Thanks to everyone who attended my French Café: Painting from Travel Photos presentation on Wednesday evening!

Below, I'm sharing the final painting, Brasserie de l'Ile St Louis, along with a few detail shots and steps I took to complete the piece.

Also included, my thumbnail sketch (about 2.5"x3.5"), a palette shot, which includes all the pastel sticks I used, and my reference photo.

Brasserie de l'Ile St Louis, 12"x16"



Thumbnail sketch

Note: You'll notice the words jotted alongside the sketch. Those help define what I want to emphasize what I want and give me direction. When I finish the painting, I often write up a description which develops over the course of the painting. Here's what I wrote for this

one: The rich reds of this café's awning draw strollers near, as they are meant to. Parisian bistros are the city's lifeblood, and this one, set on the southern tip of the tiny island in the middle of the Seine, and only a few steps from the Cathédrale de Notre Dame, is at the city's true heart. Patrons sit relaxed and unhurried, as waiters casually survey the scene. This is my impression of the elegance of Paris, the luxury of time.



Steps to complete painting:

1. Cafe windows: added lights and layers. More lights, plus some outdoor light shining through on the far right. Then, window panes and reflection from the glass partition, glazed lightly with a purple blue nupastel over each partition. Little sparks and dots of color here

and there also help suggest movement and life within—and were suggested by lights I saw here and there in the photo.

2. Figures: I needed to adjust the size of the figures - the people at the corner of the building needed to get a little larger (easy, since they were only suggestions so far) and the waiters required slight adjustments. I shrunk the shorter waiter's head a little and brought the tall waiter's shoulders and head down a little. (Not difficult but a little heart breaking as I really liked that head!). Then, I finessed a few of the figures to make sure they were more substantial and believable being careful not to get stuck in too many details.

3. Faces: for those in foreground with forward-facing faces, I was careful to avoid drawing features but tried to model bone structure only. Using 2-3 shades of nupastel I looked for bony protrusions, mainly defining forehead and jawline and in some cases, nose bridge.

4. Cafe furniture. I didn't try to copy the photo but rather picked and chose a few examples where they were convenient, and tried to pay attention to the general impression the others created, via the angles at which various lines fell. Picking out salient details such as the way the light glinted off the cafe tables (using black and white contrasts) went a long way toward creating an impression of substance without too much definition.

5. I added a few more suggestive architectural shapes in the background once I had a clearer definition of the foreground figures—because the high contrast foreground made it clear that I needed a little more variation in the back, so it wouldn't look completely flat. I was careful to keep the distant storefronts just barely suggested with values still fairly subdued.

6. Lettering here on the awning was really fun because it is just suggested (see detail below). Just scribbles, and your brain fills in the rest. It's a good example of less is more.

7. One last note: I did add a layer of color for the stones in front and then took a silicone rubber shaper and pulled the lines through it to draw in the cracks between the stones. I used the same rubber shaper to draw lines around and over the curvy lines of the chairs. This helps unify the piece and gives it a loose, impressionistic feel.









That wraps up this one! Thanks again, and congratulations to our winner, Sheridan Harrison of San Antonio, who will be getting a set of my new Parisian notecards! (They should be arriving any day—I can't wait!)

All the best to you, and please join me next time on January 13 for The Color of Snow!

Happy Thanksgiving,

From me and the turkeys who just strolled through my backyard.



Jeanne