



Internationally recognized watercolor artist Judy Rider works in her Bethlehem studio

Light and Shadow: Watercolor Artist Judy Rider

I meet with watercolor artist Judy Rider in her light filled Bethlehem studio. Her vantage point affords her with an expansive view of bird filled shrubs, flower beds and out onto a bustling golf course beyond. Her walls are hung with her vibrant and enthralling works depicting scenes both from both her daily experiences and from her travels around the world.

I ask her to tell me a little about herself and how she came to be an internationally acclaimed artist. "I'm originally from Mendon, Louisiana, which is in the northwest section near Shreveport," Judy begins. "I really had no art background at all actually. At my high school you had a choice, you could be in the band, the chorus, or you could take art. This was in the '60s and all the weird people took art. So I was in the band, played the flute and I was a majorette. But actually, my interest was in English and that's what I ended up majoring in in college. I graduated from Louisiana Tech in English Education. My husband wanted us to move back to his native West Virginia when he got out of the service. The art part of my life didn't come into play until after my husband graduated from dental school. We were in a tiny little town in West Virginia where he grew up. I stopped teaching after a few years and stayed at home with our children. But in West Virginia, especially in the winter, we had a lot of time on our hands. We were in a very rural area. Wal-Mart didn't even come to that area until after we left!"

Judy continues. "A couple of friends and I started taking some craft classes. Tole painting, fabric painting, you know. So I did that for a few years. And the lady that taught us how to do all that, she also knew how to do pen and ink and watercolor. And so she was my first introduction to watercolor. And once I did that, I just loved it! Then, another mutual acquaintance of ours who was a true watercolor artist, she was in an art group, and mentioned to me 'Well anytime you want to come and join our group, we meet on Thursday's, everybody paints, we help each other, some are more advanced, we don't all do the same thing, etc.' I ended up joining that group and got into a regular routine of painting. Most watercolorists like to start with transparent colors. A lot of the colors are transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque, opaque, and then there's staining, non-staining—it goes on and on. So, there's a lot to learn just about the property of the color. I realized that I needed to know so much more than what I knew. I was just learning technique and not any of the background that you get if you go to art school or something."

"Over the years, I would take workshops, and buy books. And sometimes, we'd work through a book as a group. Or we would have exhibits so we'd have things prepared and a goal set for ourselves so we'd have things to present for the show and so forth. I was very fortunate to have a lot of wonderful artists around me who encouraged me and helped me. And I was motivated enough to take more classes and try to learn more. So, I was introduced to watercolor in the late '80s."

"We moved to Bethlehem in 1991. By that time, with three kids in school, I didn't really have a lot of time on my hands, but I still tried to stay involved with a group at the Hickory Museum of Art and a class here or there. Or go to art group meetings and things like that. So I've stayed involved, but it was limited. But when my youngest daughter finished school in 2000, I decided I wanted to get serious about art. I really loved it, and I set some goals for myself. And I had some good luck too. I had a friend who recommended me to teach some noncredit classes out at CVCC, teaching other people how to do the things that I do. That helped because it made me stay active and involved, and have a goal. Because I had to teach somebody how to do something."

"I continued to take workshops. Every once in a while, I would get an instructor that I really liked, that would give me more than just technique and it would make me think about what I wanted to do with my art and what goals did I have in a year, and five years, and things like that. In the last 10 to 15 years, I've tried to enter shows. I'm in group called Piedmont Painters which is a critique group. We meet once a month and we look at each other's work. You have to bring something every month. So, you learn from other artists."

"I do some Plein-Air (painting outdoors) painting with a group of artists from Hickory. Sometimes when the weather is good, we'll go out on location and paint. But I tend to like to have perfect weather. I'm like, 'Is it too hot?' or 'Are there going to be bugs?' But one interesting thing that I did this summer was I went to Italy with a group of artists. Our leader was Jean Cauthen who now lives in Charlotte, but was here in



A vivid watercolor of white orchids by Bethlehem artist Judy Rider.

Hickory when I came here. We were in Florence for two or three days and did a lot of the museums and watched people. And then we went out into Tuscany and did some painting out there. The group that went has a show right now at the Newton-Conover Auditorium. And then some of that show is going to be moved to the Catawba County Arts Council and we will be there for two or three months. I've painted in Ireland as well."

"I walked into my breakfast room one morning and saw this light coming in this back window. The light was so bright, and reflecting off a glass table, it gave me this radiated light, and all the patterns of light and dark... I've got to get it down on paper."— Judy Rider

Tell me, how do you start a piece? I ask. "You know it varies," Judy replies. "Sometimes I have maybe a student who says 'Hey, I wanna learn how to paint reflections on water.' Or 'My rock looks like a baked potato. How do I incorporate my rocks into my painting?' or that kind of thing. So, some of it is me doing little demos, or perhaps doing some creations because of what my students want. And then there are times when I'm on a trip, or even sometimes when I'm out golfing, I might see a particular light or shadow pattern. Sometimes I want to paint flowers, sometimes I want to paint landscapes, sometimes I like to do things that are more light and shadow patterns like this painting over here."

"I walked into my breakfast room one morning and saw this light coming in this back window. The light was so bright, and reflecting off a glass table, it gave me this radiated light, and all the patterns of light and

dark. It was so early, I had to grope around and find my camera, and I went back in quickly and took several photographs from different angles, because I know I can't remember this, so I've got to get it down on paper. So sometimes I do work from photos since they can give me some information that I couldn't remember. I look for different patterns, even outside because the sun moves and light changes. You have to have that quick way to capture it. And sometimes I will set up a still life or something. And depending on the time of the day, I may or may not have to add extra light to it. I try to use the sunlight if I can. But I'll set it up to create some interesting compositions with whatever elements I have in my still life."

"Some of it is what I'm inspired to paint because I like it, and then some of it is because my students request it, and sometimes it's experimental. You have new ideas on how to approach a subject, and depending on whether you're doing studio work or outdoors, you have different ways of approaching the same subject in watercolor."

As our talk draws to a close, I ask where she would like to take her work in the future. "I want to slow down," she responds after a long reflective pause. "I want to not paint so much, but to paint more meaningfully."

Judy is a Signature Member of the National Watercolor Society, the Watercolor Society of North Carolina, an associate member of the Southern Watercolor Society, and the Piedmont Painters. She has been exhibiting her art since 1987. Her work has been repeatedly featured in exclusive international collections. If you would like to experience more of her art, visit her website www.judyarts.com



A sunlit Venetian canal as rendered by watercolor artist Judy Rider on a recent painting excursion to Northern Italy.



A colorful work entitled 'Buckets of Fun.'