



*Jasmine, oil, 14" by 11"*

*"This model has such wonderful skin tone. The ability to abstract the color notes gives this painting a kaleidoscope of warms and cools to play off each other. This painting was executed in one sitting. I love this type of gesture painting, as it encourages exploring intuitive color while demanding control of edge and value.*

more years. By then, it had become painfully obvious that the artistic environment he had grown so fond of in Los Angeles was absent in his hometown. So he took it upon himself to change that. "I couldn't find that energy anywhere in San Diego," he says. "So I decided to set up some kind of workshop environment to sort of get that going. I had no intention of it growing into what it is now."

Today, Watts and his wife, Krista, run Watts Atelier of the Arts. While

Watts teaches five or six classes each week and participates in a couple more as a student, Krista, maintains the Web site, designs the brochures, and takes care of many of the other business details. "It's a labor of love for us," he says. Watts works with a cadre of almost 10 teachers, all age 35 or under—except for Watt's father, who helps out as well.

In the process of recreating the energy of his own art school days, Watts has become an accomplished painter in his own right. He credits



his growth as an artist to constant study and practice with other talented artists. "I started young, and I made the mistakes young painters make," he says. "It took a while to get out of that, but now my paintings are more me."

Watts continues to take two or three classes each week and craves the company of fellow artists. "I'll always be learning," he says. "I've been at this for 15 years so far, and I'll be at it for 15 more and then 15 more and so on. And I'll still be taking classes. It's so important to maintain your skills—and the only way to do that is through honest work, and the only way to do that is to paint from life."

Watts makes time to get outdoors for plein air painting sessions, sometimes as a teacher and sometimes on his own, much preferring to be in the presence of his subjects than to work from photographs. "Working from photos can make you develop a lazy eye," he explains. "You lose your ability to perceive if you work that way."

So Watts, a signature member of the Laguna Plein Air Painters, sets up his easel on the beach. He takes his paints out to the park. He looks for anything that will inspire him, he says. One day he might be moved to paint a portrait of a grey-haired man with a curling moustache, while the next day fish swimming in a pond might catch his eye. He captures waves crashing against the shoreline and storm clouds gathering over the mountains. His goal, Watts says, is