

July 15, 2002 Issue

Creating an Impression(ism)



The lazy days of summer are here. Ed put the hammock up in the back yard between the cherry tree and the pink dogwood. Although I maintain my schedule of painting nearly every day, my break time lasts a little longer. The weather is so nice. I'll have a refreshing drink of something cool and soothing, as I lean back in the hammock and gaze up between leafy branches at the most perfect blue sky anywhere in the world. I am not just daydreaming, though. I am studying the way the sunlight makes patterns on the trunks of the trees. I am gathering into my memory banks the enticing shades of green, from deep velvety purple tinged shadows to vivid dancing golden green edges of new growth touched by the sunlight. In the distance the bees hum and the birds mutter back and forth in territorial disputes. Somewhere a dog whoops at passers-by and.....My gosh, did I nod off? Look at the time! Back to the easel. The remainder of this glorious summer day will have to be enjoyed from the cool, quiet confines of my studio.

Next Issue: It's Only Fair

I have always been a fan of the Impressionist movement. Even before I knew it had a name, I liked the way the splashes of color on canvas or paper, drew together and became a wonderful scene full of light and life. I studied the European style of Monet, Degas, Renoir, Cezanne and Cassatt. And (more recently) the Hudson River School: Cole, Irvine, Davis, Durand and Kensett. Rose, Wendt, Redmond and Bischoff, the California Impressionists of the early 20th century, now have my attention. How intriguing it is to see how much can be conveyed with so little (apparent) effort. It is fascinating to observe the luminous glow in the rich variety of yellows, reds, and oranges; the warmth in the shadows of blues, greens, purples and browns.

"The California Impressionists of the early 20th century now have my attention"

Impressionism is just that; an impression the artist sees and conveys to the viewer. The human mind does not normally conceive of all that the eye sees with exact clarity of everything in the viewing range. For example, you focus your sight on the tree in the field and the hills in the background soften to a gentle blur. When you look off to the mountain beyond, the meadow and stream before you become a jumble of pleasant colors. You receive an impression of the scene. The artist's job is to unify those two conditions to create a pleasing painting without burdening the viewer with all the extraneous minutiae. Hence, Impressionism. To relay the impression the artist believes you would see in an instant's glance, a frozen moment in time, is, as it were, the mission.

One of my first instructors was

William F. Reese. He taught me to paint loosely and with large brushfuls of paint. He was excited about color. I was excited about color. I learned to successfully integrate warm and cool areas, hard and soft edges, and lights and darks to meld into perfect harmony with mid-range values. This basic training has never failed me. When I start a painting, I arrange the composition keeping those standards in mind. Applying the paint, I strive to accent the darks with highlights at the center of interest, applying soft flows as well as crisp edges throughout the painting. When warm and cool are laid next to each other the colors sing! Color! Oh, the color! Bold and daring, deep and mysterious or vivid and glowing, color entices me.

"When warm and cool are laid next to each other the colors sing!"

The secret is to not get tied up with particulars. If I think the brush I am using is just the right size, I'll put it away and get one that is larger. That will force me to be more economical in my application of paint, eliminating unnecessary lines and detail. Another acknowledged aspect of an impressionist painting is the bold use of unexpected color. For example, a red barn may have blue and purple even green or gold in the shadows with pink and hot orange in the sunlight.

A sky may be yellow; a stream lavender. The leaves on a tree can be red or blue. When used in an artful way, the use of brilliant strong complementary colors can combine into a meaningful expression that is as valid as any "natural" interpretation.

Featured Artwork

Western Skies



"The lighthouse at Yaquina Head on the Oregon coast stands as a silent sentinel to the glorious beauty of a sunset in 'Western skies'."

On Sauvie Island



"Late afternoon shadows are spreading deeply onto fields and farm buildings on a lazy autumn day. This tranquil scene captures the flavor and mood on Sauvie Island in the Columbia River, near Portland, Oregon, U. S. A."

Guard Rooster



"Like a prize fighter dancing around the ring, this fellow lowers his head, puffs out his chest and struts stiff-legged to let the world know he is the ultimate 'guard rooster'."