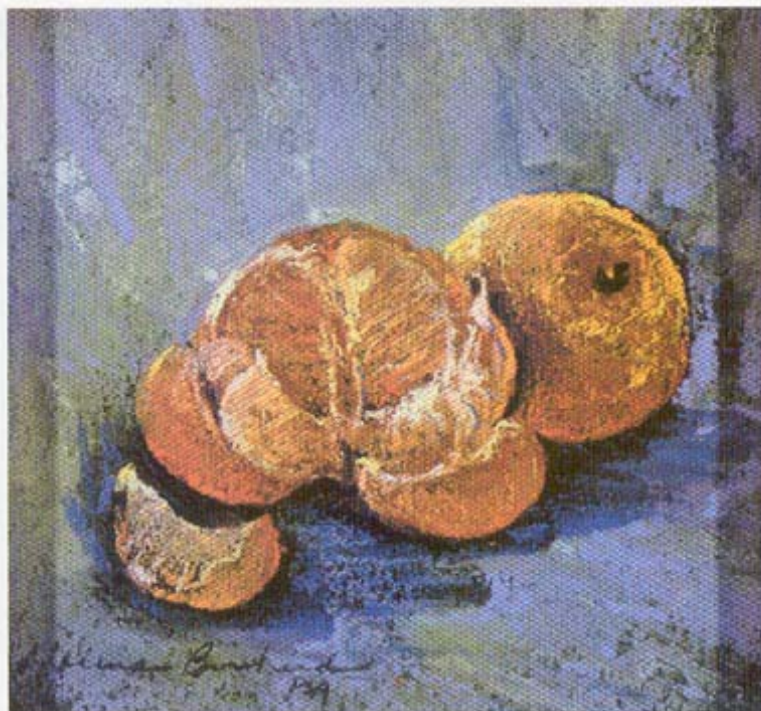
Herman introduced her to pastels. "I continued to teach in oil but all my

learning was in pastel. I would take what I learned back to my students." Today whenever she has time to paint, she works almost exclusively in pastels. Flowers and still lifes remain favorite subjects.

In 1992, she married A. Van Bernhard, an entrepreneur and former partner in Value Line, a New York Stock Exchange publishing company. "We reversed roles," she says. "He was an art patron all his life and I was a painter. After we were married, my life was transformed from being an artist to being a patron of the arts."

Van shares a lifelong love of art with his wife. He is a philanthropist and staunch supporter of all the arts. He had studied art during his high school and college years and worked mainly as a sculptor. He now studies with Herman Margulies and works strictly in pastels. Both he and Dianne are members of the Pastel Society of America.

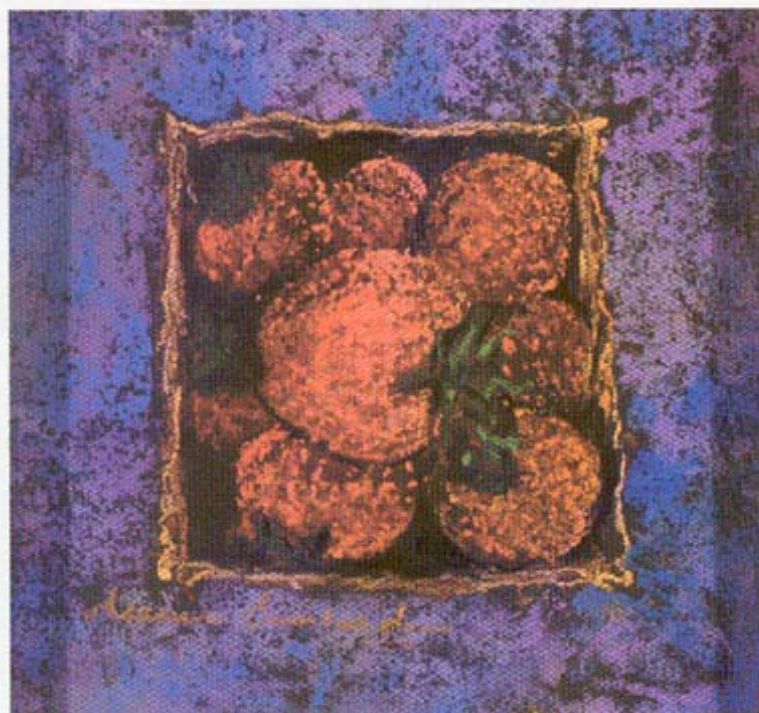
Dianne and her husband own a gallery in Southport, Connecticut, a town located within an hour's commute of New York City. The gallery features selected artists and special art exhibits. Dianne has transformed an ordinary retail store

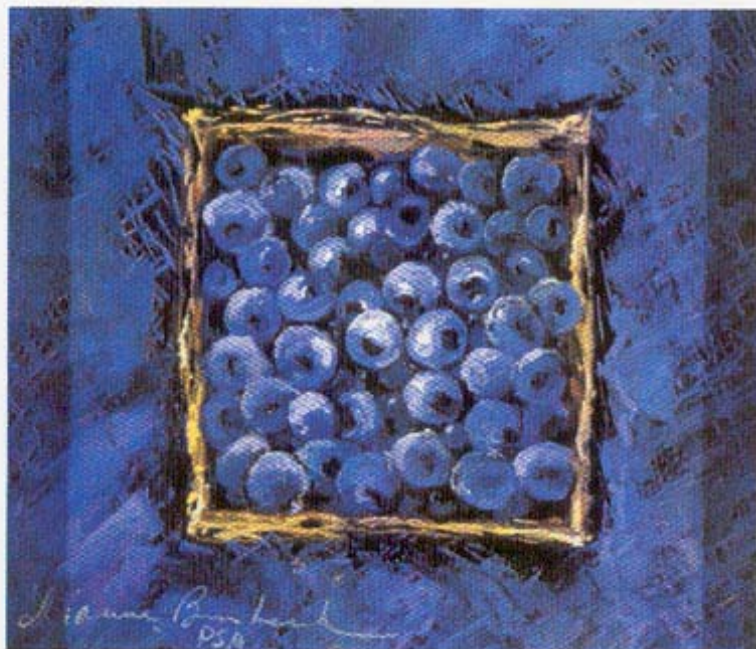


Above, Oranges; below, Strawberries, pastels by Dianne Bernhard

into an elegant art space with stone floors, decorative columns, tasteful furnishings and state-of-the-art lighting. Upstairs, Dianne maintains a studio and living quarters which she has decorated to resemble a European palazzo featuring stone stairways and terrace gardens. The gardens were designed by Dianne and reflect another of her passions.

Since becoming an arts patron, Dianne has devoted a great deal of time





Blueberries, pastel by Dianne Bernhard

to promoting the work of Herman Margulies, whom she considers her mentor and friend. "After I became a patron, I went back to the artist who helped me. I purchased over 300 of his paintings. I wanted him to be able to paint without the stress and demands of galleries." She continued to buy his paintings as they were done, and today she owns some 400 of Herman's pastels.

Her collection includes another 100 or so paintings which have attracted Dianne's attention. Many are Connecticut artists. She visits local galleries and sometimes follows leads provided by friends. "I pick and choose who I want to patronize based on their good work, their desire, their determination, their willingness to have the courage to survive in the art world."

"We are putting a lot of money into helping artists realize their dreams during their lifetimes," Dianne says. "There are no old masters on our walls; you won't see Monets or Renoirs here. We want work by living artists on our walls."

"My ambition is to change the way society looks at artists and change the way artists look at themselves. Art is the foundation of our lives. We will always need art. People think of art as a nice little hobby. It can be fun but it's also hard

work. It's stressful. You sometimes have to dig to the bottom of your core to get it right. It's not easy."

She is determined to raise the status of pastel painting and is pleased at the interest pastel is generating in the art world today. "Pastel is finally getting the respect and admiration it deserves. I always felt pastel did not get the recogni-

tion that it should," she says. "Works under glass have always taken a back seat to oil and acrylics no matter how high the quality." This prompted her decision to present awards exclusively to pastel artists.

"I felt pastel needed its own place and that if I can make awards large enough, it would encourage pastel artists to go through the trouble of entering their work in major competitions. I thought that if the first prize in pastel would equal that of oil painting, more good pastel artists would emerge."

Dianne credits much of the current interest in pastel painting to Flora Giffuni who founded the Pastel Society of America in 1972 and has worked tirelessly to promote the medium. "The whole Giffuni family—husband, brothers, children—were the initial award donors," Dianne points out. "Wealthy friends also became award donors and the National Arts Club and other societies were also helpful. The result of Flora Giffuni's devotion is that pastels are now on equal stature with all other media."

The growth of pastels is reflected in the number of paintings received by PSA for its most recent competition. Dianne notes that only 180 paintings were accepted and hung, out of 1,000 received.

Dianne is a strong advocate of competitions. "I believe competition is a great teacher and that the more we compete the better we get," she says. "Competitions are a way of putting money in the artists' pocket and still giving them dignity. They feel like they earned it."

Dianne doesn't paint as much as she used to. Her artistry has found expression in other ways—she is currently creating a cookbook with her sister, which will be illustrated by 400 of her own pastel drawings. She is also busy promoting the work of other artists. "I work on shows and promotions for other artists. I work with curators and museum directors," she says. She is now in the midst of working on a retrospective exhibit at the Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown, Ohio, which will feature 75 works by Herman Margulies. The exhibit is scheduled for this coming September, with Dianne and her husband underwriting the entire project.

Dianne sees this type of work as part of her role as a patron. A patron, she says, does more than buy art. "A patron becomes the artist's best friend. A patron becomes the artist's support. A patron is the artist's cheerleader. A patron is someone who supports the artist, not just with money. A true patron is interested not only in the work but the character of the artist."

Being a patron has been a dream come true, she says. She and her husband split their time between homes in Connecticut and the Bahamas. There is an abundance of art wherever they are. Along with the actual beauty of the art which surrounds them, what adds to their pleasure is the knowledge that they have helped other artists along the way.

"That's the legacy I want to leave," Dianne says.

■ Elizabeth Wilson is an artist and writer who lives in Waterbury, Connecticut.