

Painting is very much like an oreo cookie. The top chocolate part represents the preparation which precedes the actual painting. It is the thinking about the work, the looking, the waiting, the making of trial runs until the idea comes complete. Then there comes the selecting the stretch-er bars, putting on the canvas, sizing it, looking at it, and finally drawing the bones of the painting on it. Next comes the sweet vanilla part in the middle of the cookie - the act of painting. When the preparation is thorough and when it is finished - the painting part begins all by itself, and the painter seems to just stand there watching it all happen. He becomes a channel through which all the thought and wondering & doubt and looking and work combines into one large feeling which he then clothes in paint. That, as I say is the sweet part.

The bottom chocolate part of the cookie, the final part, involves the problem of how to frame this sweet middle. Then deciding on what to call the painting. Then backing it and putting the label on. Then you photograph it - slides & black & white. Then you label and file those. That finishes that cookie and without thinking you find yourself reaching for another.

Now, what is very interesting when people talk about painting they seldom talk about painting, the ingredients, the nitty gritty. They talk about when it was done. They talk about where the painter was when he did it, how old he was, how much it costs now etc etc. And then there is a certain <sup>kind of</sup> pleasure in knowing what a miserable time he was having at the time, how little he sold, when his dog died and when his wife left him. At the same time we're told he traveled to Europe. I always marvel at the combination of hard times and his ability to go to Europe. All these stories can be very interesting but they don't concern themselves with the recipe of the work, what parts went into the making of it,

Talk given at Ashmolean Museum - during one man show of small hand signed (not - see 85) Hammersley gallery

why those parts and not others. What prompted him to do it in the first place. So this time, this talk will be about painting and the elements used in the making of it.

When I left art school I was surprised to discover a painter uses only 7 tools. It occurred to me that if a student knew this fact on his first day he would be more relaxed and open to instruction. He would have a handle to hold on to, and he would know that whatever problem given him would be related to one or more of these tools. These are the 7 tools, the only ones all image makers use. They are - line - shape - value - color - form - pattern - texture.

Every one knows what a line is, but, can you define it? It is interesting and mildly annoying to find out that it is difficult to define such a simple word. It makes one scratch. (-eg: student asked by child.)

line - is that which has length only.

shape - is that which has 2 dimensions.

value - means darks & lights.

color - Webster says: a quality of visible phenomena, distinct from form and light and shade, such as red of blood.

form - is that which has 3 dimensions.

pattern - the repetition of a unit in which the individual unit can be identified. ...3 basic patterns/ stripes, dot, plaid

texture - repetition of unit in which individual can't be identified.

The reason for this exercise is that it slows the student down, makes him think, and, makes him look at what he's doing. It represents an important aspect of painting that is - what exactly am I going to do - what do I want to say.

To make an image you have to use at least 2 of these tools. And one of them is the daddy of them all. You can't have any of the others unless this one is represented. Do you want to guess which one it is?

I'll let you think a minute. ...the one you cannot do without is -shape. Shape is the vehicle which carries all the other tools. The least number of tools you can use are - 2. The simplest way to make a shape is with a line - or with a value / a black, a gray or a white. When I color a shape I've used 3 tools - color, shape, & value. If I were to paint an apple I would be using 4 tools - shape, value, color, and now - form. If I were to paint a portrait I would use 5 tools - shape, value, color, form and now - texture / hair for example. If a clothed figure were painted the tool of pattern might be added - making total of 6 tools. Line per se is not often used in painting.

And now, we come to the nub of this whole talk. The reason I bring the subject up at all is this - everything one looks at, or decides to paint / objects or ideas / will emphasize one of these tools! And if you can SEE that, you can paint it, and the chances of getting a good painting are in your favor. When a painter gets into trouble is when there are more than 2 tools trying to take the leading roll ... result, confusion for both the painter and the observer. It doesn't look right. It doesn't work. It makes you feel awful.

What is interesting is that what I've been talking about is not confined to painting. It applies to - when you dress to go out - when you decorate a cake - when you arrange a room. It applies when you set a table, weave a rug, or plant a garden. It applies whenever you make an image. Let's take the example of dressing to go out. You might like value contrasts and little color. Or, you might emphasize colors, or kinds of patterns, or a range of textures. You by the way would represent form. And so it goes with the cake, the garden, the rug, any and all images you'll be stressing one of these basic tools.

This next point is helpful to know, and may come as a surprise - you do not have to decide what tool to use before hand ... listen to your in-

clinations ... what YOU feel like doing at the time. Rely on your feelings and you'll almost invariably do the right tool selection, without thinking.

However in the process of learning how to paint - the approach is different. Specific problems are given, slowly and simply so that there is a building up and a adding to one's awareness of all these 7 tools.

That completes the first part of my talk. I'll answer questions after this next part which is called - a short talk on small things.

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I had an instructor once who said - any one who can walk into a room and not bump into the furniture, can paint. While that is mildly amusing it is true. Not bumping into things involves space and size judgement, just like painting. And this is something we all have, without thinking about it, it is just there.

Size relates directly to you as a person, that is in a human scale, life size, or large, medium & small. These are 3 measuring sticks we use every day as we go about our business. And oddly enough we demonstrate this fact by the way we are made. (eg: sections of index finger) This by the way is a crucial painting principle in which each of the 7 tools must be used to get a well ordered image. When this sequence is used we feel comfortable, we feel good, we like it - because it is similar to us, it's familiar, it is known. When we see something out of scale, our scale, we feel discomfort - yet at the same time a fascination. Remember carnivals years ago? They would show the tallest man in the world, or the fattest woman etc. They were not in scale to us and one would feel uneasy, yet people paid to look at these exceptions. ...on the other hand Disney can evoke an unconscious pleasure in his customers when they visit his land, because the buildings are not the usual size. They are 5/8th size, which reminds one of small things when he was a child.

The buses, the railroad tracks, even the horses are slightly smaller than the full sized one outside. The point being to make one feel good & spend.

Some time ago I was invited by the University of California at Santa Barbara to give a talk. 3 art historians and myself gave talks. It was for a remarkable drawing show called - Leonardo returns to Vinci. The main feature of the show was 4 small drawings by DeVinci - smaller than this sheet of paper. They were marvelous and so beautiful they almost hurt. As I leaned in close to look at these lovely things I realized that part of the pleasure received was due to the size of the drawing - they were about the size of - my face. It felt good. It was not forbidding, not shocking, not pushing me away. It was exactly the opposite - they seemed to invite me to come close to look. I felt flattered.

Later, now back in Albuquerque, I realized that some of my paintings were full size, that is my body size. A painting that I could comfortably pick up would be my size. They happened to be 45" square. The ones that were 48" were a shade large and I did not like to handle them as much as the 45 inch ones.

My method of doing hard edge paintings is to draw out loud so to speak in a note book, one idea after another, just as they come. Then when one stands out I put it in another book and paint it in oils. Some ideas had been sitting there for years - they simply did not feel right on a 45" canvas. So I didn't use these ideas. I only painted the ideas that were full sized, and a variation of middle sizes. Then one day I came upon several small beautiful square pieces of wood with birch and ash faces. And it dawned on me that they would fit many of my unused ideas which were - small painting ideas. I still do not know why one idea is full sized, another middle, and another small. But I did come away with a small bit of understanding that sizes relate to me and my size, and it

is helpful and important to listen to the impulses as they come and respond to the size they dictate.

One more aspect of size that gives pleasure is the projected image. At times you do not know what its size is, unless it is put in relation to an object you do know the size of. Or you'll know an image represents something small if you can identify it, like a pear for example.

There is one curious thing that can happen in looking at something small, and that is it becomes - large. The original size seems to disappear and you find yourself in another world that fills your eyes. It is especially noticable in looking at details of either a large or a small object - the image appears to be large. And then there is a distinct pleasure in seeing an ordinary object out of context, as I'll show you shortly. To see a mundane thing the size of this wall can be very stimulating, and mildly shock you into looking at <sup>ordinary</sup> things with greater attention, and perhaps with less haste.

I'll begin by showing you slides of things small, in context and out, things familiar, things not. Then there will follow examples of the 7 tools of the painter.