



**Late Evening
Marsh Tree** (12x18)

**Foggy Marsh
Morning** (below;
12x18)

the second is placed on the back of the easel, which balances the weight distribution. Thanks to the second box, Monk rarely has to return to her car to look for a color she doesn't have. She also carries a brush to remove pastel, a tool that doubles as a measuring stick for judging intervals.

She works on pastel paper that has been professionally mounted to Gator Board so that

she avoids having to clamp paper to a board. "Wind and humidity are a constant issue in the locations where I paint, so having sturdy boards that don't bend in the wind are necessary," Monk says. She also keeps a variety of surface sizes and formats in her car so that she always has options. This approach also avoids the issue of having a large board that partially obscures her view.

The final leg of Monk's preparation is preparing to be surprised. "I like to leave the subject matter to discover each time I go out to paint," she says. "My heart still races at the thought of what I'm going to find to paint that day."

A Rotating Gallery

Once she's scouted a promising spot, Monk sets up and begins work that's usually a two-day process. "I get the bulk of the painting done on the first day, and then I go back on the second day during the same time frame and weather and light conditions to finish it," she says. "I routinely have an average of seven paintings in my car so that I can continue working regardless of the conditions. This also serves as a kind of stress relief. If the day is different, and I don't

have anything I can continue with, then I just begin a new painting. It remains in my car with the others until I get a day with similar conditions that allow me to finish it. Sometimes I won't get like conditions until the following year. I really don't worry about that, though, because I have so many others I can work on.

"Fortunately, one of the best attributes of pastel is that it will look exactly the same no matter how much time passes, as long as I take care of the painting," Monk says. The artist keeps unfinished paintings in boxes in her studio to avoid dust and smears.

Simple and Direct

Monk's painting technique is simple and direct. Working on sanded pastel paper, she sketches directly on the paper to establish the composition. "Then I start painting," she says. "I typically work dark to light using soft pastels. I prefer

white paper, not toned, and I don't use fixative." Monk places the pastel with as little overlaying and blending as possible. "If I layer multiple colors, it's easy for the whole thing to turn muddy," she says. "If I don't like a color I've used, then I'll usually brush it off and replace it. I like having the light of the paper coming through the work."

Not using fixative means that the painting surface is more fragile, but Monk prefers to have the surface untouched; she finds that using a good sanded paper allows the soft pastels to stick to the surface.

The results of this approach are paintings in which the touch is direct and fresh while the tonal and color values remain rich, subtle and varied, a feat not easily achieved. In *Strange Southern Light* (below), for example, the artist deftly modulates the greens in the foreground to accommodate a variety of grasses and plants growing on the water's edge. She then shifts the

**Strange Southern
Light** (12x24)

