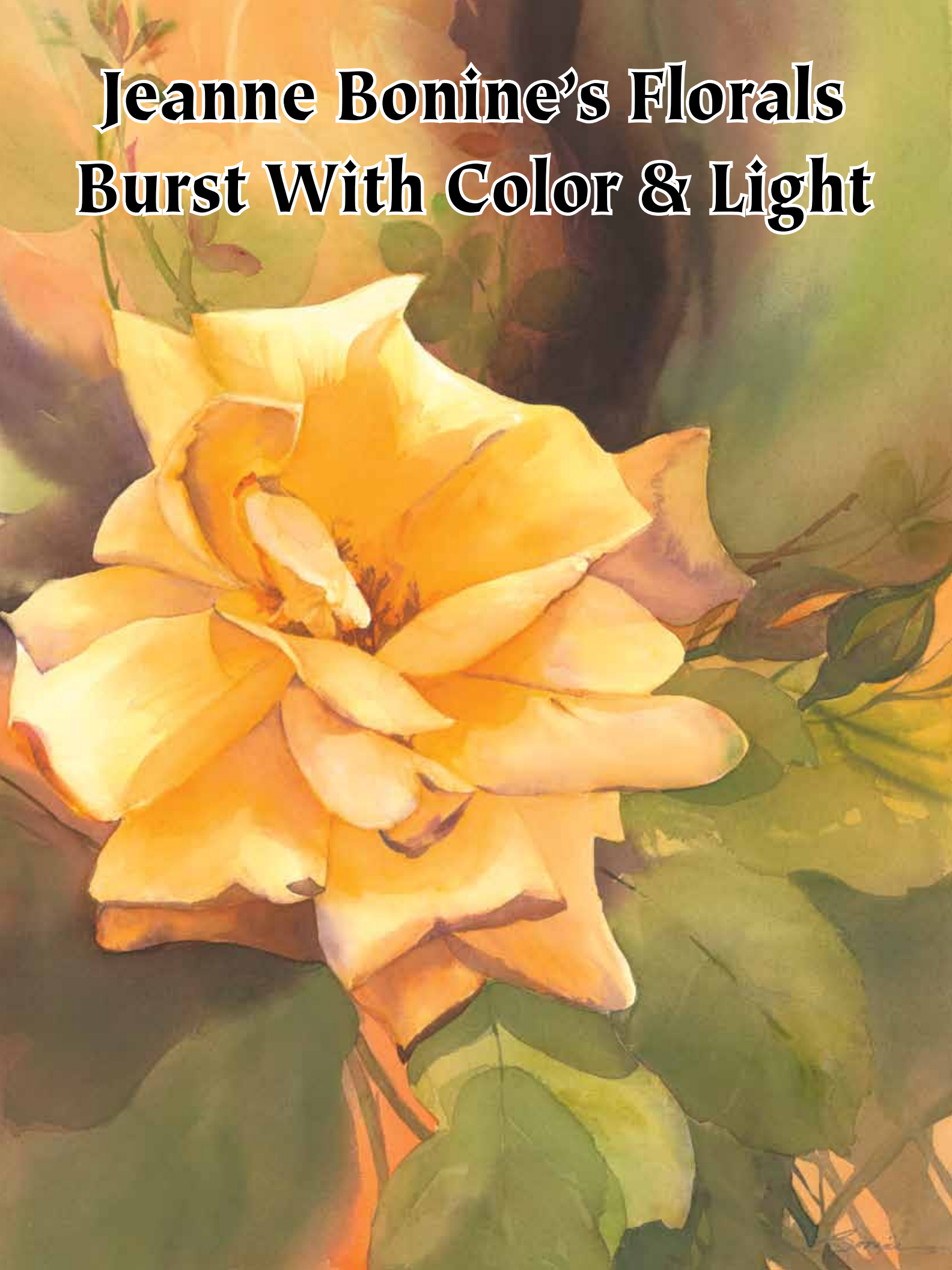


# Jeanne Bonine's Florals Burst With Color & Light



Left:  
*Gentle Persuasion*

Right:  
*Tropicana*  
150 S/N Giclees  
15 AP

Image Size  
on deckled edge  
watercolor paper:  
15½" x 39"

by J. Rose Steward

“The Tapestry of Life is a weaving of everywhere we have been, every act we have done, and everyone we have ever met. Each leaves a colored thread – a part of a pattern that we continually weave through our lives. Eventually we recognize the why of it all, as we see these colored threads and patterns reappear, interlocked and dependent on each other. It is then we know the truth.” Jeanne Bonine



Most successful painters are able to share their deepest feelings about life and all that connects us using their canvas as a stage. Almost a hundred years ago, Georgia O’Keefe enlarged the delicate and voluptuous flower as a poignant antidote to an increasingly industrialized and chaotic America, and as the century turns again, man is faced with new perils and challenges. In a style all her own, Jeanne Bonine’s larger-than-life florals, with their richly-layered colors and patches of sunlight glowing through transparent petals, are true and poetic statements about the silent power of beauty amidst this often perilous journey. But for Bonine, a lively woman with sparkling brown eyes, to complete the picture of the rich connections that bind us to each other – and to nature – another dimension of creativity would be needed: prose.

With the release of her new book *Inspirations of Timeless Beauty*, a treasure-trove of seventy-five images emboldened by her inspirational writings and set against the story of her life, Bonine has realized a dream she has nurtured since the beginning of her career. “I loved writing my story... more than I ever would have imagined,” she says in a voice delicate and sure. “It means even more to me now that I have realized my life’s purpose: to bring beauty into the world and to shed inspiration to those who are in need of courage to overcome obstacles, or the courage to simply allow their creative abilities to shine.”

Bonine’s florals are a statement about the tender

generosity of nature and life’s desire to go on, telling the story of optimism, hope, and courage in the face of adversity by depicting the magical transformation that can occur with a simple shift in focus. From personal struggles with breast cancer, the deaths of beloved family members, and divorce, to the collective agony of a nation reeling from the events of September 11, her spirit rises above the sadness again and again in search of meaning and understanding.

As a child, Bonine pulled the universal spirituality of nature deep into her heart with the help of her parents, who spent countless hours with her along with older brother Bill traipsing through Minnesota’s summer countryside. These experiences opened doors to her imagination and instilled in her a deep sense of altruism that has permeated her art and her responses throughout her life. “Even then I always felt the need to be doing some creative project; my passion for art was indeed my need to create,” she says. “I think an appreciation for beauty and the peace I received from being close to nature was what brought me to the place where I could relive those experiences whenever I wanted.”

At twenty she enrolled in art classes where she was introduced to oils, but dreams of seriously studying art and joining the Peace Corps gave way to the reality of love, marriage, and the birth of two sons Steven and Chad. Bonine joined the local art society, all the while teaching herself to paint, and for a time was happy bal-



*Did learning to paint teach Bonine to master her life, or was it the other way around? "Life definitely instructed the painting," Bonine says.*

*Enter Into Paradise  
75 S/N  
10 AP  
Image size on deckled edge  
watercolor paper  
40" x 24½"*



ancing her art with her role as wife and mother; but eventually one season of life would give way to another. Her father, so long her most cherished role model, died of cancer, and soon thereafter her marriage ended. The challenges of being a single mother forced her to fall back on her upbringing as a risk taker and a problem solver. There would be a hysterectomy, a second marriage that would last nearly a decade, and throughout these ups and downs her painting would continue to be not just an outlet, but a shoulder, a confidant, that nurtured her unending optimism.

It was around the time she found herself a single mother for the second time – her sons were teenagers – that Bonine would leave oil paints behind in exchange for the “controlled freedom” of watercolors. “I was feeling the need to simplify my life,” she said, adding that this new medium felt truer for her, in that mastering watercolors felt a lot like mastering life. It was through this transformation that she says her work began to have soul. “You try to control the uncontrollable and in the process you learn when to let go and when to quit. Sometimes it takes you where you had not intended, but if you trust the flow, it will take you to a destined finish.”

Bonine’s first paintings in this new medium would be simple and straightforward, mirroring her desire to step back and look at life with a less encumbered eye. As she became more accustomed to her new circumstances, a sense of playfulness and exploration would begin to emerge in the form of washy backgrounds that gave her imagination room to explore, and as she grew, so did her art. In 1990 Bonine began to self-publish lithographs with *Once Upon A Dream*, a peaceful depiction of two swans inspired by a visit to the Cincinnati Zoo. She found an immediate and receptive market for her work.

The question is, did learning to paint teach Bonine to master her life, or was it the other way around? “Life definitely instructed the painting,” she says, but that is not to say that learning to allow creative energy to flow isn’t fine practice for learning not to fight life’s natural courses. “When putting my book together along with the prose I wrote, I was able to look back and see the pattern life had formed for me. Both my prose and my paintings are an expression of all of my life experiences. This is how the passion is infused into the work – through the feelings I have relating to my life. For instance, after I was diagnosed with stage III breast cancer in 1994, my paintings became bigger than life and bolder in color, representing the fact that I no longer took time for granted. It was go for the gusto! And why not?”

Bonine explains that after breast surgery and the subsequent rounds of chemotherapy, she found an even greater need to express to others her belief in a force she was not able to control – a purpose meant to be just hers. Facing death, she says, can be a powerful impetus to putting things in their proper perspective. “That is when I started to write words to mesh with my work, hoping it would lead people to a place of peace. It is another form of expression, another way to dig deep into the soul and search for understanding.” With understanding came acceptance, and with acceptance, Bonine says she was

able to shift her focus to painting for herself rather than for her career. *Moonlight Surrender*, in the most symbolic way a self-portrait, depicts a lone swan swimming toward the light. She dedicated the painting “to all who encounter the face of darkness, that they may courageously surrender their fears and discover the light of hope and joy,” and she donated a portion of the proceeds to the American Cancer Society. “When admirers of my work began to tell me that my paintings brought them peace, even took their

*“We all create our own scenario by the decisions we make in the face of what life brings to us.”*

pain away, I was able to see how everything happens for a reason; it is a part of this tapestry we all weave.”

In 1999 a process of reproducing art called giclées had made the scene, and Bonine was eager to employ this new technique, which allowed for far more authentic reproductions of her paintings. To date she has published close to one hundred limited editions that can be found in collections throughout the world. Bonine prefers to keep her editions small – between 75 and 450 signed and numbered prints – printed on watercolor paper which allows reproductions of remarkable accuracy and quality in spite of the large scale of her paintings.

“I am attracted to larger canvases, as they give me the chance to be freer in my style of painting, especially in the backgrounds where I paint in a more abstract way. Often, after I have finished several larger pieces, I will work small for a little while, which helps me work on the mechanics and disciplines of painting.”

Now a grandmother of four, Bonine takes great pleasure in her role as storyteller and mentor to a new generation, reveling in life’s renewal of itself, this time through her grandchildren who are already showing signs of being artists in their own right. She has left the harsh Minnesota winters behind in exchange for the warm and primitive energy of the Sonoran desert, a place where more parallels are to be found in an environment that is as challenging as it is beautiful.

With her she brought her mother, whom she describes as the “soul of her vision,” and her long-time best friend and business partner brother Bill, who would eventually pass away only to reconnect with her through her paintings in ways that she finds both surprising and reassuring. And as she has always done, she continues to explore and reveal the many lines of her life’s tapestry as it weaves its pattern, glad for the sorrows that in the end have brought her that much closer to the rest of humanity.

“The tapestry of time is closely connected to my work,” she says. “Artists have their phases, and through my work I can see my development not just as an artist but as a person. Some call life a dream-journey, and I would have to say yes, that is what it has felt like, and continues to feel like, to me. I have learned that we all create our own scenario by the decisions we make in the face of what life brings to us; that we can learn and develop from the unfortunate as well as the good, knowing that everything has a purpose.” She feels enormously grateful for the gifts she has received, not the least of which is the sense that, through her talent, she has been able to affect others in the most positive ways. It is a dream she says she always has cherished, and one she never will give up. “Once I was aware that I was doing what I was intended to do in life, waking up to this purpose has made all of life worthwhile.” Δ



*Upon a Desert Dream  
150 S/N giclées  
15 AP giclée  
27½" x 22"*

*Ruby Red  
150 S/N giclée  
15 AP giclée  
27½" x 22"*

Artwork courtesy of  
Jeanne Bonine Studio  
Scottsdale, AZ 85262.  
Jeanne Bonine is *InformArt's* cover  
artist for this issue,  
also see ad on page 49