

Bonnie Posselli's Pointers for Plein Air Painting

Supplies: Choose a canvas that has some tooth. RAY MAR has a canvas covered Masonite panel that is quite good. You can choose from linen or cotton. I have loved the linens, but cotton is good too. They also have carriers for the panels that are light weight and very practical. You can find them online at raymarart.com or Phone 888-809-3314 to order.

Choose good paint and brushes. Student quality paint when mixed loses its pigment and disappears.

I use mostly bristle brushes, both filberts and flats. Hog hair is best.

Procedure:

1. Set up so that your palette and canvas are in the same light, preferably shadow. Use an umbrella if necessary.
2. Use of a viewfinder is helpful in planning composition. Use cardboard with a hole cut out to correspond to the size of the canvas. For example, a recipe card with a 1.5" x 2.5" cutout, or you could purchase an adjustable viewfinder.
3. Remember, **painters do not see more, they see less**. Eliminate the trivia and concentrate the viewer's attention on the essential, which means breaking the scene down to 3 to 5 masses, varying their size and shape while keeping them simple. Value and color within each mass must be close so that the mass can retain its identity.
4. Start with one of two choices (a) white canvas or (b) color wash. Working into a white canvas will keep the colors cleaner. The color wash is used to remove white and put your canvas in a middle value. The color used will affect the mood of the painting. Example: Burnt Sienna is warmer, Ultramarine plus Ochre would be more somber and cooler. There are many different choices for color washes for different effects. Always use turpentine or mineral spirits. (I use Gamblin's mineral spirits) as thinner for color washes, as they will dry faster so that you can get started.
5. Proceed with a few lines to indicate placement of the subject within the picture area. Begin blocking in with main masses of color and value.
6. You are going to make four things happen: **Drawing, Value, Color, Edges**
7. Remember: Key to direct painting is seeing **color and light**. Light, or the lack of it, is the only thing that we can paint.
8. **About Light:** Cool light produces warm shadows and warm light produces cool shadows. Use crumpled white paper or white cloth to determine color of light and shadow. (This rule can be broken, as can all other rules!)
9. **Stepping back frequently** and using a mirror are excellent ways to check for correctness.
10. **Deciding values and edges:** Richard Schmid, master painter, produced a film entitled "The Secret Squint". He suggests that when you look with eyes wide open all edges appear clear and crisp, and then if you close them a fraction, things begin to simplify. If you close them some more, then the strong shapes will dominate and the smaller shapes become less visible. As you squint down further, the last discernible edge will be your painting's sharpest edge. He also talks about the valuable secret of when you half close your eyes, you immediately blur your vision and simplify the major masses of the scene before you. Details fall away and most of the subtle variations of value and color merge into their mother masses. By looking in the overall way, you can best judge the major value of color relationships between the major masses.