

Treatise on how to paint in oils

Your subject matter must come from first hand life experience. What you see. What you live through. What you feel when you see something. This is where you get your material for subject matter. You go to the canvas with an idea or with the idea that you are empty-headed with no idea at all. You do not rely on someone else's history or narrative to evoke a deep enough response in you, no matter how beautiful their story. This boils down to the fact that you must set up your life in such a manner that ordinary occurrences are happening in an interesting manner, enough so to warrant recording in a picture.

My landscapes are my neighborhood in Jerusalem. When I lived in Mallorca the natural beauty of the island and my response to it, in addition to my life as a student, wife and mother were the subject matter for me. In Mitze Ramon, the crater, the ibexes, the people, the kitchen preparations for the Jewish holidays were my subject matter. In America I painted the figure in fantasy worlds from what I believed at the time was the truth. Ibiza was a continuation and an opening into new perceptions.

When the subject matter comes to the surface of your conscious mind, then your hands are free to paint. Your mind's eye sees and doesn't see. You remember and you feel. Forgetting all this, you simply paint.

Technically speaking, you dip your brush into the linseed oil and an oil color from a tube and go from your palette to the canvas. You walk or stand, never sit.

Where and what to look for as you paint is simultaneously going on while you are painting. If you are observing nature your eyes move from the natural object back and forth to the canvas and the palette. By the time you are looking at your beloved object there is something else that catches your eye. Do not reject this by trying to find your prior focus. Paint this that has entered your perception. You will be interrelating, rarely dominating, often submitting to your own weaknesses and strengths of concentration. It is here where the supposedly accidental things will be worked into your picture if you so permit. Lose yourself in the pleasure of color and in the tactile, the haptic pressures of the brush. Do not force this to prolong itself. As you emerge from spontaneity you will have new choices. One choice that is not helpful is self-criticism. Changes or corrections are not necessary. Do not stand back and redefine or adjust images or composition based on a prior aesthetic. Let your work be new, unknown to yourself, without references. Work within tradition but accept the strange as it may occur.

Each canvas is an adventure. You go to a place in your development where you have never been before. You are afraid and enthusiastic. As you begin to reach the conclusion of the work try to remember that it is only a painting. Let it end when you have to confer with yourself.

Never work when tired or G-d forbid sad.

Your brushes are relatively unimportant. There are points and flats and sables and bristle brushes, large house painting brushes and contrasting fan brushes. These are comparably about as significant as the touch of a piano. Without technical hand skill developed through years of training and work neither the instrument nor the brushes will get the tone you are looking for. Every brush stroke begins and ends in the action of the body.

Picasso once pronounced that one brush size per painting sustains a desirable evenness. At other times he poured oil into acrylic. The rules are as follows... for the amount of color I want to put down = shape and size of brush. Should I want to reveal paint texture = bristlebrush. Am I blending tones for minimum volume or soft edges? = sables. Are planes or clear definitions wanted? = flats. An on and on. Use the brush that at that moment, you love. You should know your brushes well, respecting even the very worn ones for the service they have given. If predictability becomes the rule, use the wrong brush, deliberately. This will avoid gimmickry.

Cezanne said that drawing is the way to improve your observational powers. When working quickly, if your drawing skills are even modestly developed you will paint a reasonably satisfying semblance of what you are looking at either in your mind's eye or at outer reality. Do not draw first onto your canvas. Rather, keep your skills heightened by drawing often so that you can draw freely with the brush when at the canvas. Energy not accuracy = beauty.

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