

## Painting Process and Musings

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### Painting Process-

1. *Tone your panel (imprimatura)*-use Transparent Red Oxide for summer, warm grey is great otherwise (I use blue, yellow, red)
2. *Thumbnail sketches*
3. *Select composition and sketch on panel in vine charcoal*-simple and linear only, noting shadow shapes and cloud shapes
4. *Set up your palette, pre mix a number of colors you may need\**most important for sunset painting
5. *Begin painting*-paint in your **Darkest Dark** and general colors in middle ground and foreground, decide on your **lightest light**
6. *Pay attention to moving elements*-the light/clouds/sky, changing shadows, people, boats, cars, etc. And don't be afraid to keep adding color!

### Elaboration of process-

#### **1. Tone your panel (imprimatura)**

##### **Importance of Imprimatura:**

-Imprimatura is Italian for “first paint layer”

-it should be a transparent toned ground (this means NO WHITE), which you can achieve by putting a bit of paint on your surface, pouring some turps or other mineral spirit, and

rubbing this in with a rag or paper towel. Turpentine dries very fast, so this will usually be all set very quickly (in a matter of minutes).

-the reason that toning your canvas is a good idea is because the white of the canvas is so bright white, it will confuse how your eyes assess the values...resulting in your mixtures being too dark

-for most of my landscapes (accepting winter scenes) I use transparent red oxide as my imprimatura

-the warmth will make your painting glow, and light helps this color to shine through the layers, it adds a lot of vibrancy to your work

## **2. And 3 “Thumbnail sketches” and “Composition”**

### **Composition and Deciding what to paint:**

-First, it's most important to make sure you are painting something that interests you, and hold onto that, make sure it's still evident at the end of the painting

-Start out with some pencil sketches to help you figure out your cropping, this avoids a lot of problems later on. I also often take a few pictures on my phone or camera as well to get a better idea as to whether my view is working

-Aesthetically, it's a good idea to avoid placing anything directly in the center of the picture plane, because the viewer's eye will get stuck there and have a hard time moving about the picture

-Odd numbers are more visually appealing e.g. three lamp posts, not 4, or 5 trees, not 6. Even if there is an even number in life, use your “artistic license” and make the choice that will result in a better painting-that is the joy of painting from life, making observations, then choosing and adjusting!

-Pay close attention to the rhythms in nature-Observe well the shapes of the trees, the idiosyncrasies of the path...these asymmetries are what make a scene believable, real and relatable

-Avoid **Repetition**, nature does NOT repeat itself, so really study what is in front of you and make it as interesting as it is in life! Repetition happens very easily, so make sure to look back at your paintings at home, you can always fix these design issues afterwards

-Including a **Manmade element if possible**-Keep in mind; a lot of landscapes that you love and have seen at museums will have a human element in them-whether it be a figure, a boat, a building. By having a man-made element, the scene feels more relatable



*Marc Dalessio, 2019*

and inhabitable, like the viewer can walk right into it. Draw out anything that may move clearly, so you can reference the drawing if it does.

A picture can seem too serene and austere without it. Of course this does not always apply to every scene, but keep it in mind and look at your favorite paintings the next time you go to a museum.

-Avoid anything leading your eye directly to the corners, this will lead you right out of the picture plane instead of around it.

### **Horizon-**

-Place your horizon anywhere from the middle of the picture plane and downwards. You will be able to convey depth better, and the vastness of the outdoors by having more sky in your picture/a lower horizon

-It looks amateur in many cases to have your horizon in the upper third. Again, observe paintings in museums and see examples of this- there are exceptions of course, such as this: Compton has made the path and enormity of the mountains the focus, thus taking up the entire composition.

-if you feel like you want a lot of foreground, but can't fit your sky, perhaps try working larger

-think about what your focus is...if the clouds are your main interest, make sure to keep that as your intention. In the painting above, the beautiful light falling on the mountain is the focus, and the whole painting is designed to lead you to it...from the path, to the

overall compression of values in the rest of the picture, everything is highlighting where the artist wants your eye to go



*MK Euell-Tramanto I, 2017*

#### 4. “Set up your palette” (+ some tried and true mixtures)

##### **Our Palette:**

##### **How we should place them, from left to right (dark to light)**

Ultramarine blue, cerulean blue, aliz. Crimson, cad red, cad red vermilion/cad orange, yellow ochre, cad yellow, titanium white

Our medium-Turpentine (quick drying paint thinner)

\*for sunset, it can be helpful to bring some wildcard colors, like cobalt blue, pre mixed purples (like dioxazine), etc. because sometimes it can be hard to get the vibrancy of sunsets with our standard palette)

Here are some consistent, vibrant color mixtures that I see and use almost every time I go out to paint:

**Cad. Yellow + ultramarine** = *true green* (evergreens, bushes)

**Cad. Yellow + cerulean** = *bright green* (beach grass, spring leaves on a tree)

**Ultramarine + alizarin + cad. Yellow** = *darkest dark* (This is a much more satisfying and richer color than using black! You don't need black for landscape painting because there is no black in nature)

**Titanium white + yellow ochre + cad. Red** = *warm tan* (sand, light dirt)

**Ultramarine + alizarin + titanium white** = *purple* (shadows on sand, shadows on roads, sidewalks etc)

**Cad. red + white** = *pink*

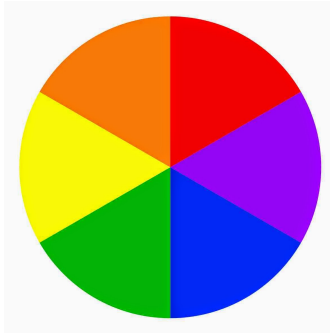
**Cad. Red + white + cad yellow** = *orange-y pink*

**Cad. Orange + White** = *light salmon*

-When we are about to mix color for an area, give that area a name in your mind-as in, “that shadow overall seems very purple/blue”. Start by making a purple/blue and then

adding white if you need to lighten. We don't want to start with white and try to add the blue and red, it will be too washed out.

\*\*\*\*Remember **color theory**- complementary colors allow for cooling down colors that may be too chromatic and saturated



If something is too *green*, add *red*  
Too *blue*, add *orange*  
Too *purple*, add *yellow*

-also, remember, once your entire panel is covered in wet paint, it will be very difficult to make anything brighter or darker. If you realize that you put down a color mixture that is incorrect, use your palette knife and scrape it off! It will be so much easier to improve that area once you aren't battling a color that is wrong.

### **SKY:**

On a blue-sky day, this is a pretty consistent, very convincing formula:

**Top-Highest part of sky:** Ultramarine and Titanium White

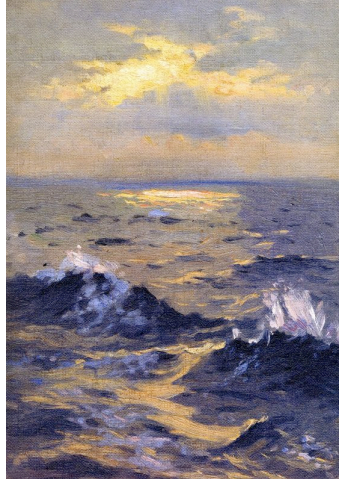
**Middle:** Ultramarine, white, tiny bit of cerulean

**Above the Horizon:** tiny bit of ultramarine, white, cerulean and maybe touch of cad. Red depending

-the highest part of the sky is always a true blue, and as you get towards the horizon, the atmospheric perspective, and pollution add a warm haziness just above the tree line

-this formula gives a very realistic gradation for sunny days

In the painting below, the light on the water was *designed* to lead the viewers eye towards the dramatic sky, it was not accidental or exactly like that in life. This was a clear choice made by the artist.



*J.S. Sargent*

## 5. “Begin Painting”

### Getting Started:

-The process with sunsets is a little different than a regular landscape, because it is changing so fast. We need to be flexible to work all over the panel as things are shifting quickly. (Painting outdoors during the day, I would usually work from the distance to foreground).

-I **ALWAYS** sketch out my scene in vine charcoal, including my cloud designs-if there are clouds. I find this easier to adjust then beginning in paint, allows for a more accurate and specific drawing

-I leave my cloud shapes blank/empty and work around them, painting my sky

-Paint anything that may move **FIRST**- e.g. clouds, a boat, a car, an animal, a figure

-mix with a palette knife-**DO NOT** brush mix- so that you have a nice little pile of paint, otherwise your brush will soak up your entire mixture, and then you wont be painting, you'll be scrubbing.

-it's crucial to have clean colors-use a clean/fresh brush for every color mixture! Don't be lazy and worry about how many dirty brushes you are going to have at the end, this is so important!

-also remember to use a brush size that is appropriate for the area you are painting. If you are working on the sky, use a big brush, because it's a big area that we want to approach loosely

-Mass in the darkest dark, and the general sky color, and the middle ground and foreground, until my canvas is covered. Try to ask yourself questions about color and

value as you go, try to be as accurate as possible on the first application, not ‘I can fix it later’-it makes more work!

-I repeatedly ask myself “*Is this color too light or too dark?*”, I decide, and then ask myself “*Is this color too warm or too cool?*”. Those are the fundamental questions to get your painting to look like the scene before you.



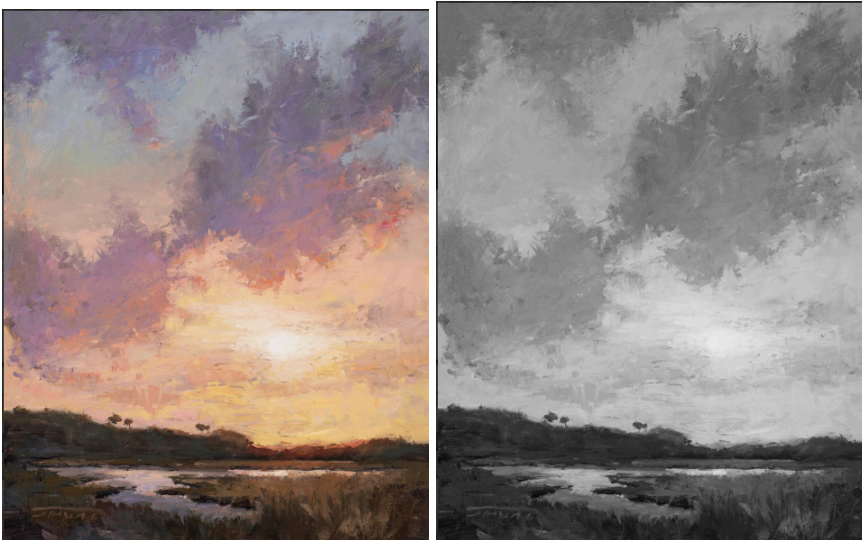
**Value scale, 7 values from lightest light to darkest dark**

## VALUE

-Value is the lightness or darkness of a color/hue

The human eye is drawn to light elements against dark elements. Great paintings have a play of light against dark. Squinting down helps you to see those relationships more clearly, so that you are less distracted by color and detail

while accurate colors are great, *accurate value relationships are far more important* (compare how dark one thing is to the next)



*Jane Hunt 2016*

\*we can see very clearly in the image above, that while the use of color is beautiful, this painting also holds up well in black and white because there was an emphasis on accurate VALUE RELATIONSHIPS. This is one of the key factors that separate great paintings from ok/bad paintings!

-establish in your head right away what your **brightest bright** is- maybe the clouds, the reflection on the water, etc. Push this brightness, and reserve pure white for small areas/ accents (or more often than not, you may not use it at all!) We don't want to overuse pure white, it will wash out the painting and make the bright white less effective if it is everywhere

-next decide on your **darkest dark**- if there are trees, it will often be the shadows in the trees, maybe it is the shadow under an overturned boat, etc. Compress the darkest dark i.e. make it as dark as you can!

-evaluate the rest of the painting with these relationships in mind. Since you have **compressed** your lights and darks (by observing while squinting and thus, simplifying), we will have more room in the middle of our value range for half tones.

### **GENERAL PAINTING TIPS**

1. **BACK UP!** Move back often to give yourself an idea of the 'visual impression' of what you are working on. This will help you simplify and also, if you notice anything jumping out at you and grasping your attention, work on correcting it- this is often only evident from a distance
2. **SQUINT** constantly!! For the first few hours of a painting, or your first pass on a painting, you need to squint so that you are looking through your eyelashes. This will help you simplify-don't work on all the color and value variations-paint the relationship that is evident when you squint!
3. **Stand ATLEAST an arms length away from your panel/canvas! You want to be viewing the scene and your painting at the same time.**
4. **If something does not make sense to you visually, do not include it!** If you are looking at scene and there is a strange fence, tarp, vehicle etc. that is confusing to you, you are better off not including it-because you can't make sense of it, you won't be able to explain it in your painting, and then your viewer won't understand it either.
5. **Avoid having sunlight directly hitting your canvas/panel.** This is greatly confusing to our eyes as we begin to assess color and value. My advice is to be parallel to the scene you wish to paint, and once the drawing is set, turn your easel and panel away from the direct sunlight, and turn to observe the scene. Alternatively, if it is not too windy, it is great to use a plain air umbrella attached to your easel. Mine is called Easy L, by Artwork Essentials, and I highly recommend it.
6. **Don't get complacent.** One of the hardest things with painting in general is to not be lazy...get paint when you need more, get a paper towel if you need to wipe something up, clean your brushes...these little things make a big difference-you just have to stop and do them. Your painting will only be as organized as your palette and brushes! They are an extension of your mind..and like anything, it takes practice.