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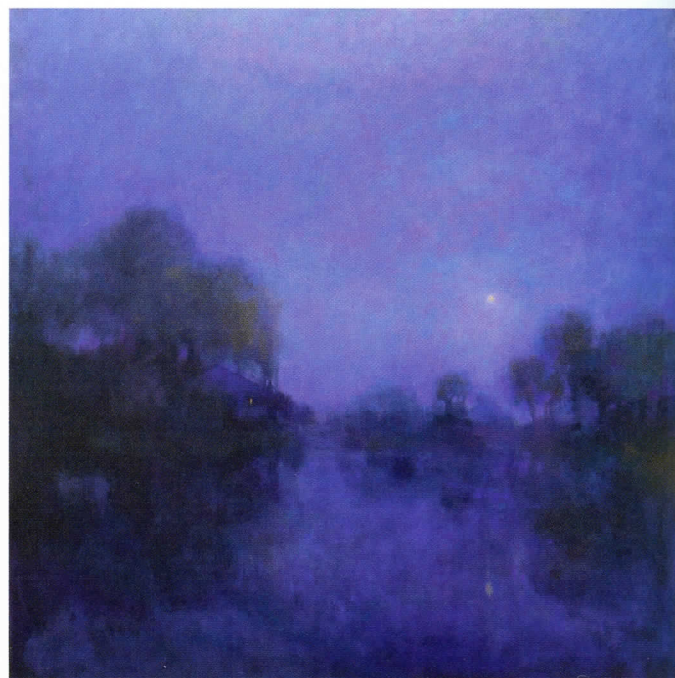
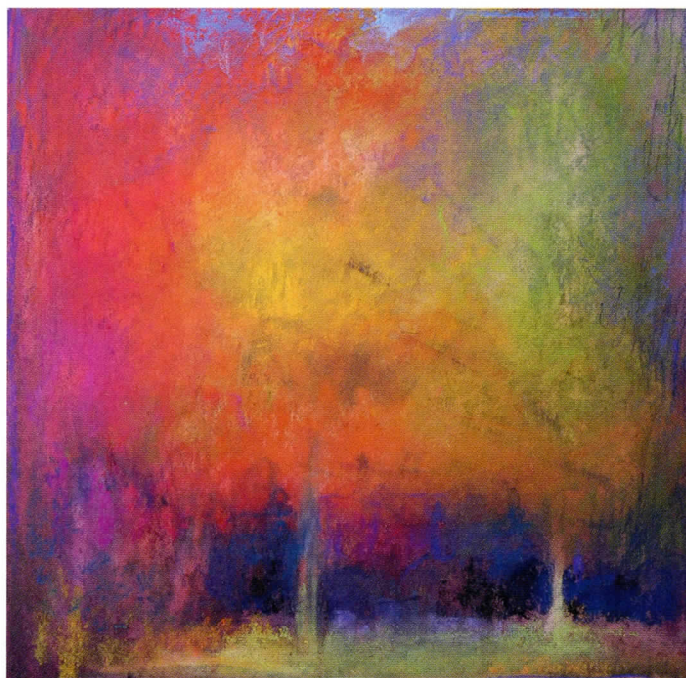
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# *capturing the* LIGHT

Loriann Signori infuses her dream-like landscapes with depth and emotion

BY JEANNE BLACKBURN

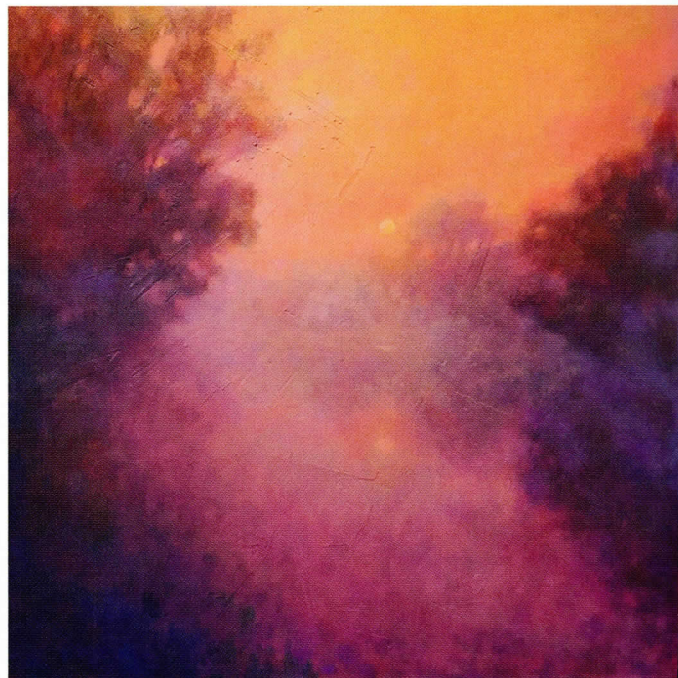
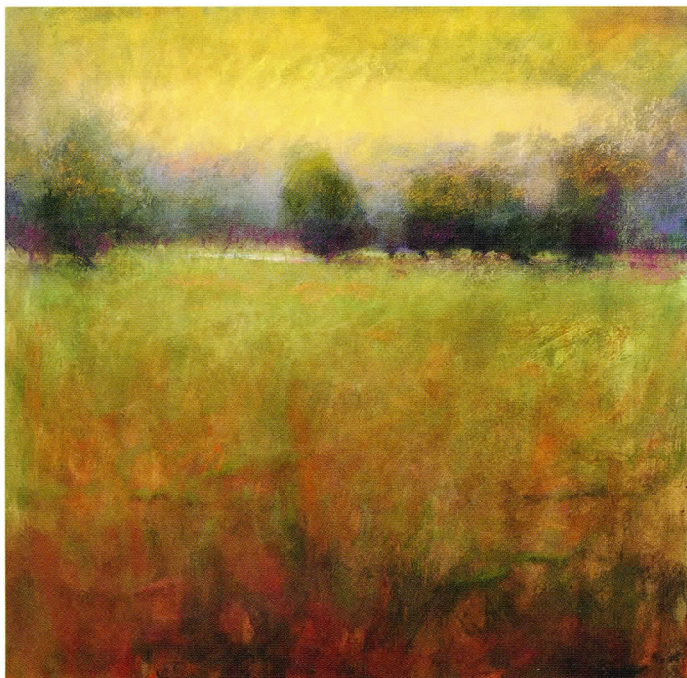
The first time you see one of Loriann Signori's landscapes in person, the contrast between vibrant color and soft shapes is riveting. The eye chases colors around the canvas, reimagining what appears to be there. As the artist says, her paintings "are an emotional response to the landscape." Part of that response manifests itself in color. Then there's the luminosity—something that Signori strives to capture in all her work.

"There's always a spot of light," she says, "a place that's more highly illuminated and glows from within." A soft, ephemeral quality permeates Signori's landscapes, which may depict trees, rivers, orchards, fields of wildflowers, the sun and occasionally the moon. Even when she paints



Signori plies her craft in her Silver Spring studio (left), where she brings to life such atmospheric paintings as (above, left to right) "Rothko Trees" and "Sapphire Twilight." She layers media—oils, pastels, gesso and watercolor—and glazes them, then rubs off the layers of glaze to achieve the luminous quality that characterizes her work.





*“Observing is the work; getting it down on canvas is the relaxation.”*

—LORIANN SIGNORI

distinctive subjects such as the Potomac River, she renders them in a muted, dreamlike cast.

The Connecticut-born artist has been painting for more than 30 years. As a young child, she loved being outdoors, and at 14 she began painting *en plein air* to satisfy what would become a lifelong passion for the landscape. After receiving a BFA in 1979 from the Swain School of Design in Massachusetts, she completed her MFA at American University in Washington under a full fellowship.

Early on, Signori became infatuated with luminosity, studying the works of 19th-century American landscape artists Sanford Robinson Gifford and Frederic Edwin Church. They remain her primary sources of inspiration today, along with artists from the Italian Renaissance and Washington’s Color Field movement.

“Initially, I was taught the technique of *alla prima*—basically, ‘put it down and leave it,’” she reflects. “But now, I really work the painting, applying multiple layers and scraping and sanding off before an-

other layer goes on.” To capture light and color on canvas, Signori employs various media: oils, pastels and sometimes even gesso and watercolor in a multi-layered application that burnishes the image and creates a depth of color that resonates. When she paints, Signori says, she sees and feels color vibrations and tensions between two or more colors, as well as the light that’s always present.

She prefers to have two or three paintings in progress at once; at the moment, she’s working on 48-by-60-inch canvases for an upcoming gallery show.

The creative process begins outdoors. As she chooses a location, the artist is open to how it might stir her feelings. Once she “absorbs” the site, Signori begins a series of small *plein air* sketches—some value drawings, some in color with hues that vary depending on how the light changes. She takes notes on the colors before her, and on her emotional response to the scene. On one level, she says, being outdoors and taking it all in is a meditative process, while the actual painting is a release. “Observing is the work; getting it down on canvas is the relaxation,” she explains.

Once the drawing and note-taking are done, Signori returns to her light-filled studio loft located behind the Silver Spring home she shares with her husband, Dan, and several rescue cats. She tapes the

Signori’s deeply felt creations include (above, left to right) “Exquisite Stillness” and “Melon-Colored Fog on the Potomac.”

sketches to a wall for reference and begins her new canvas. Each work starts with an under-painting and continues through many thin layers of glaze, which are often scraped or rubbed off to maintain translucence—and multi-layered, like an opal.

At some point in the process, Signori surrenders control to these dreamy scenes. “I know only a piece of the goal; I let the painting talk to me and it tells me the rest,” she explains. “Toward the end, the studies (sketches) come off the wall and the painting tells me when it’s done.”

Signori hopes viewers come to their own conclusions when they see her captivating landscapes. “I try not to sway them or tell them what to think,” she says. “I’m giving them an opening; the painting is an opening for them feel an emotion.” ♦

*Maryland writer Jeanne Blackburn covers art and interior design—and enjoys painting in her spare time. Loriann Signori’s work is available through Merritt Gallery in Chevy Chase; Renaissance Fine Arts in Baltimore; and Waverly Street Gallery in Bethesda, where she will participate in an invitational show from February 7 through March 4. For more information, see [loriannsignori.com](http://loriannsignori.com).*