

WHEN SELECTING BOTANICAL SUBJECTS LOOK FOR STRONG, SCULPTURED OR ARCHITECTURAL SHAPES AND VIVID, EXOTIC COLOURS AND USE A FLATTERING BACKGROUND SHADE TO ADD INTEREST AND VISUAL IMPACT TO YOUR COMPOSITION.

## how to design and paint vibrant botanical subjects

BY PAM ADAMS

I am drawn to flowers and leaves that naturally lend themselves to interesting design shapes. My particular favourites include strelitzias with their wonderful pointed shapes and spear-like leaves, lilies with their sensuous curves echoed in their leaves and stems, magnolias with their voluptuous petals against bare grey branches and waterlily pads that create natural designs on the water. I can never resist autumnal colours with interesting variation in leaf silhouettes and of course poppies, which possess so perfectly, the vibrant colours I love so much.

I often visit the Botanic Gardens in Melbourne and take photos to help me



**Poem of Poppies, watercolour, 35 x 53cm**

I visualized ribbons of warm colour flowing across the page while the stems, leaves and the plain cool background take a secondary supportive role.



**Bright Flight, watercolour, 20 x 36cm**

These bright leaves seemed to be flying in the breeze and I was keen to enhance the sensation of movement so a blue sky with scudding white clouds worked well. I like to use complimentary colours whenever possible.



decide on a composition.

I like to portray flowers in their natural growth patterns as much as possible even though I may paint a close up view.

In the studio I arrange a few flowers in a tall glass vase through which I can see the stems, or in autumn I will collect newly fallen leaves to arrange in a pleasing design.

I approach the painting in a jigsaw like fashion, starting with the main flowers and adding colour, layer by layer, and background details of other petals, stems or leaves to enhance the design. I enjoy the magic of bringing the painting alive bit by bit until finally the whole picture becomes complete. □



***Oriental Poppies, watercolour, 20cm diameter***

Working in a circular shape gave scope for movement with the poppy stems echoing the feeling of going around.



***Talking Points, watercolour, 33 x 47cm***

This is a busy painting and needed to have some of the strelitzias pushed back with a cooler blue glaze. The black background gives it a dramatic dimension.



***Echeveria, watercolour, 27 x 37cm***

I am an avid collector of cacti and succulents but most have too many spines to contemplate painting them. However, this echeveria with its symmetrical shape and thick leaves tinged with pink was inviting. I was pleased to achieve a good three dimensional appearance with the shadows.





***Nature's Colours,***  
watercolour,  
32 x 41cm

It's amazing that these colours can actually exist in nature and to show them off it was important to contrast them with some darker green leaves and a simple cool background.



***Magnolia Rainbow,***  
watercolour, 18 x 27cm

These bright magnolia flowers looked like a rainbow so I dropped rainbow colours into the blue sky and allowed them to merge wet-in-wet.

## design tips: keep it simple and unified

There is a natural order and patterns are to be found everywhere in nature. To see them it is often necessary to delete parts that do not conform to the design plan. Take away everything that is superfluous and you will be left with the essence. I often find it easiest to do this with the camera, zooming in on the subject for a close-up view, then adding abstract shapes and lines to complement the subject.

To create unity and movement link shapes and connect bands of colour using flowing lines for stems and branches. This also directs the viewer's eye through the painting.

## about the artist

Pam Adams is a watercolour artist who hails from Melbourne. She was born in England and grew up in Portugal before moving to Japan and later Brazil. After four years in Melbourne she returned to live in Tokyo where her artistic career really began while studying Japanese Sumi-e painting. She also learned to appreciate the importance of space and simplicity of design through studies of traditional Japanese woodblock printing.

An interest in botanical watercolour was awakened when she moved back to Australia in 1998. More recently she has been venturing into the world of plein air

painting where she can be at one with the flowers and trees in their natural habitats.

Now she is painting somewhere in between these diverse influences, incorporating movement, colour, atmosphere and line in her watercolours while retaining the all important essence of her botanical subjects.

Her first major exhibition was held at the Australian Guild of Realist Artists' Galleries in October 2005 and her paintings may be seen at [www.pamadamsart.com](http://www.pamadamsart.com)

