

GREAT PAINTINGS MADE EASIER

BY

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ACCELERATING THE GROWTH OF
WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

INCLUDES "HOW TO LOOSEN UP"
and "HOW TO BE A JOYFUL PAINTER"

NOTE: This is a supplement to the workshop and is not exhaustive.

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Introduction

In order to master art, one should find an artist whom they admire, watch the person paint, listen intently to them speak about painting, practice with critique, ask for feedback, practice on own, and seek feedback until mastered. It has been my experience that we only hear and understand what we are ready for at that time. Also, the people that grow the fastest find a teacher and teaching style they like and stay with that teacher consistently.

Learn everything you can about how to paint the way you want to paint, and then paint what you are really passionate about. Live a full life, hone your craft, and you will make good art. Live in wonder and awe, not detail.

“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. When one can no longer pause to wonder and stand wrapped in awe, one is as good as dead – his eyes are closed. Awe is the salve that heals the eyes.” *Albert Einstein*

Too much reality in a painting is always a disappointment to the imaginative soul. We love suggestions and not hard facts. A picture should be music in form and color, with the subject matter the vehicle. Let the viewer fill in parts of the painting.

Most paintings fail because of failure to pay attention to the big basics during a painting. Once arrogance enters the mind so as to permit you to escape a basic step, you will greatly increase the odds of failure. Allow yourself the freedom to fail and allow room for serendipity, as failure and leisure are each a prelude to creativity.

A good painting grabs the viewers attention, gets the artist's message across and holds the viewers attention in many areas. (Look at each painting and honestly answer this question.)

Inspiration

Paint as if to shock one into the awareness of being alive. If you have something to say, you will find a way. Become keenly aware of what you are exceedingly passionate about and paint that passion. Ask yourself what exhilarates and lifts you. Beautiful color harmony and transitions are often seen through awareness, and sometimes, the very best are seen from memory. Use your skills to create the Magic you feel.

What Do You See?

Keep inspiration a nose ahead of work and you will continue to paint. Inspiration sparks what is in you; translate what you see into your painting and it will be authentic. Always assume you have the talent, for you have been gifted with the desire, it is just a matter of developing the skills. For each painting keep in mind what song you are singing, what magic you feel, and how you want your paintings to really look.

Foundation Keys Used Throughout the Painting Process

Keeping these in mind will help insure a Great Painting filled with Magic.

Comparison and Consolidation

Comparison of everything is a key. You must focus on the whole and your main passion, and remember to COMPARE everything.

A. Compare Compositions (vertical, horizontal, square; middleground, foreground, etc.) Consolidate value shapes into large areas to focus on your main idea.

B. Compare and Consolidate Contrasts (Values). Squint (eyes closed about 10 – 20%) to see the order of values from darkest, all the way to lightest. Consolidate the big areas into no more than 4 or 6 values. Change color or color temperature, not value. DO NOT SQUINT TO SEE COLOR, LET YOUR EYES GO OUT OF FOCUS TO SEE COLOR.

C. Compare, Consolidate, and use Complementary Color. If one compares the colors in the scene to an actual tube of color or a bright piece of clothing, or a car, one can see how less intense the colors of nature are in the scene. By consolidating colors (not so many) and using a complimentary color to gray, color harmonies are easier to obtain. Allowing for local color, shadows are close to the complementary color.

D. Compare and Consolidate Connections of Large Value Masses. Edges, which are the hardest, with softest, and in between. Squint to determine the order and stay soft in most areas, especially in the outer areas of a painting. Use edges to direct the eye to the main area of attention and lead the viewer around the painting. Soft edges create a soft look.

Variety

Variety in line, shapes, edges, shade versus light, and color temperature make for an interesting painting. Usually one shape should dominate with unequal subordinate shapes, either more shade or light in a painting, and an overall warm or cool temperature. Use more variety toward the center of interest. VARIETY OF SHAPES IS CRITICAL TO A PAINTING BEING INTERESTING.

Look at the variety of line and shapes in the sketches presented at the workshop.

ELEMENTS

I. Composition

Composition requires that you take your main passion for painting and have all other elements support this idea.

One learns fastest when compositions are considered prior to beginning the painting.

IF THE COMPOSITION IS POOR, THE PAINTING WILL NOT BE GREAT.

Can you afford to skip composition drawings?

Good, simple compositions require thought, but get easier with practice. Practice using 3 or 6 values connected as large shapes in your paintings.

Creating good compositions is a matter of comparison as to which one usually feels and looks best. Once a good composition (foundation) and plan is established in the first 10 or 15 minutes, let your passion flow.

A. Aids to Better Compositions

1. Immediately establish the center lines for the vertical plane and horizontal plane on your canvas and do not let main value masses begin or end these lines. If a horizon line, establish a horizon line. Develop your composition around your main passion. This should be a predominate area supported by other areas. If you are motivated by a mountain, make the mountain bigger. If it is about the sky, it should dominate the space. If the foreground is your main feature, it should be the largest part of the painting.

The great aim of composition is to create unity, and that one feature should be the main interest or mass. *Edgar Payne*

Weak consideration of the main essentials will court disaster. *Edgar Payne*

2. Variety of line and shape. The compositional drawing should establish variety at the onset and carry through the painting. Begin initially using variety in line and shape. **You must arrange the elements of your subject matter to suit your interest. Do not take nature as she is.**

See the sketches provided at the workshop showing variety.

3. To help creativity, do a sketch as a horizontal, one as a square, one as a vertical, and rectangular in different sizes. Create variety in the spacing, line and shaded and light areas.

4. Generally, do not set up your main area of interest within 10% of the outer edge of a painting.

5. Your blocking-in of a composition can be determined by how you see best. Some people see in shapes, others in lines. Use a very thin wash for your value masses, and let it dry while mixing your colors. **TRY TO BE AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO THE CORRECT VALUE.** Others see in lines and can do a thin line wash. Do whatever works best for you. A minor variation in shape or line can make a big difference, so play with different lines and/or shapes.

Until The Composition Works Do Not Continue.

I recommend doing a value block-in first, unless you can see color, value and shapes all at the same time, which is rare.

II. Contrasts (values)

Comparison is also the key to contrast (value). Almost 90% of failed paintings contain a contrast (value) issue. In comparing contrasts, you should consolidate the values to 3 to 6 masses. If values are good a lot of your issues will resolve themselves. If the degree of contrast is right, you are on the money to creating the right lighting feel, the "Magic".

Squinting at the scene will allow you to compare the contrasts (values), into what area is darkest, lightest, and those in between. Do not squint to see color. **THERE MUST BE UNEQUAL AMOUNTS OF SHADE AND LIGHT IN A PAINTING (Variety).**

Generally, the darks will carry the drawing and the light will carry most of the color.

Please note, as the painting recedes, generally, the contrast between the light and shade will become less. This helps provide depth in a painting. **USUALLY EXAGGERATE DEPTH PERSPECTIVE.**

Doing value drawings and studying black and white photography is extremely helpful in learning values.

BIG VALUE MASSES HELP UNIFY A PAINTING. THEY ALSO WILL HELP CREATE THE MAGIC AND MOOD. A SMALL CHANGE IN VALUE IN A MASS CAN CAUSE A PAINTING TO REALLY BECOME LUMINOUS OR BORING. IF IT IS LUMINOUS, SLOW DOWN, OR YOU CAN EASILY LOSE THE LUMINOSITY AND MAGIC. SUBTLE TRANSITIONS IN VALUE, COLOR AND TEMPERATURE IN A VALUE MASS PROVIDE EXCITEMENT AND MAKE A HUGE DIFFERENCE IN A PAINTING.

A. Order of Lay-in

Go thin at first. Get your lightest light, darkest dark, and easiest color for you to see on first. Save the hardest areas for you for last. The more right on a painting the easier it gets to finish. Each person is different. If you generally paint too dark, try working from light values to dark. I have learned from dark to light (the old rule for oils) does not work with everyone or some water colorists. It is hard to cover lighter paint with darker paint in oils. If you must cover, wipe the lighter area off before adding the darker paint.

B. The Planes Of A Landscape.

1. Generally, (1) uprights (trees and bushes) are perpendicular to the sky and usually the darkest value in a landscape. (2) Mountains are at an incline to the sky and are next darkest, (3) the ground plane, and finally (4) the sky is usually the lightest of the 4 planes.

2. It has been my experience that a simplified composition/value block-in helps everyone grow faster and get better paintings quicker. (See demo in class.)

The idea here is to help you get 3 to 6 large value masses with a variety of shapes, that will hold the painting together and bring about the magic of luminosity.

I prefer using a warm paint diluted with gamsol and laid out on the canvas, feel your way through, designing these shapes to create a beautiful, luminous, abstract design that will hold your painting together, the bones of your painting. Use a rag to wipe off parts if necessary, but get happy with the design.

Once happy, start mixing color puddles while this design dries.

III. Colors and Harmony

When mixing colors, think of Contrast (value) first. Premixing colors with a palette knife and a limited palette is one way to obtain harmonies easier, and using grays makes it easier to learn and match values. Keep your color puddles organized on your palette.

By using the palette knife, you will be able to control more accurately the various color mixes. It will also move faster, not slower. By mixing color pools before beginning the painting, you have an opportunity to correct values and see color harmonies before you have made a mistake on the canvas (which you still will do, but less frequently). Trust your palette.

Anything wrong on the canvas or palette should be removed immediately or it will cause other areas to go wrong. Colors look differently when another color is introduced around it. Premixing puts all the colors on the palette making them easier to compare. When you place a color from your palette on your canvas, test it against the other colors by using a little at first. Colors look different on the canvas from the palette because of the way the light hits the flat palette versus the vertical canvas.

Because color changes when you introduce a new color, you should bring the painting together all at once – put strong colors and large areas of one color on your painting as soon as possible.

In nature, the colors are more neutral than you may think, and, grays are helpful in setting up strong colors. If color is in reserve, it will be easier to control your color. If the painting has reserve in color, it will be easier to see a discordant color.

A painting is generally non-harmonious when color from all over the color wheel is exhibited on the painting (failure to consolidate colors). To see harmonies, observe nature in the evenings and early morning. Color should have a variety of warms and cools to create interest, some right next to each other, and other larger areas of warm and cool (variety). **The atmosphere should be thought of as veils or layers with grayer color as the depth increases.**

Yellow is the first color to fade from the landscape as distance increases, and red the second. Generally in shadows, the colors get cooler (bluer) and lighter as they recede, and the light areas gets darker, thus the contrast between the light and shadow is less. Intense colors come forward and grayed colors recede.

Do not focus on one area when observing color but continue to look around the whole scene of the painting. Do not look directly into an area to determine color, but look somewhere else, or out of focus, or upside down, to compare colors.

Mix the easiest color for you to mix first. Mix the hardest colors last, which will usually be half tones and subtle grays in both the light and the shade.

Harmonies are easier to obtain when the painting has an overall warmth or overall coolness. Too cool a green in a warm painting will distract from the harmony, and vice versa.

Pay attention to whether you are in a dark accent, shade, light, midtones, or reflected light. Sargent was always considering which of these lights he was painting.

Do not be afraid of muddy looking colors or grays if they look good in your painting. When a color is the wrong temperature in your painting, it will look muddy. A lot of students paint greens and blues too intense and without enough warmth. Look in the trees, bushes, and grass and observe how much brown and red is in the landscape, either as earth, twigs, branches, shadows, or dead leaves and grass. You need these subtle colors to achieve the harmonies of nature.

When mixing color, get in the habit of asking these questions:

1. Is it too dark or too light?
2. Is it too warm or too cool?
3. Is it too intense or too grayed? (chroma)
4. Is it toward red, blue, or yellow? (hue) Helps to identify hard to determine grays.

Adding some complement color will gray, an analogous color may also tone down the color.

Try to relate the background and the foreground to the midground. Cool colors and warm colors in a painting cause it to vibrate, but each painting should either be overall warm or overall cool.

AFTER MIXING CLEAN COLORS (EVEN GRAYS CAN BE CLEAN) BE CAREFUL NOT TO OVERMIX WITH OTHER COLORS AFTERWARDS. CONSTANT BRUSHING OR MIXING WILL DIRTY THE CLEAN COLOR. ONCE THE COLORS ARE ALL ORGANIZED AND MIXED ON THE PALETTE, YOU WILL BE SURPRISED HOW FAST THE PAINTING GOES.

III. Edges and Looseness

How you join the value masses and handle the other edges inside each mass will help determine the looseness of a painting. If your edges are hard, the painting will feel less loose. Edges can be used to direct the eye through the painting.

For variety, even a hard edge usually contains a soft section. Midtones and transitions render softer edges also. A slanted long vertical edge moves an eye quickly, a hard edge draws attention. Many times softening an edge is all an area needs.

MAKING MAGICAL LIGHT, AND OTHER HELPFUL IDEAS

Bring the painting together as a whole. Step back often from your painting, walk away and come back, look at it upside down, or in a mirror, to get fresh eyes. As you develop the painting, you will eventually get a read of light and shade.

LOOK AT YOUR VALUES TO MAKE SURE IT READS OF THE MAGICAL LIGHT AND SHADE YOU ARE TRYING TO CAPTURE. IF NOT, EDGE A SHADE VALUE DARKER OR LIGHTER, OR A LIGHT VALUE A LITTLE LIGHTER OR DARKER. DO NOT OVERCOMPENSATE OR DESTROY THE FEEL. RELATE THE MIDGROUND (IMPORTANT) TO THE FOREGROUND AND BACKGROUND. ADD A LITTLE MORE DETAIL AROUND THE CENTER OF INTEREST. QUIT JUST BEFORE YOU THINK IT IS DONE. IF MASSES

NOT READING, TRY ELIMINATING SOMETHING BEFORE ADDING. WORK IN DARKS AND MIDTONES BEFORE PUNCHING UP THE LIGHT.

DO NOT ADD DETAIL UNTIL THE END, GET THE LIGHT ENVELOPE READ FIRST. If it is the proper read (you can usually feel it or see it) STOP, and slow way down. As you begin to put on additional strokes, check to make sure they do not impair your read. Use a light touch with the brush and observe how each new stroke affects the picture as a whole. A stroke of cool color may increase the heat in a painting. Try not to add additional values. Ask yourself are you losing form or interest in any areas?

Many times we over compensate. Feel your way slowly, each new stroke affects the painting.

Step back from the painting and the palette often to get a good read and be careful not to lose it. Fresh eyes allow you to see what you have done well and poorly. Don't lose what is working. Commit to your colors and your strokes BEFORE YOU MAKE THEM. THINK OF FORM IN YOUR STROKES. When necessary to merge certain areas of paint, be careful not to overbrush. **Overbrushing has killed many a painting.**

After completed, with fresh eyes, review and go beyond for excellence.

I. Style, Paint Application and Brushstrokes

A. Style

Your style will develop naturally like your fingerprints did, especially as long as you are painting your own pieces from life, developing compositions, and expressing your main ideas. Do not worry about your style or force a style, YOUR STYLE FINDS YOU AND IT WILL HAVE YOUR CALLIGRAPHY. Do study other artists, and the dead masters, as all artists have borrowed from other artists throughout time. You will learn and eventually make it your own. If you are taking a workshop, you may want to try to paint like the teacher, your style will eventually emerge, unless your desire is to just copy or imitate, which of course is not recommended.

B. Paint Application and Brushstrokes

Do not be overly concerned with paint application and brushstrokes or you may miss shape, color, and value. Begin a painting thin, and become thicker as the painting gets closer to being finished. Thick brushstrokes tend to come forward, so be careful. Be more concerned about your main idea, composition, values (contrast), connections (edges), and color harmonies. Do whatever it takes to support your main idea. Too much concern with your paint application may cause you to lose your focus on the more important elements of a good painting. If you think about and commit to your strokes, without overbrushing, you are well on your way to a nice application of paint. Brushstrokes can carry form so pay attention to see if you are creating form. Transitions in value, temperature, and color will also help create form. Commit to the stroke before application. If the value, temperature and color have been premixed correctly, it will help you commit.

Using a larger brush helps keep the painting looser, but it is also nice to use a variety of strokes.

C. Viscosity

Getting the right viscosity of your paint on your palette will help insure a good application and make the painting process smoother and easier. It takes practice to achieve this viscosity, but eventually you will get the feel for it. You must practice during the painting process, continue to think about how the viscosity feels on your palette, brush and canvas. You will have to vary the viscosity based upon the type of canvas that you use. Too hard a canvas, and the paint will slide a little and sit on top. Too textured a canvas, and it will require a large amount of paint to cover an area. **You need a light touch**, which must be remembered when you paint each painting. With good viscosity and a light touch, one is able to set a layer of paint on top of another without pulling too much of the lower layer to the top. Generally speaking, holding your brush at the end, like a conductor with a baton, will help provide a lighter touch. If an area is not working, remove it with a rag holding mineral spirits. Most students get very gray color by continuing to stroke the paint on the canvas with many strokes (overbrushing) until the beautiful colors create an ugly gray with incorrect temperature (muddy).

II. Plein Air Quick Studies.

Work inside with your materials and viscosity so you will feel comfortable when outside. Walk around until inspiration seizes you. Observe, close your eyes, turn away and see if you can envision your painting as painted. Resolve problems before you begin. **caveat:** do not freeze up and not paint, you do not need a perfect vision.

Work the painting up as a whole (ground, trees, shade, sky, hills) to try to get a quick read of how the main value areas will create the light envelope that you are seeing. **DO NOT GET TOO ATTACHED TOO SOON.** NO DETAIL until the overall light read is established.

We often fail by trying to get a perfect tree and we miss the atmosphere. Sometimes our best reads have no tree trunk or branches in them. Practice this process with pictures you like. Do 30 minute studies inside to develop the process so it feels comfortable when you go outside.

Plein Air pieces do not always work, so get used to trying to learn and capture something. Do at least one thing right and keep it as a reference. On a two week trip, getting just a few great pieces is a blessing.

A. Plein Air Painting Made Easier

After you have designed your composition and blocked-in your large value masses, try the following steps to convey your passion:

- look at scene as a whole with your eyes a little out of focus, do not stare into one area. Do the paint colors represent the harmonies, light envelope, and are the light and shade values correct? What color transitions are there? Make sure you have enough browns and reds, blues and greens always look more intense than they are.

- With palette knife mix your easiest color and value first, then lightest light and darkest dark.

- mix your next easiest color and keep puddles organized so you know which is which (for example, shade of trees, midtone of trees, light of trees next to each other). Look at the values first when mixing colors.

- mix thoroughly, take your time and mix as many colors as necessary. You will see what your painting will look like on your palette. Mix enough for extra of each color, you will need it, or you can save it as a gray for next painting.

- walk away, come back, check values and colors.

- when you are satisfied the values and colors are right, place on canvas, easiest first, darkest dark next, lightest light, next easiest and so on. Test each color with just a little paint to make sure it is right in value and color before you commit to it. If it is wrong, remix the puddle. Separate values, stretch value relationships to increase light; subdue value relationships to decrease light. The more right (values, colors) on the painting, the easier it is to finish. Create form and interest with strokes of color spots.

- adjust puddles with palette knife if necessary. Do not cross puddles or overbrush on canvas too much, or you will lose clean colors.

- when your light and shade are reading on your painting, SLOW DOWN. WATCH IF THE NEXT STROKES ARE HELPING OR HURTING your light envelope.

- stop, walk away, and add detail later.

- do many small paintings. You get relationships of big value masses to work together, it speeds growth, and it is FUN. Don't expect to get every painting great. 3 out of 10 is batting 300%, which is good for studies.

III. Critical Eye – After the Workshop

Your ability to see gets better as you work with these tools, paint from life, and observe good art, (especially originals). Your eyes tend to see better right after workshops, a trip viewing good art or instruction. The more you do of each, the better your sight becomes. Save your studies, even if only a certain portion of the study is good, hang them in your studio so they are easily in sight and refer to them often. By comparing and evaluating these studies, you will begin to see what areas are handled better than others. Do not sell these studies until you have exhausted your use of them.

Your ability to see and your eye will become more critical (not judgmental of yourself) and your paintings will get better. Share your paintings with other artists you trust, and ask for honest opinions. Only in honesty will your paintings get better.

Remember, usually a painting is not as great, or as bad, as you and your close friends and relatives think it is.

ABOVE ALL, DO NOT JUDGE YOURSELF OR YOUR ABILITIES AS AN ARTIST BY FAILED PAINTINGS. THIS IS COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. An element probably went wrong. Determine what it was and try not to repeat it, and you will learn from that process. Should you have failed paintings (and you will), remember the process may be that you learned something from that painting, and that is all that painting was meant for you to do. Develop the attitude that

we are learning lessons from each painting. They do not, and will not, all need to be masterpieces, and in truth, failures and experimentation are needed for creativity. (I included my quick sketches in this workshop material to show you how quick and sketchy they can be. They were not done for public eyes.)

It is important to recognize when to put the painting away, or to stop on a painting. Try to realize what fundamental aspect went wrong and right. If you do not know what to do with a painting, put it in the closet for a few months, fresh eyes usually helps.

If a painting was only meant as a lesson, remember, a great artist once said:

“IF THE HORSE IS DEAD, GET OFF IT.”

Sometimes a trip, starting on a new subject matter or painting will refresh your creativity. For some mysterious reason you have a desire to paint. This in of itself is an extraordinary joy to discover. This gift of desire is worthy of great gratitude, so be grateful that your desire to be an artist and share your desire with the world. There are many great joys in being an artist, the people, being in beauty, creating, and sharing your gifts with others.

IV. Helpful Suggestions

Composition, big shapes varied, simplify, get right before continuing.

Think in planes. Shadow, light, midtones on all objects with form.

Take your time to mix the right colors, consider their value first.

Unless a foreground painting, not too much detail in the foreground – an abstract pattern; a darker spot can help. Not too light in the immediate foreground. The foreground must not float. Intense color will bring forward.

Shade and shadows anchor objects to the ground.

Rocks need to feel like rocks. May need a harder edge or two.

Shadows in clouds are usually lighter in value than you think.

Try a little correction first.

What is wrong may not be what you are thinking. Consider several options.

Use a mirror to check your painting.

Drop your brush and step away from the palette often or YOU WILL make more mistakes.

Good artists usually can help see something you are missing.

Paint color shapes not things.

Too many highlights, especially in trees hurt a painting. (landscape planes)

“Pushing” bright colors arbitrarily hurts a painting.

Aimless brush strokes hurt a painting. Think form when making your strokes.

Overworking what should be left alone hurts a painting.

Dark accents are the bones of a painting ,with strong temperatures magnifying middle and high tones.

More things done right on a painting, the easier it is to finish.

Move at the pace of eating a great meal. Faster at first and slow way down toward the end.

Diagonal tension can provide interest.

Real growth comes from working with one problem until it is mastered.

Being around passionate painters keeps you painting.

SIMPLIFY.

Ask what you can eliminate often.

Don't judge your Plein Air piece that day, enjoy capturing the essence, feel and color spots and put the piece away until later.

Are parts COMPETING with what I intend to convey?

V. A Joyful Painter

To be a joyful painter you need to be AWARE and nourish these thoughts:

- a. Recognize first you should be joyful at all stages of your career;
- b. Be absorbed in what you love to paint and your materials, books, etc.;
- c. Paint primarily for yourself and what you love;
- d. Be grateful and recognize you are growing;
- e. Be around artists that help you grow and attend workshops that help you grow joyfully;
- f. Attend national shows and great galleries;
- g. Set up rituals that keep you painting, reinforcing the basics and getting consistent and good teaching;
- h. Joyful painters paint better, so have some leisure and take breaks often.

I look forward to serving you. Failure is a part of growing. Do not judge yourself by failed paintings. Even the best fail regularly, especially En Plein Air. Always remember the joy, awe and beauty of being in nature, which also heals us. Enjoy other artists and take joy in their good works and rewards. The world can always use more paintings filled with love and passion and conveyed through learned artistic skills.