

Reaching

FOR PEACE

Lynn Goldstein explores an enduring symbol of tranquility from a novel perspective with her series of trees in pastel.

BY DEBORAH SECOR

WITH HER EARLY ROOTS PLANTED AMID the oaks and pines, hickory and larch of the southern Alleghany Mountains, Lynn Goldstein always found comfort and delight in trees. “I think that growing up in West Virginia gave me a real appreciation for the landscape. I spent a lot of time in the woods,” she says, “and I find that I need to have time in nature to maintain a calm demeanor.”

Long since transplanted to the Virginia suburbs

“The inspiration for the *Reaching* series came from a passage in a book my friend had given me many years before,” says the artist. “In 2003, when I discovered that he had passed away, I pulled out the book, *Sketches from a Hunter’s Album* by Ivan Turgenev, and found a passage that discusses lying under the trees and looking up to the sky. It said, ‘It is a remarkably pleasant occupation, to lie on one’s back in a forest and look upwards! It seems that you are looking into a bottomless sea.’ When I read that, I realized I hadn’t done it since I was a child, and I needed to do it again.”

Towering Treetops

Goldstein’s painting of a view into the treetops from below, aptly titled *Reaching for a Friend* (opposite), might have come from the artist’s willingness to look inward for inspiration, but it launched a series of paintings of trees that reach outward. “It’s so much fun to get under a tree and look at it that way,” she says. “I repeated this type of image because I found it particularly interesting to see what different seasons

would bring to the images and different trees would bring to the idea.”

Once the series took shape, Goldstein spotted subjects close to home and in other locations she

Reaching for a Friend (36x24)



Lynn Goldstein (www.lynngoldstein.com) worked for 17 years as a graphic designer before turning her attention to her fine art career full time. She is a signature member of the Maryland Pastel Society and a juried associate of the Pastel Society of America. A juried studio artist of the Workhouse Arts Center in Lorton, Va., she is represented by the Washington Street Gallery in Lewisburg, W. Va., Pinnacle Gallery in White Sulphur Springs, W. Va., and Applegate Fine Art and Framing in Vienna, Va.

of Washington, D.C., Goldstein is an artist who first chose to express herself artistically as a graphic designer, and then as a fine artist. It would take the death of an old friend to spark a return to her roots—one that would inspire an ambitious series of paintings with trees as their primary subjects.





Reaching, Late Summer (36x24)

visited. *Reaching, Bend* (on page 51) was discovered on a trip to Bend, Ore., while *Together and Alone, Not Lonely* (on page 50) were found in Yellowstone National Park. “I’ve even painted some palm trees from the Caribbean—they look like fireworks to me. I’m endlessly fascinated and passionate about recording my perceptions,” she says. “I’ll often see a tree that becomes a favorite. They almost call to me, as if saying, ‘Time for a portrait of me!’”

The various colors she uses in her skies are derived from contrasting locations. “In Yellowstone everything

is so saturated,” she says, “while in Bend the colors felt calmer to me. It has a lot to do with the feeling of the location.” On a springtime trip to the Tidal Basin in Washington D.C., Goldstein spotted a particularly impressive tree that became the subject for several works in the *Reaching* series.

“I went to look at the cherry blossoms but this sycamore tree was just magnificent. I was riveted by it and had to get underneath it. Later, when I went back to find it, I had the idea to paint it in all seasons. I love the thrust of it, the way it shoots up to the sky,” she says. *Reaching, Late Winter* (opposite), *Reaching, January* (opposite) and *Reaching, Late Summer* (at left) are all paintings of this particular tree.

Growing Up

Using her own digital photographs, Goldstein sometimes incorporates distortions into her paintings in order to exaggerate the upward thrust of the tree; she also alters colors. “I put the photos on my computer and look at them in different ways. I find this process a fun way to think about what I want to accomplish in a painting,” she says. “Working from photographs is great, but I do remind myself that they lie, particularly in the value range.”

Goldstein prefers using softer pastels (Girault and Great American are favorites) but she says she flirts with many brands, including Art Spectrum, Sennelier, Faber-Castell Polychromos, Diane

Townsend and Unison. “Trying all the brands is like a disease that I have,” she says. “If I were going to be stranded on a desert island and had to choose only two brands of pastels to take with me, though, they would be Great American and Girault. The Girault pastels work very well for subtle passages on the surfaces I use, and I like the rectangular shape of the Great Americans, the vibrant colors and the softness for top layers.”

Goldstein prefers to use sanded boards as her surface. “I just finished a *Reaching* painting using a surface that I prepared myself with a mixture of pumice gel

and pumice on Gatorfoam—a technique I learned from Susan Ogilvie,” she says. “The texture gives a different response than my usual 400-grit UART sanded paper, which I dry-mount to acid-free Fome-Cor.” These two surfaces appeal to the artist for a few reasons. “If I’m going to use a watercolor underpainting, I really like the way that the UART paper takes the paint, but I like the texture of my prepared surface. I come up with an interesting finish using it,” she says.

At her easel, Goldstein refers to her photos and makes a small sketch, usually simplified into four values. “I believe that concentrating on the values and the shapes of those values helps ensure a strong compositional structure,” she says. “I begin with an underdrawing and then either do a watercolor underpainting, a four-value underpainting, or, when working with my own surface, I lay in local color right away with my pastels.” She generally works dark to

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—Ivan Turgenev
from *Sketches from a Hunter’s Album*



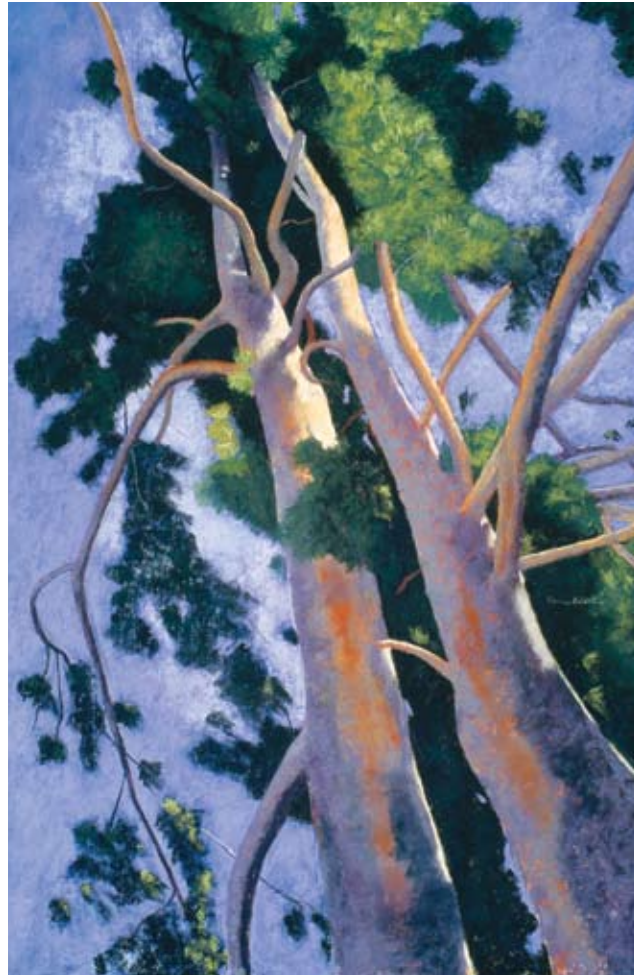
Reaching, January (36x24)



Reaching, Late Winter (36x24)



Alone, Not Lonely (36x24)



Together (36x24)



Reaching, Bend (36x24)



Reaching, Burke Lake (36x24)

light, but sometimes adds the darkest darks and the lightest lights first so that she can be more aware of the middle values as the painting progresses.

The artist draws from the knowledge she's gained in her 12 years of teaching both drawing and pastel painting classes. "I love teaching and have had wonderful students over the years," she says. "I agree with all the other teachers who have said that their students teach them more than they can possibly teach the students." Goldstein is also a docent, guiding tours at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.—a position that requires her to be aware of all the art offerings the city has to offer. "I could study exemplary work every day of the week, if time allowed it," she says.

Indoor and Out

Goldstein maintains a studio at home, in which, at the time of this writing, she was completing a painting of a redwood tree and analyzing it for finished details. "I look at it in quadrants, from left to right, the way we read. This breaks it down so that I'm looking at the individual parts. I check the values to see if there's anything off," she says. Goldstein refers to her son, Artie, as one of her best critics: "He can look at my

work and home in on exactly what needs to be done to improve the piece. I felt somewhat lost when he went away to college."

Goldstein enjoys interacting with other artists in her second studio, located in a repurposed prison called the Workhouse Arts Center, near her home. The sunny studio has lots of high windows, and a huge kitchen island holding a collection of pastels arranged by hue and value that can be wheeled into different positions. "I have my artwork hanging on the walls because the center is often open to the public. It's nice to have finished, framed work up," she says.

She finds she enjoys painting in the studio more than working *en plein air*. "I find the heat excruciating and I don't like cold or wind. I'm just a fair weather *plein air* painter," she says. "I don't think of myself as a particularly fast painter and I find that, while in the studio, I can concentrate in a way that makes my life a bit easier. Painting on location is kind of like taking my vitamins. It's good for me, so I do it. But painting a tree looking up from the ground as I do would be ridiculous. I'd be eating my pastels."

There are also good days in the open, however. "When I paint outdoors, I work in a variety of ways. I sometimes finish on location, which may require that I

return to the site. I do find that I enjoy going to the location repeatedly so that I get a feeling about the place, and I'm not wasting an inordinate amount of time finding a spot that interests me. Sometimes on location I make a value sketch and take notes and photographs so I can finish the painting in the studio," she says.


A Symbol of Transcendence

Her degree in fine arts led Goldstein into a 17-year career as a graphic designer, the majority of that time devoted to freelance work. She came to pastels gradually, giving them a chance after working with charcoals and enjoying it. In 1998, she made a commitment to painting in pastels and began honing her skills. Early in Goldstein's career as a graphic designer, a weekend job in a Japanese print gallery spurred a keen interest in prints, and indirectly influenced her current work. "I gravitate toward vertical compositions. I think it comes from both my graphics experience, since many of the projects started out as 8½x11-inch booklets, and the influence of Japanese prints, which are often vertical," she says.

The vertical format gives height as well as intimacy to her paintings, as we peek up under the canopy of a tree to view the details of light and shadow, bark

and leaf. "I think it goes back to when, as a child, I sought out areas that were more closed-in, rather than ones that afforded a wide vista," she says. "In my childhood home, we had a picture window that looked onto the mountains of West Virginia. The view was quite lovely. I like to concentrate on the type of thing that maybe people would miss if it wasn't pointed out to them. It's the still, small voice instead of the grand opera."

It wasn't until she began painting the *Reaching* series that Goldstein realized the symbolic role and importance of trees in many societies. "Trees have been a central symbol of transcendence, immortality and life in almost every culture. Without trees, we would no longer be able to exist," she says. "I found this made the images even more interesting. Trees provide great comfort to me, and in painting images of them I find a peace that I wish to share."

Indeed her *Reaching* series allows us to join her, stretched out on our backs beneath the canopy of a tree, revisiting the contentment and serenity of youth. 

Deborah Secor (www.deborahsecor.com) is an artist, pastel instructor and writer. View sample clips of her online video workshops at www.artistsnetwork.tv.