



BRE BARNETT CROWELL

Technique: What type of medium did you use? How important is your choice of medium to the expression of the piece?

I like to use Multimedia artboard and Uart320 or 500. I love Multimedia artboard. I buy it without any ground, since I like to apply it in my own way, creating various textures. It provides such a stable, versatile support. I apply pastel ground with a brush. Sometimes it is the ground that is purchased from Multimedia artboard, which is basically matte medium with #400 aluminum oxide grit. If I want more texture, I can add some pumice. Sometimes I make my own ground using the same ingredients. When dry, more ground can be applied if desired.

Next comes the drawing part. I use compressed charcoal on the white sanded surface. I use both the point and the side of the stick. I brush on Spectrafix liquid fixative, which is alcohol and casein based. This is my favorite part because it is so painterly and expressive. The fixative has a lovely consistency and doesn't dry right away. It melts the charcoal into the surface. I can lift it up with a brush or paper towel and regain light passages and movement. I can put more charcoal into the wet surface, if needed. The result is a beautiful, monochromatic underpainting that provides a great value foundation.

Theme: Do you think of a theme before starting your abstract piece?

In the past I have enjoyed doing representational subjects, mostly landscapes and figures. I always have some sort of reference to start with. Sometimes I do a value or color study. A few years ago, I began to experiment with abstraction and became very intrigued with the process. I used a very studied approach to these abstracts. Many times I've used sections of my landscapes in which I've found small designs that provided a jumping off point for an abstract piece. My abstracts are very organic and nature inspired, not geometric.

Color Palette: How did you select the colors used in this piece?

I generally decide on a color direction and pull the pastels out before beginning. I think about an analogous approach. Then I consider color temperature and chroma. I use NuPastels, Unisons, Ludwigs and Diane Townsends. The large shapes of the composition are lightly blocked in with pastel. Then odorless turpenoid is brushed over the surface. When dry, other pastel layers and lines are added on top.

I like to photograph my work in all its stages. This has been very helpful. After seeing it on my computer screen, I determine changes and adjustments. In my abstract work, I begin to turn it various ways, to see which view is strongest. Sometimes I start a piece with one orientation and decide to turn it later.

Inspiration: What historical movements, periods or artists inspire you? Do you find inspiration from the things around you?

This painting reflects a new approach to my work. I recently read a book by Steven Aimone, *Expressive Drawing*, which inspired a new way to approach my abstract work.

I start with a fresh, white board and a stick of charcoal, with absolutely no preconceived ideas about where this thing is going to take me. No reference and no game plan. What happens is a fluid, automatic drawing. I experience the joy of drawing and mark making; creating texture and motion using both the point and the side of the stick. There is no right or wrong.

Paintings that begin this way reflect emotion and surprising subconscious references that are only realized (by me the artist, that is), in hindsight. And I emphasize hindsight here with some amusement. *Dancing Til Dawn* went unnamed until it was getting ready to be in a show. What to name it? Only then did I see a suggestion of a figure in motion. Dancing. Happy. It's funny, there was no objective of a figure at any time during the creation of this piece. This inclination was expressed in a totally subconscious way. I am a figurative artist, with experience in life drawing. I love doing figures, and I guess my brain wanted to draw those lines.

My art is a kaleidoscope, combining lessons from the masters, both modern day and past, with my own vision. It is always shifting and changing. I strive to create a genuine product that is uniquely crafted and an inspiration to those who view it. My finest effort is an enduring expression of the figures and landscapes that populate my life.

Recognition: What does it mean to you to be published?

Winning any award is a confidence builder. Winning this has been such a boost. Working with abstraction is sometimes not met with the same enthusiasm as representational work. It is very meaningful that this major publication embraces this category. Confidence improves any artist's work. It is that intangible quality that makes a painting sing. I recognize this quality in the work of others. I hope this will result in a greater show of confidence in my own work.

◀ DANCING TIL DAWN, pastel and texture on board, 20" x 24" (51cm x 61cm)