

“I realized something that would forever change my method of work: I saw that my worst painting done en plein air is still better than my best painting done in my studio.”



color for the receding wetlands, gradually making it lighter and cooler as it begins to reflect the sky toward the horizon. The deep greens reflected in the water are less saturated and more olive. The rooftops in the distance to the right are a lighter value than the sky.

Monk’s control of color and tone, along with her sensitive drawing, allows her to discover unexpected riches in what some might see as unpromising subjects. In *Broken Marsh Grass* (opposite, bottom), she concentrates on the way an area of dried grass and reeds has been flattened against a bank. She presents a wealth of information about the angles of various clumps while re-creating the subtle interplay of light and shadow. The way the dried flats move toward the horizon also is handled with considerable care; Monk follows the shifts and nuances of the color as it becomes lighter and less saturated. The range of mark-making matches the appearance of the subject with bold, clean strokes in the foreground and softer, shorter marks in the background as the space drops away.

Monk’s direct technique and the demands for speed in plein air painting mean that she can be quite prolific. She recalls once making 20 paintings within a month after a last-minute invitation to have a gallery show. “I do better

under pressure,” she says. “Those kinds of experiences make me grow.”

#### An Artist’s View

While her response to changing conditions can be swift, it’s Monk’s sensitivity and insight that make her work compelling. “So many people get up and go to work and live their busy lives and don’t have time to think and look at certain things. The best thing about being an artist is that we get out to see the dawn, the sunset, the changes of the light, the beauty. I’m so happy that I stumbled upon this way of painting.”

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**Mary Monk** ([marymonk.com](http://marymonk.com)) was born and raised in New Orleans, La., and for the last 20 years has lived in Abita Springs, La., with her husband and four children. She studied classical drawing in high school, but is largely self-trained as a pastelist. She’s an active member of the Degas Pastel Society and the Pastel Society of America. Her work can be found in many public art collections, including St. Tammany Parish and the State of Louisiana. She’s represented by Lemieux Galleries, in New Orleans, and Rita Durio and Associates, in Lafayette, La.

**October Marsh Grass** (12x18)

**Flooded Marsh Grass** (opposite, top; 6x15½)

**Broken Marsh Grass** (opposite, bottom; 12x18)