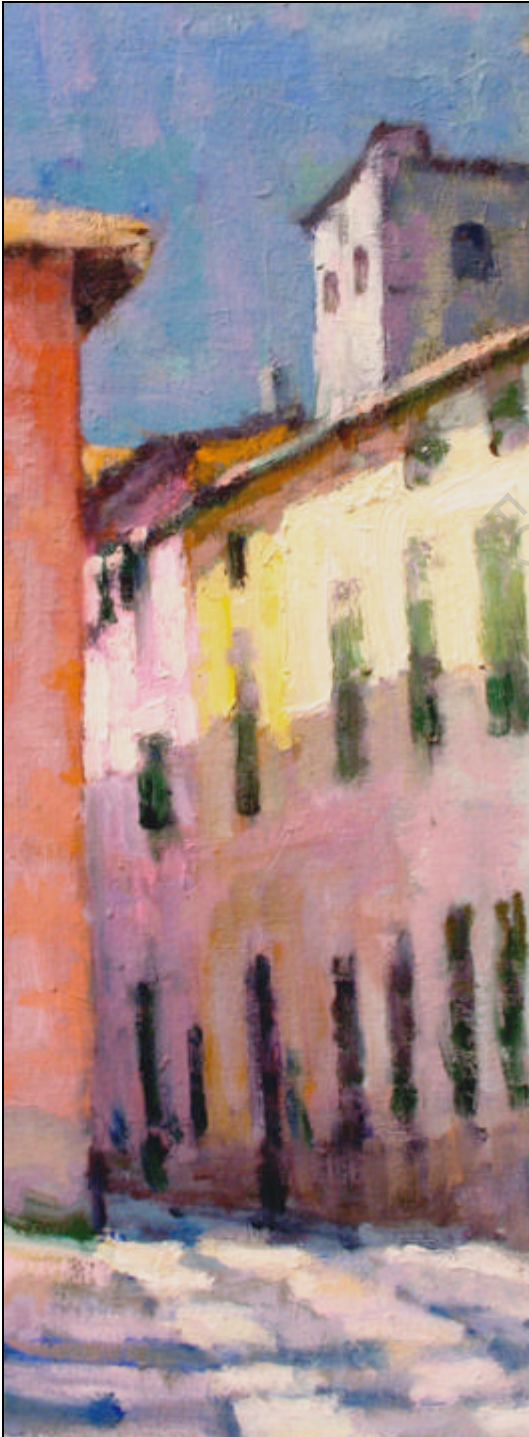




Our task is not to make an amazing thing called art. Our task is to show the world the amazing gift each of us already possesses. Painting is a means of getting that gift out. Our work is just the stuff we make and do on the way to becoming more of who we are. Paintings become art when they pick up the life we impart in one creative moment before the next. We let them go so we can move on.

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Show Me the Pleasure

Picasso said that it took him four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child. The more I paint, the more I begin to appreciate what Picasso was saying. Children never think of career. They seem to delight in the process, get a huge kick out of growing and realizing their abilities. They are one with the subject when they work. They begin everything and finish nothing, always moving on to the next new wondrous thing. What they make one week is forgotten the next. If anything, they seem to be loyal to becoming more of who they are. Is this what Picasso so valued?

It's Already Within You

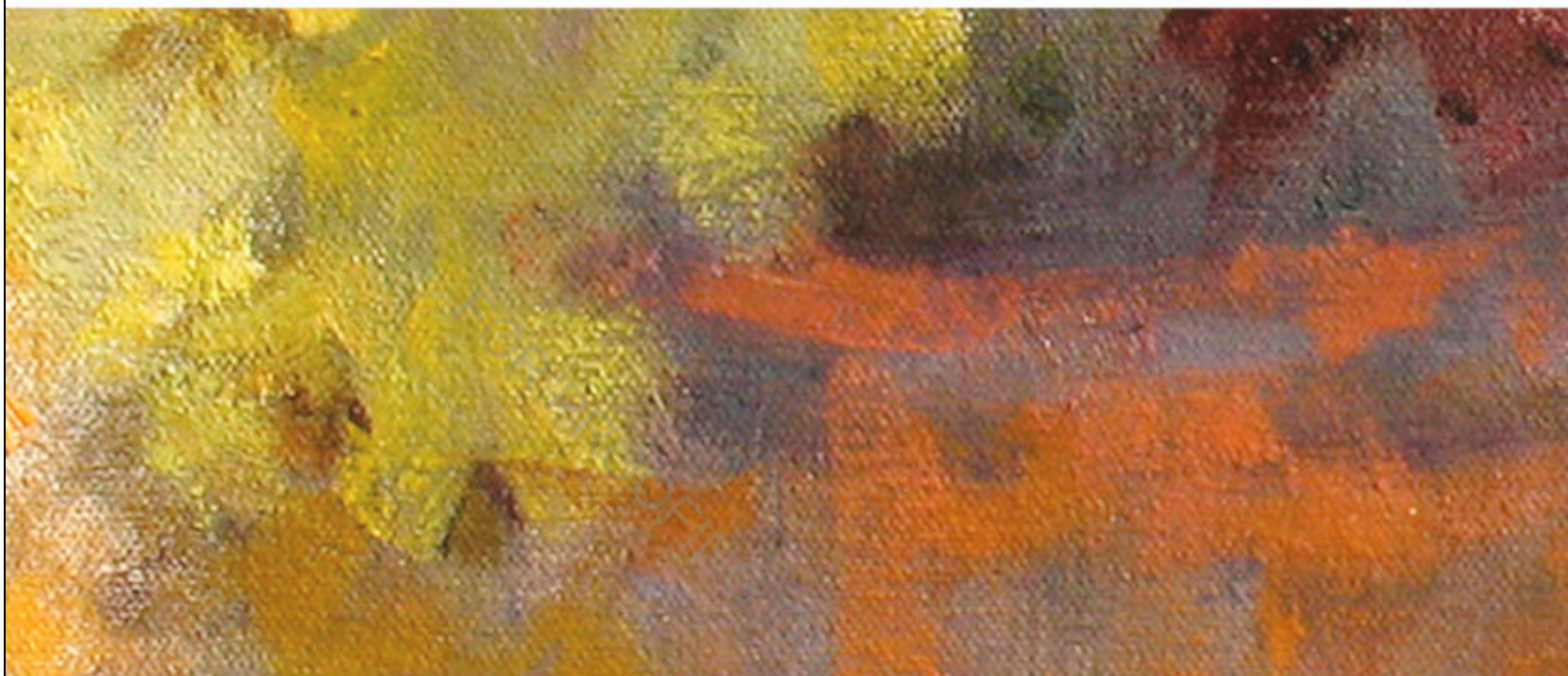
Before moving to Italy with my wife Conchitina and my wonder cat, Lupo, I lived in San Francisco for fourteen years. It was during that

period that I exhibited, practically every weekend, with one of San Francisco's outdoor exhibition groups in some of the city's most popular parks and commercial centers. There I enjoyed conversations with tens of thousands of people about my work and art generally.

Often, early in the morning before crowds arrived, Anne, another painter in the group, and I would show each other our new work. What do you think, Anne? Dead. Anything I can do to jazz it up? Nope. It's dead. So it would go. We both concluded that if you really want to get right down to it, there are only two categories of paintings in the history of art: dead and alive.

I found it amazing that whenever we brought out a painting that we felt especially good about, people would be drawn to it





like we were giving something away. There was a noticeable difference in how an "alive" painting impacted the general public. Why was that? Why, when we look at a painting, do its visual elements - not the subject matter - draw us in, make us look again, excite us? Here's the answer: because the person who made the marks was moved. If you are moved, you will move someone else. You can take a zillion art classes but I can tell you in two words precisely what you need to do to make art: get moved. And the real secret is that your ability to get moved by seeing is already within you. Do not think about the results. Embrace the excitement. Think getting moved.

Seeing Past the Facts

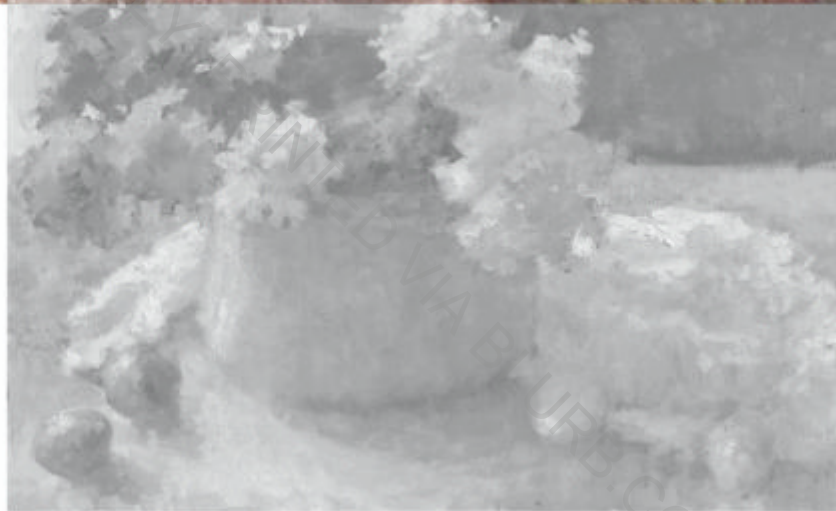
"Step back a little, honey. It looks better from here," was an observation that I would hear many times.

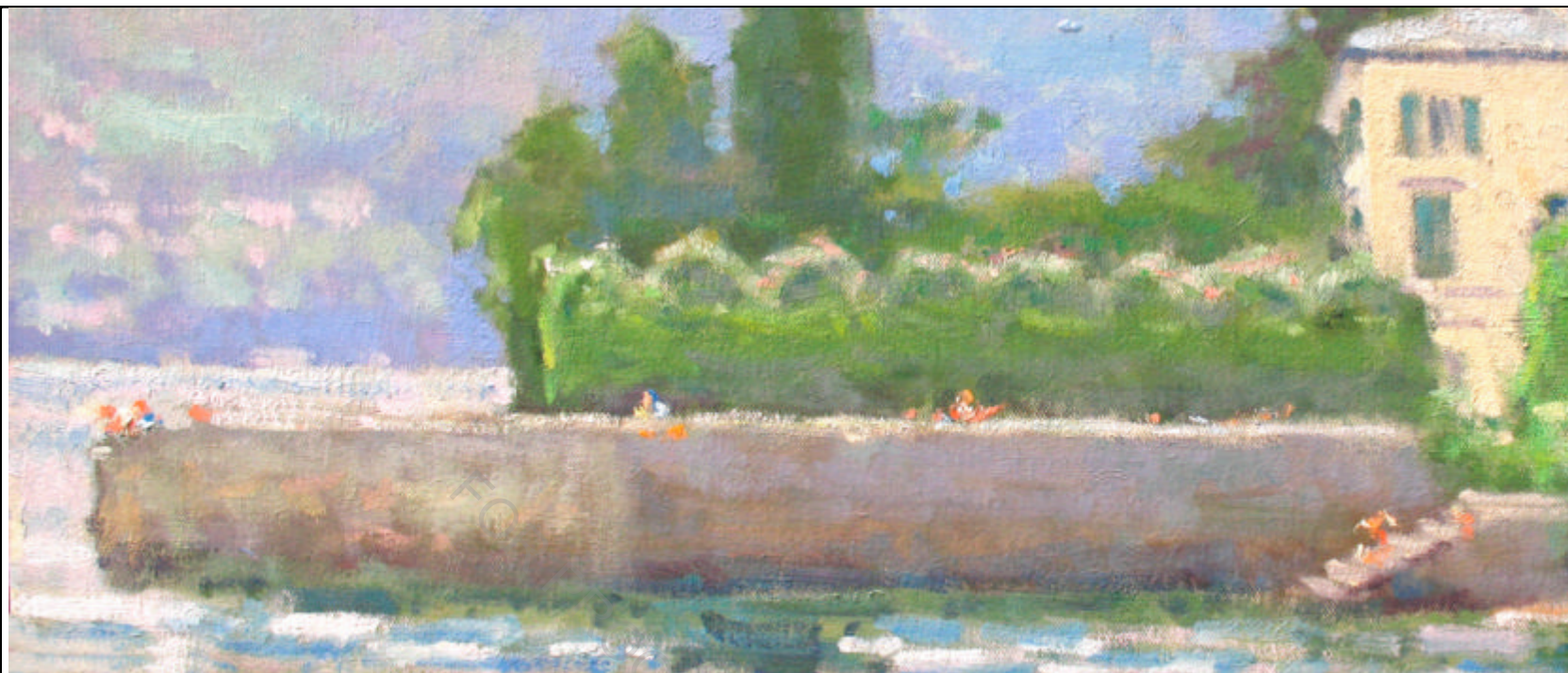


"Oh yes. You're right."

It would be the husband, often, now moving in again closer to the canvas, bending over, looking with an earnestness suggesting that he was clearly on to something. "Up close it just looks like a bunch of marks, just blobs of color."

"Well, isn't that something!"





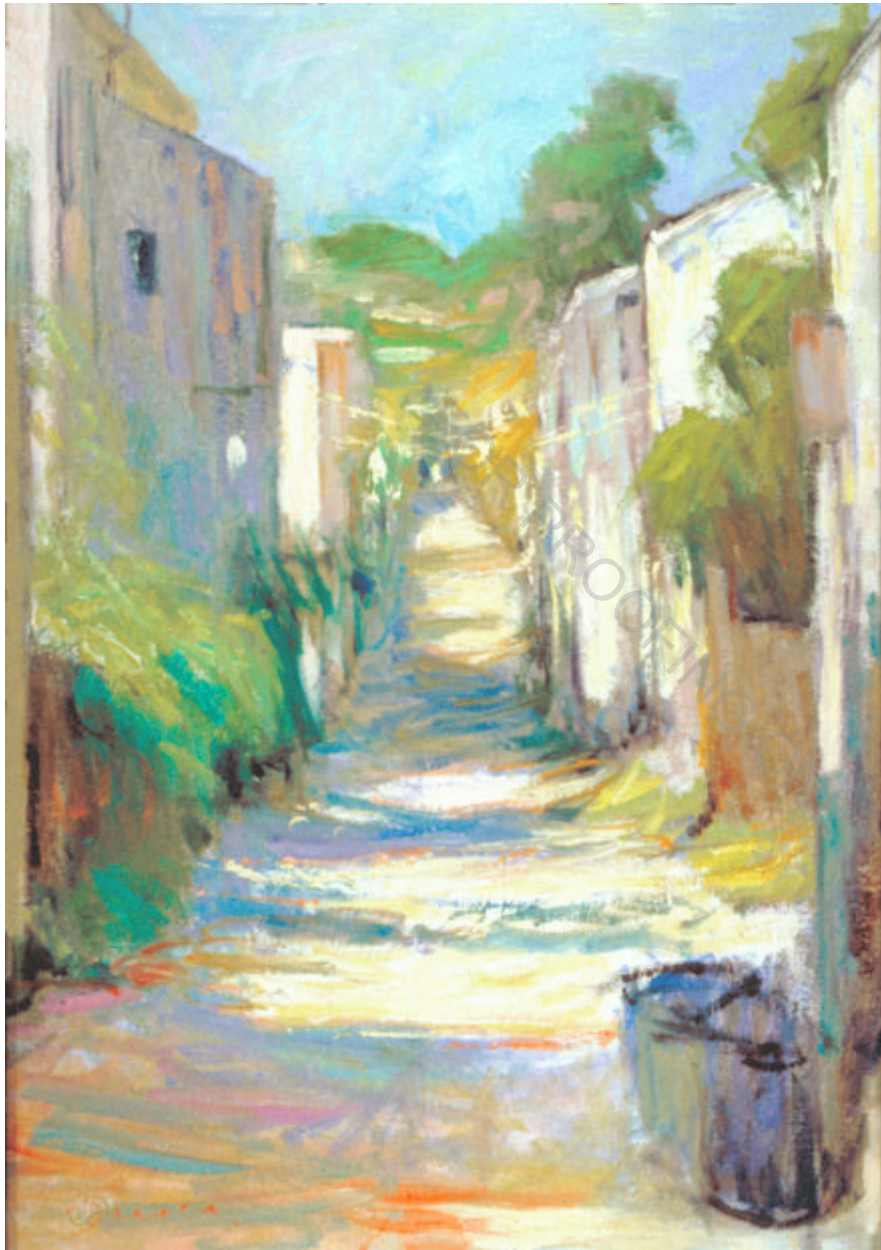
This happened again and again, so many people getting a kick out of seeing differently, this kind of double vision. This kind of excitement arises from the sudden realization that we are actually what we had hoped we were. It is as though someone were to throw us off a 10-story building and instead of falling to our death, we find ourselves flying. Wow! That urge I had all along was real. Glory Alleluia. I can fly!

So it is with noticing for the first time that we can see a thing through its color. Something within us, lying just below the surface all along, suddenly springs to life. We discover some power, some ability that we may not have known or were not too sure about. We are able to observe the thing – the house, or person, apple, car, mountain - and then it is as if we fall into a spell: not only do we see the thing but we are seeing it through its color – and more than that, those colors speak to us. The visual experience moves us. Then the spell is broken. We are back to a way of seeing that is again mere observation, disconnected from the thing. It is just a house or person, apple, car, mountain once more.

We all have this ability to see differently or as I would prefer to say, we all have this ability to see, to see in a way that is like tasting, a way of seeing that is rich with pleasure. The artist is simply the person who notices the spell, loves it, believes in it and tries to get into it all the time. The problem is we do not have a word for this spell or as I like to say this ability to get past the facts. So it is something that is hard to refer to. In addition, we have picked up this notion that only a few talented people can make art and that making art requires some special set of skills, so that leaves us out. I hate to be the bearer of such good news, but you can drop the self-doubt. Just about everybody has the ability to see beyond the facts and get a kick out of it.

Beatrice, a friend of ours who loves paintings, stopped by one





day to have a look in my studio. She took her time, surveying the many paintings scattered about. Some on the floor. Some on the walls. She paused for a moment before one - a painting that I had done of a sprawling villa that reached into the lake, nestled in front of an enormous wall of steep high mountains. I liked the painting but there was one part that I did not like. It was the house itself. It looked like...how shall I say?...just a house! "That's George Clooney's villa," I casually remarked, wondering if the name-dropping might add a bit of interest. I had never met Clooney but his villa wound up in this painting by chance, so I often point out when someone looks at it that it is indeed the house of the famous movie star. She continued looking and said disapprovingly, "It just looks like a house." I was tickled by her reaction. She got it. As Anne would



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say it is dead. It was nothing more than a picture. I never got past the facts or felt the undercurrent. Instead, I just made a picture of a house.

When I painted it, maybe I was struggling, hearing that critical voice, or was distracted in some way. But the upshot is that I was just seeing as in observing and not

as in tasting with my eyes. You see, that is the hard part – getting into the spell where we begin to see in a magical sort of way. I may paint five paintings in a row, competently perhaps, correctly perhaps, but they are mere pictures: dead, dead, dead, dead, and dead. Can I jazz them up Anne? Nope. They're dead.

Let the Art Happen

I have painted long enough now to know that if I am patient and relaxed, if I slow down, if I do not think about results and if I allow myself to see and enjoy the line of the thing or the color of the thing as if not a single damn thing depended on it, I then become aware – much like when you notice that a drug is taking effect – that I am being transported to a center. I am past the house, the facts. Monet's admonition flashes through my brain, "...forget what object you have before you - a tree, a house, a field or whatever. Merely think, here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow." I can see what I could not see just moments ago. I see dozens, no hundreds of little pieces of color, vibrating, pulsating, twinkling as I try to mix a color. I look back, the color has changed a little. Now it

is back. Now it is gone. It does not matter. I do not care, it is the pleasure that I want to sustain. A lush juicy stroke. I am pulled in even deeper. Look at those lines, the big movement, how it curls and slinks away. For a moment I am in love with line. Oh, and over there. That ceramic-bright-orange color beckons. I almost cannot look away. It separates so cleanly from everything around it. But I better hold off. The lights come last. I am like a kid with hundreds of toys before me. What about this one. And that one over here. Yes, oh that is nice. Love that. I hear Sargent whispering, "Begin everything. Finish nothing."

Then I feel as though I am coming down. The spell is weakening. I can still see the steep mountains, the villages, boats and all that obvious postcard beauty. But it does not do anything for me. The



lush seductiveness is gone. I am no longer one with it. It is over. I stop. Unfinished but complete. What do you think, Anne? Alive! That's a good one. Definitely alive!

I do not set out to make a successful painting. Success is getting to that place. In fact, I could not possibly evaluate the work as I do it. It would break the spell. It would be

like going out and having a good time and constantly asking, "Are we having fun yet?"

What I wish to do, is to slip into a process that produces the work. It is no wonder that so many great painters remind us that, before all else, painting is first an activity that gives the painter life.

Monet spoke of wanting to paint as the bird sings. Picasso said he did everything for the intense pleasure it brought. Cézanne said he was not painting the subject but realizing sensations. Pollock said he would get into a state of being. Wolf Kahn, a contemporary artist urges us to not think of our work as manufacturing luxury items but instead as an activity that enlarges our sphere of freedom.

Robert Henri was quite explicit. "Unreasonable as it may sound," he pointed out, "we do not paint to make pictures but to obtain the





extraordinary moment of existence that makes art possible." When we are in that process, in that extraordinary moment where we are painting as the bird sings, seeing and feeling more, the excitement impacts the canvas and is somehow made permanent within it.

Henri's crucial corollary follows: the painting is a by-product of the experience. This a wonderful idea because it takes the pressure off. We do not have to measure up or perform or fail. Our job is not to make a successful painting directly. Our job is to enjoy our vision, go as far as our knowledge permits and as long as



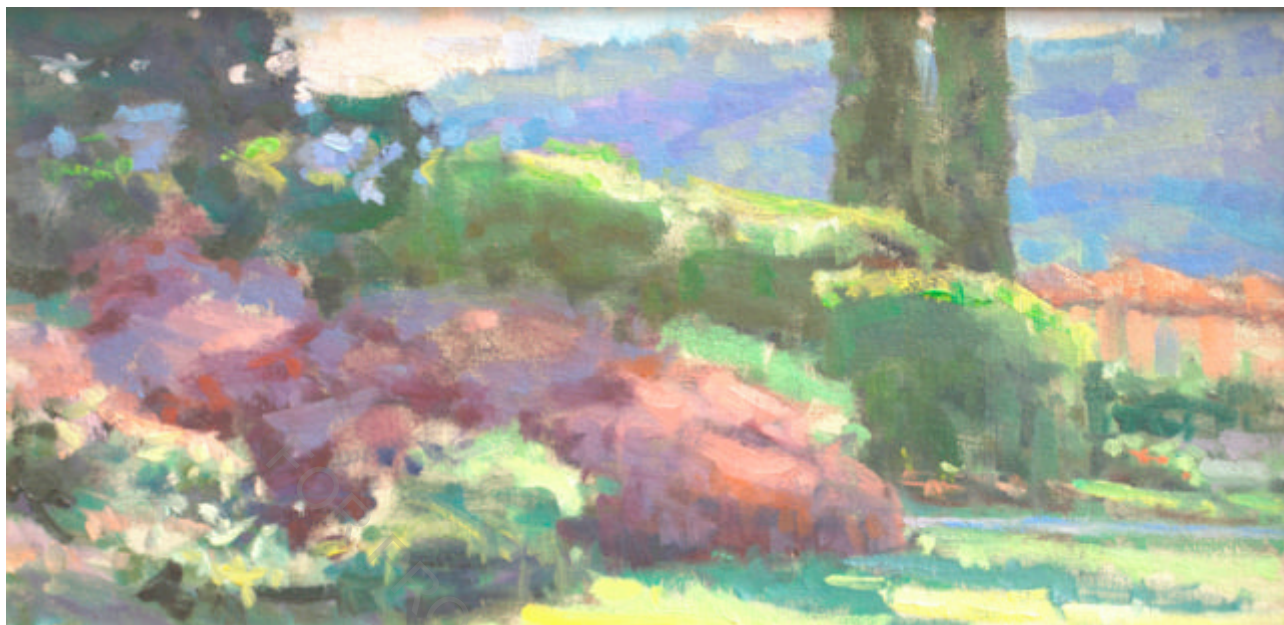
our excitement is sustained.

It is a pretty good job. And it is available to everyone because our task is not to make an amazing thing called art. Our task is to show the world the amazing gift each of us already possesses, the gift of obtaining pleasure in the simple exercise of our own creative abilities, whatever they are. If you can get a kick out of becoming more of who you already are, you can make art. The hard part is ridding ourselves of the notion that the good feelings follow the making of a successful painting. It is just the opposite. Make the good feelings and the successful painting follows.



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Risk Being You

This is a book on teaching you how to paint. Generally, a book of this nature spends a considerable time walking the reader through a specific method with painting stages and useful techniques, and we shall be doing that in detail, comprehensively. That is essential. Generally, this has been called the "mechanics of painting." Very necessary and worthwhile, but we do not want the mechanics to be disconnected from the motives for which they were invented. It would be a mistake if we first learn to paint and then afterwards hope that the intense feelings that carry our life into the work happen all by themselves. It is necessary in teaching the mechanics or craft of painting to show how the craft is a way to get to the pleasure and the love of becoming. When we teach how to get to the pleasure, we are teaching individuals how to access gifts they have had all along. When we teach how to reveal and express those gifts, through a process using various techniques, we are teaching how to make art.







We are born as creative, daring creatures. All of us. Each of us possesses all the natural gifts that we tend to assume are the province of only a talented few. We are born as artists. You, at this moment, have this creative force churning within you. You know it as an urge. Your challenge is always the same: it is to risk being you.

This makes my job somewhat easy because I do not have to correct you as much as help release you, to help you get that urge out. The method here is not intended to bend you in a particular direction, it is a language of sorts that will help you express yourself. I have zero interest in getting you to "paint like." Your urge is precisely the

right urge. It is your gift. But I do wish to show you an approach to painting that will give you a direction, confidence, and a reason to get up every morning.

The method I teach is like a set of training wheels. At some point, if you paint long enough, you will abandon the method and invent your own. This would be a great day. We both would have succeeded. You as a creative force would have emerged more fully you.

Come, come. The world is waiting to know you. It is time to sing your song.



The Stages of Pleasure in the Painting Process





We have seen that statements about the painting process by such diverse renown painters as Monet, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Henri, Picasso, Matisse, Pollock, and Kahn unfailingly emphasize a particular virtue of painting as an activity, namely that it transports us to a place where we experience some greater freedom, ability and joy. We would be remiss if we studied the work of the great artists who move us apart from the advice they are giving to us as painters. We need, then, to always keep in the front of our minds, that if we wish to make art, the practical how-to steps of painting, cannot stand alone, like a set of



tools in a tool box. Again, our techniques serve our motivation. As for me, I wish to get that rush of seeing more and becoming more as I paint, so each step, each technique that I use has that specific end as its reason for being. In short, we do not want our painting method, because of its technical detail, to function as one of those intimidating how-to-assemble manuals produced by IKEA. Painting is a magnificent struggle, to be sure, but the process of painting ought never be dull or painful.

Instead, painting instruction ought to be a bit more like the proverbial sex manual, where the purpose of the instruction is intended to augment our pleasure and self-worth while we are doing the activity that is explained. The method of painting that I was taught was called "The Mechanics of Painting" and yet each step is an avenue to pleasure and greater awareness, a reminder that the activity of painting is not mechanical at all; rather, it is life-giving *throughout*. The quality of the thing improves as the quality of our experience improves. I have decided, therefore, to rename the process to convey what it really is: the stages of pleasure in the painting process.



The image to the right is the first 10 seconds of my beginning. I am using charcoal, very lightly and I want to grab the whole thing so I can position it comfortably on the canvas.

Can you tell what it is? I hope not. It is not about separate, recognizable parts. I am asking, as I look, is there one big simple movement that I see, that I can feel? It is our feelings that move our hand and when we actually make marks, our feelings change or grow by what our hand does. In other words, we are not separate from the subject. We allow it to become music within us.

Mozart, when asked how he wrote music, replied, "I just write down the notes that the music suggests to me." The same manner of creation is taking place here. I am listening too as I see: what lines are the subject suggesting to me? It is not so much the task of drawing lines than it is the task of drawing lines that move us, that are inspired.

The image is the birth of a life. Think of it as a week-old infant. Would you say that the week-old infant is not *finished*? It would be an odd term to use, would it not? Here is a secret then: it is just as odd to say that this image is not finished. It is what

it is. If it were done with profoundly felt emotion, it would move others. I could frame it, sell it, or stop and let it go so that it could keep its life. And I could begin again.

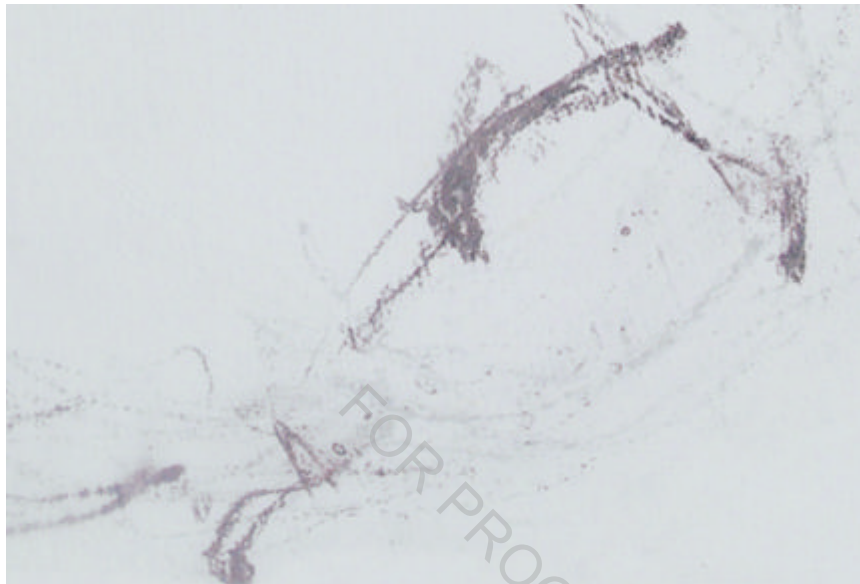
However, if I wish to see the life grow and be part of its creation, if I wish to enjoy a deeper and more complex relationship with the subject, I would continue, especially if I believed I could sustain the life that I have created. That is what this method does by walking us through the stages. It teaches us how to sustain the life on the canvas by steadily moving us to new visual experiences where our own interest and pleasure can be intensified and sustained.

There is absolutely no need to continue. It is complete in any stage, when it is alive. And if it is not alive, there is no point in going forward. The first few seconds is an introduction where we look and open to the undercurrents of feeling that the subject makes upon us. Is there a simple single movement that suggests a line? Before we continue we wish to be aroused, to want more.



CONSTRUCTION - stage 1, line

step 1: charcoal, gesture, movement, simple, the whole, no parts



I am working with vine charcoal because after this step I will wipe off everything. It is a dress rehearsal of sorts. It is exploratory.

Part of my interest at this point is composition. I am still trying to embrace the whole thing with gestural lines – taking something in three dimensions and putting

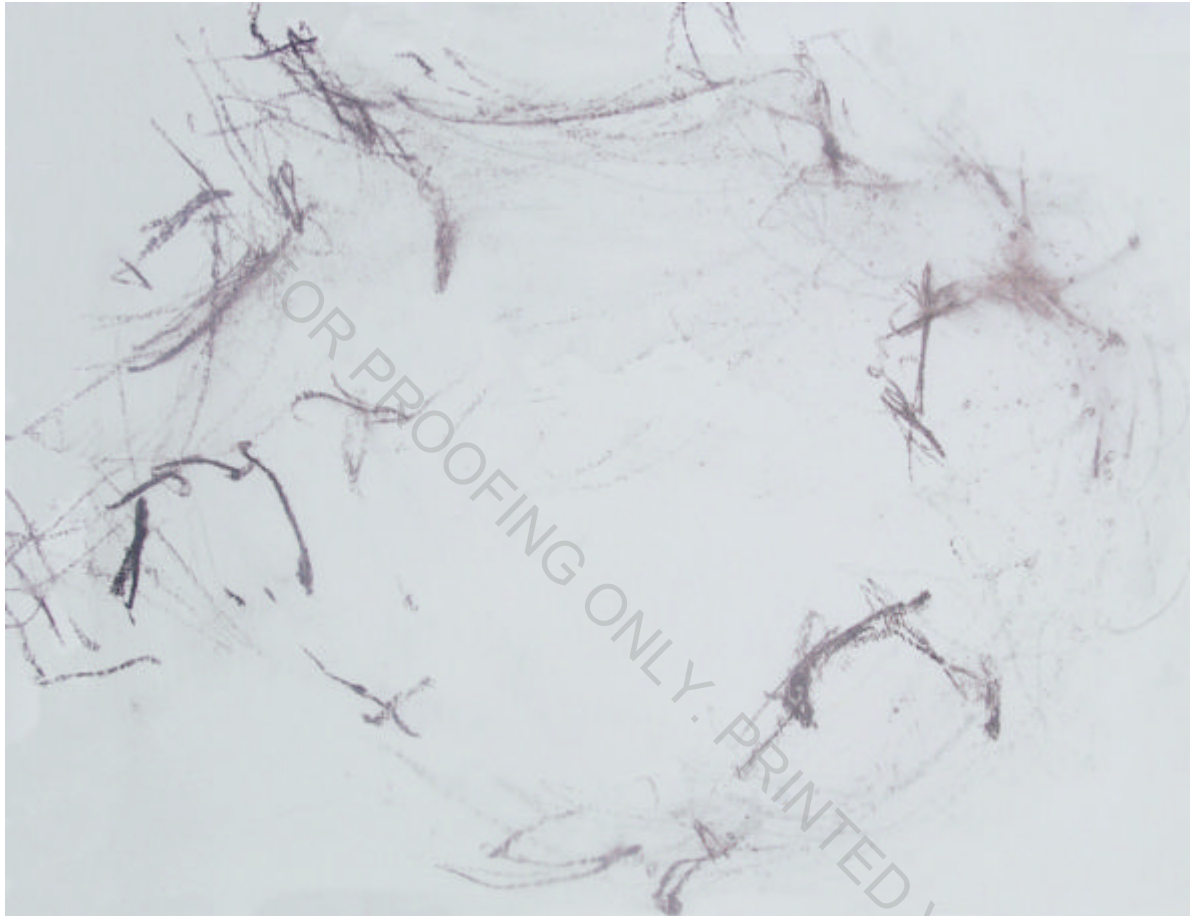
it on a canvas in two dimensions. I am still concerned if the way it fits pleases me. So I never begin with a part - an apple or eye or tree - and then move on to the next thing.

I am always squinting. This helps me to simplify and also insures that I always see the whole and not the parts. So just as you may

not be able to tell what the subject matter is, neither can I, in principle. I wish to know the feeling of the subject as one thing.

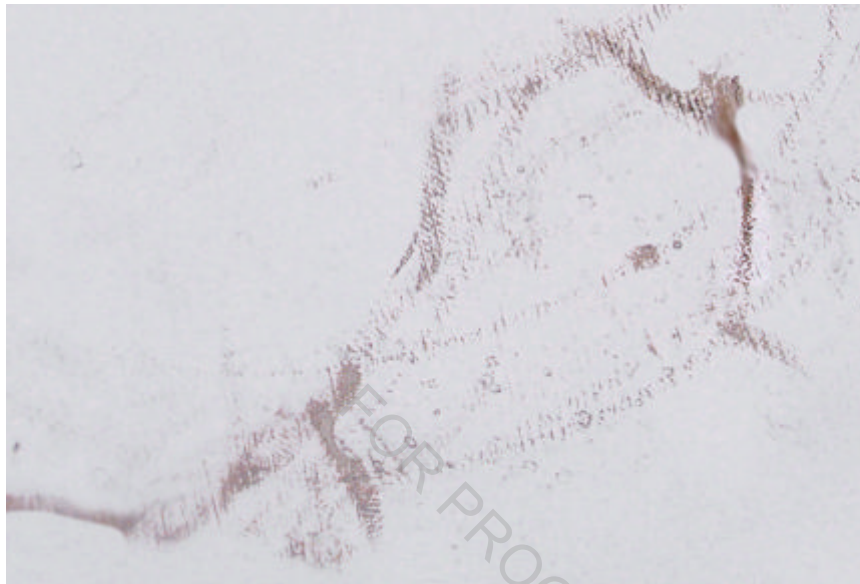
After gestural lines, I squint and look for values that separate, as in edges. But not all edges separate. Some melt into the value that is behind it. And often there are value changes that are gradual and they do not separate. If there is an intense separation, I make a relatively intense line. If there is a less intense separation, the line is less intense. When there are just gradual changes, there are no lines. I do not see color. Just value. And to keep it simple, I try to reduce all values to three: dark, middle and light.

My interest is growing. I am also getting to know the subject. I have decided to move forward into oil. So I take a rag and wipe everything off.



CONSTRUCTION - stage 1, line

step 2: charcoal, separation of value, think composition



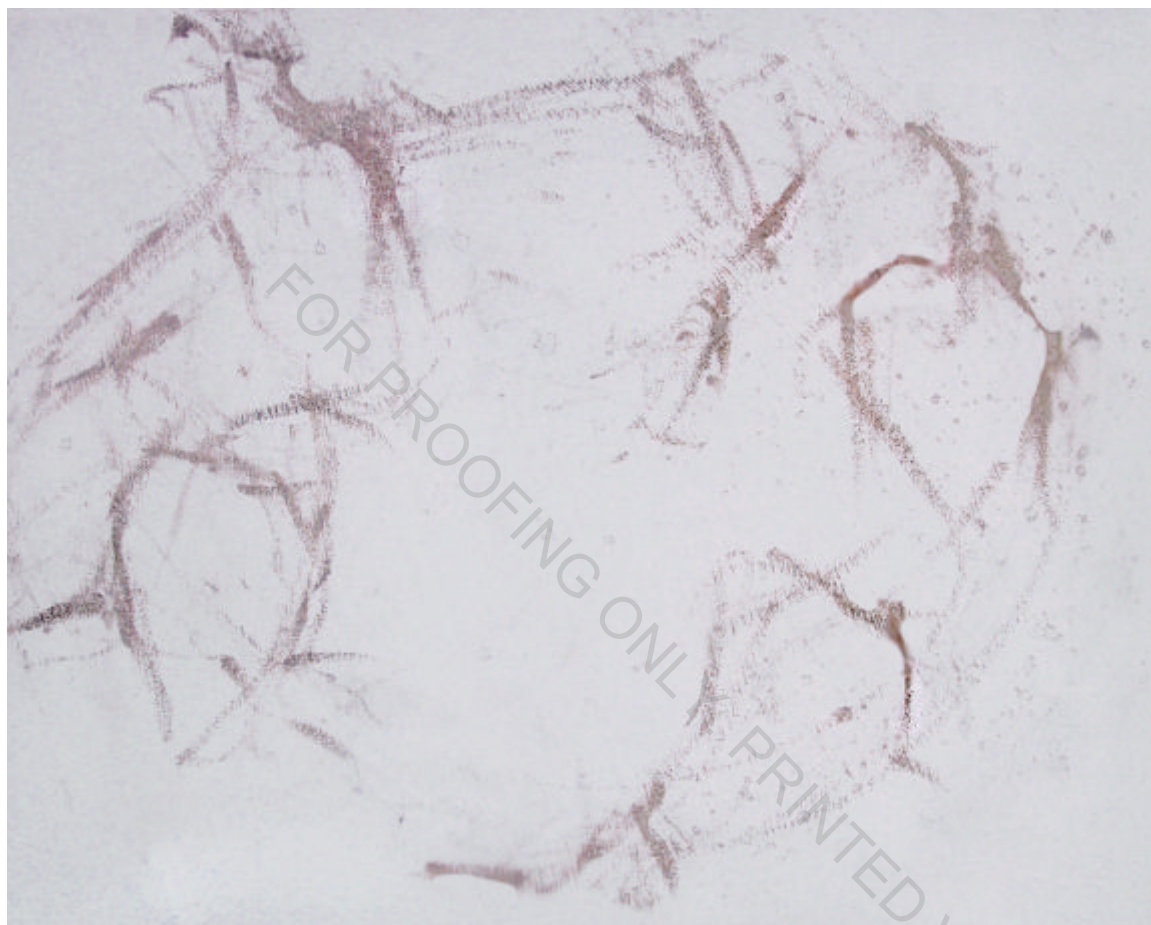
Students often ask why it is necessary to wipe off the charcoal entirely? The answer is because we never look at the canvas for answers. We would be foolish to rob ourselves of the chance to do it again, to do it with more feeling and more fun. Besides, after having spent some time with the subject we often can see more, we notice more. I

use no medium. I want the paint to be on the dry side so I can drag a nice line. Be careful in terms of getting too wet or too dark. The thing is emerging from a white canvas. Like a child, it is delicate. Also, we are thinking in terms of line so there is no color. Our line must be fairly neutral. A mid-value grayish color is fine, but definitely not a color such as

blue, red, green, purple. This is about line. There is no color, in principle.

As with the charcoal, begin again with gesture. What simple movement is the subject suggesting to us? With very dry light lines, find the movement. Then squint and feel the beauty of where values separate. You will see a pattern. Some lines will be more intense than others. Eliminate as much as possible. We want the essence of our feelings, not a map. We want to show that we are inspired. Every feeling we have is precisely the correct one. Let the mistakes show.

Remember, we do not put a dark line where there is a dark. We put a dark line only where there is an intense separation of value.



CONSTRUCTION - stage 1, line

step 3: repeat in oil, gesture, separation of value, composition, no color



In this stage, the method asks us to enter into a new world, the world of color. But the color we are invited to feel is not the color of a thing. Rather it is the color that seems to touch and bathe everything. It is atmospheric color or tonality. It is the medium in which we exist, that surrounds us, that envelops us. This stage is called Under-painting.

We use a special technique to apply the paint called scumbling. It is a scrubbing sort of application. This technique allows us to know and feel atmospheric color because it allows us to apply the paint in thin swatches of color. We are able to capture the vibrating, overlapping veils of atmosphere – the hazy “ishes,” greenish,

reddish, purplish and so on. We are not painting things with names or parts; rather we see color in terms of how they cohere within the families of “darks,” “middles” and “lights.” We begin with the darks and we move around within the darks, “beginning everything, finishing nothing.” Then we move on to the middles, and because we began on a white canvas, we leave the “lights” open. That is, everything we determine to be “light” we do not paint at all.

The under-painting is very dry and very light. The values are always properly related. We are still exploring, the image is slowly emerging out of the white canvas.

What happens on the canvas is always the by-product of our finding visual pleasure, our seeing more. Resist the critical voice. It will break the spell.



UNDER-PAINTING - stage 2, color

oil, scumble, dry, begin with darks, leave lights open, think veils of atmosphere



Our method is an oscillation between our love of line and our love of color. When we apply color, we lose the line and so to push the painting forward we must reinsert line once more. This is the Reconstruction. The line we shall make will be very dark (alizarin, viridian and ultramarine blue). As with the Construction, we are looking for

separation of values, but this time our use of line is not exploratory. The heavy lines will sit on top of the under-painting. They will not belong. In fact, they will "undo" what has been done, compelling us with color, in the next stage, to bring the whole thing back into balance with painting that will be more vigorous and rich.

We are shifting gears, in a sense, but as always, the painting is complete in any stage. Its personality is always greater than its parts.

Many artists have fallen in love with the feeling of these dark lines and have left them. These lines are sometimes called Cézanne lines for that very reason. He often did not "paint into them." Nor did Degas at times or Van Gogh, Picasso or Matisse, for example.

We have turned the corner and are beginning to make commitments. It is in this stage that we are able to find the proportion or plane or perspective or composition that is most satisfying. If, for example, something has "grown," with a reconstruction line we are able to slice into the thing and scale it down to where it wants to be.



RECONSTRUCTION - stage 3, line

dark, separation of value, undo under-painting, think commitment



The fourth stage, called Painting, is a color stage. But as opposed to scumbling "veils of atmosphere," here we *release* the color. Using more paint, we are letting the brush strokes show. We are feeling the emotional crescendo of our visual experience and what we feel is registering in each of our strokes. At times we attack. At times we caress. We risk being

who we are.

Again, we begin with the darks, then move on to the middles and save the lights for last. We are making commitments with each stroke. We are dropping the entire painting down in value, with each stroke of the darks and middles being a little darker than the under-painting.

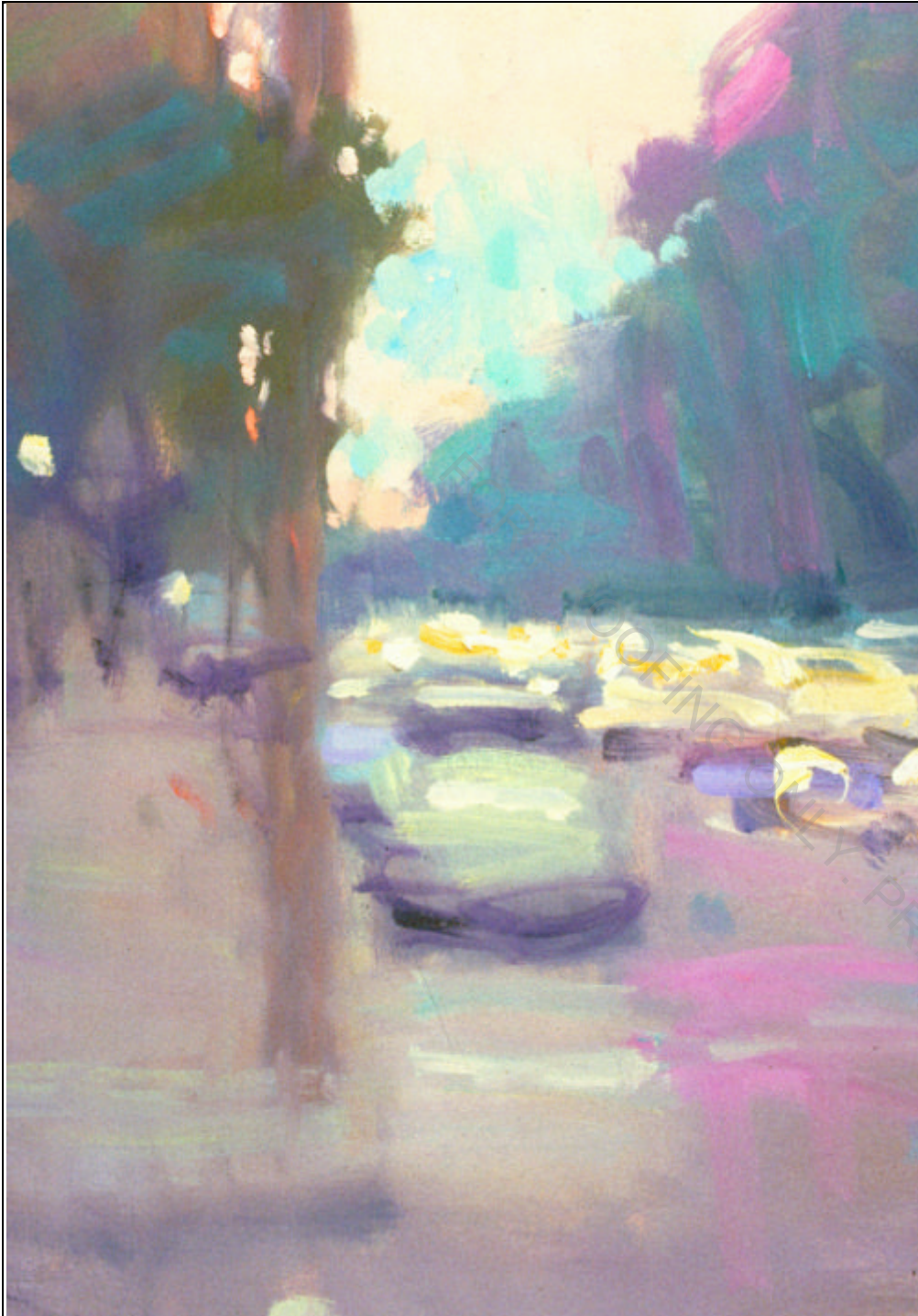
We do not "plug up" or entirely paint over the under-painting. We want everything to breathe, to feel fresh. We let some of the tonality of the under-painting to show through. We are releasing color in a layer above the under-painting. We want to be able to look through the "painting" layer and down into the layers below. We are in the full rush of intense play and pleasurable sensation. We are dancing a painting.

From the first stroke to the last, however, we are artists. There are no gilded lilies, formulaistic endings, or ribbons and bows that tie things together. We have sustained the life of our beginning and we need to let our work go so that it can have its own life and so that we can begin anew.



PAINTING - stage 4, color

release the color, let under-painting show through, think variety



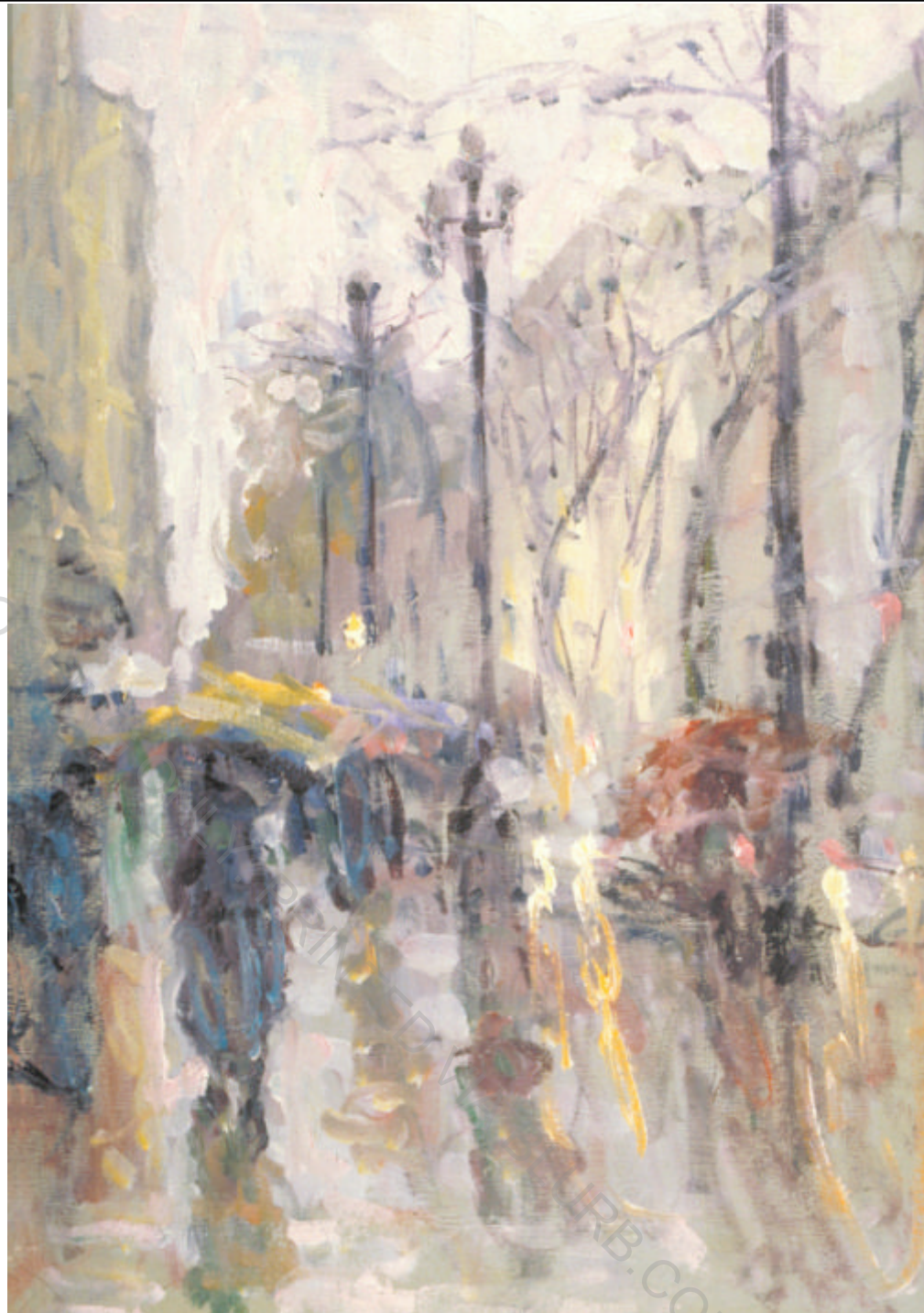
Are You an Artist?

"I am not an artist. I cannot draw a straight line." Where does this thinking come from? The assumption that making art is about some rare set of skills that only a few possess? No doubt there many activities - sports for one or even piano playing, perhaps - where winning the genetic lottery makes a difference. But not with visual art.

As kids, did not each of us all lie on our backs on the ground and stare up at the clouds? And see in the shapes of clouds shapes of animals instead? Were not all of us born with the the natural ability to see past the facts and get a kick out of it besides? Or as kids, did we not take broomsticks and gallop around the house as though we were riding the most magnificent stallion of all time? This is what Picasso is getting at when he says he values relating to the world more as a child than

as a skilled draftsman like Raphael. Making art has to do with accessing our natural capacity to go through the looking glass and cross over into some magical state of being. And yours will be different from mine.

When we learn the order of painting, the how-to steps, the special techniques, we are learning a way of opening to our natural gifts. There is no special class of endowed people. There are only periods when a few of us let go of the notion of having to measure up or to perform or prove something. Think of painting as an activity that brings us to a place where we are larger, more beautiful, more of who we are most. Painting is simply a means of becoming. The less we think of the painting as the point of the activity, the more success we will have with it because both it and we will be more alive.



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