

BELOW

**Father's Camera Bag**

2003, oil, 18 x 24.  
Collection the artist.

OPPOSITE PAGE

**Queen of the Garden**

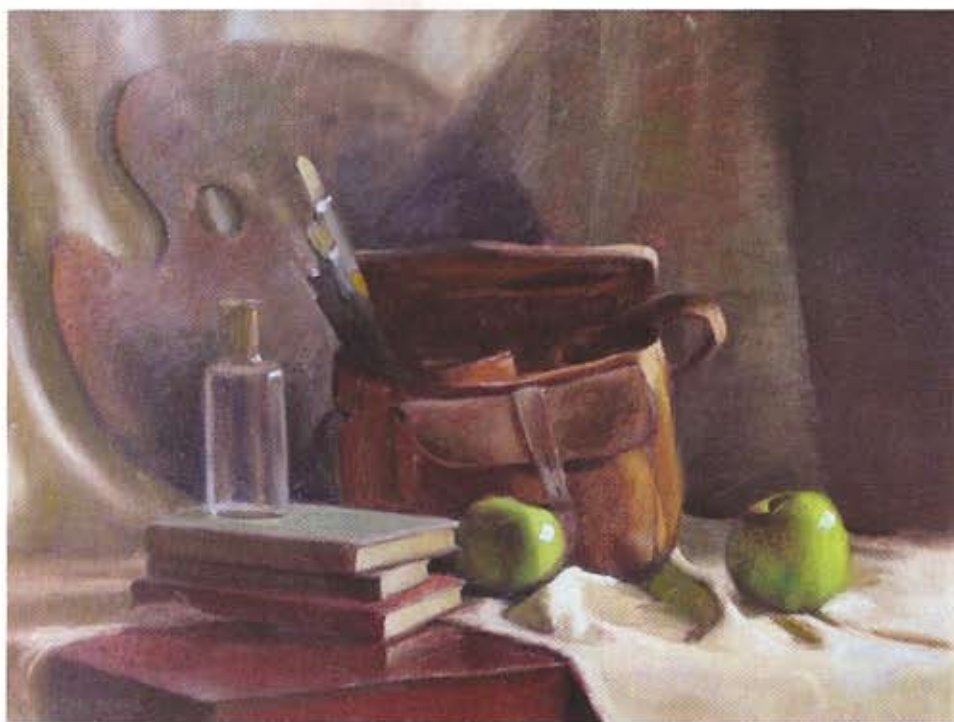
2004, oil on linen, 24 x 20.  
Collection the artist.

# Painting by North Light

The influences of a prismatic palette, a gifted teacher, and a solid foundation in drawing have combined to infuse **Susan Hope Fogel's** oil paintings with convincing realism and sublime atmospherics. | by **Rob Bahr**

**IT DIDN'T HAPPEN INSTANTLY**, but the north light in a school in Northern New Jersey completely changed the art of Susan Hope Fogel. The New York State painter had been working from the human figure and depicting landscapes until one day in a class at the Ridgewood Art Institute (RAI), in Ridgewood, New Jersey, she didn't have any reference material from which to work. Reluctantly, Fogel decided to tackle a still life. And, "it was just magic," she recalls.

The large facility at RAI, known as "the Barn" among students and staff, is fabled for its north light. For many people, this soft, slightly cool natural light is the ideal environment for working from life. "Before I went to RAI the thought of doing a still life was rather unappealing to me," Fogel says. "There was nothing about it that intrigued or inspired me. But once I started working in the north light at Ridgewood all that changed. By the time I completed my first still life in the north light I sensed that there was something quite extraordinary about this light. A few paintings later, I was hooked. The transformative qualities of the north light inspired and challenged





me. Every object in north light is bathed in the magical and poetic quality of this silvery light. The cool lights, juxtaposed against the warm shadows, create a wonderful color story within each element of the painting, as well as the overall visual effect."

North light is diffuse and slightly blue. According to Mark David Gottsegen's *The Painter's Handbook*, (Watson-Guption Publications, New York, New York) the scientific standard for pure white light is 6,500 degrees Kelvin—roughly the color temperature

of midday sun on a somewhat overcast day. North light ranges from 7,500 degrees to 12,000 degrees Kelvin, depending on the cloudiness of the day. The result is light that makes

objects seem a bit moody and mysterious, while emphasizing the coolness of the

atmosphere and the relatively warm shadows of objects.

The effect of light on subject matter has long fascinated Fogel; her personal discovery of north light's attributes was simply the latest and greatest develop-

ment. Fogel traces her interest in the play of light on objects to the summer when she was a 10-year-old and found a faceted crystal ball. "As I held it up to the window, a whole new way of seeing awakened my vision," she recalls. "Every object I saw was broken up into the full spectrum of color. Rainbows were radiating through everything. Even the most mundane objects of neutral hues became a celebration of color. Years later, as I was reading, studying, and pursuing my art, I came across a quote by Frank Vincent DuMond stating that there are rainbows in everything." Consider it foreshadowing:

**ONLINE GALLERY**  
[www.myAmericanArtist.com](http://www.myAmericanArtist.com)





**Picotee Lisianthus**  
2006, oil on linen, 14 x 11.  
Collection the artist.

## Fogel's Materials

### Palette

Gamblin oil paints in the following colors:

- cadmium yellow light
- cadmium yellow medium
- cadmium yellow deep
- cadmium orange
- cadmium red light
- cadmium red medium
- cadmium red deep
- alizarin crimson
- manganese blue
- cobalt blue
- ultramarine blue
- ivory black

Martin/F. Weber's  
Permalba white

### Brushes

- Princeton filberts

### Surfaces

- lead-primed linen for indoor paintings
- stretched canvas or panels for plein air work

### Other

- cold-pressed linseed oil, as a medium
- wood palette stained a warm, middle-value brown to approximately match the tone on the painting surface

DuMond taught Arthur Maynard, the founder of the Ridgewood Art Institute.

Fogel gained drawing skills through a traditional path of art instruction at the New York Academy of Art and the National Academy of Design, both in New York City, and she learned how to handle color from Harvey Dinnerstein. The final piece of the puzzle was instruction from John Phillip Osborne, a former student of Maynard and a strong proponent of DuMond and Maynard's approach, especially the

idea of the prismatic palette.

This way of setting up one's palette is designed to reinforce the notion that atmosphere lightens the value of colors and lessens their saturation, or, as Osborne explained it in the summer 2006 issue of *Workshop* magazine ["The Progression of Light and the Prismatic Palette," by M. Stephen Doherty], the prismatic palette is set up "according to the way our eyes perceive color values at different distances when painting the landscape."

The tube colors for the prismatic palette as used by Fogel are: Perma white, cadmium yellow light, cadmium yellow medium, cadmium yellow deep, cadmium orange, cadmium red light, cadmium red medium, cadmium red deep, alizarin crimson, manganese blue, cobalt blue, ultramarine blue, ivory black. Earth colors are occasionally used in this method, but the artist mixes them from the tube colors. The tube colors (warm cadmiums and blues) are laid out in a row in a value prog-



**LEFT**  
**Cosmos and Lisianthus**  
 2006, oil, 24 x 18.  
 Private collection.

**BOTTOM**  
**Lemons in Space**  
 2003, oil on linen, 11 x 14.  
 Private collection.

**BELOW**  
 Fogel's palette showing the prismatic palette championed by John Phillip Osborne at the Ridgewood Art Institute. Tube colors, blues, grays, and greens are arranged by value on this palette to aid in depicting depth in a scene.



priateness for different areas in the composition, particularly in landscapes. The warm tube colors are the fireworks that can be used sparingly to bring life to the painting. The row of blues is crucial to creating the atmosphere and pushing select elements back into the depth of field. The blues are also used in shadows and in the color and value progression in the sky. The prismatic palette also reinforces the importance of color temperature and its role in creating depth in a scene. "Adding gray to any color diminishes its intensity and will push it back in space," says Fogel. "A color with more yellow in it will tend to move forward in space. I'm careful to use the correct value in the right step, because if I make a poor choice, it will flatten out the space immediately. Too big of a jump in color also won't work—students sometimes don't fully understand that one must gradually add the color. Painters have to fine tune their color mixing and observation skills to selectively reveal the incremental changes in the landscape that will contribute to the success of the overall effect. There are color and value progressions that should inform every color choice and these occur throughout the scene—from foreground to background, from left to right, from horizon to zenith, as well as within each of the elements."

sion from light to dark, then a grayscale is mixed and placed below those colors. The third row consists of blues that are mixed from cobalt blue and white and placed underneath, arranged by value. Then greens are mixed using cadmium yellow light, ultramarine blue, and a touch of alizarin crimson, and these green mixtures are also placed in a final row that roughly correlates with the values on the grayscale.

This palette arrangement makes it easy for an artist to convincingly sug-

gest depth in a painting. Local color is used with a touch of gray added incrementally to indicate depth. A color from the spectrum (yellow to purple) is also added, depending upon the distance to be suggested. For example, orange and gray would be added to the local color green to indicate middleground grass. Then red and gray are added to suggest the increased atmosphere between the viewer and a distant object. The varying greens allow easier recognition of their individual values, and thus their appro-

## DEMONSTRATION: MIXED BOUQUET

### Reference

The reference photo for the still-life painting.

### Step 1

On a toned canvas, Fogel began by indicating the major shapes with a line drawing and evaluating the success of the composition.

### Step 2

Next, the artist blocked in the major areas in shadow using a thin layer of paint.

### Step 3

She then began to break the big shapes in shadow into smaller pieces using a dark value—by reinforcing this color in the darker and smaller shadow areas, they were further defined, yet retained a sense of cohesion with the rest of the background.

### Step 4

Fogel moved on to the middle values and began to pay close attention to accurate color choices. "At this point, I will vary the edges to define which flowers are within the visual center and which are moving back in space—the sharper the edge, the more important that element will be," she explains.

### Step 5

Next came the lighter values, which further reinforced which flowers were intended to be the most prominent—not just by virtue of their individual value but also in their role in the dark-light pattern. Fogel focused on form and texture in this stage as well.

### Step 6

Fogel added the lightest lights—the highlights—in the final stage. At each successive stage, the artist used thicker paints, and these highlights were thus the thickest, ensuring a strong value and a subtle sense of three-dimensionality.



THE COMPLETED PAINTING:  
**Mixed Bouquet**  
2006, oil, 20 x 16.  
Collection the artist.

### Westtown Morning

2004, oil on linen, 12 x 24.  
Collection: the artist.



Osborne's instruction and the prismatic palette have eased the actual painting process for Fogel, but she still must start by finding the right scene. "That's one of the most challenging and time-consuming parts," says the artist. "Outdoors I look for diagonal movements, especially those moving back in space. I'm always intrigued by pathways and roadways that lead the eye into the composition. And I'm looking for the light effects—where the light falls and where the shadows are." For still lifes, Fogel says she spends no more than an hour arranging the setup. "If I am lucky, the still-life setup comes together very

quickly," she explains. "I look at the play of light across the flowers—the movement of the light helps the dynamics in a still life, as it also can in a landscape."

Fogel starts a painting by indicating the major shapes with lines on a warm, toned canvas. (Indoors she uses lead-primed linen. She achieves a similarly smooth surface on inexpensive canvas panels for small plein air work by gessoing the surface three times.) She next blocks in the dark areas and assesses the resulting dark-light pattern to see if the composition will work. She paints further into the darkest areas in shadow—particularly in still lifes—to nudge

it closer to the right value and to differentiate those sections from the rest of the shadow areas. (Fogel points out that there's a tradition of painting the sky color into background elements in a landscape for the same reason—to create cohesion and atmosphere.) When the artist is satisfied with this first step, she moves on to middle values and begins to pursue correct color. "I try to be as accurate as possible in color and value right away," Fogel says. "Especially when I'm painting en plein air—time is of the essence then." Highlights are added last in the thickest application of paint.

The lure of north light—especially the north light in RAI's studio—has led Fogel to paint still lifes as well as landscapes. Her current challenge: translating a plein air sketch into a larger studio piece while maintaining the energy and spontaneity of the outdoor work. "I'm trying to be quick and energetic in my application of paint while putting more paint on the surface and with more painterly brushstrokes," Fogel says. "The urgency of changing conditions keeps me moving outdoors. I try to recreate a sense of those conditions within the studio environment by recalling the particular outdoor experience." ■

## About the Artist

**Susan Hope Fogel** studied at the New York Academy of Art and the National Academy, both in New York City, and at the Ridgewood Art Institute, in Ridgewood, New Jersey. She has also attended workshops led by Gary Faigin, Jacob Collins, and Wolf Kahn. The artist is a signature member of the Hudson Valley Art Association and the Pastel Society of America, and she is a former president of The Warwick Art League. Fogel has been featured in shows throughout the Northeast and was the recipient of the 2003 Arthur Maynard Award from the Ridgewood Art Institute. She lives in Warwick, New York. For more information on the artist, visit her website at [www.susanhopefogel.com](http://www.susanhopefogel.com).

*Bob Bahr is the managing editor of American Artist.*