

It's All in the Edges: Lessons from Richard Schmid

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July/August 2014  
[www.artistsmagazine.com](http://www.artistsmagazine.com)

fw media US \$7.99

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Display until August 4, 2014

*The Dandy* (detail; oil, 24x30) by Jeff Morrow



**Judi Betts** builds upon lessons from her early mentors, the California Scene painters, in her orchestrated blendings of abstraction and realism.

# chords of COLOR

BY HOLLY DAVIS

JUDI BETTS DESCRIBES her work as “creative realism.” Her style is unquestionably representational, but from her very first paint layers, she’s working with colors and shapes that have only occasional correspondences with reality. As she adds layers, she finds more ways to blend representationalism with expressionism—letting a corner go completely abstract; depicting foliage, riggings, or other elements with strokes of exaggerated hues; glazing bands of color vertically across the sky. Her liberties with shape and color speak softly, though. The world never appears as Betts depicts it, but you find nothing preposterous about the way she presents the world.

## Abstract Underpinnings

Betts learned contour drawing in junior high and high school, but in the 1950s, Abstract Expressionism was the style favored by Betts’s undergraduate painting professors at Indiana



University. “We worked large paintings in oil with big brushes,” says Betts. “It was different from what I’d done in high school. It was exciting, and I was rewarded for working in that style. Those classes have a good bit to do with the abstract patterns I combine with realism.”

She moved to Louisiana and went on to earn a master’s degree in education so she could teach art, but she also wanted to develop her own creative skills. She admired the watercolors of John Singer Sargent and Winslow





splashes of color may serve as trumpet notes; bits of intense color, often added by Betts in the last paint layers, can act as staccato notes.

“When I’ve completed a painting I really like,” says Betts, “I say I can ‘hear’ it—I can hear the music. Many inexperienced painters, those who’ve done only 20 or 40 paintings, don’t have the percussion and the brass and the bass. As they paint more, they’ll add more instruments, so to speak, more sound, more depth.”

### Practice, Practice, Practice!

Experience, in a word, is what Betts holds as key to learning to “conduct” a painting. She estimates that she’s filled hundreds of sketchbooks (“pure joy!”), not to mention the thousands of small paintings, demonstration pieces, and large show paintings. “Many people, when they watch me paint, say, ‘It looks so easy!’” says Betts. “Well, when I see ice skaters or dancers, I feel I can do what they do, but I can’t. You must develop those skills. I like the thought, ‘We work so hard to make it look easy.’” ■

**HOLLY DAVIS** is the senior editor of *The Artist’s Magazine*.

**ABOVE:** The light red, blue, yellow, and green underpainted space divisions in *Little Billy* (watercolor, 22x30) are relatively easy to discern in the finished painting. The effect for the viewer is like looking at the goats through stained glass. In the background Betts preserved light-valued hornlike shapes, but she merged the heads and bodies belonging to these horns into one shape that gives the illusion of several animals.

## Meet Judi Betts



Judi Betts earned a bachelor of fine arts degree in silversmithing and jewelry making from Indiana University Bloomington and a master’s degree in education from Louisiana State University–Baton Rouge. She’s received more than 100 awards from major watercolor competitions, and her work has appeared on national television, in more than 35 books, and in numerous invitational exhibitions around the world. She’s taught more than 425 workshops and written two award-winning books, *Watercolor ... Let’s Think About It!* and

*Painting ... a Quest Toward Xtraordinary*, both available from Aquarelle Press. For more information, visit her website at [www.judibettsaws.com](http://www.judibettsaws.com).