

DO YOU HAVE AN AFFINITY WITH WATER BUT CAN'T EXPRESS IT? TAKE THE PLUNGE INTO WATER SUBJECTS CONFIDENTLY WITH THIS COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE.

## movement and reflection

BY REGINA HONA

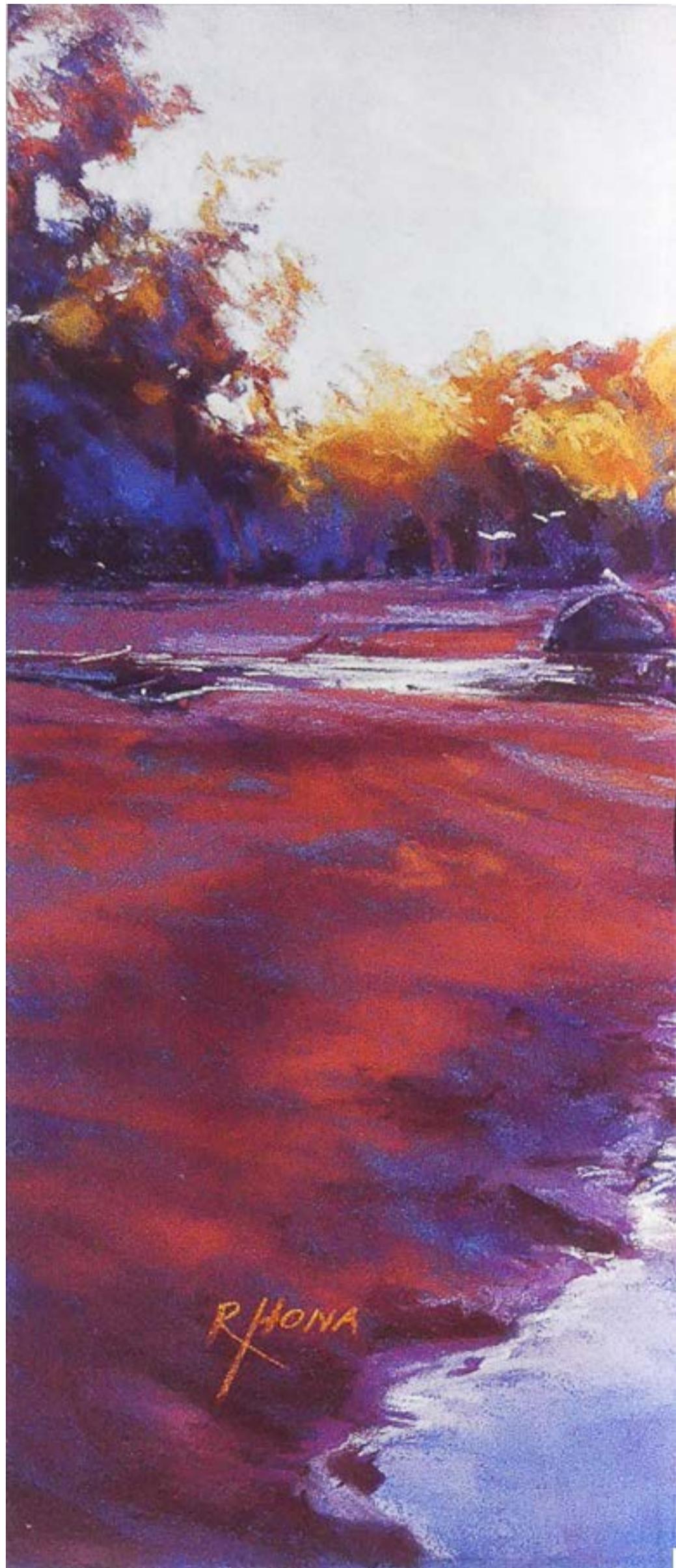
**W**hat is it about water that provides so much fascination not only for the artist but also the viewer? I have always enjoyed watching and capturing the feel of water as it tosses, curls, tumbles, ripples or laps at an edge. There's not just the water itself, but add to it the effect of the sky and its light as it shimmers on the water, or the reflections of the boats, buildings and other objects in and around the water. All this adds to the drama which never ceases to please.

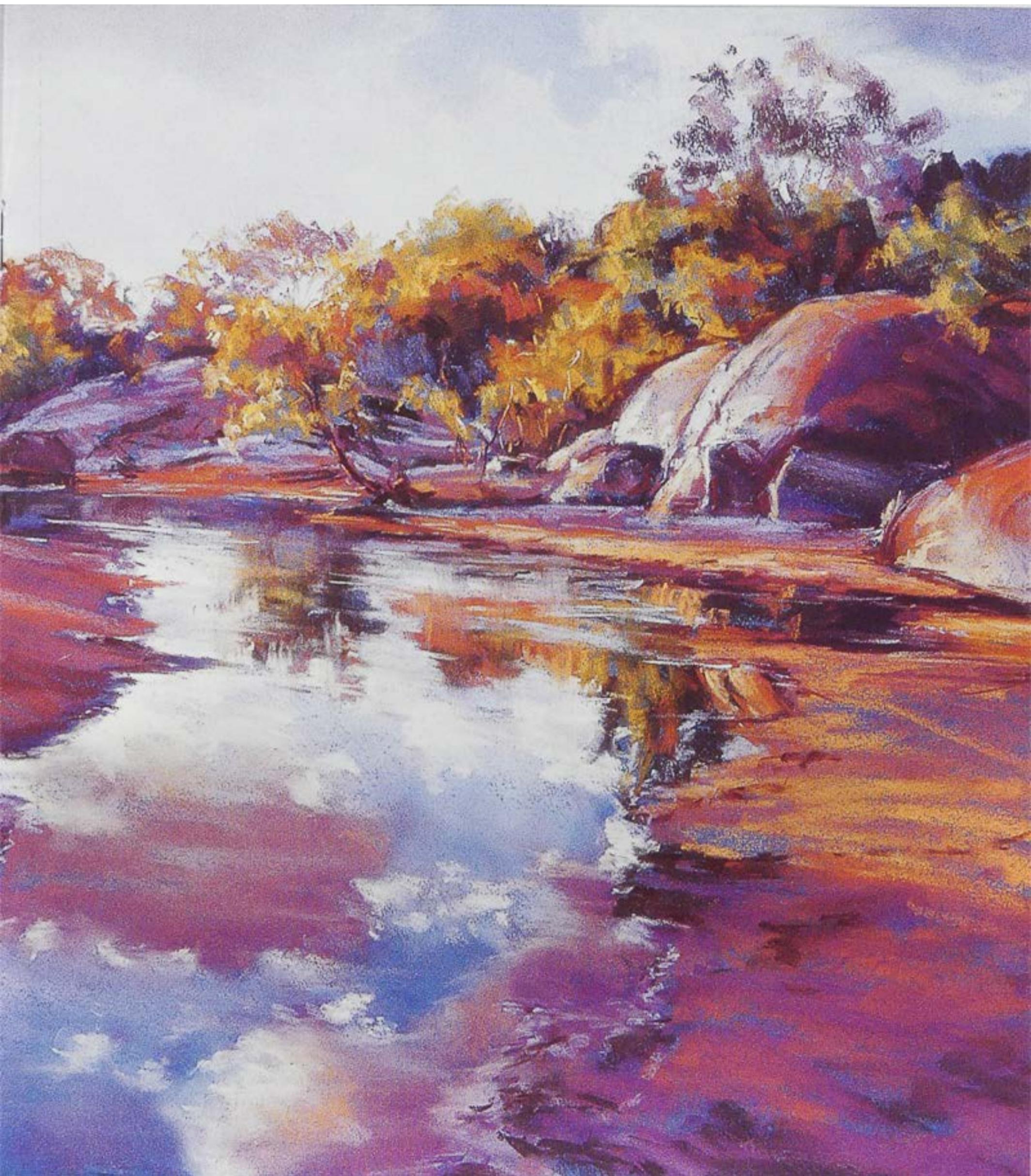
It may have something to do with how water makes us feel. I always feel exhilarated when I am near water especially on a beautiful sunny day. Even a puddle reflecting the sky or objects near it creates interest and excitement for me and I try to capture this in my paintings.

If you then add the element of life to your work by including people, animals or birds, these change your painting from being static into having a dynamic element of movement and life. I feel it adds another dimension that adds to my enjoyment and also that of the viewer.

### ***The Heavens Above, pastel, 68 x 49cm***

It's obvious that I was attracted by the reflection of the sky in the water as the end of the day was approaching. My husband and I camped to the left here (on our way south for the tip of Cape York Peninsular) amongst the little rivulets of the much larger Archer River when it's in full flow. Capturing the light as it reflects off the water and nearby rocks was my inspiration and challenge. The 's' shape that leads the eye to meander to the background and beyond plays an important part in the design. This painting won the 2005 Best in Show Award at The Pastel Society of Victoria's annual exhibition.





*Sunrise, oil, 152 x 51cm*

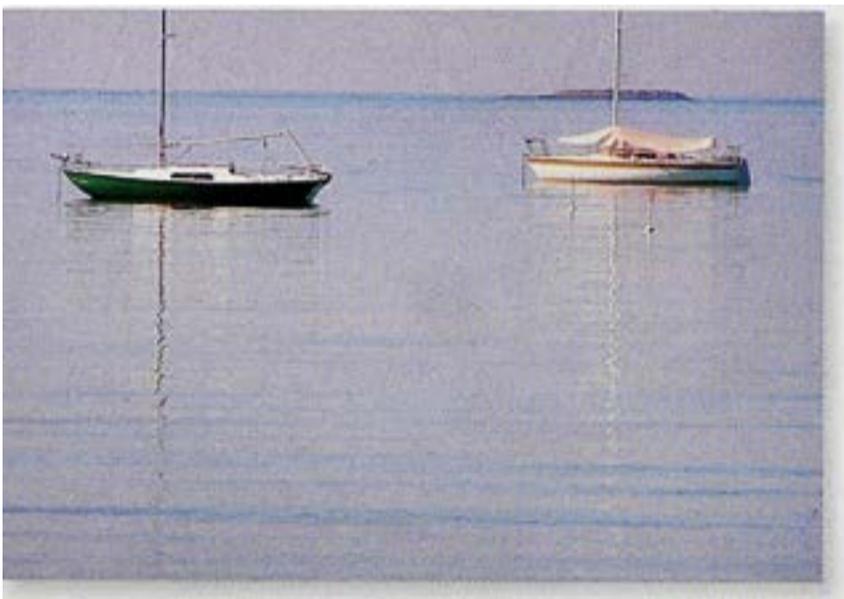
## A word on paper selection

The selection of paper can play an important part in the overall mood and temperature of a painting. This becomes even more important when you want to paint a scene such as this. I chose the pink colour to help me achieve the tranquil mood of the scene as I could see a lot of pink in the subject. I could also have chosen a pale blue paper but preferred to apply the blue tones rather than painting the pink. I also felt a darker toned support would destroy the subtle mood and merging of tones.

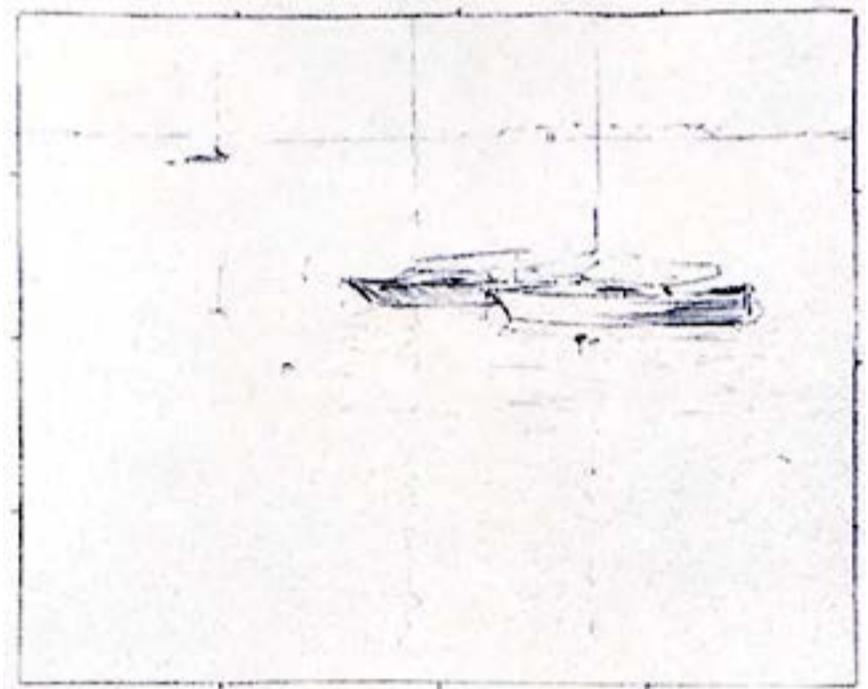
I would have needed to paint very heavily with my pastels to knock back the darker tones that would invariably come through. Darker tones are not necessary as the majority of the painting is in mid tones. Although I paint to cover all the paper I still wanted it to slightly show through in many places. After all, why not let the paper work for you!



## art in the making



This is a photo of the scene that inspired me. Simple isn't it, but the simplicity harbours many difficulties such as capturing the quiet mood, the gentle colours, the haunting reflections and the connection between the sea and the sky.



### step 1

#### Composition and sketching up

It's important to use your viewer to compose and draw up your painting otherwise it can be difficult to block out areas you don't want. This of course doesn't mean you can't move objects in or out of your composition. If you work from photos do the same by covering up areas to create the best composition. I generally work within a frame, and if you feel it will help, mark the edges of your frame with basic divisions such as 1/2 or 1/4 and visualize these divisions through your viewer to get an accurate horizon line, or placement of your main objects. Don't overdraw



## step 2

### Initial block in

I like to work the whole picture as one keeping everything loose. I start by blocking in the large areas of colour and tone, using horizontal strokes to depict the movement of the water. I felt that there was too much mid-tone in the overall tonal value of the subject and decided to lighten the sky a little to provide more variance. If I made it too light I felt it would detract from my focal point.



## step 3

### Centre of interest

As you can see I felt the overlapping of the boats presented a much better composition and gave me a strong centre of interest (golden mean). I decided to change the green colour of the boat that I blocked in earlier by brushing back with a bristle brush, and subdued it to a blue-green which I feel gives better colour harmony. I also worked on the correct contrast and tonal balance between the boats and the water.

## top tips on painting water

- Water is generally painted using horizontal strokes unless it is very choppy. To create recession, your strokes need to be shorter and narrower in the distance and longer and broader in the foreground. Make sure ripples are broken and don't overdo them.
- Reflected objects in the water are generally at least one tone darker than its source, often even stronger, depending on the distance and angle of your viewpoint. There are rare exceptions to this rule.
- Pay special attention to reflected angles in the water, and even direct vertical reflections need soft or harder broken edges depending on the movement of the water.
- Ripples and waves catch light at the top of them that provide a shadow tone underneath. Depending on the direction of the light, waves that build and are about to roll and crash have a transparent lighter tone near the crest.
- Make sure your background is finished before putting in finer details such as masts, ropes, birds, and other features. This makes it so much easier and also avoids correcting dirty marks that often appear as a result of alterations.
- Paintings with strong tonal contrasts give strong focal points and have more of a 'wow' factor. You may have to enhance the colours of a scene in front of you in order to achieve this when painting water.
- Black is a dead 'colour' which I believe can 'kill' a painting. Overuse of white can do the same thing. I use the darkest tone of AS Flinders Blue Violet, or Flinders Red Violet for my darks. Try using the lightest tone of a colour for your lights instead of white. Very soft pastels aid in accenting your lights more easily.
- If using people in your paintings, avoid making their faces too dominant or identifiable, as usually the viewers prefer anonymous subjects.
- As with any subject, to become good at handling water you need to paint it over and over. Observation of tone, colour, positive and negative shapes is the key and you have to be prepared to fail many times before you begin to get it right.
- I like to work the whole of the painting as one, never focusing to long on one area. This way I can stop at any stage.



### step 4

#### Sky

With the block-in complete, I now start at the top again building up the pastel pigment and forming the clouds, softening some edges with my finger. I am conscious not to make the land mass on the horizon come forward by keeping the tone cooler and light, and the horizon line soft edged.



### step 5

#### Boat reflections and masts

Before placing the verticals, such as the masts, I like to have the background behind them finished. Although it is not impossible to make the changes afterwards if necessary, it does make life easier by getting it right first. Take careful note of any angles, which have reverse angles reflected in the water. I intentionally deepened the tone of the water in the foreground as this helps to keep the viewer's eye from going out of the painting. I also lightened the tone value of the water close to the boats to create a stronger shimmer and to enhance the focal point.



*The Pleasures of Water, pastel, 60 x 50cm*



## step 6

### Detail

Now its time to add detail, making sure to reflect the detail where appropriate in the water. Usually reflections in the water are at least one tone darker than their source. Although the photo shows thw water as quite flat, in this case I felt that showing a little more movement made for a more interesting painting.



## step 7

### Finished painting, On the Bay, Pastel, 50 x 40cm

The thin lines for the mast ropes are easily created using a hard pastel. A mahlstick can be used to rest your hand when doing this. I never make the lines too exact or straight by ruling them, nor too heavy as this would draw too much attention to them. Once the bouys were added to the water (taking care with the reflected angles), plus the distant boat and some birds to give the subject life, my painting was finished.



***The Water's Edge,  
pastel, 33 x 33cm***

Birds are synonymous with water and I include them a lot in my sea subjects. This subject was all about light and reflections. I especially liked the way the sand reflected in the pool of water and how the placement of the gulls helps to lead the eye to this area.

***Here Little Fishies!,  
pastel, 50 x 40cm***

Children love water and as this little girl moved her hands gently in the water, the ripples picked up the array of colours and bouncing light around her. Her own shadow and reflection, together with a reflection of someone else in the right hand corner, work beautifully to link the whole painting together.

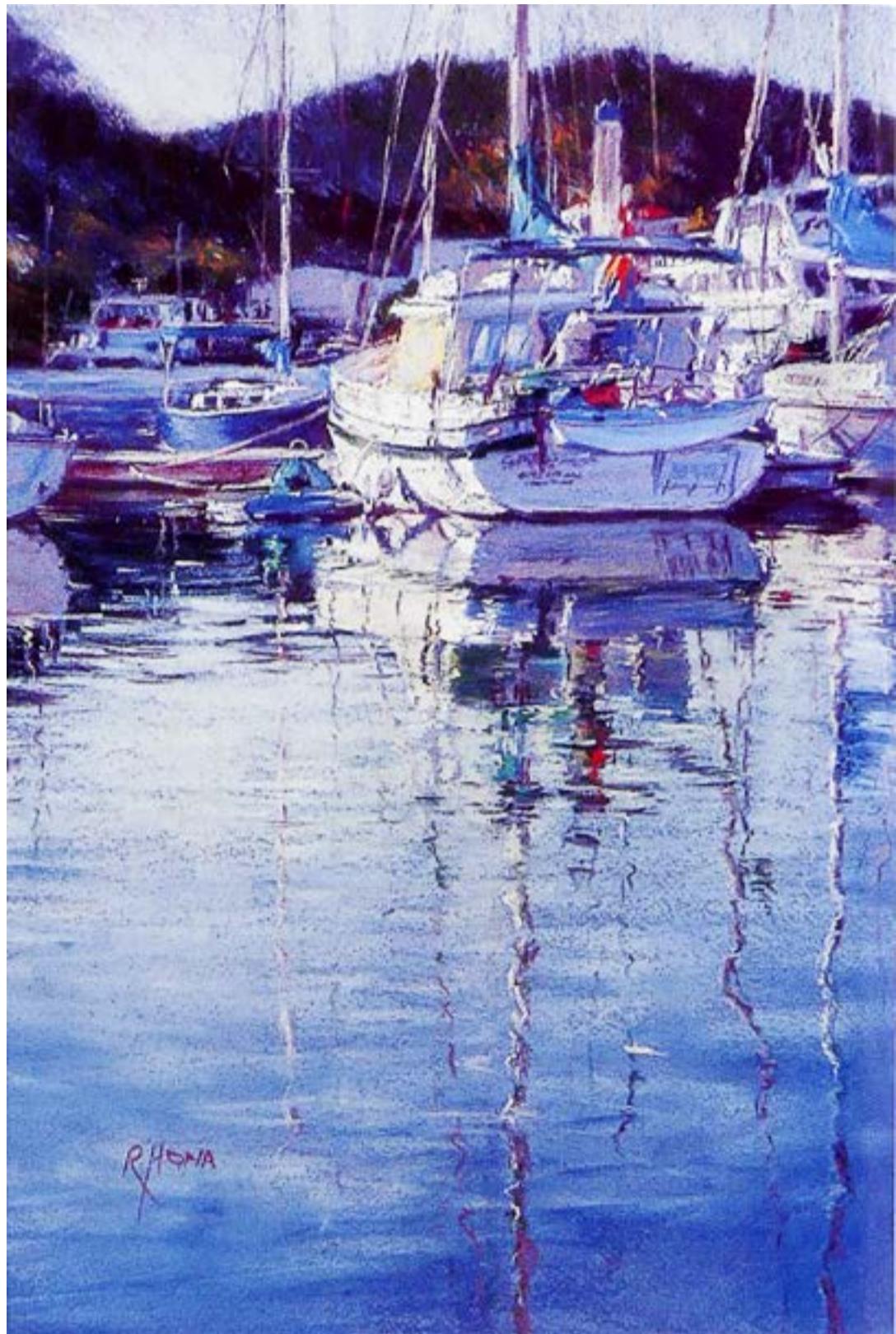
**“Black is a dead colour,  
which I believe can kill a painting”.**

## **brush up on your composition skills**

- Don't hesitate to move or leave out objects to create a better composition. Your job as an artist is not to record exactly what you see, but to create a work of art. More often than not water scenes require you to shift things around and recreate the scene.
- Always use a viewer to compose your subject. It doesn't matter if you are plein air painting or in a studio. There are many types on the market that you can purchase or make yourself. It eliminates unnecessary distractions so that you can clearly see what captures your interest. Should you forget to bring one, you can use your fingers to create a frame or rip out a rectangle from a folded piece of paper or even look through your camera lens.
- If using reference photos, never accept the composition to be perfect the way you have photographed it.
- Use the backs of other photos or bits of paper to block off areas, to change the horizon line, or simply to zero in on a small part of the photo that may provide a better composition.
- Take more than one photo of a subject you intend to paint, and whenever possible zoom in on shadow areas to gain a better colour analysis of your darks.

**Overnight Stay - Whitsunday's, pastel, 48 x 63cm**

The fading light on the boat, but more importantly the strong contrast of the red dinghy and the blue rippled water took my breath away here. The red is like a magnet that draws the eye and a myriad of soft ripples and reflections in the water further enhance the subject. This painting won 2003 Best Seascape at the annual Pastel Society of Victoria exhibition.



**Morning has Broken, pastel, 30 x 40cm**

The inspiration for this painting was the strong early morning light on the boat and its reflections. The water in the front was handled in a similar fashion as my demonstration piece, but the focal point was enhanced by the shadow tone on the distant hills and surrounding marina behind it.

The sky at the time was much brighter than shown in my painting, which I purposely subdued to take the viewer's eye straight to the boat. This painting won The Australian Guild of Realist Artists Kevin Taylor Award 2004 for Best painting in their annual Art Excellence Awards Exhibition.



**Archer River, pastel, 50 x 40cm**



- I continually check my subject through the viewer until I have drawn it up. At the same time I am mentally dividing my subject up into halves or other intervals so that the major elements of my drawing are placed correctly. Mark these intervals on your paper or canvas as a further aid if you find you often misjudge them. I find it is easier to misjudge position and distance in water scenes than in landscapes.
- Subjects that have an "S" or "Z" shape in them draw the viewer's eye to the focal point. Make use of them whenever you can.
- I enjoy observing reflections in water and I often use them to my advantage to draw the viewer's eye to the focal point, or to draw them down and around the painting. Many of my boat subjects have the mast cut off at the top as I prefer to focus on the boat's reflection.
- To include both mast and reflections often places the horizon line and focus in the middle of the painting and not in the golden mean.



***Approaching Storm, pastel, 40 x 50cm***

Born in Melbourne, Australia, Regina initially began her career as a private secretary after completing an Associate Diploma in Private Secretarial Practice at Caulfield Institute of Technology. She is married with two adult children and what began as an interest in painting as a child quickly grew into a burning desire to achieve more once the opportunity arose. Her initial training was in classic tonal realism in oil and some ten years later she embraced her painting with a new intensity upon the discovery of pastels.

Regina has gained instruction from notable artists such as Helga Ivanyi, Walter Magilton, June Woods, Shirley Stratford, Malcolm Beattie, and Maxwell Wilks. Although predominantly known for her

seascapes and landscapes, she is equally at home painting portraits, still life, and other subjects.

Regina is past President of The Pastel Society of Victoria and Councillor with The Australian Guild of Realist Artists. She has won many major awards since 1999, has held four solo exhibitions, and been involved in several group exhibitions. Her paintings are represented in collections on four continents. She has conducted workshops, gives demonstrations and teaches weekly painting classes in oil and pastel. In addition Regina is a volunteer & Assistant Curator for Friends of Art Very Special Kids Charity. For further information and galleries feel free to contact Regina by email: [reginahona@gmail.com](mailto:reginahona@gmail.com)

