

BEGINNING LIFE PAINTING

"Sometimes I think beauty is the bravest thing on earth. It goes on Day after day, in spite of all the ugliness men bring to it."

-Laurens van der Post (The Hunter and the Whale, Chapter 13)

COURSE DESCRIPTION: In your growth as an artist it is important that you develop an array of skills and abilities so that you may choose the medium(s) or techniques which are most suited to your individual expression. This beginning level life painting course will introduce you to painting from the figure in an intensive traditional studio format. There will be demonstrations of specific techniques and critiques of work in progress and completed paintings. Because of the small size of the class there will be much time for individual instruction.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: Painting from the figure can be done in a variety of techniques. One particular style is not necessarily better than another. You will learn basic ideas of planar construction of the figure through simplified expressions of light on form. Since it is important to understand how the human form functions in relation to its surroundings attention will place the figure in space. As the course progresses you will learn more advanced techniques for figurative representation. After about two thirds of the semester you will have been exposed to a number of different ways of painting from life. At that time we will explore interpretative and expressive forms of figurative painting.

REQUIREMENTS: You should have taken all prerequisites for this course or had prior consent from the instructor. You are expected to come to class prepared to work with all the necessary materials required for that day. All home work should be completed by the due dates as no late work will be excepted. Please come to class on time and do not leave early, your time spent in class is very important.

GRADING: Periodically we will have group critiques, at that time I will be assessing your progress and making note of your grade. You may check with me at any time to find out how you are doing. Your grade is based on your individual performance, you will not be judged interrelation to others. I am primarily concerned with your personal progress and you will be evaluated and graded as such. Late arrival and absence from class will adversely affect your grade (see below).

ATTENDANCE: Unless you have a legitimate excuse you are required to attend all classes. Because we meet only once a week one unexcused absence will seriously affect your grade. If you have three unexcused absences you will fail this course.

MATERIALS: The bookstore has some of the items that you will need for this course but I strongly suggest that you contact the vendors on the attached list to order supplies at greatly reduced prices. Also there are some things which the bookstore unfortunately cannot acquire. Please note that you will be replenishing many of your supplies throughout the semester. Also but paint of decent quality such as Art Graham, Rembrandt, Williamsburg (I suggest them over all others) or Le Franc Bourgeois.

OIL UNDER-PAINTING TECHNIQUES:

Grounds for Oil Under-painting

Either an oil ground on linen or a gesso ground on hardboard provides a good ground for under-painting. Gesso on canvas is acceptable.

A gesso panel should be sized using shellac thinned with alcohol to a watery consistency. A size consisting of half damar varnish and half turpentine may also be used, followed by a light scrubbing with absorbent cotton moistened with turpentine. Keep in mind that a good sizing should penetrate and seal the surface and not create an actual coating of material.

Under-painting Techniques

The under-painting begins with a drawing or tracing in charcoal or pencil. The line of a charcoal drawing may require fixing with superimposed lines in waterproof ink or thin oil paint. Pencil lines should not be heavily built up since oil paint does not adhere well to them and they may also show through in time.

There are many methods that can be used in developing a successful under-painting. The following section outlines some principle ones and even these may be interpreted for individual use.

According to one method, the drawing is covered evenly with a half-tone gray glaze, applied not too wet. If the under-painting is in tones of black & white, yellow ochre may be added to warm the tonalities, even going as far as a sandstone color if desired. This basic glaze, called Imprimatura, may be left slightly streaky, patchy or stippled. The glaze may be semi-opaque or made denser by repeated applications. In any case, the drawing beneath should remain visible.

On this middle tone of gray, white modeling is added to establish the lights and darker gray (not black) is added to lay in the shadows. The paint should not be watery thin: add turpentine only as needed and spread the paint evenly into a thin but well-bodied layer of pigment.

In a colored monochrome, the shades are represented by the dominant pigment. Dark areas may be deepened with a touch of black, but only very little.

Using another method, modeling is developed directly over the drawing in an all prima method (but thinly applied) rather than from a middle-tone glaze. Even still, some workers unify the final result with an imprimatura (all-over glaze) prior to the overpainting. This imprimatura may be related to the color of the under-painting, or it may introduce a contrasting color on which to continue. In either case, the stronger the color of the imprimatura, the stronger its harmonizing effect on the painting as a whole.

In still another method, the monochrome (either neutral or colored) is glazed with an imprimatura of white. The white pigment should be carefully and equally distributed to create an even grayness. Over darker areas of the under-painting, this light glaze creates a cool, bluish effect. By contrast, lighter areas assume a warmth and an activity of color contrast is established at a very fundamental level of the painting. This generally cool glaze is allowed to dry and is superimposed by a warm brown or gray-brown glaze. This again is very thin and simply warm and neutralizes the cool grayness. When applied with care (and some experience), the previous warm-cool relationships remain, although of a different kind, and provide a rich source of contrast and harmony within the painting to be carried out.

Choosing an Under-painting Color

A black & white under-painting provides a neutral basis for all colors while a colored monochrome will decidedly influence the final coloration of the painting in one way or another. A colored monochrome may contribute to the final effect in one of two ways: as a color related to those in the final work or as a color that exploits the interplay of contrasts by means of complimentary relations. An example of the later would be a cool or greenish under-painting for flesh tones, which are generally warm. The result of this combination is a dynamic yet subtle effect of color that is unique to oil glazing.

Italian painters of the Early Renaissance, such as Giotto, used what has been called a Verdaccio, an under-painting in a muted greenish-gray tonality to contrast with the warmer flesh tones in their figures and portraits. This color may be achieved by mixing yellow ochre with a touch of ivory black and a little white. A bit of light red or venetian red may be added as well. The Verdaccio is not a specific color but a generally greenish tone.

Leonardo utilized a yellowish ground with an under-painting that had a purple tint. This was intended to offset the yellowing effects of the uppermost layers of oil. By opposing the colors of one layer to the next, he hoped to neutralize the anticipated effects of aging common to oil paint at that time.

Other examples of a contrasting under-painting are Titian's light orange-brown beneath a blue sky (other artists have used a cream color for this purpose) and the gray under-painting for flesh tones used by Rubens and Vandyck.

It is known that Vermeer used a sandy, ochre colored under-painting, and a wide range of browns was utilized by Rembrandt and other Dutch Masters of the 17th Century.

Ingress' work is typical of other French artists of his time in its Venetian Red under-painting, a tone that relates to the warmth of flesh tones rather than contrasting with them in the manner of the early

Italian painters.

To add to the possibilities, it is also feasible to under-paint major local areas of a composition with colors best suited for that particular area. An example would be preparing flesh tones with a cool gray while under-painting a room interior with a warmer tone. To unify the differing areas, a thin imprimatura of a neutral gray will harmonize the two (or more) while retaining the particular character of each.

It can be easily seen that the variation and adjustments are numerous and that the possibilities for personal interpretation and use of these techniques are great once a basic technical ability has been achieved.

Additional Notes on Under-painting

It is important to point out that no single method of under-painting and glazing technique has been generally practiced. In addition to historical variations, each artist has his or her own preferences and methods as well as specific solutions to unique problems in an individual work. Nevertheless, broad methods and procedures do exist and certain guidelines must be followed to achieve a successful result.

Unlike a direct ("alla prima") oil painting in which form and color are developed simultaneously throughout, indirect oil techniques develop the form to a high degree in a limited tone under-painting followed by the addition of colors in a separate application of colored veils or glazes. A major achievement in mastering the indirect technique is learning to think in terms of the under-painting and its contribution to the completed work. This is a mental framework that is gained mostly by experience and personal preference.

The following notes are not specific instructions but general suggestions that you may find helpful.

1. The under-painting should not attempt to achieve the final color effect of the painting. If it approaches a full color treatment, then the final stages are only mechanical repetition and the integrated element they are intended to be.
2. Generally speaking, the forms and composition should be set down as precisely as possible in the under-painting. Glazes tend to soften the edges of forms and an under-painting that is too unresolved in terms of form will become weak and indistinct.
3. Because of the structural character of the under-painting as a foundation for forms, changes in composition should be avoided. Major compositional decisions should be reached in preparatory drawings.
4. Because the glazes will tend to obscure subtleties, delicate half-tones and fine nuances should be reserved for the overpainting. Under-painting forms should be clear and precise but fundamental in terms of planes and light.
5. The under-painting should be generally light in key and should not include heavy darks. This insures the luminosity that the white ground is meant to offer and prevents deep shadows from going dead. Since oil painting continues to become clearer over many years, a too dark ground will become overly apparent and darken the picture over the course of time.
6. The under-painting should conform to guidelines effecting permanence. Colors of high oil absorption should not be used full strength under colors of lower oil absorption (to learn the relative oil absorption or oil index of various colors, refer to The Artist's Handbook by Ralph Mayer). Painting or glazing mediums should not be used in the under-painting. Thin colors judiciously with turpentine or mineral spirits.

Glazes are thin, transparent or semi-transparent layers of pigment applied over dried oil, tempera or acrylic under-paintings. Although glazes are used in under-painting thinned only with turpentine or mineral spirits, a traditional glaze as used in the overpainting is a mixture of tube oil color with a glazing medium.

The following is a recipe that I use for my medium:

Turpentine	7 parts
Stand Oil	5 parts
Damar Varnish	1 part

Here some other commonly used recipes:

Stand Oil	1 oz.
Damar Varnish (5 lb. cut)	1 oz.
Turpentine	5 oz.
Cobalt Drier	5-15 drops

(The cobalt Drier should be added with care to include as little as possible to achieve the desired drying effect. Too much drier imparts excess brittleness to the dried paint film and promotes cracking.)

Stand Oil	4 parts
Damar Varnish (5 lb. cut)	9 parts
Turpentine	9 parts
Venice Turpentine	9 parts

(Because of its higher proportion of resin, damar varnish, this medium provides a less oily handling and a glossier, harder finish.)

Another formula includes sun-thickened linseed oil which is a rapid drier in relation to stand oil's slow drying characteristics.

Sun-Thickened Linseed Oil	2 parts
Damar Varnish (5 lb. cut)	4 parts
Turpentine	4 parts
Venice Turpentine	1 part

All of the above recipes are subject to slight variations either for the purposes of preferred handling characteristics or for the relative oiliness of the paint layer to the ones beneath it. Some artists add more oil a drop at a time to insure greater flexibility of upper layers of paint. The amount of oiliness contributed by the glazing medium can also be controlled by using it sparingly at first and gradually more as the work progresses.

Working Suggestions

1. A glaze is not intended to be a watery or varnish-thin fluid of thinly tinted pigment. The glass effect attained through the application of semi-fluid or even soft paste consistency of paint is carefully spread on the surface into a very thin but well-pigmented layer of paint. Surface manipulations are controlled with brushes, fingers, rags, and "daubers" (a good dauber can be made from cheese cloth folded neatly into a pad)> It's said that Turner used balls of white bread for this purpose.
2. Early attempts tend to overdo the use of glazing medium with a result that is anemic in color effect and glassy in texture. The glazing medium assists in paint handling but a good glaze is a matter of skill in application and manipulation. As usual, the best teacher here is experience.
3. For the sake of convenience, a glaze should dry within a relatively short time. Overnight is considered desirable and one or two days the longest it should take to set up. Drying is controlled by the amount of oil in the medium (less dries more quickly), the type of oil in the medium (sun-thickened dries faster than stand oil), and the amount of drier in the medium (more drier hastens the drying effect). In lower layers where the addition of medium should be minimal if used at all, the turpentine or mineral spirits helps to spread a thin paint film that dries more rapidly (the turpentine is not a drier in itself; it evaporates out of the paint film).
4. Deciding when to over-paint a previous layer is a matter of personal preference and technique. Usually the previous layer should be dry to the touch if it is not meant to be picked up. Glazing can proceed over a partially dry layer, the result being that the color underneath will mix partially with the glaze. It is also possible to glaze a new color into one that is still wet.
5. If areas are allowed to dry completely and turn slightly mat (called "sinking in"), their gloss can be restored when work is resumed by means of retouch varnish. The importance of this is in evening out the reflective qualities of the freshly applied colors with the dry ones so that accurate color decisions may be made. Retouch varnish sold in spray cans is convenient for this purpose since the spray will not disrupt the surface. Do not be tempted to use the glaze medium for this purpose since it would introduce an essence of oil un-tempered by pigment.

6. The key to color richness and effect in oil glazing is transparency, the quality of light within

the colors. To insure this characteristic, the glazing color should be darker than the color over which it is applied.

Glazing a light color over one that is darker is a matter of some experience. Too much of it destroys the effect of the luminosity of the painting in general and creates an unpleasant smoky or clouded effect. Handled well, a light color over a darker creates a uniquely cool color quality like the opalescence of pearl or the inner coolness of marble. Care must be taken that the light tone be closely valued to the darker tone beneath.

7. A painting that employs glazes is richest when it is not mechanically perfect in the sense of one consistent and clear glaze overlaying another. The effect is strongest when transparent areas interplay with semi-transparencies and even opaque passages in the lightest areas. The use of glazes should be handled freely to benefit the expression of forms and color and not suppress them in a mechanical and unfeeling application.

WEEK ONE/ INTRODUCTION/VALUE STUDIES

DAY I:

1. Course introduction. Review of syllabus. Discussion of materials and suppliers for course. ALL SUPPLIES MUST BE PURCHASED BY THE THIRD WEEK OF CLASS! Expectations and goals. Questions.

2. Demo of value painting of figure.

3. Initial paintings from the model. Begin black and white acrylic on gessoed BFK with single light source planner value studies from the model. Focus on, composition, control of value and planner structure, activate the page. Be general not specific.

4. At end of session introduce the self image diptych project. Students should begin now to work out drawings for life size self portrait in some kind of realistic space. The self image should speak in either a symbolic, iconic or indexical (handout on terms) way about personal issues. Students should begin now to look at the works of Frida Kahlo, (early) Lucian Freud, Cindy Sherman, Beckman etc. Two self portraits will be done one very traditional realistic and another same size contrasting it in terms of formal structure and conceptual presentation, i.e. non-traditional medium, abstraction, etc.

Homework:

A) Begin to think about self image diptych

WEEK TWO/

DAY II: VALUE STUDY CONTINUED

1. More of the black and white acrylic paintings on gessoed paper.

2. Mid way critique of work.

3. Continue.

4. Bring gessoed paper (BFK 3 shts. 24x30) pthalo blue, quinacradone red, cadmium lemon yellow, and white oil paints to next class, and all painting supplies (brushes etc.).

Homework:

A) Think about those self images

WEEK THREE/BI-CHROMATIC COLOR

DAY III:

1. Bi-chromatic painting is the process of using two colors and white to make a painting of the figure. Talk briefly absolute color value and intensity vs. de-saturation.

2. Demo using cad. lemon yellow and pthalo blue.

3. Students paint.

Homework:

A) Work on finalizing self image studies.

WEEK FOUR/

Day IV: BI-CHROMATIC CONTINUED

1. Students continue to do the bi-chromatic paintings. now using quinacradone red and pthalo blue, quin. red and cad. lemon yellow, pthalo blue and cad. lemon yellow.

2. Look at students ideas for self image diptych

Homework:

A) 1 11x15 bi-chromatic self portrait (color pair of your choice) on gessoed paper.

B) Prepare 8 15x22 sheets of BFK, gesso (2-3 coats light sanding in between) then tone with each of the following colors (under painting wash): venetian red (2), pthalo green (2), quin. red (2), leave two white.

C) Make medium (see handout) for next class.

WEEK FIVE/THE FLESH TONES ON COLORED GROUNDS

DAY V:

1. General information on mixing Caucasian flesh tones. Establishing base color to mix “up” and “down” from. How to alter these colors. Deep shadows and extreme lights. Why highlights are not white. Remember cool dark and warm light. The rule of transparent darks and opaque lights.

2. The first figure painting demo (2hrs).
3. Student do a quickie first one on white ground

Homework:

- A) Get self image drawn on canvas bring to next class
- B) Prepare written statement of personal, psychological, social (content) communicative objective in the image (1-2 pages typed).

WEEK SIX/

DAY VI: TRADITIONAL FLESH TONES CONTINUED

1. Students continue to paint flesh tones on various colored grounds.
2. Mid point critique of flesh tone paintings.
3. While students paint look at self image diptychs to scout out problems.
4. Talk about where (how) to begin on self images.

Homework:

- A) Start self images. They should be developed beyond a under painting to a first level.

WEEK SEVEN/ LAST WEEK OF FLESH TONES-WHAT IS A “PICTURE”?

DAY VII:

1. Students work on flesh tone paintings for two thirds of class.
2. Examine self image diptychs while they paint and talk individually.
3. Group critique of flesh tone paintings.
4. Introduce ideas about how a painting does not have to use just paint. Mixed media, new/alternate surface, non-traditional medium.

Homework:

- A) Work on self image diptychs these will be due in two weeks.
- B) Go to the hardware store and or junk yard and purchase a bunch of materials that you would not think to make a painting from. i.e., asphalt, nails, plaster, a screen door (as a surface) and so forth.
- C) When you get home contemplate the pile of stuff (make sure you got enough) and try to visualize how you would make a “painting” with it. Don’t act upon any of your ideas only write the down for class.

WEEK EIGHT/ A BREAK WITH TRADITION

DAY VIII:

1. Brief discussion of the materials brought in and how they can be used. Get students to talk about what they wrote in their sketch books.
2. Begin the “break point” paintings working from the model.
3. Suggest that some of the new methods discovered by each student can be incorporated in their self images.

Homework:

- A) Work on self image diptychs
- B) Put some time in on the “break point” paintings.

WEEK NINE/ VIDEO AS PAINTING

1. Work on the “ break point” paintings.
2. Critique on in progress “break points.”
3. Introduce idea of video as alternate form of figurative image. Vitto Asconchi and others.

What is a painting? Is any “flat” image a pictorial image?

Problem-

Make a self portrait showing what you like about yourself and what you dislike about yourself with out recognizable words using only your body as symbol, index and icon and unintelligible sounds.

Homework:

- A) Finish self image diptychs.
- B) Write down (type) concise descriptive idea for a 2-3 minute self portrait video.

- C) Finish self image diptych
- D) Finish "break point"

WEEK TEN/ GENDER TRANSFER PORTRAIT

DAY IX:

1. Critique on self image.
2. Discussion of video "self portrait" project. Technical information on how to use camera.
3. Introduction of project problem-

The idea is to depict yourself as the opposite gender in a portrait. Waist up or full figure but larger than life in over all size. You must somehow show what you think the difference in your present gender would be in terms of emotional, psychological, social or spiritual characteristics that would be represented by a gender switch. Don't be crass or obvious.

4. Begin in class figure painting on stretched canvas (minimum size 38x50) your choice of color or stylistic approach (2_ hours to work).

Homework:

- A) Work on videos
- B) Develop ideas for "gender transfer portrait."

WEEK ELEVEN/ WORK DAY

DAY X:

1. Work on large scale figurative painting (2 hours).
2. Work on "gender" portraits (2_ hours).

Homework:

- A) Videos.
- B) Gender portraits.

WEEK TWELVE/ IMAGINATION THE FIGURE AND NARRATIVE EXPRESSIONISM

DAY XI:

1. Discussion of symbolist, German expressionist, neo- expressionist and contemporary expressive figurative painters (Gauguin, Blau Rider, Baslitz, Fischel etc.,). Why they came about what they are trying to do. How they manipulate the traditional picture plane and other formal traditions in order to transmit a strong statement, idea, or feeling
2. Introduce the final project problem.-

Without using any models photos or other fixed reference for the following image develop a complex large scale (_- life size) expressive narrative image. The content should be either social, political, or personal revelation. the major medium used must be paint but you may mix and introduce any other traditional and non traditional mediums you like, but it must remain sound structurally and archival.

3. Finish large scale figure paintings.

Homework:

- A) develop idea for expressive narratives type a statement up about your conceptual objectives.
- B) Finish gender portrait.
- C) Continue on videos.

WEEK THIRTEEN/ WORK TIME AND CRITIQUES

DAY XII:

1. Critique on gender portraits.
2. In Class work on expressive narratives. Brief group critique

Homework:

- A) Work on expressive narratives.
- B) Finish videos.

WEEK FOURTEEN/ PORTRAIT DEMO AND WORK SESSION

DAY XIII:

1. Portrait demo.
2. Students have the option to do portrait or wok on their expressive narratives

Homework:

- A) Work on expressive narrative painting.

WEEK FIFTEEN/ WORK SESSION

DAY XIV:

1. There will be a model present for two thirds of the class and students may paint from the model doing either full figure study or portrait.

2. Students may choose to work on their expressive narrative images.
3. Group critique on expressive narratives.

Homework:

- A) Finish expressive narratives for final.

WEEK SIXTEEN/ FINALS

DAY XV: Final Critiques Please note that the final critique time may extend into the week of finals for more extensive discussions

1. Viewing of student “self portrait” videos.
2. Critique of expressive narrative paintings.