

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## On Being Creative: Getting On With It

Edward Lawrenson · Wednesday, March 11th, 2015

**You can sift through as much manure as you like, but you may not find a pony.**

*“The most effective way to do it, is to do it” -Amelia Earhart*

As a graduate of a post-post-modern era fine arts education, my fumbling journey into the depths of representational painting and all the challenges therein has been entirely my own.

My experience has shown me that mainstream and established arts universities in England do not teach you to draw and paint from life.

Not all actively discourage being creative. However, many seem to promote a palpably suspicious attitude (much present in the wider art world) toward craft and skill in general and seem to offer only: “What you do in the privacy of your own home is none of my business, but we’ll have none of that filthy aesthetic nonsense in here, thank you very much.”

Consolation exists in that three years of drinking coffee in a well lit studio on a leafy campus in Hampshire gave me plenty of time to daydream, formulate and scribble down ideas, but more importantly, it allowed me to develop a critical awareness and an analytical approach to the creative process.

Now that I have become somewhat distanced from academia and have gained greater perspective, I feel at liberty to pursue whatever interests me, rather than chasing that illusive Zeitgeist.

This new found freedom has lead me to attack the discipline of representational painting and drawing afresh, something which seemed difficult at 16. But ten years later, it’s just as tricky, and I can’t help but overthink my approach.

So are my developed, more analytical thought processes now an advantage or a handicap?

The trend in psychology seems to suggest that over thinking or intellectualising everything you are doing is not conducive to attaining flow, that brain-state where musicians or athletes become one with what they’re doing. That to do something well, you need to submit to it, to almost sink into a state of meditation and ignore all but the task at hand.

With this in mind, I have been thinking a lot about achieving greater realism in my paintings. Like many disciplines, it seems that with painting, the more you learn, the more you realise there is to

discover. Once you master accurate drawing, you then have to face up to tonal value, colour theory, chromatic scales, and of course there is the initial challenge of holding a paintbrush steady. My education in representational art has been mainly DIY. What I have discovered so far has been achieved by stalking the web pages, social media accounts and YouTube channels of other artists, and spending my hard earned cash on many instructional books.

Everything else I have learned through trial and error.

Throughout my days in the studio I will make notes and reminders in the vain hope that I will internalise certain mantras by committing them to paper and taking a mental note of the written words, convincing myself that somewhere these notes are being stored away in an orderly subconscious.

Very recently, on annotating a sketch of a current self-portrait (which proves my abilities as either a genius or a puddle of organic matter depending what mood I'm in), I wrote the words:

Paint what you see, not what you expect to see.

I initially looked at this and thought, *yep, sound advice*. That's what the realists would have done. And all them French painters back in the 19th century.

After all, optical painting relies on the artist looking at the visual field as an array of abstracted blocks, a two dimensional plane of tonal colour which coalesce on the retina so that information can be analysed by the brain.

Simple.

I then remembered, from somewhere in a dusty pocket in my mind, a slightly different mode of thought that suggests:

Only by studying human anatomy, how things usually occur in nature, will you be able to understand what you are looking at and therefore comprehend what is happening before your eyes. You need to conceptualise what you are studying as a three dimensional object in space, with known preconceptions of how those objects usually appear and therefore how light and shadow reveal their structure.

These are two opposed ways of thinking, yet both conceptual approaches seek to attain a realistic representation of the physical world. Same end, different means.

So whichever approach is the best, or at least facilitates the painter more, is only of interest to the painters themselves. The only obvious revelation is that I am simply overthinking it.

This type of circular thought pattern will in practice lead me to continually rework something, or more usually it will encourage me to cease work altogether.

I believe that when attempting to learn new skills, which require hand eye coordination above all else, despite the intrinsic value of reading up on your discipline, the only way to get good at

something is to do it. You can sit around and talk about it as much as you like, but those problems and potentialities will remain in the cozy realm of theoretical aesthetics.

Artists practice.

Whether you are a beginner or an expert, recognise that all this information, though valuable, amount to a lot of noise and too much data. I believe that independent research doesn't reveal its true value until you have clocked up more hours at the easel/piano/driving-range. When habits set in, your preferred methodologies become subconscious, automatic, ready-loaded thought patterns and all the extraneous chatter dies down.

That's when you achieve flow.

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