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ARTIST NEWSLETTER

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ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

**2025 Online Workshops**
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**Strathmore Mixed Media**
Meet the line of paper that started it all

**Artist Spotlight**
Strathmore Ambassador Jordan Rhodes

**Watercolor Blocks**
Get better acquainted with this convenient watercolor option

MAIN FEATURE

# From Paper to Precious: The Artful Journey of a Goldsmith

By Eleanor Clifford

To me, the art I make is one of my many tools. I'm an Artist, yes, but first and foremost I'm a Goldsmith. I've been in the jewellery industry and clattering away on the bench since the age of 16. I've worked for several local and luxury jewellers, mostly doing repairs, manufacturing and design. These three things go really hand in hand. To be a good jewellery designer, it's helpful to know how things are made and how things can go wrong if they aren't made properly. My experience on the bench is behind everything I design and paint. You really get to understand how to capture jewellery by working with it every day.

I love this industry. It's full of fascinating people, practices, objects and stories. There's always something new to learn or some sort problem to dig your way out of.

I specifically started to seriously delve into Jewellery Illustration, or Rendering as it's also called, back in 2019. I was goldsmithing for a Jewellers where the workshop staff were required to go down to the showroom to consult with and sometimes draw up ideas in front of design clients. Now, I've sketched and messed around with paints as soon as I was capable of holding a pencil (my Opa was an artist, I was brought up in a very arty family) but this is still a pretty daunting thing to do, especially when dealing with highly sentimental or important potential commissions.

I'm very aware that my style of  sketching is naturally chaotic and my handwriting is even worse, the combination of which doesn't really make for a very helpful design service! To solve this, I started learning about and teaching myself the art of jewellery rendering so I could confidently present my ideas to clients in a way that I was happy with.

That workshop closed, 2020 happened, but I stuck at the painting and have used it as a  part my work ever since. One of my favourite things since starting is finding just how many parallels there are between the art world and jewellery industry.

Pigments have been my special interest. You only need to see Ultramarine to know that its the colour of lapis lazuli,  the beautiful (but highly toxic) yellow fuzz that sometimes spews up whilst melting down old jewellery is cadmium and the delicate duck egg pigment that is used for Copper Blue is the same crust that forms in our "pickling pots", the acid solution that goldsmiths use to clean jewellery after soldering.

With the art I create and the pieces I design, inspiration is completely dependent on the situation. If I'm designing for a client, the inspiration is all theirs and the design is led by their requirements. It's similar when designing for a company or collection, there's always a brief that must be followed. That suits me just fine though as I like the structure and coming up with something that will be loved.

I always especially enjoy jobs that require lots of colour, though. If I'm just practicing or designing for myself, I like to take inspiration from architecture and have recently become very interested in the aesthetics of Art Nouveau.

> *"It's such a special feeling to be trusted to bring to life and illustrate someone's hard work."*

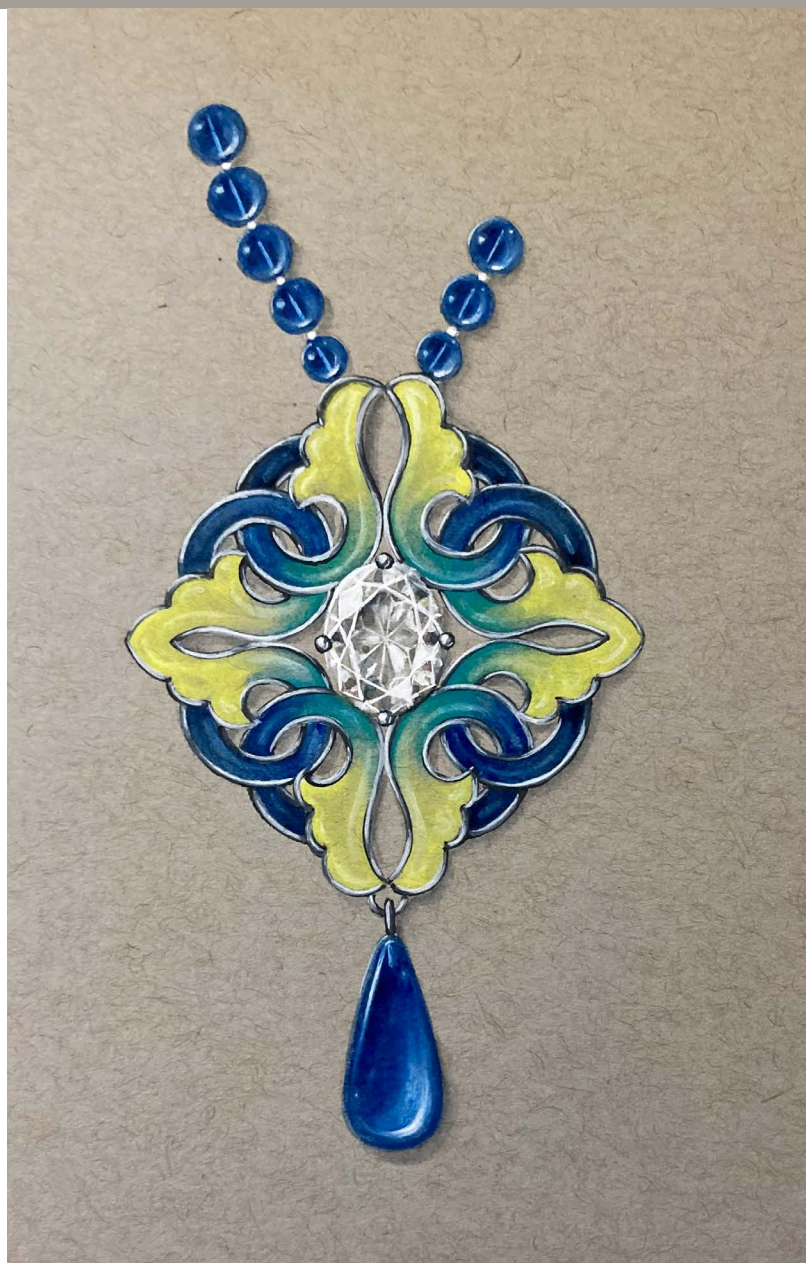
I also find that quite often, when painting on behalf of other people, I'm not involved in the design process at all. This has normally already been done and a final design has already been reached. I'm just required to illustrate that finished design so that it can be beautifully presented. I really love this. It's such a special feeling to be trusted to bring to life and illustrate someone's hard work. Hand rendering is an incredibly interesting and increasingly niche segment of the jewellery industry; however, I think it can be argued that this art is experiencing something of a revival.

Traditionally, jewellery illustrations would have been produced by designers (or Gouacheuse, to use their correct name) as the final step of the design process. The whole purpose of these beautifully intricate gouache paintings was to serve as an representation of what a finished piece would look like. It would be relied upon as reference throughout the manufacturing process and then maybe tucked away in a little drawer somewhere once the physical piece was created.

Many design houses kept hold of them for records, but they weren't really produced with the intention of display. Much like with hand rendered illustrations across most other design fields, Gouache would have been the paint used for the task. It's still favoured by most people for the job today. Personally though, I like to take a mixed media approach.

Most of my work is painted with watercolours, although I use a little gouache to capture facets and metals. The properties of some watercolours really do lend themselves marvellously to jewellery rendering. There's no way I'm dabbing away with my brush to capture the patterns in fluorite, for example, when I can just utilise the granulating combination of Ultramarine and Quinacridone Violet to do it all for me. It's like a cheeky little short cut recipe and I love it.

When it comes to paper choice, normally (though not necessarily always), Jewellery Illustrators tend to choose a tinted paper to render onto. This really makes the highlights pop in contrast and helps give that sparkle you expect to see with jewellery. I like a good, heavy, neutral grey that can put up with a lot of working. *Strathmore Toned Gray Mixed Media* paper is ideal for this.



As I touched upon earlier, the art of traditionally hand rendering jewellery (along with many other areas of the trade) took a hefty wallop due to the modernisation of the industry, brought on by the introduction and mass utilisation of CAD. The whole design and manufacturing process has experienced a huge shift. A good CAD designer can present an incredibly accurate, gorgeously computer rendered and lifelike jewellery design. This can then be used to print a model for you to see in person. You want tweaks to the design? No problem! The designer can hop back onto the software and make those changes for you.

When you are happy with the design, the file gets sent off for casting, the casting is cleaned up and polished, it's whooshed off to a stone-setter and wham bam there's your finished piece. Not to mention that it's produced at significantly less cost, time and labour than it would have been previously. It's a no brainer for quick turnaround and mass production. You can see how it made such an impact on the whole industry.

Lacks that little bit of romance though, doesn't it?

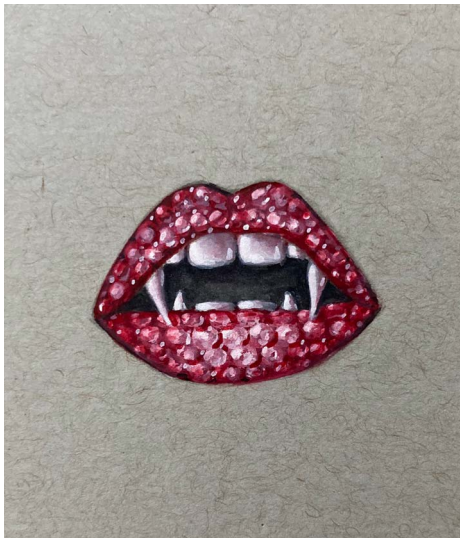
That, I think, is how the art of hand rendering is keeping a grip on the industry today. We're part a luxury trade, there's an awful lot of luxury to be found in both tradition and the hand crafted.

Even alongside CAD, hand rendered jewellery illustrations are being celebrated in their own light. The craft is increasingly being appreciated on its own merit, not just a step in a process. As mentioned, quite often, I find myself painting up illustrations based on CAD files. Is this extra step necessary? Arguably, no. The designing has already been done and there is already an accurate depiction of what the article of jewellery is going to look like.

But the hand crafted element, knowing that somebody has taken the extra time and care to present this design to you, that's romantic. That's luxury.

The value of jewellery isn't only made up of the core materials, the stones and the metal. Value is placed upon it through the many years of skill required, the perceived time taken throughout crafting and the deep history rooted in all these things that says "This is precious. This is worth something to someone else, therefore it's worth something to me."

Jewellery in itself isn't a necessary thing, nobody needs these shiny baubles to live a happy life. But they are nice. We want them because they appeal to the little magpie in all of us that craves treasure and precious things.



The purpose of hand-rendered jewellery illustrations is very much the same as it always was. It's a tool to seduce that little magpie. Not only does it sell an idea, it also places luxury, value and care onto an item of jewellery, even before it's necessarily been created.

It does a very good job at it, too. I'm glad this historic craft is being valued in its own right, as it very much deserves to be.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Eleanor is a Goldsmith and Jewellery Illustrator living on the south coast of England. With 13 years in the jewellery industry, she specialises in hand renderings using both watercolours and gouache. Eleanor loves colour, and especially enjoys working with bright gemstones and paints.

Strathmore® ONLINE WORKSHOP SERIES

# Join us for Strathmore's **FREE** 2025 Online Workshops!

Strathmore's Online Workshops feature free video lessons and downloadable instructions created by experienced artists. Follow along in the online classroom as instructors guide you through various art topics. After a lesson releases, it remains on the site for viewing the rest of the year. #StrathmoreWorkshops

**Share all the fun on Instagram and Facebook using #StrathmoreWorkshops**

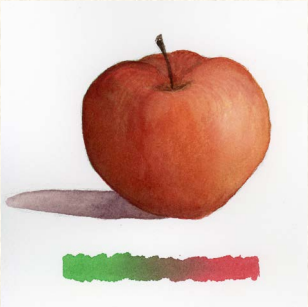
**Workshops start March 3 and continue through December 31, 2025**

## Workshop 1: Sketching – The Foundational Artistic Skill

Instructor: Jordan Rhodes

Start Date: March 3, 2025

Sketching is the gateway, the first step in the art making process. It is the fastest way to communicate visually and translate an image in your head into something that you can share. There are no rules to sketching, no right or wrong way that universally applies to every artist. This workshop will go over how I like to sketch in my practice, how it can be used for idea generation, learning new concepts, and just having fun.



## Workshop 2: Underpainting in Watercolor

Instructor: Mallery Jane
Start Date: May 5, 2025

Discover how to create beautiful undertones using an underpainting technique in watercolor. This method helps establish shadows and provides a foundation that enhances the overall color harmony of your painting. You will learn what underpainting is, how to choose the right underpainting color, which areas of the painting to apply it to, and how to incorporate this technique into your own artwork effectively.

## Workshop 3: Drawing Birds of the World in Colored Pencil

Instructor: Claire Milligan
Start Date: August 4, 2025

We'll draw four realistic birds in colored pencils, each from a unique habitat around the world as we explore their beauty and diversity. We'll master the various textures of feathers and iridescence while exploring different color palettes. You'll learn essential techniques for layering, blending, and adding fine details. Our primary goal is to develop your realistic drawing skills and inspire a deeper connection to wildlife that honors the incredible birds of our world!

## Workshop 4: Vibrant Illustrations with Gouache: Seasonal Paintings

Instructor: Sofia Pavan Macias
Start Date: November 3, 2025

In this workshop, we'll use gouache to create four sketchbook spreads illustrating different subjects for each season: spring, summer, autumn, and winter. We will bring the seasons to life by illustrating their beauty with vibrant colors and detail. This four-part workshop will cover techniques on how to paint with gouache, how to keep the colors vibrant and make your illustrations jump off the page.

Join us for our free workshops at: **strathmoreartist.com/artist-studio**

# STRATHMORE MIXED MEDIA

## The Original Creative Paper

DID YOU KNOW? Strathmore Mixed Media was the first and the original mixed media paper that changed the game for artists everywhere. Born from artist feedback and innovation, Strathmore created a surface that could do it all. We listened to the growing requests from artists for a paper that had the surface of a drawing sheet, but the properties of a watercolor sheet.

Surface for Drawing – Vellum surface that is perfect for detailed lines, bold strokes, and everything in between.
Built for Painting – Tough enough to handle wet media applications without warping, pilling, or compromising.
Media Applications - Graphite, colored pencil, charcoal, pastel, watercolor, acrylic, gouache, marker, ink, and more.

Strathmore Mixed Media Paper is available in a range of weights and formats to fit your artistic needs:

### 300 Series Mixed Media

*117lb / 190gsm*

For mixed media sketches, practice of techniques and quick studies. Medium weight paper in wirebound pads.

### 400 Series Mixed Media

*184lb / 300gsm*

Heavyweight for finished artwork in all mediums. available in black, white, and toned pads.

### 500 Series Mixed Media

*100% Cotton*

Archival. Available in a range of weights and formats including Pads, Boards, Sheets, Rolls, and Journals.

# ARTIST SPOTLIGHT
## WITH STRATHMORE AMBASSADOR
# JORDAN RHODES

jordanmrhodes.com

**Instagram: @jmr_art • YouTube: @jmr_art**

Jordan Rhodes transitioned to an art career after earning a Ph.D. in chemistry. While in graduate school, he rekindled his passion for art and now specialized in portraiture. Jordan primarily works with traditional water-based media like gouache and watercolor but also enjoys using digital tools. We sat down with Jordan to get some insight on his work.

**Q: What's the most common art-related question you get from your followers, and what's the answer?**

**A:** The most common art question I get is about my choice of underpainting colors for portraits. In many of my timelapse videos, I start with unusual colors like blue or green. This stems from the verdaccio technique, where a green base complements red skin tones. I adapt this by using blue for brownish or orange skin tones. Beyond complementary colors, I enjoy experimenting with unusual hues to see their effects. With opaque media like gouache, I'm more adventurous, while with transparent watercolor, I use very diluted layers to avoid overpowering the painting.

**Q: What do you look for in a reference photo before creating a portrait?**

**A:** My criterion for reference a photo typically is just that it looks cool or some aspect of it captures my eye. It could be as simple as an interesting shape of the ear or the silhouette of it in general. When using references, I like to have them zoomed out and small for most of the process because it allows me to focus more on the big shapes and leave some of the details up for interpretation. I found that to be a helpful way to not feel so constricted by the reference and free to add my own artistic touch.

**READ THE FULL INTERVIEW**

# WATERCOLOR BLOCKS: WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW TO USE THEM

A watercolor block is a pad of watercolor paper bound along all four edges, leaving just a small section unglued. This helpful design eliminates the need to stretch the paper beforehand or tape it to a board. The result? A secure, flat surface that can handle even the wettest techniques without buckling. Here are the three easy steps to using one:

## Start Painting

No prep needed! Simply grab your watercolor block and start applying your paint to the top sheet. The glued edges keep the paper taut, so you can load it with water.

## Remove your artwork

Once your painting is completely dry, use a palette knife, letter opener, credit card, or any slim, flat tool to remove your artwork from the block. Gently slide the tool under the top sheet at the unglued section and run it along the glue line around the block.

## Ready for the next painting

Underneath, you'll find a fresh, clean sheet ready for your next piece.

**CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE PROCESS**

*Strathmore 400 Series Watercolor Blocks* are made with 140lb/300gsm cold press watercolor paper. They are available in 5 sizes: 9 x 12", 11 x 15", 13 x 17", 15 x 20", 18 x 24"