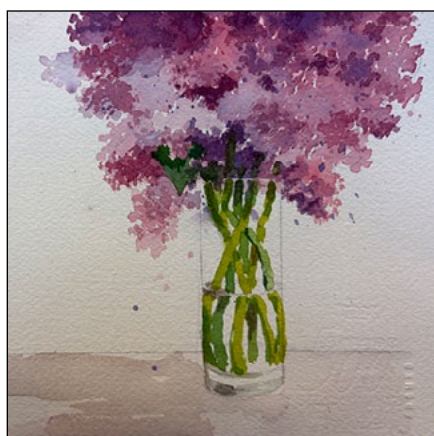
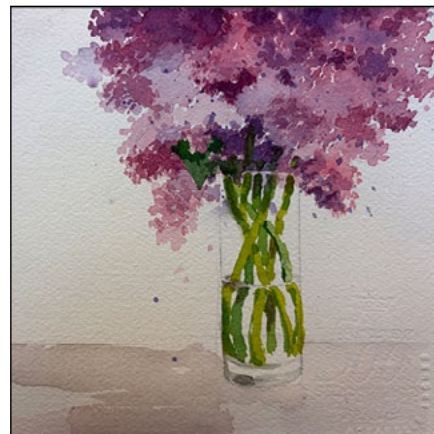
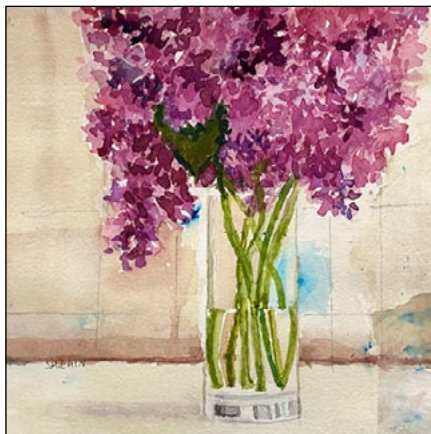




Community Outreach

Lilacs — A Still Life by Sheila Cain



Michael found a wonderful reference photo of a vase of lilacs online and led the Oakland veterans through the painting process. Each participant received an 8" x 9½" sheet of watercolor paper, a printout of the reference photo, and fresh squeezes of cobalt blue, lemon yellow, alizarin crimson, and ultramarine blue—though if Michael had his way, it would always be French ultramarine! They also worked with a detail brush, a mop, and a flat brush.

We began by drawing the glass vase using two straight lines connected by ellipses at the top and bottom to create the illusion of a three-dimensional form. Michael emphasized that the ellipses should be smooth and rounded, never pointed at the ends. While everyone understood the concept, drawing convincing ellipses proved to be more challenging than expected.

The lilacs themselves were painted freely. Layer by layer, we mixed pinks with blues to create soft purples, gradually adding darker, richer values to suggest clusters of blossoms. Negative painting technique was occasionally used to define individual flower shapes, giving them more depth and sparkle.

One of the most enjoyable observations was the way the lilac stems appeared to bend as they entered the water inside the glass vase. Capturing this optical distortion added realism and became a fun challenge for everyone. The transparent vase itself emerged through careful negative painting as the background was developed around it.

The veterans thoroughly enjoyed the project. As I watched them work, they would paint intensely into the lilacs, pause to look around the room and compare their progress with others, then return to their paintings with renewed determination. They quickly discovered that richer, darker purples and additional layers were what brought the flowers to life. By the end of the session, the paintings had indeed come alive. We left feeling proud of our work and looking forward to our next watercolor gathering with the Oakland veterans.

Sheila Cain

Co-Director, Community Outreach