

Louise A. Frechette channels her fascination with the ocean into high-powered seascapes that capture both motion and emotion.

Making Waves

By Chuck Sambuchino



Winter (37x37)



Matters of the Heart, I
(29x29)

Louise A. Frechette's interest in creative expression was triggered by her father's creative work as stonemason. Frechette wanted nothing more than to follow in his footsteps, creating something beautiful with her own hands. She quickly learned, however, that her hands were better suited for creating with pigment rather than stone.

That was 50 years ago, and now the artist continues to pursue her art, painting in both pastels and oils, in a studio along the New England shore in Kennebunkport, Maine. Here, inspired by the power, beauty and motion of the Atlantic, she paints energetic seascapes that communicate messages of loneliness, evolution, change and the presence of a higher power. After painting many

hundreds of seascapes, she's still enamored with her pastels—and the ocean—every day.

From Sea to Shining Sea

Frechette, 65, was born in San Francisco, and became infatuated with the ocean at a young age. A favorite activity, in fact, was swimming under the city's Golden Gate Bridge. After marrying her husband, Carl, job relocations kept the pair traveling around the country until they eventually settled in Maine in 1975, introducing the artist to a new coast.

At that time, Frechette was a successful oil painter with no plans to learn to paint with another medium, but when she happened upon a set of pastels, it opened up a new artistic chapter in her life. "I was

running short in a show and needed two more paintings, so I went to the garage and got Carl's sandpaper and did two pastel paintings," she says. "I sold them right away." More shows followed, with more pastels, more quick sales, and more surprises for Frechette. Some admirers of her work urged her to apply for membership in the Pastel Society of America, and within two years, she was a signature member.

The artist was amazed by the reception her pastels received, and is still struck by the way her seascapes continue to turn heads. "I've been painting the ocean for 25 years and my paintings evidently strike some sort of emotion in people," she says. "I don't see the storms in my work; I see evolution; I see change; I see movement. The ocean is never stagnant. It's always moving and churning. I think that's what evokes the interest and the emotion in people—the movement of it."

Being familiar with both coasts, Frechette is conscious of the differences between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans—and makes an effort to note the color variations. "A mixture of minerals, sea life, light and sand produce a colorist's dream," she says. In *Sanctus* (on page 53), she used a selection of Winsor & Newton pastels to depict her vision of the clean waters off the coast of Carmel, Calif. "Many say there's no one color that can describe this area of the California coast. I found the closest was Winsor & Newton green (blue shade), and for the wave a mixture of the

lightest shade of caput mortuum plus the lightest ultramarine violet.

"This intimate painting makes viewers feel as if they're diving directly into the wave," she says. "It's a scene I repeat many times, as I love the idea of being engulfed in this cleansing of pure water."

As much as the sea can change from season to season, Frechette is continually inspired. New England's notoriously rough winters, for instance, encourage a range of moods. "You look at the water at night and you recognize the loneliness and the isolation that fishermen must feel during winter. That's one of the reasons that I like to paint the ocean," she says. "It's so vast and there are times when it becomes so dark and very sad," she says.

Painting the subject year-round does pose the challenge of capturing, in winter, what can sometimes seem like limitless shades of gray. The artist's painting *Winter* (on page 49) is one response. She used a range of Winsor & Newton's Davy's gray, as well as various shades of violet, ultramarine blue and black. Some platinum leaf was added for a touch of shine. "When the ocean turns silver," Frechette says, "we may think of this moment in time as colorless, when in fact it has many colors; all we need to do is take the time to look with open eyes."

Letting Things Flow

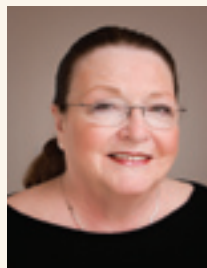
When Frechette sits down with her blank surface, she has no idea where the painting will take her—



The Way (37x37)



The Light (37x37)



About the Artist

Louise A. Frechette (www.frechettegallery.com) of Kennebunkport, Maine, became a signature member of the Pastel Society of America in 1993. The award-winning artist has taken

part in a number of exhibitions, including the Florence Biennial International Exhibit in Italy.

Her work has been featured in several museums, including the Attleboro Museum in Attleboro, Mass.; The Brick Store Museum in Kennebunk, Maine; and the George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum in College Station, Texas.

The artist owns the L.A. Frechette Fine Art Gallery in Kennebunk. Her work can also be seen in the Christopher Bell Gallery in Monterey, Calif., and Northport Landing Gallery in Northport, Maine.



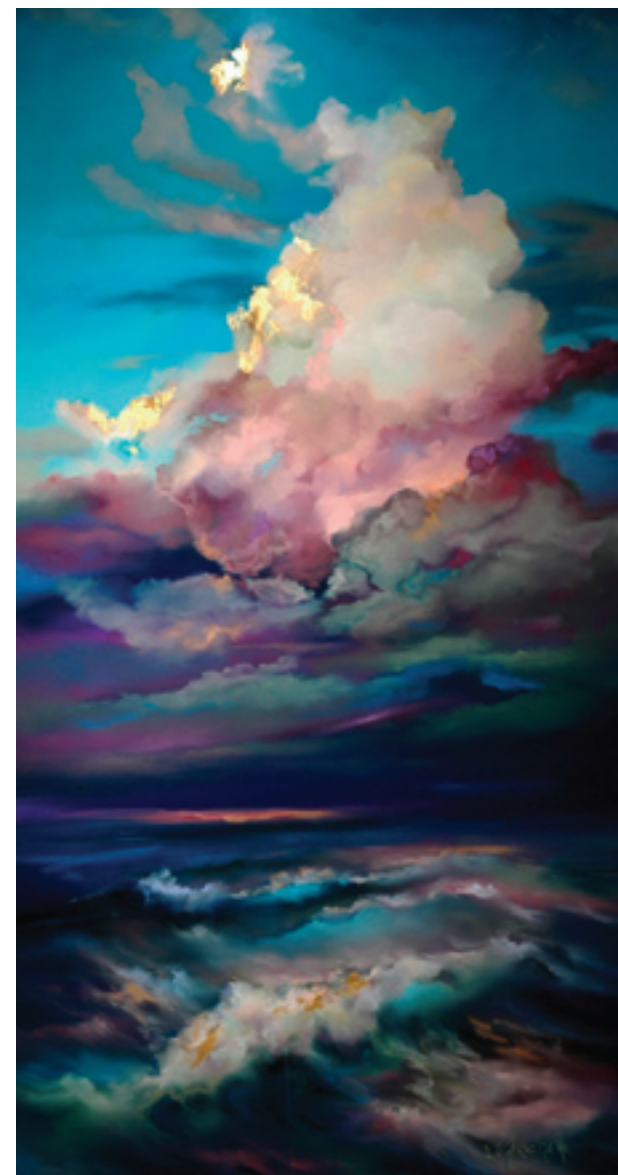
L.A. Frechette Fine Art Gallery

Photo of artist by Tim Frechette.

something like getting into a car and driving without knowing or worrying about the direction and destination. She likens her method to the style of improvisational jazz musicians, who, like her, create intuitively and on the fly.

“Painting is both a song and a dance,” she says. “There’s a rhythm to the whole working process and there’s that dance or song that my hands move to as I paint. I don’t think about what I’m doing at all. There aren’t any words that can describe it. It’s almost supernatural and it’s mysterious.” Much like the ever-changing sea itself, no painting experience ever feels exactly the same to the artist.

Another important influence on Frechette’s work is her faith, which compels her to create. “For me, my painting is a form of prayer,” she says. “The idea is that—no



The Best of Times (55x33)

matter what your faith is—there’s something greater than yourself. I believe that we’re divinely guided somehow. We’re on a mission. What’s important to me is that I give my heart and soul to my work. Inevitably, it will move somebody.”

Even though Frechette wants viewers to experience an emotional quality in her work, she doesn’t paint with any message in mind, but instead leaves it up to the individual to interpret. And while she doesn’t create overtly religious paintings, this is an aspect that consistently shines through to viewers. “People find them spiritual,” Frechette says. “It’s not a New Age thing, but it’s whatever ‘spiritual’ is in the broad spectrum—and whatever that means to each person.”

An Obsession with Color

Frechette’s *modus operandi* is a strange mix of knowing how she wants to paint, then freely creating without a final image in mind. She doesn’t start her paintings with any visual aids—no preliminary sketch or reference photo—although she does sometimes take photographs to observe the characteristics of waves in general.

Her surface of choice is museum-grade Kitty Wallace paper. “I buy Kitty Wallace paper by the roll and I love it,” she says. “Museum quality paper offers something very exceptional. It’s very rough and sanded. I paint and blend until I have no fingerprints. There are times a callous forms, a finger starts to bleed and I have to stop painting, but it gives me the intimacy with the paper and the pastels themselves. I get to work with my hands—like my father did, which I truly, truly love.”

The collection of pastel sticks in her workspace is massive, and still growing because, like so many pastel artists, Frechette is obsessed with color. One of her favorite palettes, demonstrated in the painting, *Matters of the Heart, I* (on page 50), includes a full range of purples, pinks and aqua. “Every brand of pastel gives you something different and every color gives you something different,” she says.

Her favorite pastels include Diane Townsend, Unison (“They go on the paper like liquid,” she says), Winsor & Newton and Great American. She especially loves a set of iridescent colors from Great American, which provide a sparkle that’s perfect for




Sanctus (29x29)

conveying sunlight on water. Her favorite of the iridescents is black pearl—a brownish gray stick that she often picks up to paint rocks in the water.

Frechette will also add bits of gold or silver leaf to a painting to create radiance. “When I use leaf, I put it on in a triangular fashion,” she says. “Maybe I’ll have it in the rocks, in the sky and in the water.” You can see her use of leaf and the iridescent pastel colors in *The Best of Times* (opposite), a piece that also demonstrates the artist’s interest in format as a creative tool. A vertical format, for example, helps suggest deep water.

Made for Pastel

Frechette stresses that artists, whether they create with paint or pastels, clay or stone, must be fully in love with their medium in order to reach their full potential. “When you create, you have to find a medium that’s yours—that you’re designed for,” she says. “I was designed to use pastels, I think. I just love them. If you can do what you love to do—just for the pure joy and love of doing it—it’s so satisfying. There’s nothing better.” 

Chuck Sambuchino is a freelance writer and an editor for Writer’s Digest Books (www.guidetoliteraryagents.com).



To see a painting demonstration with the artist, visit www.artistsnetwork.com/article/pj-frechette.