

A General Approach to Painting

Below is a general approach to painting and some thoughts. The best advice for the beginner and intermediate painters is to concentrate on mastering value relationships and drawing skills. Color and temperature are important, but are subordinate to value and rendering accuracy. Use good materials and draw and paint often. Study the work of the Masters - in person. Read incessantly. Take workshops from a variety of contemporary masters. Paint from life when at all possible - the camera distorts, simplifies and lies...

PROCESS:

This is a common approach (usually). Every painting presents a new set of visual challenges. Thus, techniques change as need be, lest one falls into a formula or routine. This is a very generalized description. This is certainly not the only approach to painting.

A) Preliminary Decisions - not necessarily in this order

- Choose what it is you are trying to “say” with your painting - what is the concept?
- Choose subject(s)
- Compose (thumbnail sketches) - research and study good composition
- Choose a color palette (keep it simple)
- Choose color scheme - high or low key.
- Choose lighting effect

B) Painting

- Under Painting - Mass/block in tonal composition as an under painting. Usually use burnt umber or transparent oxide red (for most landscapes and still life) or Raw umber (for most figures) with thinner. This will dry fairly quickly.
- Painting - Using no thinner and perhaps a bit of medium, pre-mix colors on palette and apply over previous tonal block-in under painting. Work on main subject and expand out. Use as large a brush as you can for as long as you can. Remember - “thick over thin” - always apply your paint thick (more pigment and vehicle - perhaps some medium) over thin (less pigment and vehicle - more thinner). Begin to create the form using local color and tone variation, and careful brush direction/handling. Check for color and tone accuracy by holding up your pallet knife with paint on it next to your subject. Alter the value, chroma, and hue as need be. Keep edges blurred in shadows. Use the brush direction to model the form. Keep the shadows thin and the lights thick.
- Refinement - Alter color, temperature, and value by scumbling and glazing. Using a small brush add details.

C) TIPS AND RULES OF THUMB:

Here are some thoughts to pay attention to - there are always exceptions to the rule.

- Concentrate on reducing your subject to simple terms (don't get too gimmicky - keep simple and true to subject). A deft artist can make even the most mundane subject captivating.
- Landscape: Keep your values in check: The sky is always the lightest value mass (except with snow), the ground (horizontal masses) are the medium value masses, the vertical masses are the darkest. Water is a horizontal mass and thus reflections from upright objects should contain less contrast than the objects forming the reflection - darks reflect lighter and lights reflect darker. Colors get cooler and reduce in value as they go further back in a landscape (except blues and whites - they warm up in a landscape as they go further back). Landscapes are much grayer than people perceive - watch your chroma intensity - especially as planes recede - atmospheric perspective. Direct outdoor light is warm and the backsides are cool (lit by blue sky). Deep recesses are usually also warm due to being lit by the overhead canopy that glows as it is illuminated by the overhead sun. Watch for complementary color relationships. · Still life: background is the medium value mass, highlights on subject are the lightest masses, and the shadows on the subject are the darkest masses(usually). Indoor light is cool (with a natural north light) and the shadows warm.
- An interesting painting has a harmonious balance (not necessarily equal amounts) of opposites (yin/yang) - cool and warm, light and dark, thick and thin, focused and blurred, details and ambiguity, hard edged and soft edged.

