

## Working in Series

By Jane Davies

I often hear students making negative comments about their individual pieces: “I don’t like this” or “this didn’t work out how I planned”. I want to say: “MAKE MORE OF THEM before even thinking about passing judgment on one!”. Before *I* can give effective advice I like to see how the artist works out her ideas over the course of several pieces to give the individual pieces some context. I see the *series*, not the individual piece, as the basic unit of art making.

Working in series is an approach to art-making that acknowledges the importance of process. It offers the opportunity to give an idea some breathing room. You can try out different solutions to one artistic “problem” over the course of multiple pieces, and expand an idea beyond what any one individual piece could possibly express. Working in series can give you momentum and focus for your art practice; instead of facing the blank canvas with too many possibilities to choose from, you can work on a series in progress, or start a new one. This way you narrow down your choices and create clarity of intention.

What counts as a *series* in art-making? Simply put, it is a group of pieces based on a common element or group of elements. A series can be based on an abstract idea (“balance” for example), a more tangible idea (impressions of a particular place or season); it can be any compositional element (colors, forms, lines, textures, etc.); you can base a series on subject matter, a technique, a particular set of materials, or a compositional format. A series can be created in an afternoon – as in a group of quick collage studies exploring a group of materials or a format – or last a lifetime. Many artists keep several series going throughout their careers.

As an abstract artist, composition tends to be my inspiration for series, rather than subject matter or abstract ideas. Concrete visual elements and their relationships to one another are what get my juices going: colors, textures, line, arrangements, proportions. Once I get going on a series, some of the pieces may begin to suggest more definitive reference, such as a particular mood, place, landscape, or subject, but it is usually the composition that defines the group as a series.

Producing art in groups allows you to let go of attachment to individual pieces that can inhibit creativity. If you get stuck on one piece, you leave it and move onto the next. When you look at the group as a *whole*, then you can see each *one* more clearly.