

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.

