

# Elements of Style

Style develops in the sheer investment of time. I've painted about 50,000 hours in the last 25 years, and something was bound to happen in there somewhere. My advice: Don't be premature in trying to determine your style. Resolve to spend a whole lot of time painting without evaluating yourself. Then try competing; even the

tinest success is like gasoline on the fire of inspiration.

Although my paintings have always contained many objects, I plan them more than I used to. In the past, I was fearful of planning because I rely on zany ideas that just pop up as I go along, and I was afraid I would plan that nuttiness out of existence. I've

worked out that conflict, though. I seem to see a collection of details rather than the elements necessary to organize a composition. This is a natural handicap for a realist painter, and it accounts, in part, for the "look" of my work. Chaos of detail gives many possibilities for resonance of meaning. Association is fundamental in the history of Western art, and the more there is to associate, the more meaning can emerge. Of course, I probably take that past the natural breaking point!

I painted *The Doctor Husband* (watercolor, 60 x 40) from life with no preliminary sketches or photo references. These clients have the best contemporary figurative art collection I've ever seen; I'm really proud to be part of it. They live about five hours away from me, so I worked for two and a half days in their house and also stayed with them there, where they treated me like a princess. When I left, I took all the still life objects, fabric samples and paintings in the scene with me, and finished the painting in a couple of months' work. The clients drove for their final sittings and left with their painting and all the borrowed stuff. This is a real "seat-of-the-pants" way to work, but I love how the painting turned out. I attribute everything to the clients' wonderful senses of humor, which the painting reflects.

This is one of the advantages of painting portraits from life—the subject becomes increasingly warmer, more natural and confident in the course of a sitting. As a result, my paintings not only reflect my style, but they also capture the essence of my subjects. ♦

*Kathleen Jardine has exhibited her paintings in more than 60 national and international shows. She is a charter member of the Watercolor U.S.A. Honor Society and a signature member of the National Watercolor Society. A native Californian, she lives with her family in the woods outside Chapel Hill, North Carolina. To see more of her work, visit [www.kathleenjardine.com](http://www.kathleenjardine.com).*

