



Foggy Marsh Tree

2016, pastel, 11 x 14 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air

marshes are full of light and shadow, cool and warm and full of life. The grasses go in wonderfully random patterns. The sunsets are filled with moisture from the wetlands. For those reasons, I paint about 90 percent of the time in the late afternoon to sunset. The wetlands are the most beautiful at this time. The light is warmer, and I feel it moves at a pace I can keep up with. Weather also translates to mood in a painting. I love the rain. It's such an elusive subject for artists, and it's very difficult to portray. My second favorite time to paint is dawn. The light at dawn, however, moves at a quicker pace than evening."

In addition to wetlands, Monk is drawn to gritty street scenes in New Orleans and the city's old wharves and docks along the Mississippi River levee. She is intrigued by places that reflect the passage of time. "I have so many childhood memories of sitting by the river with my parents when I was young," she says. "It always calmed me. The wind that comes off the river is so strong it seems to blow away all the sound in the world except the sound of the water. It makes you feel alone in the world but strangely content and peaceful at the same time. I always loved watching the Mississippi River. I could sit for hours and stare at it."

Sugar Cane Field

2-15, pastel, 12 x 14 in.

Collection the artist

Plein air

She also seeks out rural scenes and worn country roads that show life though people are not present. "There is something comforting about an old crooked dirt road that disappears into the distance," she explains. "It's so hopeful and serene. They help you see the presence of humanity. Also present are the telephone poles that remind us of the technology and hustle and bustle of life that is never far away even on an old country road."

Early Life And Training

Monk's interest in art began early in life; when she was a child, her mother often brought her to the French Quarter in New Orleans to watch sidewalk artists at work. "The pastels seemed like magic crayons to me," she recalls. "I was amazed how quickly and accurately they

Painted." Although Monk had little formal training in art, except for classes in high school, she developed her skills over the years by studying the works of Rembrandt, John Singer Sargent, Edgar Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, and others. While Sargent's brushstrokes and Rembrandt's dramatic light set the stage, she says, the French Impressionists' emphasis on painting plein air has had the most lasting influence on her approach to painting.

"Plein air is my favorite method of painting, and many of the challenges are the same today as they were back then," she says. "The immediacy of their paintings, their obsession with the effects of light and the changing of the season, have also become my own driving force. Plein air isn't really about speed but more about focus, understanding and capturing the light and the effect that light has on the landscape."

In describing her work, Monk claims her paintings are a bit too precise for impressionism and too loose for super-realism. The most accurate description, she says, is simply "realism."

Plein Air And Observation

Though Monk started as a studio painter, she decided early on that she works best on location. Her first attempt at painting outdoors was in 2006, during a plein air workshop and show. "I came from a studio experience with air conditioning and all of the comforts of home," she recalls. "Working outside in the hot Southern sun was horrible. But when I woke up the next day, I saw that my painting was better than anything I had ever done from a photograph in the studio. I knew there was something special here."

