

A Touch of Burnt Sienna

. Notes from an over worked art tutor

Barry Whitehouse



Introduction

After twenty three years teaching adults painting and drawing, I thought maybe I should jot down a few things for posterity. So here are some hints, tips, and techniques to help you get through life as an artist.

I have always maintained that my purpose has been to teach technique and not style - the style should always come from you, and don't let anyone else tell you otherwise. Sometimes you may not even realise you have your own style as you amble from one media to another desperately searching for your 'thing'. If it helps, I have never found my thing and gave up looking for it decades ago, because instead I began to love the journey far more than the final destination. Exploration is what I have discovered to be what makes art a passion; the constant search for the new and different. Being an artist is a process and not a cessation.

Yes it is frustrating and perhaps maddening at times when your brain just won't get it, or when your bin is so full of waste paper and broken dreams you wonder why you even decided to ever pick up a pencil or paintbrush, but it is all ok and part of the artistic process of creation.

A poster on my classroom wall says 'that which we call *failure* is that necessary struggle called *learning*'. Your bin is not full of failure, it is full of learning. You haven't failed if you know something you didn't previously, and yes you may not know where you are going, but you know where you don't want to be again from doing something and *learning* from it.

Enjoy your journey, and absorb as much information from as many artists and tutors as you can. That way you can build up a bank of knowledge that suits you, and more importantly *works* for you.

Notes on Paint

We often get customers in the shop asking what the pigments in our paints are made from such as Cadmium Red and Ultramarine and what the difference is between artist and student quality paint. Artist quality paints are mainly made from pigments ground from the earth such as Yellow Ochre, others are manufactured chemically from the metal cadmium such as Cadmium Red and Cadmium Yellow.

Student quality paint however, is a synthetic mixture that closely mimics the real pigment, but is often not as bright or permanent. I thought I would share with you a brief, interesting and sometimes amusing history of the lengths artists would go to make the colours they needed. Historically, artists would make their own paint in their studios by mixing the pigment with either gum Arabic for watercolour or linseed oil to make an oil paint. Traditionally, Sepia was made from the ink sacks of cuttle fish, Indian Yellow was made from the urine of cows who has been fed on mango leaves, and Vermillion was made from the highly toxic Mercuric Sulphide. Egyptian Brown was historically made by grinding the remains of Egyptian mummies! Some greens were created by mixing copper sulphide and arsenic, but when the colour got damp it gave off a toxic gas. Thankfully, these colours are either no longer made or have safer modern alternatives.

In years gone by, artists could be identified by their pallor, their sunken cheeks and dark rings under the eyes weren't from a late night painting, but from the chemicals inhaled or absorbed into the skin as they mixed their colours or painted on their canvases. How thankful we are that the tube of paint was created along with the legislation to makes paints safer! Even today, owing to where pigments are found or how they are made, there are still some high quality paints manufactured that do carry a warning due to the pigments used. The better the quality of paint, the higher the chance of it being slightly toxic. These paints give brighter, stronger more permanent colour and are perfectly fine to use as long as you don't suck your brushes!

Can any art materials make a decent painting? Simply put, no. The quality of your materials greatly affects the quality of your work. Beginners will often say that they will go for the cheapest materials to start with and as they improve, get better quality ones. The harsh fact is, with the cheapest materials, they will never make a marked improvement. Paper, especially watercolour paper, is one area where money shouldn't be scrimped on. Real watercolour paper is sized both sides with gelatine, this is so the paint has time to be reworked and specialist techniques can be used before the gelatine breaks down and the paint is absorbed in the paper. Cheap watercolour paper is not properly sized and is in effect, blotting paper. The paint is just absorbed straight away, leaving you no time to do anything with it. If money needs to be considered then you do not need to go for the expensive cotton rag paper like Arches or Fabriano, just stick to the wood pulp watercolour paper like Bockingford, Cotman or Langton. This is not cheap as such. An A4 pad of 12 sheets is around £9 but you can use both sides. Unlike food, supermarket own brands of watercolour paper are markedly inferior to the named brands.

A tip I will give is to buy a much larger pad size than you need. I always buy an A2 size pad. 12 sheets costs around £20, but each sheet makes four A4 sheets. So when you work out the value, it is much cheaper. Also, get a decent weight of paper. I would recommend paper of at least around 300gsm (140lb) as this will take quite a bit of water and is a good all-rounder. You can even use it for acrylic painting. Brushes and paints too will also have differing qualities so don't be swayed by price. Stick to reputable brand names or ask your local art shop for advice.

Is today's fast-paced society losing its love for oil painting?

When I first started in art retail seventeen years ago, there were two main mediums the artists worked in: watercolours or oil paints. Acrylic paints lined the shelves but were always seen as *'student' paint* or *'what you'd use at college'*. There was always much more kudos if you said you were learning oils or watercolour, yet a sympathetic smile if you said you worked in acrylics. There were so many television programmes on watercolour painting such as *'Watercolour Challenge'*, and *'Alwyn Crawshaw Paints...'* and even more books and videos available; it was the obvious choice for many starting out learning art, even though it is one of the more difficult mediums to grasp.

I began my artistic career painting in oils, but soon started working in acrylics as it was easier to teach in a small classroom, without the extra smells of linseed oil and turpentine needed to work with oil paint. When I began working for Daler-Rowney as their acrylic demonstrator in the large shows at the NEC in Birmingham, it was clear that acrylics were not the medium of choice and it was my mission to change people's minds! Over the years the shift has changed – acrylics have become as popular as watercolour, and oils have begun to fall by the wayside a little. Is our fast-paced modern way of living the cause of it? Do people have less and less time to spend waiting for the oil paints to dry, favouring the quick drying, and versatile acrylic over smelly, slow-drying oil?

It would of course, be wonderful to see watercolour, oil and acrylic all being used evenly, but fear as life gets more rushed and time conscious, that oil painting will soon be a *'thing of the masters'* as Egg Tempera (another drying medium) has become. There are alternatives to traditional oil paint however that are not often publicised, but readily available. There are Alkyds that have been available for decades. These are fast-drying oil paints in a tube, so you do not have to wait days or weeks for them to dry. As they are oil-based, you still need turpentine to clean brushes, but are a much quicker alternative to traditional oil. You could also use an Alkyd Medium which speeds up the drying time of ordinary oils.

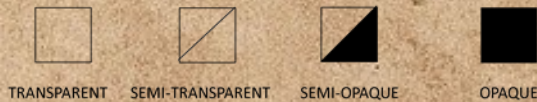
There are also now Water-Soluble oil paints. These are still 'proper' oil paints but have been modified to make them water reducible. This means no turpentine and they have a very low odour. These dry quicker than traditional oil paint, but slower than acrylics. These are ideal if you would like to work in oil but suffer with asthma.

There is nothing quite like the feel, the texture, or that gives you the ability to blend colour like an oil-based paint, so maybe consider trying them out. You can even use them on top of acrylic paintings. So why not give this traditional medium a go?

Many people are now looking at understanding the food that they eat. Packets and labels are now so in-depth that we not only know everything that the food contains, but where in the world it came from.

As an artist, it is just as important to understand your tubes of paint. Is it opaque or transparent? Will it fade quickly or last hundreds of years? All too often people just go and pick up a tube of paint without even giving thought to these important questions, yet the information is there for them to see.

HOW TO READ A TUBE OF PAINT



**** OR AA	EXTREMELY LIGHTFAST	TAKES OVER 100 YEARS TO FADE
*** OR A	FAIRLY LIGHTFAST	WILL FADE EVENTUALLY
** OR B	LIGHTFAST	FADES OVER TIME
* OR C	FUGITIVE	FADES QUICKLY IN DAYLIGHT

SERIES 1	LEAST EXPENSIVE PIGMENT	CHEAPEST IN PRICE
SERIES 2		
SERIES 3		
SERIES 4	EXPENSIVE PIGMENT USED	MOST EXPENSIVE

'HUE' DENOTES THAT A LESS EXPENSIVE PIGMENT HAS BEEN USED TO CREATE AN APPROXIMATE MATCH TO THE ORIGINAL COLOUR. IE: 'CADMIUM RED HUE' CONTAINS NO CADMIUM, WHEREAS ARTIST QUALITY 'CADMIUM RED' DOES.

'ARTISTS QUALITY' DENOTES A PAINT THAT CONTAINS REAL PIGMENT AND IS USUALLY MUCH STRONGER IN COLOUR AND MORE OPAQUE. SO WHILE MORE EXPENSIVE, LASTS LONGER AS YOU USE LESS OF IT.

'S' = STAINING COLOUR

'O' = OPAQUE

'G' = GRANULAR

'T' = TRANSPARENT

Many of the larger art manufacturers follow simple labelling rules to enable anyone to understand what the tube of paint will be like. Here is a simple guide to help you choose the paint that you want.

Which medium do you start in when you want to take up painting?

The shelves of an art shop while being attractive and like you would want to buy everything, can also be a mine field of indecision for someone taking up art for the first time. The natural process for most people seems to lean towards watercolours as the first step – even though this is the most difficult method. But what if you've not even picked up a pencil since you left school?

Adult colouring in books and magazines are hugely on the rise and are actually a great way to get back into the swing of things. They offer a wide range of things from landscapes to doodles. They will help you get used to colour, shape and tone and also help you build up techniques until your confidence grows enough so that you could perhaps join an art class.

You could start by just using a good quality colouring pencil like Derwent's *Coloursoft* range, and by adding a colour bending pencil it will smoothen out the pencil lines and give a richer, deeper colour. Then if you wanted to try paint, you could perhaps use a watercolour pencil and colour in as normal, but using a damp brush to blend or mix the colours on the paper. The *Supracolor* range by Caran D'ache are both excellent colouring and watercolour pencils. You could then move on to designing and drawing your own pages to colour in.

Studies have also found that colouring in is a great way to relax as it can send you into a semi meditative state due to the repetition needed. So by picking up a colouring pencil, it can have both health and creative benefits. Why not give it a go?

Which Medium is Right for You?

The beginning of a new year often brings about the urge to take up art, or attend an art class. I thought I would run through a few of the popular mediums and what they do to give you a better idea of which medium to make a start in.

Acrylics

These paints are fast becoming one of the widely used mediums with beginners. A plastic polymer based paint in the same colours as in the traditional mediums, but with these there are subtle differences. Available in student and artist quality versions.

Plus Points: They are much brighter than oils or watercolours as a clear binder is used to trap the pigment. Acrylics are opaque and so are extremely forgiving due to being able to paint any colour on top of each other. They are water based, but permanent when dry. They dry extremely quickly and have no smell so they are great for working in a class, or at home. They can be used on any surface including paper, card, wood, plastic, clay, and canvas, and can be used straight from the tube to give an oil effect, or diluted down with water to give a watercolour effect. Brushes or knives can be used to apply the paint. Paintbrushes are cleaned with water.

Negative Points: They do not wash out of clothes easily. To some people they are gaudy and require some learning to make more 'natural'. We do not know how long a picture painted in them will last because they are too new (only 30 years or so) compared to the more traditional mediums. Do not leave any paint to dry on brushes as it will be almost impossible to clean the brushes and get them useable again.

Oil Paints

The oldest paint medium still in use today. The paint consists of pigment mixed with linseed oil and in some cases has the addition of beeswax. Available in student and artist quality versions.

Plus Points: The artist quality versions are lightfast and will last hundreds of years. Solvent based, they require using turpentine or white spirit to dilute. Oils are opaque so any colour can be applied on top of another colour. They work similarly to acrylic paints. They can be painted on canvas, canvas boards, and primed wooden surfaces. They are very traditional and paintings painted in oil can generally command a slightly higher price. Brushes or knives can be used to apply the paint. Paint need to be applied in layers starting with the thicker paint first, and more diluted subsequent layers. This is because a thicker more impasto paint will not adhere to a diluted paint.

Brushes or knives can be used to apply the paint. Paint need to be applied in layers starting with the thicker paint first, and more diluted subsequent layers. This is because a thicker more impasto paint will not adhere to a diluted paint. Brushes clean with turpentine or white spirit.

Negative Points: The solvents used can smell and cause breathing problems if asthmatic. Low odour and citrus based solvents are now available to counteract this problem. As oils are solvent based, they can take weeks or months to dry depending on the thickness of the paint. They dry from the outside in so the only way to ensure they are dry is to stick a pin in the thickest part of the paint. If it comes out clean, then it is dry enough to varnish.

Watercolour

The most popular medium, and one of the oldest. The paint consists of pigment mixed with gum arabic and in some cases honey. Available in student and artist quality, in tubes and solid blocks (pans).

Plus Points: They are a transparent paint and so give a beautiful glow when painted properly. Due to being available in solid pans, it means paint sets are thoroughly transportable and are great to use on holiday or at classes. As watercolours are the most popular, there are plenty of reference books, guides and instructional videos available to help learn from. They can only be used correctly on properly sized watercolour paper. The paint is diluted with water and brushes are cleaned with water.

Negative Points: As they are transparent watercolours can only be painted in a certain way. The lightest colours have to be applied first and slowly darker colours can be added. This makes painting in them less forgiving as mistakes cannot easily be rectified. Getting the correct ratio of water to paint can take a little time to get right.

Coloured Pencils

With the increasing popularity of grown up colouring in books, colouring pencils are coming into their own as an art medium. Available in a wide array of colours and qualities.

Plus Points: Extremely portable and user friendly. Pencil blenders or a blending medium can be added to the collection to help get more subtle blends or a more painterly quality. Coloured pencils are great for beginners as it's a medium everyone is used to. By varying the pressure on each pencil, a wide variety of shades and tints can be achieved. Coloured pencils are great for taking on holiday or for class as all that is needed is cartridge paper.

Negative Points: As they do not blend or mix in the same way as paint, a greater variety of colour is needed.

Most coloured pencils come in a range of 72 colours – the good part is you don't have to buy all 72 together! It is easier to use them on smaller scale projects, although some artists do create very large pieces using them.

How to Paint Bright Light

No matter what medium you are painting in, this principle will always help you remember how to create the essence of light – whether you are painting light from the sun, a streetlamp, or sunlight reflecting off water.

Remember that the brightest thing you have at your disposal is only your whitest white paint, or the white surface of the paper or canvas – there is no other way to get a brighter colour. If you use this for your 'light', then every other area of the paper or canvas must be darker (even if only slightly) than that lightest colour. The greater the contrast, the brighter the light will look.

If I am painting the sun or the flame/bulb of a lamp, I always start with a white circle, I then add and blend some lemon yellow around the edge, further adding and blending cadmium yellow around the edge of that. This will make the light 'glow'. The background behind that glow will need to be quite dark to help it look brighter. I now cannot have any pure white paint anywhere else in my painting for if I do this, it will instantly stop the light from shining.



Colour Psychology

Most creative minds tend to avoid all things scientific, yet colour in art is all about science! Colour mixing itself is deeply related to physics and an understanding of light and how light is absorbed or reflected to create a coloured object and so on. However, since the mid 1800s, artists have realised that there's a whole new depth to colour and how we see it and have been using it in their paintings ever since. In fact I am about to make a bold statement ... Colour does not exist only in the brain! Our brain can create colours that are not even there. Our brain can invert colours without any problem at all. Take a look at this negative image of a bowl of fruit for 45 seconds. Look at the red dot in the centre, and then immediately look at the white area next to it (you may need to keep blinking to retain the image). What your brain has done is reverted the image from negative to positive. The brain can see the complimentary colour of an object (a colour opposite each other on the colour wheel) and creates it as an after image. Give it a go, although if you wear contact lenses it may not work.

Complementary Colours

Complementary colours are colours that are opposite each other on the colour wheel. When placed side-by-side they make each other 'sing' and look more vibrant. Many artists paint the background of a painting in the complementary colour of the object or scene they are going to paint. This makes the colours richer and adds depth. John Constable used to make his trees appear a brighter green by adding a few dabs of red paint next to parts of the foliage. When looking at a colour, the after image our brain sees is in the complementary colour of that object. For example if you sit daydreaming looking out of a white window frame, when you look away or blink, your brain will see the window frame but in a dark grey as they are complementary colours. Company logos are often created using complementary colours to give it greater impact.

Basic Complementary colours are:

Green - Red

Orange - Blue

Purple - Yellow

Simultaneous Contrast

In 1839, Michel-Eugene Chevreul published his great work on the principles of colour harmony and contrast (*De la loi du contraste simultane des couleurs*). He noted that if different tones of the same colour are placed side by side in strips or if different colours are juxtaposed in the same way, the contrast between them will appear far greater than if they are viewed separately. When two separate areas of tone are viewed separately, they will not appear as contrasted as when viewed side by side. Their point of contrast (point of contact) makes the tone of the darker piece look even darker. When two complimentary colours are placed side by side they appear brighter – the purple looks more purple than when viewed separately.

Mixed Contrast

When looking at a coloured (Orange-Red) square for some time then immediately look at a white area, its complimentary colour (a Green-Blue) appears as a 'ghost'. Chevreul noted that this could be taken one step further. What if instead of looking at a white area, we looked at a coloured area?

Stare at the Orange-Red rectangle for 45 seconds and then immediately look at the Yellow rectangle and see what happens! By immediately looking at the yellow square, the yellow appeared to turn green as it mixes with the blue after image of the red square we looked at.

The idea of mixed contrast relates to very large scale work such as murals that are viewed successively.

Chevreul noted (as did Leonardo centuries before) that when colours are placed next to or on another coloured surface, the top colour tends to colour the surrounding space with its complimentary:

Red colours it Green,

Blue colours it Orange

Yellow colours it purple and vice versa.

According to Chevreul, the proximity of grey makes the colours gain in brilliance and purity. A grey image on a coloured ground will take on the complimentary colour of the ground and by doing so will intensify the colour of the ground.

Any colour superimposed on another colour will be affected to some extent by IRRADIATION – the effect of the colour's proximity. This can be avoided by isolating the colour with black or white. Chevreul noted that colours surrounded by black tend to glow and the colours surrounded by white become deeper in tone.

This deeper understanding of the brain, the eyes and colour helped the Post Impressionists such as Seurat, Pissarro and Cezanne which helped forge the future of art into Cubism and Abstract Impressionism. Knowing all you can about colour will greatly improve your paintings.

If you use watercolour blocks or pans and want to increase the depth of colour, there are two things you can do to improve this. Many of my students that use the 'student' quality of paint often say that it takes them a lot longer to get the desired depth of colour than when using artists quality, so these two tips should help you.

Spritz your palette with water a few minutes before you start painting. This will awaken the pigment in the block and will give a richer, more intense colour on your brush.

When painting use warm water. The heat from the water dissolves the pigment faster and unlocks the colour quicker.

When mixing several colours together (more than two), the order you mix them in will help greatly in getting the colour you desire. For example, if you have the four colours Ultramarine, Cadmium Yellow, and Alizarin Crimson depending on the order you mix them you can get a whole host of new colours. Without first determining the sequence of mixing more than two colours together you are in danger of consistently mixing 'mud'. Below are four examples of creating four totally different colour mixes by using the same three colours, but by changing the order you mix them in.

To get a *Dark Chocolate Brown*, first mix together Ultramarine and Cadmium Yellow in equal amounts to make a Green, and then slowly add the Alizarin Crimson.

To get a *Very Dark Green*, first mix together a lot of Ultramarine with a little Cadmium Yellow, then add a small amount of Alizarin Crimson

To get a *Light Tan Brown*, first mix together Cadmium Yellow with a little Alizarin Crimson to make a Yellow Orange, then add a little of the Ultramarine Blue.

To get a *Shadow Colour*, first mix together the Ultramarine and Alizarin Crimson to get a Purple, then add a little Yellow.

The Colour Blue Did Not Exist Until Quite Late In Human History

'But the sky is blue!' I hear you cry. Well although our ancestors saw the sky, there was no word to represent blue in any language on earth until the Egyptians invented a dye which was blue in colour. Blue is very rare in other areas of nature - there are no blue animals, most blue flowers are manmade (even bluebells are purple and not blue), blue eyes are rare, and even the sky isn't always blue. The few items that we perceive as blue, would have been grouped with shades of other colours such as greens or purples depending on the vocabulary of a group of people. In *'The Odyssey'*, Homer famously describes the sea as "wine-dark"; why "wine-dark" and not blue, turquoise or green? In 1858 William Gladstone, before he became the prime minister, noticed that this wasn't the only strange colour description in *'The Odyssey'*. Though Homer spends describing at length the intricate details of clothing, armour, weaponry, facial features, and animals, his references to colour are strange. Iron and sheep are violet, and honey is green.

Gladstone then decided to count all of the colour references in the book. Here were his findings: Black is mentioned almost 200 times, White about 100, other colours are mentioned much less. Red is mentioned fewer than 15 times, and yellow and green fewer than 10. He then started looking at other ancient texts and noticed the same thing - the word 'blue' didn't even exist. Gladstone thought this was perhaps something unique to the Greeks, but a Lazarus Geiger followed up on this work and noticed this was true in all cultures.

Geiger studied the Koran, an ancient Hebrew version of the Bible, Icelandic sagas, ancient Chinese stories, and. He wrote: "These hymns (Hindu Vedic hymns), of more than ten thousand lines, are brimming with descriptions of the heavens. Scarcely any subject is evoked more frequently. The sun and reddening dawn's play of colour, day and night, cloud and lightning, the air and ether, all these are unfolded before us, again and again ... but there is one thing no one would ever learn from these ancient songs ... and that is that the sky is blue."

Blue as a word or specific colour did not exist. It was indistinguishable between shades of green and other colours such as purples. So Geiger looked to see when "blue" started to appear in languages and found an odd pattern. In every language the colour Black is the first to be named, and also white (dark and light).

The next word for a colour to come into existence — in every language studied around the world was red, the colour of blood and wine.

Historically after the word appears, yellow follows, and later green.

The last of these colours to appear in *every language* is blue.

The only ancient culture to develop a word for blue was the Egyptians — and as it happens, they were also the only culture that had a way to produce a blue dye. Once the dye was made — a name for that colour had to be given. Before we had a word for 'blue', people didn't see it as a different colour to other things.

Do we really see something if we don't have a word for it? Researcher Jules Davidoff travelled to Namibia to investigate this and conducted an experiment with the Himba tribe. This tribe speaks a language that has no word for blue, and has no distinction between blue and green. When tribal members were shown a circle with 11 green squares and one blue, the vast majority could not pick out which one was different from the. Those who could see a difference took much longer and made more mistakes than would make sense to us, who can clearly spot the blue square. They were then shown the same circle of green squares, but instead of an odd blue square, it was replaced with a square which was a different shade of green. This time, every member of the tribe was able to pick out the odd square out! Interestingly, the Himba tribe have more words for types of green than we do in English.

Davidoff says that without a word for a colour, even though our eyes are physically seeing it, it is somehow blocked. Without a way of identifying a colour as different, it is much harder for us to notice what is unique about it. The name of the colour is a way of identifying it as different or separate. Before blue became a common concept, maybe humans saw it. But it seems they did not know they were seeing it. There are two ways I can try to explain this...

Firstly scientist and author of *"Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages,"* Guy Deutscher, tried a casual experiment. In theory, one of children's first questions is, "Why is the sky blue?" So with his wife's permission he raised his daughter to never describe the colour of the sky to her. He taught her colours of objects as all parents do, but always omitted telling her the colour of the sky. One day they were outside taking a walk and he was practicing asking her to name the colour of objects. He then asked 'What colour is the sky?' His daughter looked up and couldn't answer.

Deutscher's daughter, had no idea. To her the sky was colourless. After much hesitation she decided it was white, and later on, eventually blue. So blue was not the first thing she saw or thought of, though it is where she settled in the end.

A second way is this - when teaching children colours from a young age, we teach them the rainbow song: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple and pink. We only name those colours. Their language and perception of colour is based purely on those colours taught. So when shown anything that is a shade of green, they call it simply 'green'. They know that they are not all the same shade of green, but they lack the language to express it and so therefore they lump them all together. It is only when their language develops as they get older and they learn shades and tones they are able to identify it. As adults we can look at a shade of green and say it is 'sage,' or 'mint', 'emerald', 'turquoise' and so on, but as unless we have a word for it, we can just say its green, or at best a light green or a dark green'.

Language and colour go hand in hand - for a colour to exist, it needs a name. Once it has a name it can be described and then picked out amongst other tones of the same shade. You only need to look at all the tubes of paint on the shelves in an art shop to see the wide names of colour for various hues of a colour: Vermillion, Scarlet, carmine, Rose Dore, Rose Madder, Magenta, Alizarin Crimson, Quinacridone Red, and Opera Rose all describe various shades of red.

Explore and Experiment with your materials

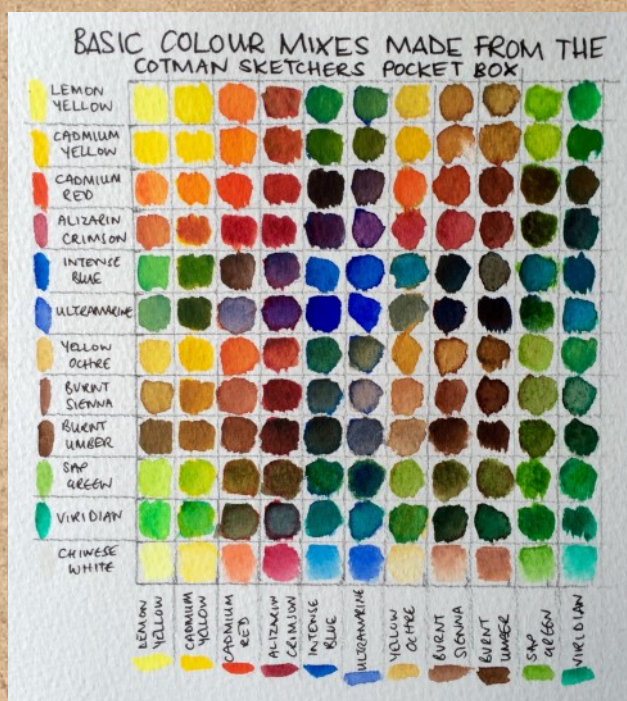
February is often seen as just a dull and gloomy month where not much creativity takes place. The lack of bright light among the constant grey clouds, cause many arty folk to hunker down and hibernate until the spring. February is actually a great time for getting more familiar with your materials. How well do you know what you can actually do with your brushes or paints? How often do you give yourself the time to explore and experiment? Probably not too often, as we tend to always want to produce something 'worth framing' each and every time we sit down to create. Why not use this month to really go back to basics?

Colour Charts

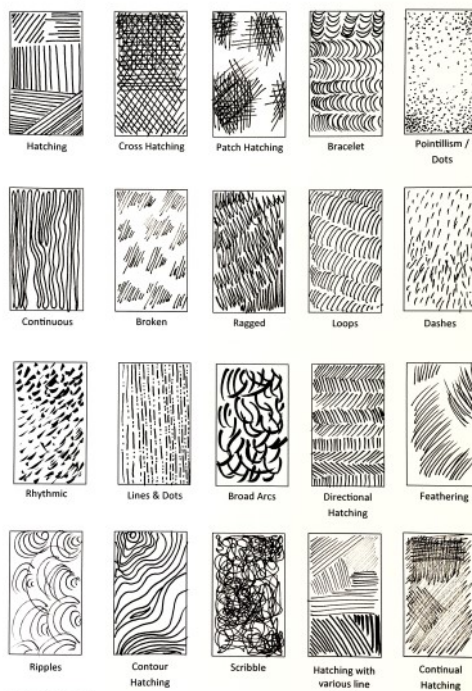
Create a grid and paint all of your colours in your palette along the top and side, then slowly fill each square in with the mixes made by each colour. This will give you a handy reference to know exactly just what your paints can do.

Mark Making

Create a swatch of all the different marks each brush can make and you will be surprised just how versatile one paintbrush can be! You may find you have several brushes that are just doing the same jobs and are taking up space. You may also find marks and patterns that you never realised your brush could make!



Mark Making and Line Work



Notes on Paintings

We often get customers in the shop asking what the pigments in our paints are made from such as Cadmium Red and Ultramarine and what the difference is between artist and student quality paint. Artist quality paints are mainly made from pigments ground from the earth such as Yellow Ochre, others are manufactured chemically from the metal cadmium such as Cadmium Red and Cadmium Yellow.

Student quality paint however, is a synthetic mixture that closely mimics the real pigment, but is often not as bright or permanent. I thought I would share with you a brief, interesting and sometimes amusing history of the lengths artists would go to make the colours they needed. Historically, artists would make their own paint in their studios by mixing the pigment with either gum Arabic for watercolour or linseed oil to make an oil paint. Traditionally, Sepia was made from the ink sacks of cuttle fish, Indian Yellow was made from the urine of cows who has been fed on mango leaves, and Vermillion was made from the highly toxic Mercuric Sulphide. Egyptian Brown was historically made by grinding the remains of Egyptian mummies! Some greens were created by mixing copper sulphide and arsenic, but when the colour got damp it gave off a toxic gas. Thankfully, these colours are either no longer made or have safer modern alternatives.

In years gone by, artists could be identified by their pallor, their sunken cheeks and dark rings under the eyes weren't from a late night painting, but from the chemicals inhaled or absorbed into the skin as they mixed their colours or painted on their canvases. How thankful we are that the tube of paint was created along with the legislation to makes paints safer! Even today, owing to where pigments are found or how they are made, there are still some high quality paints manufactured that do carry a warning due to the pigments used. The better the quality of paint, the higher the chance of it being slightly toxic. These paints give brighter, stronger more permanent colour and are perfectly fine to use as long as you don't suck your brushes!

What to look for when in an Art Gallery

When visiting galleries, especially large exhibitions of paintings of centuries past in the big city galleries, it is easy to become an art critic and judge the piece for purely how it looks on the gallery wall. But galleries don't necessarily display the work how they were intended to be viewed.

My top three questions to ask when viewing famous works of art are:

Who painted it?

Who commissioned it, and why?

Where was it originally designed to be hung?

If you can find the answers to these questions it will put the painting in a whole new light. For example, many paintings may look distorted or odd on the gallery wall, but that doesn't mean that the artist was unskilled. In fact it means quite the opposite. When constructing the original art work, the artists would work around where the painting would be displayed. Paintings were often only ever intended to be in one position and would be made to fit exactly. More than that though, if the painting was to be set quite high up in say a large dining room with 18' high ceilings, then the artist would deliberately distort the proportions so from ground level looking up, the figures and angles looked perfect. The only snag with this is that centuries later, the painting finds its way into a gallery and is hung only 6' high instead of 12' high. From this new viewpoint, all of the exaggerated proportions will look very wrong.

Also by asking who commissioned it, it will give you a deeper understanding of why it looks the way it does. For example, *The Venus of Urbino* by Titian in the Uffizi Gallery, was known as 'Titian's Beast', after being called it by Mark Twain who was deeply scandalised by such a nude piece of art. He slated it for its vulgarity and the way the nude woman was portrayed. In reality, this painting was never meant for public viewing. It was commissioned as a wedding present from a husband to his young bride, and was to for the front of a large chest that stayed in their bedroom. Never was a member of the public meant to see it, or understand it. It was just a private painting between two people.

So sometimes by thinking about a work of art in this way, you get to know far more about it and appreciate it for what it is, rather than making an opinion about something, as Twain did, without knowing the *whys*

Whenever you go to an exhibition as a viewer or purchaser go with an open mind. I remember the fear I felt when exhibited my work in my first one-man show when I was only fifteen. The excitement of seeing my work hanging their on walls other than in my bedroom was soon overshadowed by the arrival of visitors to the gallery. A few family and friends came, but largely it was the general public whom knew nothing about me, my age or my style. They only knew 'what they liked'. I recall shrinking back in horror as these people came inches away to each painting, their noses almost touching the canvas in close scrutiny. I felt like saying "Paintings are meant to be hung from a distance! Please don't look so closely."

I would advise all artists to anonymously attend their own exhibitions as you get to know what the public like (or don't like) so that your next exhibition can be tailored to suit their buying needs. Be warned though - you must be able to hear and accept harsh criticism. Listening to people in a gallery, you soon realise that everyone is an art critic and some comments you overhear can be hurtful, others uplifting and some very constructive. I did not reveal myself as the artist as I did not want to hear false flattery, but I wanted to know what these people *really* felt about my work. These were all potential buyers and I needed to find out how I could change my work to enable me to sell more. After my month long exhibition, reading the scores of comments in the visitors book gave me a warm glow inside and seeing all the red 'sold' dots on the frames made me feel even happier! That exhibition I had sold 37 out of 40 paintings and I felt on top of the world, but I also to this day remember some of the comments made about my work that have helped me expand and change style and make sure that when I paint, I not only fulfil my need as an artist but that I make it commercial so that it will sell.

People often approach me at the shop and ask me the age-old question '*How much should I charge for my work?*' There are several answers to this. Firstly you have to ask yourself if you are selling it as a hobby and just to recoup materials costs, if you are selling it to make profit or if you are selling it to be your business. People's perception of you as an artist will depend not only on the quality of your work, but also the price you are selling it at. If it is a cheap price, they will think you are an amateur and don't have much talent. They will not think of it as 'bargain artwork'.

If you are just selling to fund your hobby, then simply sell it to cover the cost of materials - paints, paper, framing and so on.

If you are selling it to make a little profit, just double your materials costs. That way you can get back what you spent and then have more money to maybe buy better quality materials.

If you are selling it to be a business, that's a different story. You need to show people that you are serious and value what you do. I know a lot of professional artists that price their work by adding up all the hours they spent painting it (they have an hourly rate of anything between £15 and £30), some then also add a design and research fee to it and then finally the price of the framing and materials.

Also, if you are exhibiting in a shop or gallery, they may well take a commission when it sells. Commission can vary, but it is usually between 25 and 50%. You will need to add this to the final selling price so you don't lose out.

Exhibitions – how often do you go?

With the constant use of the internet, many people claim to have 'seen' famous paintings, but even a decent resolution of a painting on a laptop is nothing compared to seeing it first-hand. We are so used to seeing postcard sized versions of all the paintings that we tend to forget they are all different sizes in real life. Monet's loose, Impressionistic waterlilies for example are several metres long and look so detailed when reproduced in a book or on the screen.

I remember after teaching an art history lesson on Renaissance painting and looking at one particular image of the virgin and child on a huge projector screen, the class then went to The Ashmolean where it was being displayed and couldn't find it! It was actually only the size of the palm of a hand and in a cabinet!

Make a promise this year to attend more exhibitions and go to more galleries and see these wonderful art works up close and personal instead of in a book or on a screen – it will mean so much more.



How can you tell if a painting you are working on is becoming overworked? Is it some natural ability or can it be honed so that your paintings remain fresh, imaginative and not forced?

Many centuries ago, the monks creating illuminated manuscripts made sure their writing was error free and not -overworked by being fearful of a creature known as Titivillus. Titivillus was a demon said to work on behalf of Satan to introduce errors into the work of scribes. The first reference to Titivillus by name occurred in *Tractatus de Penitentia*, in 1285, by Johannes Galensis, John of Wales. As well as collecting mistakes, Titivillus also collected idle chat that occurs during church service, and any mispronounced, mumbled or skipped words of the service, to take to Hell to be counted against the offenders.

It was said that Titivillus would go around all their books and manuscripts collecting all of their errors into his sack. On the monk's death, Titivillus would empty his sack and the monk would be judged according to the errors he had made in his life; the more errors he made, the more likely he was to go to Hell. As a result, the monks would always be careful and watchful not to make any errors. He has been called the "patron demon of scribes," as Titivillus provides an easy excuse for the errors that are bound to creep into manuscripts as they are copied. In his painting 'Virgin of Mercy' by Diego de la Cruz in 1485 clearly shows Titivillus in the top right corner with his sack of errors. In a similar way, artists can make errors, not always by creating a bad painting with bad techniques, but by overworking their picture making it lose originality and that initial spark of creativity that caused them to want to paint it in the first place. In landscapes it is often the skies and foreground that is overworked whereby the clouds look less natural and highly contrived, or the rocks and grasses at the front of the picture look somehow out of pace with the rest of the picture.

On the wall of my classroom I have invented a character to remind my students not to overwork their paintings and to help them see when it is best to stop painting. The character is a snake and not just any snake it is the Adder - the '*Just Adder*'. He enjoys overworked painting and helps paintings gradually get worse. I created him because over the years I have heard students whilst painting say "I'll just add a..." which is then followed swiftly by an "...Oh dear, I don't like it anymore". To my surprise and delight my students all comment about the *Just Adder* so it seems to be working. Why not think of the *Just Adder* when you are painting and see if it helps keep your work fresh.

Should you sign your artwork?

Many centuries ago, paintings were not signed at all. Artists were merely people doing a job - whether it be staining a saddle, painting heraldic shields, coats of arms, a religious painting for a church, or a religious fresco for a wall. A good artist was known by their reputation, and their work had a distinct style. However it was not thought important to sign work, no more than any decorator would sign the corner of your living room wall after putting up wallpaper!

Signatures started to appear when the age of celebrity in the art world began round the mid to late Renaissance. Good artists were in high demand and the owners of the artwork wanted to ensure people knew that they could afford the work of these highly skilled artisans. Signatures were also important for another reason: these masters of their craft began taking on pupils to train them to paint in their style. In time a student's work could often be mistaken for that of their tutor's, so a signature would ensure that there was no confusion over the creator of such pieces of work. In most occasions the students wouldn't sign their work as they were copying the work of the master.

Problems would arise if several students learning from the same tutor had an almost similar style, and paintings would on many occasions be altered or cropped to fit different spaces or new walls over time meaning that signatures usually went missing. At other times, some artists fall out of favour and the way they signed their work would no longer be recognised, especially if using monograms. One such problem occurred concerning the 15th Century Dutch artist, Judith Leyster. By the age of 27 in 1633, she became a member of the Haarlem Guild of St. Luke, the first female painter to be registered there.

There were more women active at that time as painters in Haarlem, but since they worked in family workshops they did not need the professional qualifications necessary to be able to sign works or run a workshop. Within two years of her entry into the guild, Leyster had taken on three male apprentices. Records show that Leyster sued Frans Hals (a contemporary and now a more well-known artist) for accepting one of her students who left her workshop for that of Hals, less than three days after the student entered the studio. !

She signed her works with a monogram with her initials JL with a star attached. This was a play on words as "Lei-ster" meant "Lead star" in Dutch, which was the common name for the North star used at the time by Dutch mariners. The Leistar was also the name of her father's brewery in Haarlem. She was also known as a 'leading star' in the art world at that time.

Although well-known during her lifetime and esteemed by her contemporaries, Leyster and her work became largely forgotten after her death. By the end of the 1800s her work was virtually unknown and often attributed to other (male) artists. Her rediscovery came in 1893. A dealer in 1892 had purchased a painting as a Frans Hals only to discover it had been painted by Judith Leyster.

The painting was signed by Leyster with her monogram, but the monogram was unrecognized. In 1893 Cornelis Hofstede de Groot recognized it and wrote the first article on Leyster. Since then Art Historians have often dismissed her as an imitator or follower of Hals, although this attitude has changed more recently. Her relationship with Hals is unknown. Now rediscovered, her reputation is secure as a highly skilled, successful female in a field dominated by men. There are now only 19 surviving works by Leyster.

You can see the similarities between the style of Hals and Leyster, so without knowledge of the signature, it would be easy to confuse them. Sadly all too often, the skilled paintings of many female artists throughout the centuries were attributed to their male contemporaries. Fortunately, many of these paintings are now being reattributed to the female artists and their names are once more being known.

So a signature on a painting is extremely important!

Summer Painting En Plein Air - When did it start

As soon as the weather is warmer, artists pick up their paints and take them outside to paint from nature. Was this always the case? Interestingly the term '*en plein air*' is a French phrase and many of the old fashioned art terms are in Italian and were devised in the renaissance, so that fact that we are dealing with French phraseology could indicate it happened much later in the timeline of art than we imagine. It is sometimes called '*peinture sur le motif*' (painting objects that the eye actually sees) which perfectly describes the artist sitting in the environment of what they are painting.

Throughout history many artists painted only in their studio as it was difficult for them to paint outside. If they wanted to paint real objects they would have to dig them up or cut them and bring them to their studio to observe. As seen in the painting '*Large Piece of Turf*' painted by Albrecht Durer in 1503. This also meant they could keep the lighting at a constant angle giving them longer to paint than in natural sunlight which causes shadows to change direction over a short period of time. It wasn't because the artist did not want to paint outside, but they were not taught to due to it being extremely difficult to do it. Imagine the renaissance artists trying to carry all their essential materials away from their studio to paint outside! Where would they put their wooden boards to paint on, their eggs, their powdered pigments, their mortar and pestle, their brushes, their linseed oil, their water, their charcoal, their stylus and all their other additional materials? This is not to say that they wouldn't make on the spot sketches or studies which they would then use to make paintings from once they got back to their studio or workshop. Although it is accepted that at times Rembrandt, Da Vinci, and Claude Lorrain all painted outside at some point, but it was not their usual way of painting.

Largely the change to moving to painting outside happened when tubes of paint were invented, along with collapsible easels, carriers to transport canvases and so on, along with trains and railways so artists could travel further afield. This is thought mainly to have happened in France in the mid-17th Century with the birth of art movements such as Impressionism where the artists wanted to capture natural light from life. They felt that by being absorbed in the atmosphere it could give more sensitivity to the subject. For example it is difficult to paint a cold snow scene whilst sitting in 25 degree heat.

Eugene Boudan was a French artist who used en plein air painting a lot, and even encouraged a young Claude Monet to go with him and to learn the art of painting outside. In the painting '*Beach at Trouville*', grains of sand or stuck to areas of the oil paint indicating it was painted on site, on rather a blustery day

Over here in Britain at around the same time as the Impressionists were painting outside using their modern Alla Prima (all in one go) technique where the whole painting is created from start to finish outside using broad flat brushstrokes, the Pre-raphaelite Brotherhood had formed and were painting outside but in a method closely related to the mid Renaissance! They wanted their art work to feel real, as if the viewer were standing in that scene and could feel the heat, or the cold. William Holman-Hunt for example travelled to the holy land just so he could make sketches and see what the landscape looked like for the religious scenes he was painting, as seen in his painting entitled '*The Scapegoat*' painted in 1854. Interestingly many artists before him that painted religious scenes would either make up and imagine what the landscape looked like, or use scenes from their own town and area as it was all they knew. So dedicated were they of capturing the true essence, that '*The Light of the World*' was painted by moonlight in a small shack in a woodland so that Holman Hunt could observe how the moonlight landed on the tree filled landscape.

Much earlier in Britain though there was an artist not only breaking from the norm and painting landscapes, but he was also painting some of them outside and again breaking what was considered to be the 'proper' way of painting. That artist was English landscape painter John Constable. During Constable's early career, landscape painting was not viewed as a genre of art in its own right, but were merely there as backdrops for whatever was happening - albeit a religious scene, mythological story, or a portrait. Constable decided to take this to a different level and followed in the footsteps of Claude Lorrain whom he admired. Because of this action, Constable's work was never really accepted to begin with and caused him a delay to be accepted into the Royal Academy, and also caused him to be engaged for seven years until his fiancée's father was satisfied that John had a stable enough income to support his wife and raise a family! His painting '*Wivenhoe Park, Essex*' was one of the landscapes painted on location, outside. of reality'.

Why paint outside?

Painting outside is totally different to working from a sketch or photograph. The reason is because a sketch whilst capturing the bare bones, fails to capture the 'feel' of the environment; and a photograph deadens the mid tones - it lightens the light bits and darkens the dark bits. Photographs also push back what is seen. Painting from life however really makes you see far more colours and layers that a photograph can. Try to paint outside as much as possible, for as John Constable said '*imagination never can or will compare to the beauty of reality*'.

Top Tips For Painting Outside

Make sure you have all the equipment you need, but limit it to the least amount possible for carrying. No more than 7 colours, one pencil, a pad, and a few brushes should give you a nice enough range to get the painting right.

Consider the changing light. Monet said that it is impossible to paint for longer than 30 minutes at any one time due to the change in light and shadows. I would advise that you work in one of two ways (i) sketch everything first and then begin painting leaving the shadows until last, or (ii) draw an arrow indicating the direction of sunlight first so that even a while after you've been painting you still know the original direction of the shadows. Never add the shadows as you progress in the painting as you'll find that an hour in they will all be changing direction and the painting will not look right.

Pay attention to what you wear. If possible wear darker clothes or have a black apron. This method was used in full by Monet who wore a black smock when painting outside so that the colour of his clothing did not reflect and change the appearance of the colours he was creating on the canvas. Darker clothing stops reflection so the colours you paint are the colours you see and want.

Try not to get carried away by the whole landscape. A photograph captures one small area, but when you are outside you are faced with a 360 degree view which can be distracting and also make angles look odd if you try to add a building on the far right into a painting where you're mainly looking left.

Use Natural markers to stop your eyes from wandering outside the scene. For example use a tree on your left to be the left hand edge of your paper, a fence post on the right to be the right hand edge of your paper, a rock to represent the bottom edge of your painting, and perhaps an overhanging branch to represent to top of your painting. This way your eyes can remain fixed on the subject at hand. Should you see an interesting building outside of this 'view', do not try to fit it in, but perhaps create a second painting that moves the view to incorporate that building.

Paint what you see and not what you know. Whether you know the landscape you are painting well or not, it is advisable not to guess at what things are, nor is it recommended to paint something in detail if the eye can't make out what it is even if you know what it is. Doing so will alter the perspective and depth of a picture. For example a dark flick in the distance should be painted just as that. Even if you know it is a pylon if you paint it as a pylon you are bringing it closer to you and therefore altering the depth, which will make some of the closer things you don't know and have painted as seen look further back than the background!



Changing Trends

Instead of using the more traditional methods of art such as oils, gouache, or acrylics, many artists are taking to the pen! Not just the traditional pen and ink style of art, although this is beginning to make a big come back, but there now a growing amount of graphic based marker pens being released into the art market which artists of all backgrounds are embracing.

Pens such as the alcohol based Promarker, or Copic Ciao pen have been around for some years but in the past twelve months or so many art companies have released their own markers. Winsor & Newton now have *Watercolour Markers* which are basically watercolours in pen form that when wetted gives the look of a watercolour painting, and their *Pigment Marker* and work created using them is said to be lightfast for 100 years. The paint markers that have been on the market for a while such as the vibrant *Posca* pen and the *Posterman* chalk marker, have got competition from the acrylic paint markers from both Liquitex and Daler-Rowney, as well as the oil based gloss paint marker from Pebeo with their *4Artist* range of colours.

Why are so many artists turning to this marker based way of creating work? One reason may be that in this fast paced modern world, the marker pen gives instant colour, doesn't need to take time to set up such as getting a palette, squeezing tubes, carrying brushes and so on, they are highly portable and can be used on the move, and they are bright and vibrant and they scan well, meaning they can be added to any digital art work.

The traditional art mediums will never leave us, but it doesn't mean that new ways of creating should be dismissed. It was feared that digital art would take over, but these new art trends help enhance the 'hand made' feel and can strengthen digital based art work, instead of letting it rule.

Notes on Art Classes

As we begin the New Year, our thoughts turn to resolutions and often to hobbies. Many creative minds are determined to improve on their skills; to devote more time to getting arty or maybe attending art classes.

What are the benefits of joining an art group or art class? For many people, the painting side is just one aspect; in a group you will meet many like-minded people who of course share similar interest to yourself. It also gives you 'permission' to paint. Many of my students simply don't have the time to sit at home and paint throughout the week, the art class is the only chance they get to give time to themselves. They tell me they often feel guilty about painting at home as there always seem more important things to do, but when they know they have booked a course, or know that there is a regular session for them to attend to sit, draw and paint it really gets them creative as ideas bounce off other creative minds. If your group or class is fortunate enough to have a tutor on hand, then it's a great way to ask for help and learn new techniques and explore new media that you may never have the confidence to do by yourself at home.

In short, joining a group or class is all about *you*, expanding knowledge, learning new skills, sharing ideas with similar minds and having time for yourself to enjoy the things that *you* like doing without feeling guilty.

Picasso famously said "Every child is an artist. The problem is staying an artist when you grow up." Well there are many classes or groups to join whether you want to learn how to paint, draw, or just learn about the history of art. It is so easy to allow the everyday chores of life to get in the way and stifle creativity and make you feel guilty for giving up time to pursue a hobby. By joining class or group, you buy out your time, you remove yourself from the house where all the jobs are that should be done (but can wait) and you spend time with like-minded people being creative which is a great source of relaxation. Look around where you live and see what arty things are on offer, and give yourself some 'me' time.

"Starting from January, I'm going to..." Sound familiar? You may yearn to do something 'arty' but not know what you want to do or what you are capable of. Even if you are not sure which area of art you are interested in such as watercolours, acrylics, portraiture, art history or life drawing, the first thing you should consider is what sort of tuition you are after.

Deciding on what tutor style you need is often more important than the medium you choose to paint with. Some classes have a structured lesson with themes, subjects and where the tutor demonstrates every stage and as a student you can follow step-by-step and come away with a 'finished' piece. This style of tuition is more suited to total beginners or those wishing to learn specific techniques. Other tutors take a more relaxed approach allowing you to be creative and do your own thing but they are on hand should you need technical advice. This is great for those who know what they want to achieve but need a little guidance to achieve it. Finding out the tuition style before you commit to a course or workshop can save a lot of wasted time and disappointment. Do you need a tutor that gradually builds techniques to allow you to learn slowly or are you after a fast paced workshop with broad brush strokes and a more abstract approach? If you would feel uncomfortable in a group setting, why not look for tutors who provide private one to one tuition as is available at The Artery, Banbury. That way you can structure your learning to get exactly what you want out of art and learn techniques specific to your progress.

I would advise anybody that is considering taking an art lesson to meet with the tutor beforehand - does their personality appeal to you? You need to find a tutor's personality that you feel comfortable with which will make your learning so much more enjoyable. Has anybody you know recommended their classes? If so that is a good sign that you would enjoy it also. I have been teaching art for seventeen years this year and I know how important it is to make students feel comfortable in new surroundings when their last time holding a paintbrush may have resulted in deep emotional scars from their art teacher at school. A tutor that can inspire, build confidence yet create a relaxed learning environment where you can feel able to make mistakes and learn new things is truly worth their weight in paint!

Which type of class is best for you?

Many groups restart after the summer break and it is an ideal time to give a group a trial. Being an artist (or 'dabbler') can often be a solitary profession, especially with the rise of YouTube tutorials. By joining a group, you immediately learn new ways of seeing and doing things and also feel that you are not alone as you meet like-minded people who also live in your area. It helps to be able to see and ask questions which cannot be so easily done online.

As well as learning new things, it is a chance for some 'you' time where you can be as creative as you wish and also a great way to socialise. I thoroughly recommend doing so, and we live in a very creative area where you are spoilt for choice! Think about what sort of group you want to go to (there are three sorts).

Structured Classes A tutor attending the group that sets the theme of the lesson and provides a full demonstration at the start and is on hand to give advice throughout the lesson, or paints a long with you guiding you step-by-step. This type is ideal for beginners

Less Structured Class There is a tutor or experienced artist on hand to give advice should you need it, but you set the pace and paint or draw whatever you wish.

Self Structured Class This class is run by the group and is a tutor-less group of arty people who just meet up and paint. There is no instruction, just the help from each other.

Similarly there are classes whereby you can pay for a set course which may help you commit to learning and sticking at it, but is not ideal if you have an active and varied social life as committing yourself to a five to seven week course could mean you miss some of the lessons due to prior engagements. Other classes are more flexible and allow you to just book a single class without the huge financial commitment of a course. This means you can be free to try different subjects and media.

Decide which sort of class is for you, or try them all out and then decide. Why not go to one close by and see what you think?

Notes on Art History

Recently, I have been teaching an Art Appreciation course for the WEA and was showing my students the wonders of Renaissance art and discussing Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci in particular. I have a deep passion for this period in art and the technical skill and scale that these artists worked in without the many resources that we arty folk take for granted today. For example, they only had a round type brush in limited sizes, they had to grind their own pigment, make their own paint and even make their own charcoal to draw from.

Painting on a board was a long laborious process with the artist having to prepare the panel by mixing heated rabbit skin size with gesso powder to paint and make the board less absorbent and able to take the paint well. Once the panel was prepared, the artist would sketch his outline using charcoal and when he was satisfied with it, he would take a silver stylus and use it to push the charcoal into the panel to set it. The remaining charcoal would be dusted off using a feather. The paint for painting on panels was made from pigment mixed with egg yolk and a little water. This type of paint is known as Tempera and has to be built up over time in thin layers or glazes. It is worth noting that it was a slightly different method for painting a Fresco (mural) as it was painted on wet plaster so hardly any egg yolk would be used to bind the paint as too much egg would cause the paint to flake off the wall. Instead more water was added to the pigment to make it absorb into the wet plaster. The majority of paintings were either of portraits or religious in nature interpreting various scriptures.

The artist would need many easy to remember methods of producing all of these figures and painting the flesh tones. There was also a lot of rivalry in that period and in fact Leonardo da Vinci once said that Michelangelo's figures looked like a bag of walnuts! Was he jealous of his younger counterpart? Sadly, many of the methods used by these 'masters' are not often or widely taught any longer, but it is my mission to share these interesting and amazing techniques whenever I get the chance. After all, if these techniques were what helped create these masters and make them revered for centuries, surely they should be taught and understood to help create master artisans of the future?

We are bombarded with Tweets, Facebook messages of videos or photographs from people 'capturing the moment' of events, happenings, and occurrences across the globe on their mobile phones. There have been many huge events and in times gone by, artists would have been commissioned to paint a picture to commemorate or show what was happening - Terence Cuneo captured the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in such intricate detail, L.S. Lowry portrayed life for the working man during the war, and artists such as Rembrandt who were commissioned to capture important figures of their day in a portrait. Why such a need to represent these things in art form? Longevity. As a society we have the need to show others we were there, or to depict the horrors, pleasures and celebrations that can be passed down to our ancestors as a reminder.

Indeed, we still refer to these paintings and regard them as historical documents. Archaeologists use them to work out where buildings of long ago were built to find them and rediscover their buried treasures. This is nothing new, for as long as mankind has walked the earth, they have seen the need to mark occasions. I refer to the Neolithic cave paintings found in France, Italy and the UK depicting celebratory hunts or kills or even artwork to ask the spirits for safety and good health. Picking up a piece of burnt wood or using a stone to carve into the walls of a cave was so important to these Neolithic societies.

For years it was thought that the chieftains or spiritual leaders created such artwork, but in recent times, the theory has been put forward that it was in fact the youths of the tribes that felt the need to express themselves in this way as it was their only way of making their voice heard. They still had opinions of what was happening in their life, but as a youth they were never valued in their society until they could become a 'man' and hunt and provide or become a 'woman' and give offspring to keep the tribe going. The cave art was simply their freedom of expression. Sound familiar? The youth of today feel exactly as did the youth of Neolithic times. How do they express their opinion? How do they get their voice heard? Its impossible to travel anywhere without seeing some teenager's expression sprayed to the wall of a derelict building or on the sides of an underpass.

There are striking similarities between Neolithic and modern 'graffiti'. Is it mindless vandalism or in some cases do they have a message that the youth like his Neolithic counterpart feels the need to get across? Councils across the country are recognising this and are setting up 'Graffiti Walls' where people have permission to spray and say what they need to and then a month later the wall is whitewashed and ready for the next lot! I think this is a great idea and helps control the spread of graffiti but also lets the young ones express themselves in the right place.

In this country, art exhibitions are in the grand scheme of things, relatively new. In fact, the first exhibition was in 1740 or 1741. How did it come about? In 1740, William Hogarth painted a portrait of his close friend Captain Coram, who established the Foundling Hospital in London. The portrait was then presented to the hospital as a good gesture between friends. Hogarth then persuaded a number of leading British painters to present their own pictures to the hospital which were then hung in rooms for the public to see.

It soon became the fashion for people to visit the hospital to see the pictures. Obviously, the artists donating these paintings did it for a dual-fold reason: it made them look benevolent, but also they knew it would increase the number of people able to see their work and hopefully buy and commission more. This new way of showing paintings and sculpture to the general public showed great initiative and proved successful.

There was so much interest shown in this semi-public exhibition, that it was decided to hold a much larger one fully open to the public. In the two weeks it was held, was a great success.

There were two more exhibitions held the following year and so the art exhibition was born!

Queen Elizabeth I and Her Influence Over British Art

In the days before social media, photography, or television, the only way we would know what our monarch looked like was from our currency, or official portraits. Many monarchs embraced this by getting the best portrait painter they had heard of, often bringing them in from other countries to paint them in the most modern of techniques thus showing their wealth, importance, and grandeur. Henry VIII hired Hans Holbein as his court painter and because he was known throughout Europe for his talent, so Henry had to have him paint his portrait.

Elizabeth I also made her mark in the art world but not necessarily in the same way. In Italy at the time of her reign, artists were using a technique known as 'Chiaroscuro'. This was used by many artists, but Caravaggio (1571-1610) and Rembrandt (1606-1669) were considered the masters of its use.

Chiaroscuro was wonderful for portraits and figure paintings as it helped create the feel of solidity, and if done properly, the person or object could look as if they were lifting from the canvas. Europe was racing ahead in the art world creating new techniques and methods, leaving Britain far behind.

Elizabeth I deliberately halted the growth of art in Britain by using her power and personal choice to influence British artists to adhere to a certain style. She much preferred the flatter light and little contrast of Holbein rather than the strong shadows of the Italian artists painting their new chiaroscuro style. Obviously artists want to try new methods and compete with the artists in Europe, but in Elizabethan England if you wanted to paint a portrait of the sovereign you would have to adhere to certain rules! This contrast can be clearly seen when comparing a portrait by Italian artist Titian painted in 1520 to a portrait of Elizabeth I painted by Nicholas Hilliard in 1575. Although the Hilliard painting is 55 years later than the Titian painting, it looks more naive and less skilled. It is not the case if an unskilled artist as we shall see later, but an artist carrying out the will of their patron. Elizabeth also gave orders to Sir Walter Raleigh that any street signs bearing her likeness painted by *'unskilled and common painters'* be *'knocked into pieces and cast into the fire'*. She wanted total control over the image that she wanted to portray and would go to any lengths to keep it that way.

Perhaps she may have known that she wasn't as ravishingly beautiful as her courtiers made out and wanted the rulers of the rest of the world to see her how she saw herself. Would a commission to paint this queen be an enviable task?! Who would take on this role as portrait painter to Queen Elizabeth I?

Miniatures were all the rage during the Elizabethan period and the greatest of all miniature artists was Nicholas Hilliard (1547 -1619), and English goldsmith and portrait painter. His work is still used today in historical text books because his skilful painting gives the most accurate representation of what the costumes were like for those living at that time. His work has been used a reference for centuries. The way Hilliard depicts the rich fabrics and delicate laces, the jewellery and clothing style is non-surpassed. What makes this more staggering is that Hilliard preferred to work mainly on paintings 2"x2.5" in size! To get that amount of detail in such a small painting requires unbelievable skill and dedication.

So Nicholas Hilliard became Queen Elizabeth I portrait painter, but he painted other portraits at the same time. When you compare the miniature painting of An Unknown Man, to the miniature of Queen Elizabeth I both painted in watercolours in 1572, the differences in the way the faces are painted are obvious. The Unknown Man has stronger shadows on the skin so that shape of his nose can be seen, whereas the painting of Queen Elizabeth is much softer and her features are muted. What were the instructions given to Hilliard before he painted her?

During a meeting, Elizabeth I told Nicholas Hilliard to avoid dark shadows on the faces of his sitters. He replied after in an interview "*this, Her Majesty's curious demand, hath greatly bettered my judgement*". Perhaps she realised that her face looked better in soft light?

So because of vanity, the advancement of art in the British Isles was stunted briefly. The history of art in this country is so interesting with many twists and turns but has shaped art as we know it today.

Notes on Art Advice

Basic Art Supplies To Get You Started

Walking into an art shop can be somewhat of a minefield as there is so much choice, it can be impossible to know where to start in selecting a range of items to get you started. It is easy to read art books and each author will have their own recommendations of what to buy, but often their choice is to either promote a certain brand, or to give you a selection of materials that helps to paint their way. It is not necessarily a recommendation for what materials are best for you. Here are my top tips for buying the basics:

Start out with the best you can afford. It is often a mistake to buy the cheapest items and then upgrade when you improve. Cheaper items may not have the same pigment, or quality and may in fact hinder your progress! If in doubt start off with mid-range items. Most of the bigger name brands have three ranges - a budget range, a 'student' range, and artist quality.

Find an all-rounder paper. Bockingford watercolour paper can be used for watercolours, acrylics, pastels, and pen and will save you having to purchase a pad for every medium you want to try. A good weight is 300gsm, and choose a cold-pressed (NOT) surface. It will certainly keep the costs down, and you can paint on both sides. For practice paper, Goldline do a 100 sheet lighter weight watercolour paper pad for around just £16.

Limit your colour choice. It is better to learn how to mix colours from a limited palette than to purely rely on the wide range of colour choices available. No matter what medium you want to try whether it is watercolours, acrylics, or oil paints, far greater harmony will be achieved in your work with fewer colours. I recommend the following colours to get you started: Lemon Yellow, Cadmium Yellow, Cadmium Red, Alizarin Crimson, Ultramarine Blue, Cerulean Blue, Yellow Ochre, Burnt Sienna, and White (not needed for watercolours). As long as you have a warm and a cool tone in each colour it will give you a wide range of mixes. From the colours above it is possible to make several thousand colour mixes (including glazing).

Don't get bogged down with brushes. An easy mistake to make when starting out is to buy the biggest brush set you can find, then only to find after a few months that you are only using the same few over again.

Instead just choose wisely and get just four or five brushes across the spectrum. I would go with a large flat (I-2"), a large round brush, a smaller round brush, a detail brush or rigger, and a filbert shaped brush. Nylon is more affordable and can be used for any medium.

You can probably get set up with all the basics for a budget of around £35.00, and as long as you look after your purchase they will last quite a while. The only thing you will need to replace often is your paper.

"I sit at home and never know what to paint." Does this sound familiar? I have been in that situation myself. You have the urge to paint and you get your palette and brushes ready, sit down and....nothing! No ideas spring to mind and you sit staring at a blank sheet of paper for what seems an age before you pack it all away again and do something else.

The first thing I can suggest to climb out of the creative block is to take plenty of photographs, if your mobile phone has a camera function then you will never be without a camera to take that interesting sky or picturesque landscape. Keep the photographs to hand as you can look through them to gain inspiration and they are all your own work so are therefore copyright free. Remember that you can combine elements of photographs – the sky from one, the land from another and the old, twisted dead tree from another to create a whole new picture.

Another suggestion is to look at some of your previous paintings and try to paint them again but in a different media. This not only helps you to critique your own work and look for improvements but also gives you experience in using a new media that you may have never thought about using. If you don't have a room set up that you paint in, it can be disheartening because when the mood strikes, you spend fifteen minutes setting up all your materials, in which time the mood may have been and gone. It is therefore important to grab the mood whenever and wherever it strikes. Always keep a sketchpad in your pocket, a pencil and even a few colouring pencils so that you are armed and ready for action. I mentioned last month how useful the biro was to get beautiful tone and shade so there really is no excuse! Don't give up, the block will eventually pass and just feel safe in the knowledge that everyone goes through it at some point.

I was thinking of the words of the great landscape painter John Constable the other morning.

He said that "*the imagination cannot alone produce art to bear comparison with reality*". So I thought I would give you a few pointers in what to look for when painting outside, as June offers a spectacular opportunity to paint reality with open garden events in the local area. If you do decide to go off out and paint or draw from reality firstly, remember that one thing that we cannot plan for is the weather.

Keep your materials limited so that whatever the weather, you are not carrying trolley loads of paints. Watercolour pencils are a great media to work in outdoors as they are lightweight and produce good results and all you need is a watercolour pad, a paintbrush and bottle of water to go with it.

Give yourself boundaries. When you are outside, you are faced with a full 360° view. It's near impossible to do a large panorama justice when outside as each time you turn your head, your viewpoint, and therefore the angles change. This will mean that you will struggle to get everything looking like part of the same scene. The best advice I can give is to use parts of the landscape to form the edges of your paper: a tree on the left forms the left hand edge of your picture, a telegraph pole the other side forms the right hand edge a stone just in front of you creates the bottom of your painting and so on. This way, if you do look away, you will always know what is supposed to be in your painting.



Finding Balance

It is so hard for a creative person to actually find the time to create. Your mind may be full of ideas, your journal or note pad may have plenty of plans scrawled upon its pages, all in the hope that 'one day when I get time, I will act upon them'.

Have you found that one day never comes as life just gets in the way, and you are weighed down by all the little things you need to do and so the things you want to do are left behind?

Has it been weeks or months since you last picked up a pencil or a paintbrush, even though you know how much you love creating and that you find great peace of mind when you do?

There comes a time when we have to take stock and allow ourselves the time to get arty and creative, without feeling guilty. We almost feel as though when we are at home and get the creative urge that we need to spend hours slaving away creating the next piece of artwork that will steer the art world in new directions; but just ten minutes of creative doodling every day can really relax your mind, unlock creative potential and set you up for whatever the day will throw at you. Whilst sitting with a cup of tea, or waiting for the bus, in a café, on the train - utilise the quiet time in between doing things to pick up a pen, pencil, or brush. Keep a small pad and pencil in your pocket, handbag, beside your chair at home, or on your desk at work. Draw as soon as the urge strikes and let your creative juices flow.

If it becomes impossible, then treat yourself to an art class. Buying your time makes you feel more inclined to enjoy it without distraction. What's more you meet plenty of like-minded people too.

Don't feel guilty about it, you need this time, and you deserve it!

Holiday Art Essentials Kit

As holiday season approaches, and indeed warmer weather for visiting the many historic places and sites we are lucky to have in the area, I thought it would be good to give you an art essentials list to make sure you have on you at all times to ensure you are ready for when creativity strikes!

A small pocket sized sketch book. An A6 size is best, and an all media cartridge paper around 150gsm in weight.

A water soluble black pen

A waterbrush (a hollow plastic-brush that is filled with water)

A small swatch of watercolour paper with pre-coloured palette of watercolour pencils in red, yellow, blue, brown, green, black. (scribble the colours on the paper which can then be used with the waterbrush to make paint).

Or a small watercolour palette.

A 2B pencil. This is a great all-round pencil for sketching and shading.

A putty eraser

A small glue stick in case you wish to stick in any memories of your travels to help with your art work, such as tickets, or leaves, and so on.

An empty mint travel tin - this is ideal for storing all of these materials in!

By keeping your materials to a minimum you will cut down on carrying a lot of weight in your pockets, and remember that these are just sketches to be used to create proper works of art when you get back home if so inclined.

Try to sketch every day when you are out - sitting in the café, resting under the shade of a tree there is inspiration to be found everywhere. Use a camera or smart phone to take photographs to help aid your memory, but from experience I know that sketching something remains in your memory for much longer than just taking a photograph.

With Christmas now only around the corner even though everyone is still feeling the pinch of the recession, many people are going back to traditional ideas and making their own wrapping paper, Christmas cards, gift tags and presents. Making your own things will make Christmas feel more special both to the giver and receiver. It shows more thought than just picking out any generic Christmas card and it will have a little of your personality involved too. The best thing is that it doesn't have to cost a lot either. It is amazing what you can do with a bit of coloured card, a marker pen and some paint! Reuse items and recycle bits and bobs you have knocking around the back of a drawer to create some festive and fun gifts. If you are an arty or crafty person, you probably have quite a few things lurking in cupboards but if not, it may be well worth keeping a box full of arty essentials under the bed for that last minute birthday card!

I would recommend that you always keep:

- A pack of 300gsm white card as this is an ideal weight to fold and turn into a card. If you cut it in half, you can make two cards out of the one sheet.
- A silver, gold and white gel pen as these add a little sparkle but also show up really well on dark coloured paper and card.
- A selection of colours of small tubes of acrylic paint - they paint on any surface
- A black fine tip marker pen
- A small selection of some coloured card and tissue paper
- Some PVA glue or Copydex
- Some off cuts of thin coloured ribbons
- A pair of good quality scissors

With all of these items you can make a card for any occasion. Remember that you don't have to be amazing at drawing as a few lines to give a suggestion of something are often more effective than an attempt at a highly detailed piece of work. Keep it simple and fun and you may just be surprised at the results.

My artistic skills took a different route recently when I was approached by one of my students to illustrate a book she was writing. It was something I was eager to do, especially when I found out what the book was about. My student was a holiday rep for Saga and her book was all about her experiences in that area. Illustrating something for someone is fun and interesting but is a totally different mind-set to say, landscape painting. When painting a scene, you choose your composition, take note of what colours you need and paint what you see and miss out the bits that you don't want to show (or in some cases can't paint well!). I am not making light of landscape painting here, just explaining the process. The techniques however can be tricky - what brushstrokes are needed to capture dappled sunlight or the texture of foliage and so on.

Illustration has a different purpose. One illustration may have to convey several ideas or thoughts in a simple, clear and easy to understand style. It may be that the whole story or several paragraphs of a story are depicted in just one illustration. Well, my student gave me my brief, a rough idea of each short story I was to illustrate and the kind of thing she would like to see. I set to work creating cartoon-like characters and produced fifteen illustrations and a front cover. And so 'To Hell And Back: With A Laugh Or Three Along The Way' was born (available on Amazon). I am very proud to have been asked to do this work. I love my job! My tips for illustration are to keep all the lines simple. Cut out any non-important background detail and only concentrate on the main details. In my instance, a light-hearted look was needed. To achieve this, I had to think of not only how to convey what was needed, but also how to convey it in a comical way and yet make it appropriate for the area of the book it was to be inserted in to.

My challenge is this: When reading a magazine or newspaper, try to capture a thought or an idea as simple illustration. It will get your creative juices flowing and certainly make you think!

Sometimes we have to look back to go forward in art. Having my art shop and classroom in at town with an amazing independent bookshop, it is wonderfully tempting to browse through the huge selection of their second-hand art books. When I get a quiet moment I peruse the many shelves heaving with weighty tomes of artists of years gone by and I find out so many ideas and techniques that I then buy the said books and add them to my own bookshelves! I think in art it is important to look back at the techniques and methods of the old Masters: these artists have been revered for centuries and are what artists aspire to be like, yet these methods are scarcely taught and in fact the only places they are taught are during art history lectures and often not to practising artists wanting to deepen their knowledge and understanding of art.

By looking back at these methods, I have learnt so much more than I ever did during my time at college studying art. I also got me thinking about a quote that I have printed out and hung as a banner in my classroom, "*That which we call failure is often that necessary struggle called learning*". My students occasionally say to me how frustrated they feel as their work sometimes doesn't look like it's getting better. There are a few things I say to help them see that they *are* improving even if a little slower than they had hoped. Firstly, the knowledge that is in our head (techniques we learn in an art class for example) can take several years to reach the end of our fingers in skilful rendering of that technique, so it may take a while before what is in your head gets rendered on paper. With that in mind, I ask my students to critique their work after they have finished their painting and ask themselves 'if I were to paint this again, what would I do differently?' and if they can see that a few techniques could be altered, or the use of colour or that the perspective isn't quite right, that shows great learning, even though it may not be obvious from the execution of the painting that is before them.

Also, I tell my students to keep their paintings in a file - even the ones they're not happy with. This way, when they are having a bad day, they can look back at their old paintings and see how far they have come and even though they may not be pleased with the latest painting, it is a lot better and shows more skill than their earlier works.

"I want to be more creative...but I don't know where to start" Does this sound familiar? Many people get the urge to do something arty and as soon as they grab their brush or pencil nothing happens. It is hard to channel creativity, a thought or idea, into a piece of art and many hit this stumbling block straight away and then give up. Here are a few pointers that will hopefully help give you ideas to harness your creativity when the urge strikes. These will help keep you creative, give you ideas and inspiration and help plug the gap in between bigger paintings and drawings.

Keep a sketchbook handy

Sketchbooks can come as small as a postcard in size so it is a great way for on-the-spot urges of creativity as it easily fits in a pocket or handbag

Have a designated arty area

I am not using the word 'studio' as most can't have a designated room for their art, but by having a table or bench, a conservatory or shed - anything where you can keep your art materials to hand is vital. If you have to clear a space, get your art materials ready and sort things out before you start, the urge will pass or you will have less time to do anything. By having an area with everything already set up, it will make it so much easier for you to just sit down and paint or draw.

Give yourself a theme

Having a daily, weekly or monthly theme is a great way to start. It could be anything - chairs, shoes, glass or anything you can think of. Draw the ones in your home, your place of work, or from photographs from different angles or in different styles or in different media.

Limit Yourself

Limit the amount of time you take. Challenge yourself to do a drawing or painting in only 5 minutes.

Limit the size you work. Try working in 2"x3" areas.

This helps stop the daunting feeling of filling a whole page with one drawing or painting.

Limit the colours you use. Try using 1, 2 or no more than 3 colours to create your work.

Vary the medium you use

We normally have all sorts put in drawers that we have been given for Christmas or birthday presents, so why not dust them off and use them? Pick an object and try it in as many different mediums as possible: pencil, charcoal, ink, acrylic, oil and so on.

Vary the techniques you use

Try out different painting or drawing methods such as cross hatching, pointillism, loose strokes, Impressionistic broad strokes, hyper-realistic or abstract.

Late last year I wrote my own art instruction book which is also available on Kindle. 'Simple Start: A beginner's guide to drawing and painting' is 100 pages of step-by-step art instruction and advice. It is based on my 17 years teaching and painting experience and all methods have been taught and used by me.

This got me thinking about which books a serious artist should have in their arsenal and I have come up with a few titles that I wouldn't be without. All will be available to order from your local bookshop or art shop:

'The Craftsman's Handbook' by Cennino D'Andrea Cennini and translated by Daniel V. Thompson, Jnr is wonderful for learning all of the painting and drawing techniques as used by the artists of the Renaissance. Great for artists and those that enjoy art history.

'The Artist's Handbook' by Pip Seymour is a bible for artists. It includes detailed information on art materials as well as some recipes for artists. It gives greater understanding of pigment, paint and how to use them effectively.

'Blue and Yellow Don't Make Green' by Michael Wilcox. This book is invaluable as it gives great insight into not only how we see colour, but how colours are represented in paint form and how to mix every colour you want every single time and from only a limited palette! Michael Wilcox also has more in depth books on *'Colour Harmony and Contrast'* and *'Glazing'*.

I often get asked that if you exhibit or sell paintings you have created that have been done in a workshop or from a step-by-step art book, is it acceptable or legal?

In short the answer is 'no'. However most of us art tutors understand that when you start out learning to paint or draw, our instruction will be the only reference point you have so are fairly lenient. It all boils down to two areas: permission and profit. By attending an art workshop or buying an art instruction book, you (may) have the artist's permission to reproduce their painting(s), as it is often taught in a step-by-step fashion. However, this does not mean you have their permission to reproduce their artwork to sell on or make a profit from. They are not the same thing.

In reproducing a painting that is being taught (whether it be in book form or in a class), you are being allowed to use the artist's ideas to learn techniques to become a foundation to your own style so that you can create and sell your own paintings from what has been taught. Most tutors will accept that when you start out that you will exhibit and sell one or two of your versions of their paintings, the problem can begin if they become your 'best sellers' and more versions are painted and are either repeatedly sold, or prints made from them as greetings cards or open print runs. It could also be a problem if you reproduce any painting from any art book, even that is a step-by-step book as the publisher and artist has exclusive rights to its reproduction.

Why could you get into trouble?

You are painting a picture that is basically someone else's originality - it is their composition, their colour choice, their entire own idea, and without careful consideration you could be in breach of copyright law. The same goes if you are using photographs you find on the internet or in books to copy from.

Here a few steps you can take to make sure that you are never in breach of copyright law.

Always where possible, only sell art work that is of your own originality and not copied. Use your own photographs to work from at all times.

Ask the owner of the original painting or photograph for permission to sell it. Permission will often be granted especially by your art tutor. However, do not make prints of them or turn them into greeting cards. Make sure it is a 'one-off'. But if working from an art book, you would need to contact the publisher for permission to reproduce the painting as they may have exclusive rights on that image.

Where possible, credit the originator of the painting on the back: 'inspired by a painting from...', or 'after...'. Check the front pages of the book you are using. Some

clearly say that 'no images may be reproduced in any form', others say 'a substantial part may not be reproduced'.

In short, it is much easier to only produce art work that is yours and only yours - painted by you from a photograph that you have taken. There are one or two websites available that allow artists to use the images posted on there, but always check the copyright before copying it.

Just a couple of quick reminders now that your central heating is getting turned up as the days are getting colder; factor in the dry warm air when you are painting in any medium. Your paint will dry faster on both your palette and surface because the air will be much warmer. Also, if you normally work in a summer house or conservatory be sure the store your paper elsewhere unless it is kept at a constant warmer temperature over winter months. This is because the paper (especially watercolour paper) is treated with a size on the surface to help the paint flow properly. The cool damp air can eat away at the size invisibly so that when you come to paint on it, it won't respond in the way that it normally does. It will leave areas of paint that get absorbed straight away meaning that you cannot create any techniques on it, instead of it allowing the paint to sit on the surface a little while to enable you to move it, lift or blend it.

Which Watercolour Paper Do I Use?

I often get customers coming in the shop wanting advice on what sort of paper to use when watercolour painting. Does it really matter? In short, yes! With watercolours, the paper is the most important thing to get right.

Avoid very cheap watercolour paper that can be purchased from some supermarkets and bargain book stores. The reason is simple - while it may be cheap to get you started, the results will put you off. Basically because the paper surface is not sized (prepared) and the paint and water will not react properly, in fact they will just get absorbed straight away as the paper behaves very much like blotting paper.

A good all-rounder is Bockingford watercolour paper made by St Cuthbert's Mill here in the UK. It is made from wood pulp so is cheaper than the cotton paper but is wonderful to use. A good weight of paper to use is 300gsm (140lb) as it will take a reasonable amount of water. However if you know you will be using a lot of water, perhaps get a heavier weight such as 200lb or 250lb.

This paper comes in three types:

Hot Pressed (HP) which is very smooth, so great for detailed work paintings of buildings, botanical art or pen and wash.

Cold Pressed (CP) often called 'NOT' as it is not smooth and not rough. This paper has a reasonable amount of texture and is a good standard paper to use.

Rough paper is exactly what it says! It has a rougher surface so great for landscapes and seascapes where you want to create texture.

I would advise any beginner to go for a 300gsm 'NOT' surface paper in either Bockingford, Langton, or Cotman as they are more affordable.

When did you last spring clean your art box?

Every artist is guilty of two things: buying more materials than they need, and hanging onto things that could be thrown away but 'may come in handy'. The thing to keep in mind is that paint has a shelf life of a maximum of 5 years, after that time it starts to break down or dry up. Summer is an ideal time for you to open up your art box (or boxes), rummage through your studio and check on all those odd bits and bobs and see if they have any life left in them. There is nothing worse than having your mind set on starting a new project and finding out that the item you want to use has either run out or dried up.

Here is a checklist of how to keep your art essentials lasting longer:

Keep all pens flat (after a while of being kept upright, the ink dries up at least from the top of the pen)

Store all paper in a room that is not prone to much temperature change, humidity or damp (if the paper gets damp it can damage the surface by breaking down the size). An airtight box is a good alternative.

Make sure all lids are tight. Clean out the paint from the threads of paint pots and tubes to ensure no air can get inside and dry out the paint.

Store brushes in a tight roll or upright in a box. This will stop the bristles getting bent out of shape.

Make sure all brushes are clean, not stiff and free of paint at the base of the ferule. If paint is allowed to lodge at the base of the ferule it will in time begin to splay the bristles apart.

Keep all loose pastels or charcoals in an air tight jar surrounded with rice or ground rice. This will stop the pastels rubbing their colour off from each other keeping them clean and as good as new.

Check your masking fluid. If you are a watercolourist, then you may have a jar of this in your box. If you don't use it often, it can turn into rubber. This process starts as soon as you open the jar for the first time. Keep checks on it so that it is still useable.

Store all pencils in a tin, tube, or separate box. Keeping your pencils loose in amongst your other art materials will break the point off and may even damage the graphite throughout the length of the pencil.

Is Tracing a Picture 'Cheating'?

My art teacher loathed tracing, he wouldn't allow it to be done and often said it was cheating, and that we were to learn how to 'do it properly'. I have heard this tale spoken many times over generations, in many different areas. Is it true though, does tracing something take away from the finished piece of art?

When I began lecturing in art history, one thing from my studies became clear; every great artist traced! Way back in the fifteenth century, art student of master Giotto, Cennino d'Andrea Cennini wrote about how all those being trained by the masters were encouraged to trace art work that they aspired to be like. It was felt that this approach helped them learn the shapes and forms much more quickly, enabling them to be able to draw it without tracing with ease later on. In his book 'The Craftsman's Handbook', Cennini goes on to explain in detail how to make the best quality tracing paper.

Since that time, many methods of tracing images have been invented and used widely by artists. We need to remember that artists make their living through selling art, not crating it, and they will use whatever means necessary to speed up the creating process so that work can be sold! When lenses were invented in the mid 1400s, it didn't take long for artists to begin adapting them to use in tracing their art work. Artists such as da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Caravaggio used them to aid their work. An extensive user of the portable Camera Obscura was Canaletto, all of his intricate Venetian scene were traced using one, and then traced onto canvas by his students for him to then paint and fill in.

Many other famous artists used concave mirrors (like the enlarging mirror on a bathroom mirror) to trace their work on to canvas, and more recently in terms of art history, artists such as David Hockney, and Andy Warhol used projectors to trace work onto their surface.

Personally in my painting classes, I allow my students to trace the subject matter if it is complicated or may cause them anxiety to try to draw it freehand. I feel that if they are there to learn how to paint a landscape in watercolour, then I would hate for them to spend so long trying to draw it first, that they run out of time to do the painting, which is what they actually want to learn. I don't however permit tracing in my drawing classes, as that is where I teach the techniques to help students learn how to draw to aid them in their artistic endeavours.

So is tracing cheating? Well if it's good enough for the great masters of art, then I certainly don't think it's wrong for us today!

Brush Care and Maintenance

One of the most expensive outlays for any artist is paintbrushes. By looking after them well you can extend your brush life for months and years longer. Here are a few tips to keep your brushes working longer:

Don't mix your brushes – keep your watercolour brushes, acrylic, and oil brushes separate.

Never leave them brush-end down in your water pot

Store your brushes bristle-end up in a jar, or if carrying them use a brush roll. This will stop the bristles from bending out of shape.

Always clean your brushes well after use (especially when using acrylics). Clean your brush in water (or turpentine if oil paint) and gently massage the base of the bristles to agitate any paint left in there.

Failure to do this will result in paint building up at the base of the bristles and will eventually cause the brush to open out and lose its point.

If you think a brush may be beyond repair, try using a product called 'The Masters' Brush Cleaner. It has been around for a very long time and will help clean off any oil or acrylic stains and any build up at the base of the bristles.



Ten Minutes a Day Keeps Creative Blocks at Bay

As with any hobby, the more you do, the more proficient you get, but with art it sometimes gets shelved as if time is limited you don't away want the hassle of getting the materials out, or people feel guilty about doing it as home because there are other things more important that need to be done. It takes roughly five years for something learned to become a habit, but that is five years of regular use. If you only do an hour of art each week, then it may take longer. If you add to what you already do each week, then it will take less time.

So here is my challenge for you this month:

Give yourself ten minutes every day to be arty. That's all, just ten minutes! When you're sitting down with a cup of tea, or waiting for a bus, or in the doctor's waiting room, do a quick sketch of something that is in front of you. It can be any object at all. Or if you are not in a position to have a pen or pencil and paper handy, then talk yourself through the idea of drawing or painting that object. What colours would you use to paint it? Do you need to mix colours? What order would you paint them in? What shape is it? Where is the light coming from?

By doing this every day, you will be creating a regular artistic line of communication with your brain so that everything you see will be a potential drawing and painting. This means that through constant use, it will become a habit and within seconds of looking at something you will know a simple way to draw it, and what colours you'd need to paint it.

Give it a go and you will see improvements in your art in no time.



The Benefits of Shopping locally

During the recent recession, art shops nationally went into decline as more savvy shoppers left their traditional bricks and mortar suppliers in favour of online shopping with the belief that the internet had all the benefits of retail shopping but from the comfort of your own home. Many shops downsized or closed altogether, yet lately traditional art materials shopping has seen a resurgence as more and more people recognise the benefits.

What are the benefits?

Firstly simply just being able to handle a product rather than view it on a screen has multiple benefits for even something as simple as purchasing basic white art paper. In a virtual world it is hard to feel thickness, texture, or see the exact colour, all of which can be discovered within seconds of being able to handle it.

Secondly, the benefits of being able to ask for advice on a product, or additional items to help your project can be found online, but may take a lot of searching, particularly if you do not know exactly what you're looking for. Many American names for things are very different to the names of items over in the UK and so can be a minefield. Your local art shop however may be able to answer these queries straight away as they delve into their own knowledge and experience.

Finally, the social benefits which I believe are the most important. Being an artist is often a solitary skill, but visiting your local art shop to talk about your latest project, ask for advice or tips on how to improve it, or even just to show them how pleased you are with the results of whatever materials you have purchased to complete it. Whilst there you may meet other artists and be able to share ideas and discuss future projects.

Art shops are like a communal hub for those interested in the arts, professional artists, and those that are just starting out. They are a space to buy materials, seek advice, show off your successes, and where you leave feeling valued and enthused. The earliest art shops were set up by the likes of Winsor&Newton, Rowney, and Reeves, some as early as 1783 and are names we are still familiar with today.

Notes on Artists

Where is this year going? As we hurtle towards winter (and cooler weather), our thoughts often move towards cosying up in front of an open fire with a warm drink in our hands, but in the art world the autumn/winter time is always a busy period. It's a time when art groups are at their peak with more people attending, artists prepare for Christmas exhibitions and Christmas craft fairs and art shops stock up with gift sets. A unique painting or hand crafted piece makes for a wonderful gift. It is something that nobody else will have, a one-off.

In the fast paced bargain driven retail culture that we seem to have created, no time or thought is given to purchasing original works of art by the general public. I was told by one person at one of my exhibitions many years ago "Why would I want to buy a small one of your paintings for £50, when I can have a large Monet print for £10?" She missed the point. When you buy an original piece of art work, you are buying a piece of the artist too. A lot of energy and effort goes into creating a painting but the artist's personality is also reflected in the paint. Compare the structured, ordered creations of Georges Seurat to the exciting, quick painted world of Monet. Both were fore runners of Impressionism, yet their personality has been captured in their brush strokes.

There is so much creative talent in our area with a whole spectrum of genre and media that I would thoroughly recommend visiting as many art galleries as you can. Visit the local potter's studio, or arts centre and you may just be surprised by the artistic talent in your area. You may even find something there to grace your home. Remember, in his home town of Giverny, Monet was just a local artist too!

I thought I would share with you the importance of supporting local artisans. Not only is it part of the 'buy local' ethos that is vital to help local economy, but also it means that you are helping to keep traditional methods alive. Whether it be a wood carving of a spoon or bowl, a calligraphy poem, a sculpture or painted work of art, there are so few skilled hands out there that our region is very fortunate to be keeping these vital things going by showcasing such local and important talent.

While it is useful, technology has overtaken these traditional skills to keep up with the demand that society dictates for faster turn around and mass production, but let us not forget that technology is only as good as the people that program such machines. Yes they may be accurate and affordable, but everyone can have one. Whereas with a bespoke hand crafted item you are sure to be the only one with that specific item anywhere in the world. By attending these various open studios and seeing artisans at work, look deeply and absorb the many skills, time and energy used to create just one item and it may make you realise why such things may be more expensive but are by far individually beautiful.

It cannot be denied that the recession has hit the art world badly and artists have been naturally concerned that people will have the same thirst for purchasing original, local art by unknown artists as they once did. Obviously, high end art is still as popular, but I am talking about the average village art group and how they struggle to sell their work. Many towns do not have gallery spaces, and those artists starting out can't always afford the commission if they do have one locally.

What are the options?

We are all familiar with the art shows at local churches and village halls which work in promoting the art group locally, but not always yielding high sales. There are now other ways. So many people are waking up to the idea of using Social Media to promote their art work. It is free and can reach thousands of people within hours and some artists locally sell their work as soon as they post it on *Facebook* or *Twitter*.

A student of mine recently handed me a newspaper clipping from a daily national. The article was entitled: *At last, the real shark is exposed*. It was all about artist Damien Hurst and how his work is starting to lose value. The writer of the article comments that Hurst is talentless and that in decades to come people will look at work such as his and wonder why in the 20th Century and beginning of the 21st Century, rubbish such as this was displayed as art. The article also went on to say how they felt that the Turner prize, named after one of the most influential and innovative British artists in our history, is constantly being given to "exhibits that are at best pathetic".

This got me thinking, and so here are my questions to you: what is art? Does it matter what we as individuals think of a piece of art as long as the one that purchased it is happy? Is the art world losing its credibility by allowing things that have never been classed as 'art' into their galleries? Ponder over these.

Throughout recent history, we have seen many different styles and movements in the art world, that maybe aren't my cup of tea, but does that mean that they aren't 'art'? It would be foolish of me to think that I am the authority of what art is, I can only say what my personal taste is and it would be unfair to label other artist's work as 'rubbish'. We have seen Impressionism, Cubism, Abstract, Fauvism, Installation Art, Dadaism, Bauhaus, Abstract Impressionism to name but a few of over one hundred different art styles and movements in the world since 1860 alone. What all of these do is make us think. Regardless of whether we like some, all or none of them, we have an opinion on them, we talk about them. It is our choice what art we buy. As long as we appreciate or buy it because we like it and not because we *think* we are supposed to like it because 'the artworld' says we must then it paves the way for artists to stay creative and further their individuality.

Which type of artist are you?

In February 2016, I was fortunate enough to launch the *People's Prize* at Banbury Museum's prestigious *Ironstone Art Awards*, which my shop sponsors. It's at exhibition preview evenings like this I'm reminded of the first public art exhibition which was almost 280 years ago back at the Foundling Hospital in London. Before that time, viewing art was considered something worthy of only patrons and collectors. The great artist William Hogarth donated his portrait painting of Foundling Hospital founder, Captain Coram to the public rooms of the hospital. He also encouraged other artists such as Joshua Reynolds to donate paintings to the public rooms. So popular was this first exhibition that more work was shown in more places. The public loved seeing and appreciating the skills of the artist, even queuing to see the paintings on display.

The thoughts of the everyday person concerning art is a great driving force for commercial artists and can shape what they create, tell them what trends to look for, and helps them see what sells. Public opinion is very important, and the choices they make on what art they like can influence galleries, art shops, and other artists alike.

There are two types of artist though, those that create for themselves and their own expression; and those that paint with purely selling in mind. Occasionally these cross over, but largely the latter artist type is more driven by public opinion and worldwide trends, whereas the former whilst perhaps mindful of public thoughts, are not necessarily swayed by them, and continues to create work from within and won't perhaps consider commission work. What both artist types have in common is the desire and need to create, and whilst the end goal may be different, the reason why they do it are the same.

Whenever you go to an exhibition as a viewer or purchaser go with an open mind. I remember the fear I felt when exhibited my work in my first one-man show when I was only fifteen. The excitement of seeing my work hanging their on walls other than in my bedroom was soon overshadowed by the arrival of visitors to the gallery. A few family and friends came, but largely it was the general public whom knew nothing about me, my age or my style. They only knew 'what they liked'. I recall shrinking back in horror as these people came inches away to each painting, their noses almost touching the canvas in close scrutiny. I felt like saying "Paintings are meant to be hung from a distance! Please don't look so closely."

I would advise all artists to anonymously attend their own exhibitions as you get to know what the public like (or don't like) so that your next exhibition can be tailored to suit their buying needs. Be warned though - you must be able to hear and accept harsh criticism. Listening to people in a gallery, you soon realise that everyone is an art critic and some comments you overhear can be hurtful, others uplifting and some very constructive. I did not reveal myself as the artist as I did not want to hear false flattery, but I wanted to know what these people *really* felt about my work.

These were all potential buyers and I needed to find out how I could change my work to enable me to sell more. After my month long exhibition, reading the scores of comments in the visitors book gave me a warm glow inside and seeing all the red 'sold' dots on the frames made me feel even happier! That exhibition I had sold 37 out of 40 paintings and I felt on top of the world, but I also to this day remember some of the comments made about my work that have helped me expand and change style and make sure that when I paint, I not only fulfil my need as an artist but that I make it commercial so that it will sell.

Does formal training make you a better artist? I ask this question because there is a huge divide. Great modern day artists like Scottish born Jack Vettriano are denied exhibition space by the UK's leading galleries such as the Tate, because the artist has had no formal training, yet these galleries display paintings (admittedly older) by Vincent Van Gogh who also had no formal training, but is historically popular. Will Vettriano have to wait another 70 years or more before his work becomes recognised as 'art'?

In asking this question to you, I am merely asking you to reflect on what makes an artist good. What do you look for when in a gallery or if you are choosing a piece of art to hang on your wall? Is it the degree or letters after the artist's name that appeals to you, or is it simply because you like their style or use of colour and so on?

Formal training may make an artist understand theory better and maybe understand the ideas behind techniques and open their eyes to other mediums, but does there have to be something there, a creative intuition, an innate skill already in that person to make it work? Could anyone be a best-selling artist from just doing a degree in fine art? Or can an untrained artist produce work that surpasses someone that has a degree in fine art and only a little talent?

Informal workshops, like I teach may not give you a qualification in art, but it will teach you new ideas, pass on techniques as old as art itself and also in the wider sense, heighten your appreciation of the world around you, make you see things in a different way and broaden your understanding of art and the history of art. This is the way many of the Masters were taught: an artist passing his knowledge on to a trainee as it were. It is my belief that anyone can learn to paint or draw. They may not be the next da Vinci but they will certainly be able to improve their skills and have a good basic level of understanding of art. And certainly, to improve you need to be taught and shown, but any training is beneficial. I do not believe however, that an artist with a degree is any better than a self-taught artist. It is the finished product that makes the difference.

Don't lose heart if your art career doesn't take off as quickly as you had hoped!

The recession severely affected the art world – art shops and artists alike struggled as people stopped buying materials or commissioning works of art. So many artists felt like giving up and the rise in people buying online also didn't help art retail many art shops closed their doors for good.

Artists too both now and through the centuries have been able to keep going because of those that have kept their faith in them and purchased paintings just to help them put food on the table. You may not become a household name, but with perseverance you may be able to make a comfortable living from your artwork. Working in the creative industry is not always easy, but do keep faith that it will work out – you are in a career that you enjoy which is worth its weight in gold and just keep working at it and it will happen, just not as quickly as you may have hoped.

Determination, hope and strength of will are key. Believing in yourself – that your paintings are worthy of a decent price is the most important thing. If you don't think you are good enough, potential customers won't either. Build up a good reputation – always meet deadlines and slowly, people will recommend you. The Impressionist Degas was such a perfectionist that he often failed to meet deadlines and never thought his work was good enough to sell. Because of this, it took a lot longer for him to build his career as an artist.

Back in early 2012, I never thought that I would be able to relocate to larger premises, have a separate classroom, more stock and a gallery space ever again, and especially not within two years. But through sheer hard work and faith in that what I have is worth holding on to, here I am in the new shop and although it has been a bumpy ride, I have learned so much and gained many new friends.⁷

Remember the saying: The darkest hour is just before dawn.

When someone criticises your art

I know all too well how scary it can be to sell your art work or to put on display with a view of selling it. People's comments can be harsh, hurtful and cruel, especially if they do not know you were in earshot! When I held my first large exhibition at the age of seventeen, I used to hang around the gallery and listen to the comments. After the initial shock at how scathing some of the words were, and the huge dent in my ego, I sat and thought about them, and read the comments left in the visitor's book which I always did. I noticed one thing: the comments in the visitor's book were full of support and encouragement (which you'd expect), which is a stark contrast of several visitor's real thoughts.

This realisation helped me get a more grounded view. It wasn't that my work was hated by everyone, far from it as was evident from the many handwritten note in the book, but the comments that I saw as hugely critical could be used to my advantage. Some comments were just personal opinion so I learned to acknowledge it and move on, but other comments were actually really constructive. These were the people that are prospective customers so it was good to know what they liked and didn't like. Even though it made me feel like giving up and hanging up my paintbrush initially, I used those comments and improved my work. I made sure I didn't just have the cheapest frames I could find to just get them on the wall, I looked at how I could make my work less 'twee' and more commercial. It ended up as a fun and exciting learning curve on the journey of being an artist!

Notes on the Seasons

As winter takes hold, and the autumn colours start to fade, your paint palette can also do with a rethink. I see many students bringing trolley loads of colours to my classes, and yet if you take time to understand the way we see colour, you can limit your palette to only 9 colours. Those colours will make every single colour you want, every time you want them. I will talk about this further in the New Year, but for now I will explain that by understanding how we see colour, there are times when you can restrict your palette to only four colours. To do this you must know your colours and colour mixing well.

For example, to paint a winter scene, you can limit your palette to Cerulean Blue, Ultramarine Blue, Yellow Ochre and Burnt Sienna. With those four, you can get a whole array of colours. If you are using watercolour, then they are the only colours you would need for a winter landscape. However if you are using oils or acrylics, you would need to add white. Through years of looking into the science of colour, I have discovered that various mixes of Ultramarine and Burnt Sienna will create a whole array of browns from Burnt Umber and Sepia through to greys such as Payne's Grey and a near Black. It will also make a very dark Prussian Blue. In fact this combination is one that is used often in every single painting I create. Cerulean Blue with Burnt Sienna will make cooler more green shades of grey such as Davy's Grey. Cerulean Blue with Yellow Ochre mixes to make teals and Turquoises. When you mix Ultramarine with Yellow Ochre it will make a dark wintry green like Khaki and Yellow Ochre, Burnt Sienna and Ultramarine mixes to make a fantastic tree bark colour.

So with just those four colours you will get: Cerulean Blue, Ultramarine, Prussian Blue, Yellow Ochre, Burnt Sienna, Burnt Umber, Sepia, Payne's Grey, Davy's Grey, Black and a tree bark colour. Use these in varying amount and you have an amazing wintry landscape! I will be showing a simple winter landscape using only those colours on my Art Surgery section opposite. Why is limiting your palette a good thing? Surely the more colours you use, the better the work will look?

Surely the more colours you use, the better the work will look? As you progress as an artist, you will soon see that by limiting your palette, you not only make life easier for yourself, but you get to know your colour mixing inside out and because every colour on your painting all come from a small number, there is a great harmonious quality in your work and it just seems to gel. In the new year, I will explain in detail which are the main colours every artist should own and exactly what mixes can be made from them.

With Autumn beginning to dig in its heels and the nights drawing in, it always makes me think of how skilled those monks were back on Lindisfarne Island. Creating such beautiful works of art to illustrate the gospels, in their dark cells lit by just candlelight. How they managed to create such intricacy and amazing colour from the glow of a candle always amazes me. These beautifully painted manuscripts were actually the first forms of 'art' as we know it. Previously, the inhabitants of our country had no need for pretty art as there was nowhere to display it - carved furniture and jewellery were the only things created.

As for books - well until the Christian missionaries came from Italy and Ireland, nobody could read or had need to. So by decorating the gospels and religious text with pictures, it became possible for the illiterate masses to understand the word of God. Then when there were enough Christians in an area, a church was built and on the walls of the church, religious scenes were painted. This was for anybody that couldn't understand the Latin sermons - they could just look around the walls of the church and still learn something. I often wonder that had the Christian missionaries not arrived, where art would be now or if it would exist in the same form. Something to ponder!

New Year. New you! No doubt you have spent the Festive season pondering about your achievements and where you are lacking as most of us do this time of year. "Starting from January, I'm going to..." Sound familiar? You may yearn to do something 'arty' but not know what you want to do or what you are capable of. Even if you are not sure which area of art you are interested in such as watercolours, acrylics, portraiture, art history or life drawing, the first thing you should consider is what sort of tuition you are after.

Deciding on what tutor style you need is often more important than the medium you choose to paint with. Some classes have a structured lesson with themes, subjects and where the tutor demonstrates every stage and as a student you can follow step-by-step and come away with a 'finished' piece. This style of tuition is more suited to total beginners or those wishing to learn specific techniques. Other tutors take a more relaxed approach allowing you to be creative and do your own thing but they are on hand should you need technical advice. This is great for those who know what they want to achieve but need a little guidance to achieve it. Finding out the tuition style before you commit to a course or workshop can save a lot of wasted time and disappointment. Do you need a tutor that gradually builds techniques to allow you to learn slowly or are you after a fast paced workshop with broad brush strokes and a more abstract approach? If you would feel uncomfortable in a group setting, why not look for tutors who provide private one to one tuition as is available at The Artery, Banbury. That way you can structure your learning to get exactly what you want out of art and learn techniques specific to your progress.

I would advise anybody that is considering taking an art lesson to meet with the tutor beforehand - does their personality appeal to you? You need to find a tutor's personality that you feel comfortable with which will make your learning so much more enjoyable. Has anybody you know recommended their classes? If so that is a good sign that you would enjoy it also. I have been teaching art for seventeen years this year and I know how important it is to make students feel comfortable in new surroundings when their last time holding a paintbrush may have resulted in deep emotional scars from their art teacher at school.

A tutor that can inspire, build confidence yet create a relaxed learning environment where you can feel able to make mistakes and learn new things is truly worth their weight in paint!

Winter: a time of inspiration

For centuries, artists have been inspired by the winter months. The low bright sunlight casting long shadow on snow covered landscapes have been captured in a variety of ways. The icy blue skies, or vivid sunsets, bare twisted branches and muted tones can capture the imagination. Monet was fascinated by the changing light and colours of the winter landscape, often painting the same scenes over again, such as the haystack(s). You can see how inspired he was by the multiple times he chose to paint the haystacks in the winter months. Look at the changing light, and shadows that he captured so beautifully.

Why not give yourself the challenge over the winter months to document the changes in the landscape near your home. It is a great way to develop regular sketchbook practice, and get to grips with simple resources, such a pencil, coloured graphite, water-soluble pen, or monochrome watercolour painting.



