

ELEMENTS AND IDEAS FOR GOOD PAINTINGS

by Jo Castillo

www.jocastilloart.com

* Be happy. Be in a good mood and enthusiastic. Be physically comfortable. Have your surface at a good angle with no leaning over. If you aren't comfortable you won't be able to enjoy and do it again and often enough to improve. If you do more small or fast paintings, you learn more than one large painting that takes weeks to finish. (This was suggested by Susan Carlin, executor of good paintings. www.susancarlin.com)

* If you paint/draw on paper, mark off the standard size area before you start, to conserve on cost of framing. (Susan and I both do this and have for a long time.) You can expand your sizes after you make progress. Take photos of your efforts and try to frame them.

* Lighting on the surface and your palette should be the same.

* Get focused. Remember why you wanted to paint the subject and what you liked about it. Simplify your information.

* Thumbnails on paper help most artists. Sketch main items and values in a value sketch. Three to five main values and shapes. Squint to see values and large shapes. For still life and portraits you can take photos and manipulate them on a computer to help decide on colors, background, etc.

* Composition is important. You can have a triangle shape, circular, rule of thirds, off center, etc. Most landscapes have the rule of thirds. If the sky is important, make it two thirds of the painting or vice versa if the land is important. There are very few times that centering the focal point feels correct. Paintings are more interesting if the center of interest is not in the middle.

* Balance. Too much info in one place gives an "off kilter" feeling. Vary your shapes, size and margin lines.

* Contrast and value changes create excitement and interest. Usually the most contrast is in the center of interest. Most good paintings have a dominant value .. dark, light or medium with the other two as accents. A midday scene is harder to make interesting with

the lighting being direct and the same over all. Morning or evening scenes with shadows are more dramatic.

* Try to tie in your shadow areas and your light or mid ground areas. This helps in the flow of the painting and directing the eye.

* Color and value change depending on the objects next to it. A color on your palette may look perfect, but on the canvas be too dark or light. You can actually hold the brush or pastel up against the object in the distance to help judge your starting colors. It is helpful to put down color around the canvas to coordinate your painting. I usually try to have some of each color in every part. Not necessarily the same value, but the same color. Complements (opposite colors on a color wheel) are usually found in shadows and highlights.

* To create depth, vary placement and overlap objects. "Kissing" or touching of objects is a no-no.

* In landscapes, aerial perspective is important. In general, cool colors and light values go back into the distance, warm colors and darks come forward. There are exceptions but it takes practice. Van Gogh used a yellow background for his blue iris and it worked. :)

* In still life usually the back is darker and the light is up front and on top of the items. The background is darker where the light is coming from and lighter around the subject except for the shadows.

* For realism in objects I try to use five values. The body (main) color, the body shadow, the cast shadow, the highlight and the reflection. For example in a brass object, it is mainly yellow - body color. The shadow as the object turns away would be a darker yellow with some purple to gray it - body shadow. The shadow on the table would have purple and be the darkest value - cast shadow. The darker side would have some light from the table or other objects, this light would not be as light as the highlight and would have some of the complement and color from the object - reflection. The highlight on brass would be very light, almost white, and a touch of lavender/purple would make it look brighter - highlight. (Advice from Helen Van Wyk and others.)

Now ... THE BEST ADVICE ... forget about rules and methods and advice and GO PAINT!!