



# ***IRISES FROM MY GARDEN***

*Step-by-Step Instructions for Oil Painting Technique  
with Optional Acrylic Under-painting*

***Judi Parkinson***

Includes Printer Friendly section

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*Cover: 'IRISES' by Judi Parkinson (2004). Oil on stretched cotton duck canvas (90x60cms/3x2feet).*

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The information and hints outlined for painting and drawing are drawn from the author's own experiences as an artist. Judi has a Master of Arts with Honours in Visual Arts from The Queensland College of Art Griffith University, South Bank, Queensland, Australia (2007). She has been painting & drawing since childhood and professionally for nearly 30years. Judi has been tutoring privately, in galleries and adult education since 1986. Judi is also the producer of *Share-Time Pictures – therapeutic images for the care industry* – information available at: [www.sharetimepictures.com.au](http://www.sharetimepictures.com.au).

Additional information about Judi such as curriculum vitae and images of current works may be found at the Australian, Queensland Artworkers' Alliance website.

Visit [www.artworkers.org](http://www.artworkers.org) and then > search for Artist > enter Judi Parkinson or click on the following link: [http://www.artworkers.org/artistsearch/artist\\_profile.php?u=jparkinson&v=cv](http://www.artworkers.org/artistsearch/artist_profile.php?u=jparkinson&v=cv)

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Includes Creating and Understanding a Colour Wheel (eBook)*

*Preparing Art Canvases: Beginner's Tips, Grounds for Oils & Acrylics (eBook)*

*Beginner's Guide for Art Materials (eBook)*

*Step-by-Step Instructions for Making Tiffany Light Shades (eBook)*

**Art Materials Required**

Linseed oil – purified (refined)  
Canvas board, stretched canvas or primed surface  
Odourless turpentine  
Palette  
Rags  
Dipper  
Jars, 2  
Pencils: Variety 6H & 6B  
White Eraser  
Masking Tape  
Apron or old shirt  
Acrylic Binder medium

Brushes: Variety of flat chisel sizes 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 (minimum)  
One small size 2 round brush (optional)

OIL Colours:

Titanium White  
Light yellow  
Cadmium yellow  
Yellow Ochre  
Cadmium Orange  
Cadmium Red  
Alizarin Crimson  
Cerulean Blue  
French Ultramarine Blue

Optional – additional ACRYLIC Colours for under-painting:

Light yellow  
Alizarin crimson  
Cerulean blue  
French Ultramarine Blue  
Mars Black

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## Points to Note

**Acrylics before Oils:** When painting with acrylics and oils, work with acrylics first and then oils. Adding acrylics on top of oil paint may cause crazing or cracking.

**No Mixing Acrylics & Oils:** This also may cause cracking.

**Fat on Thin:** When painting with acrylics and oils, start with thin paint and build up your layers with thicker paint. Adding thin paint over thick paint may cause crazing or cracking.

**Oil Mixture:** Mix a little of the Linseed Oil and Pure Turpentine in the dipper. If you are using the acrylic under-painting then use 50-50 of each. If you are working the whole painting with oils then use 2/3rds turpentine and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> oil for the thinner under-painting stage as this will help the painting dry a little faster.

**Traditional Oil Painting Technique – DARKS TO LIGHTS:** The traditional method for painting with oils (acrylics can be used in this method also) is to start with your basic overall colour as a thin base, squint your eyes so you can't really define the contrasts of light and shade. Then start with the darkest colours and shades and slowly work up through the mid-tones to the lights. Highlights are the last stage of painting.



**Observe Angles:** Note how the appearance of the stems is altered by the vase and water.



**Improvise:** Fresh flowers tend to move, droop or die. Just rest assured that you have drawn them correctly to start with and refer to another similar flower for detail. Flowers like these Irises tended die over night and then new ones would appear at a different point on the stem. It was constant 'improvisation' over the 3 days it took to paint them. 😊

## Freshly Picked Flowers



*Detail*

If you are striving to portray the soft and delicate aspect of flowers then avoid painting or sketching them when they are freshly picked. Depending on the variety, give a few hours, or a day or two for the flowers to relax and gracefully begin to bend their heads a little otherwise your artwork may appear a bit stiff and starchy. The daisy-chrysanthemums above are part of a painting that I painted when they were freshly picked and appear fresh and sprightly, but perhaps a little strong.

## Composition

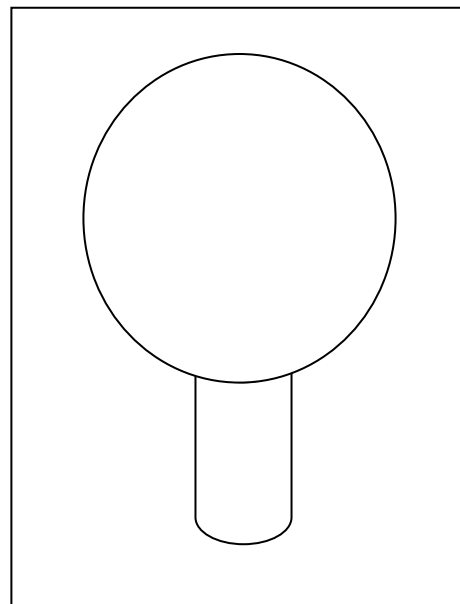
### **Suggestion:**

#### ***1/3 vase and 2/3 flowers***

Basically, if you are having a difficulty composing your arrangement use the above suggestion for a traditional composition.

Also allow a little space at the bottom of the canvas to allow the viewer's eye to 'wander into' the painting.

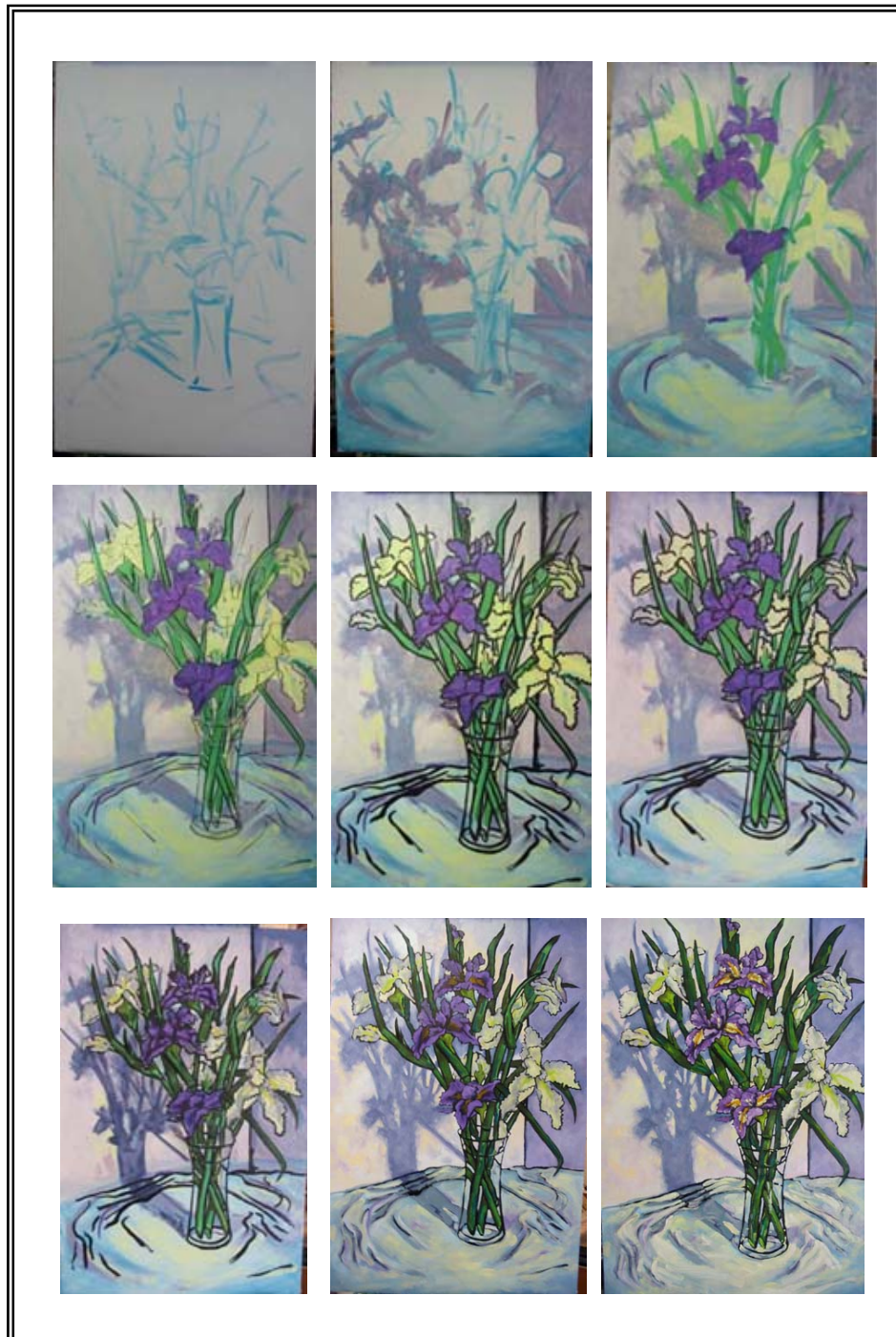
Breathing space is also suggested at the sides and top of the canvas although these could have finer pieces foliage such as leaves or buds. However, taking the flowers to the edges may create a full and bursting feeling of spring.



## **FLOWER DIRECTIONS**

When painting a vase of flowers remember that some flowers and leaves will be facing away from the viewer (usually). The majority of arrangements are round in shape, not standing-up looking out of the painting.

**Overview of the stages that will be worked**

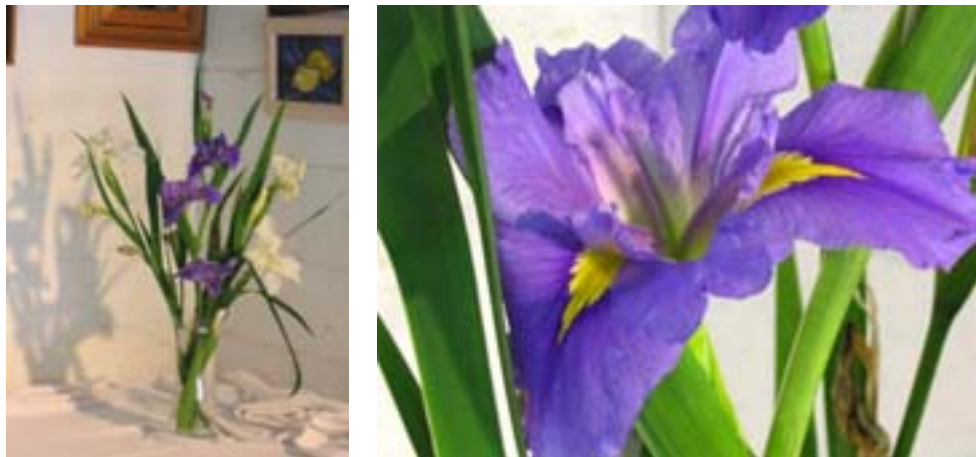




Whether you choose to paint flowers fresh or from a photograph is a personal choice. (If you do not want to draw the subject then there is an outline on page 8.) Life painting for me has always opened my eyes to the colours and individual characteristics of the subject. Then, when I have painted from a photograph I feel that I know the subject a little better and hopefully I have employed that knowledge into the work. However, even if you only paint or draw a few small flowers on occasions from life you will discover that you are able to 'see into' the subject a little more.

Choosing fresh flowers is sometimes hard for me, as they do look beautiful in the garden.





Arrange the flowers in a way that appeals to you. In this arrangement I have added a couple of leaves that were at an angle as I felt the composition was too boring with all the leaves standing upright. I have not added a background fabric, as I liked the strength of the shadows on the wall. Avoid placing flowers next to each other or directly above each other as this may appear too symmetrical.



When working from life I prefer strong directed lighting, usually to the left or right of the subject. For this composition I chose to have the light to the right of the subject. The spotlight is a standard tungsten, portable light. I also use a florescent overhead light and daylight behind me.





If you prefer to follow the painting instructions and trace this image then simply print it out and make a photocopy to the canvas size you are using. You may have to put the first copy in the machine and enlarge it again if you want it quite big. Some generation lose will occur each time you photocopy a copy however.

Turn the selected size over and using a soft graphite pencil such as 6B shade the back of the page. Easiest results are to hold the page against a window to save shading the whole paper, and roughly sketch back and forth over the lines showing through in the light. When completed, place page onto your canvas, shaded side down, secure the 4 corners with a piece of masking tape. Using a hard pencil such as 6H trace over the photocopy. Do a few lines first and check underneath to make sure the imprint is coming through onto your canvas.



Set your easel up so that you are comfortable and can see your subject without having to twist your body or turn your head.

I am right-handed so I have my easel so that I can just turn my eyes to the left, or move my head slightly, to see the subject.

As this is a large painting 90x60cms (3x2ft) I preferred to stand up to paint so I was freer to move around.

I rarely use a pencil to draw in the outline. (If I am painting something that requires fine detail and accuracy then I may use a pencil.)

For this stage I have used a size 10 flat chisel brush and acrylic paint thinned with water and a little binding medium. I do the underpainting with acrylic as it dries quickly and the painting doesn't become too wet to work on. You may prefer to start with oils.

Commence with the large geometric shapes. I have used Cerulean Blue and allowed 'breathing space' around the subject as I felt it was a very busy composition.

Step back and check that the composition is balanced, interesting and allowing your eye to wander around in the picture. Correct any glaring mistakes but don't be too hard on yourself. A fresh and free approach is desirable.





Using the thin blue wash again I have blocked in the cloth.

I have then added a little Alizarin Crimson to the blue to give a muted mauve shade to the shadow areas.

To add interest to the composition I have made shadows slightly deeper than they actually appear.

Note that I have not used white yet for the 'white' areas. The background is just thinly roughed in with a mauve wash.



It is good to step back again and check your composition, now including the basics of lights and darks. Is it continuing to flow and keep your attention in the picture? Avoid having strong highlighted areas towards the edges as this will lead the viewer's eye out of the painting.

Although I work from life studies or photographs I treat the canvas as its own identity. I feel it is better to have a composition on the canvas that I am happy with, rather than be restricted to copying something exactly and discovering that the finished work isn't really balanced.



Using the Alizarin Crimson and Ultramarine Blue created the purple for the Irises. A little Yellow Ochre and Lemon Yellow has been thinly washed over where the white irises will be. Both these colours have also been reflected and washed into areas on the cloth and background. Create the green for the leaves by mixing a little of the Ultramarine blue with the Lemon yellow.



For about 20years I have usually outlined subjects in my designs. This is optional. If you are trying it and also using the acrylic under-painting, then I also do this stage in acrylic paint.



In this painting I have used a mixture of Mars Black and Cerulean Blue to create a charcoal shade.

This is the stage where I begin working in the oils. By mixing a \*similar charcoal colour in oils I then go over just a few of the acrylic outlines – where I am wanting to blend a little of the charcoal with the colour to avoid it being too stark.

*Mixing a Charcoal colour with oils:*

Mix equally a small amount of Alizarin Crimson, Ultramarine Blue and the Cadmium Yellow to create a black, than add a little Cerulean Blue to create the charcoal.

The black outlining looks quite heavy at this stage but there will be lighter colours coming over on top, as demonstrated in the second photograph. If this type of outlining is to be a feature in you painting then it may be lost as you build up layers if it is too thin a line.



*Current stage*



*Final stages*



At last - some white. Use white carefully to keep your colours fresh.

Pure white has not been used in this painting. It has always been mixed a little of one of the other colours in the painting, for example, the white cloth has not actually been painted white.



Note that the white is not used for the leaves or stems at all. A little white was added to the leaves in the finishing touches where they were misty, not as highlighting.



Begin adding more detail now. Placing the darker colours before the lighter ones.





Introduce some of the mid tones to the background and cloth.



Work in some of the deeper toned orange and lime details to the petals. The Cadmium Red and Yellow Ochre make a muted orange for this stage. Cerulean Blue and Lemon Yellow make the fresh lime colour.



The purple flowers were softened to mauve by gradually adding a little white. Increasing either the crimson or blue created variations of the mauve. More pastel colours have been added to the cloth and background also.



It is good to still keep the whole painting working at the same stage.





Add Small amounts of all the colours to the white flowers and cloth. Reflecting these colours will create more interest. Painting them plain white may result in them appearing flat.



Build up the highlights on the leaves. For the leaves I have worked with the basic green mentioned earlier. However, to create variations of the green and more interest, Lemon Yellow or Yellow Ochre or Cerulean Blue were added to the mixture



Observe where the light is falling. Don't worry about the shadows now. Because you have paid attention to them in the earlier stages they are established. Just concentrate on where the lights are and the dappled light falling will take effect. A large, size 10, flat chisel brush was used to drag the lighter colours over the top of the mid tones.

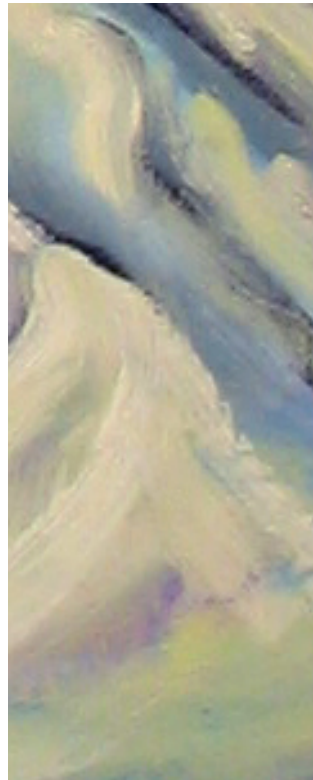
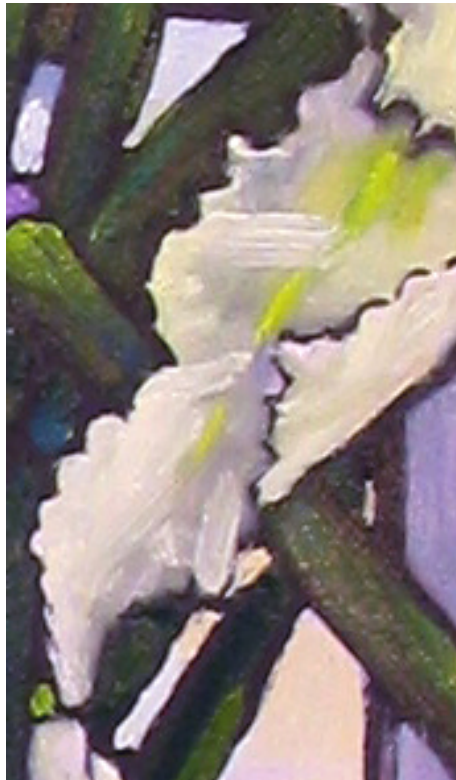


Finalize any highlights to the background and purple Irises also.





The final touches to the painting are the lightest highlights. For this subject it is the white irises and white cloth. Pure white has not been used even in these highlights, always a touch of pastel tone has been added to avoid the starkness that white may create.



Then finally, when you are finished painting, complete the work with your signature. This should also be part of the painting. Place it where the composition suits it, sometimes the left side may be a better position, less distracting or competing. Choose a complementing colour also.



## Notes

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### Setting up the Still Life

Whether you choose to paint flowers fresh or from a photograph is a personal choice. (If you do not want to draw the subject then there is an outline on page 8.) Life painting for me has always opened my eyes to the colours and individual characteristics of the subject. Then, when I have painted from a photograph I feel that I know the subject a little better and hopefully I have employed that knowledge into the work. However, even if you only paint or draw a few small flowers on occasions from life you will discover that you are able to 'see into' the subject a little more.





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For this stage I have used a size 10 flat chisel brush and acrylic paint thinned with water and a little binding medium. I do the underpainting with acrylic as it dries quickly and the painting doesn't become too wet to work on. You may prefer to start with oils.

Commence with the large geometric shapes. I have used Cerulean Blue and allowed 'breathing space' around the subject as I felt it was a very busy composition.

Step back and check that the composition is balanced, interesting and allowing your eye to wander around in the picture. Correct any glaring mistakes but don't be too hard on yourself. A fresh and free approach is desirable.



Using the thin blue wash again I have blocked in the cloth. I have then added a little Alizarin Crimson to the blue to give a muted mauve shade to the shadow areas. To add interest to the composition I have made shadows slightly deeper than they actually appear. Note that I have not used white yet for the 'white' areas. The background is just thinly roughed in with a mauve wash.

It is good to step back again and check your composition, now including the basics of lights and darks. Is it continuing to flow and keep your attention in the picture? Avoid having strong highlighted areas toward the edges as this will lead the viewer's eye out of the painting.

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Begin adding more detail now, placing the darker colours before the lighter ones.

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Introduce some of the mid tones to the background and cloth. Work in some of the deeper toned orange and lime details to the petals. The Cadmium Red and Yellow Ochre make a muted orange for this stage. Cerulean Blue and Lemon Yellow make the fresh lime colour.

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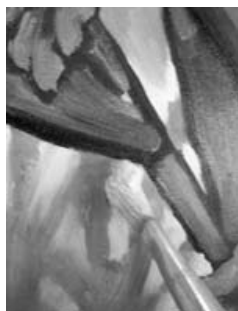


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