



EVERETT, 16x9 inches, watercolor & gouache

Member of the issue

I am a self-taught artist. Although I've been drawing and dabbling in various media since high school, I've not seriously applied myself to watercolors until about two years ago. North Light Book Club has been instrumental in helping me along my path. I have a full-time job so there is no time for seminars, and books are all that I have.

Pennie Harris



KIKI, 9x10 inches, watercolor

Finding Inspiration

One book in particular, Jan Kunz's *Painting Beautiful Watercolors from Photographs* was an epiphany for me. Jan's color combinations for fleshtones helped me create my very first watercolor portrait — one that won "Best of Show" in the Florida State Fair. That particular painting, *Kiki* (above) was inspired by a photograph I had taken of a friend's daughter. I knew right off it was a winner.

As in all of my paintings, *Kiki* was created by working from light to dark, with fleshtones built up in many transparent layers. I found the hair especially difficult as I tried to make it dark and opaque in some areas, while keeping it soft and light in others. I learned a valuable lesson in completing this painting: **less is more**. Don't try to stuff in too much detail. Decide on the subject, decide on the focus, and then stick with it.

Materials

Since I like to work wet-on-wet as much as possible I use 300-lb. paper. Because I like detail, I prefer to use hot-press. I have found that I don't care for the hard edges left by masking fluid and therefore try to paint around my white spaces. It was Jessica Zemsky's *Capturing the Magic of Children in Your Paintings* that showed me it was not a mortal sin to forget about those white spaces and use white paint instead.

Finding Your Way

Don't listen to the people who tell you that you can't paint from photographs; don't listen to the ones who tell you that only live models or "alla prima" will do. Learn. Do better next time. The people who see your paintings will let you know how you're doing. Usually their reaction to your work is all the reassurance you need.

You can contact Pennie by writing to P. Harris Studio, PO Box 6843, Lakeland, FL 33807-6843. Pennie also has a Web site where you can check out her gallery or commission a painting: www.pharris-studio.com.

Planning Ahead

One of my first commissioned pieces, *Cindy & Tally* (below) presented a challenge as it was not done from one of my own photographs, and I didn't know the subject. I paid attention to aspects of the photo that appealed to me — the sun in the girl's hair, the light in the horse's tail. I learned a big lesson in finishing this piece: **a background can make or break a painting no matter how beautifully rendered the subject**. So now I plan more carefully. Maybe a thumbnail, maybe a quick, messy color sketch of the subject and it's setting. Just a little something to let me know where I'm going.

CINDY & TALLY, 13x17 inches, watercolor

