

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Old Master's Painting Techniques will guide students toward developing their skill using the technical, compositional and conceptual skills that were perfected by the *Old Masters* (*Rembrandt, Vermeer, Velasquez, Rubens, etc*). These processes will be demonstrated and discussed. Students will study both from the old masters and contemporary paintings, as well as from the live model to create a successful painting.

Accurate drawing and proportion will be stressed as each student learns to portray the human form in space. Strategies in technique, such as usage of impasto, glazes, and scumbling, will be discussed in order to create form and illusion. In addition, color relationships will be stressed in order to create space and volume. The final goal is to have each student begin to realize their own style and channeling it toward a successful figure painting.

OLD MASTERS PAINTING TECHNIQUES

WORKSHOP GOALS: To learn the techniques and methods of the Old Masters. Using materials as close as possible to the originals, we will create a painting in the style of the Masters. We will be working on a wood panel, prepared in the old-world way, developing the painting from the live model over a period of 8 weeks.

PAINTING SUPPORT (WOOD PANEL)

Out of necessity and expediency, we will use currently available products. Rembrandt would hire a cabinet-maker (joiner) to make solid wood panels which were radial-sawn, planed, dried, aged and beveled. (We will also buy pre-made panels). The wood was sealed with rabbit-skin glue, which we will do as well. After drying and sanding, the panels were covered with several coats of glue-chalk mix (gesso), sanding each layer in between. We will substitute acrylic gesso, as we don't have 6 months of drying time. The Masters would then prepare a mixture of a lead white and linseed plus a ground pigment (umber, sienna, ochre) to prime the gesso layer. Now the panels were ready for painting.

Their preparation was so meticulous and thorough, that the Rembrandt paintings today, more than 300 years later, still are un-warped, un-yellowed, un-chipped. An examination of the backs of the paintings (those which were not cut-down or resized, show the sealing layers still perfectly intact).

COLORS

Certainly the majority of the colors used by the Old Masters were earths: Sienna, Ochre, Umbers...which were chunks of local colored clays, ground fine, and mixed with linseed oil. We still use the same colors today. Kremer Pigments, Sennelier, and several other suppliers, sell raw chunk and powdered pigments which you can buy and mix with oil to make your own paints. (We will have a demonstration in class). In a nod to expediency, we will use pre-made paints (if you prefer, you can make your own).

CLASS WORK SUMMARY:

- One 8-week painting from model
- Homework: Copying a master
- color mixing and understanding color relationships as resolved by other painters
- paint application and techniques of Master painters

DETAILED SYLLABUS

Week 1:

Discussion of Old Masters, with visual examples of Rubens, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Velasquez, Caravaggio.

1. Materials: Supports, Paints, Mediums
2. Image Making: Imprimatura, Wipe-out method, transfer of image to support (lenses, grid, direct).

The Turning of the Figure & Creation of Volume

Use of Warm & Cool

Transition from Highlight->Light->Turning->Shadow->Reflected Light

Thin in Shadows, Thick in Lights

Local Color in Light

Warmth in form shadow. Cool in cast shadow.

Working the whole canvas...

Toning the 'background'.

Color shifts & perceptions with adjacent colors.

To Do:

1. Mix of Imprimatura: Warm + Cool + OMS. Brushes/Paper towels/rags.
2. Imprimatura.
3. Adjust drawing, using measuring techniques.
4. Wipe-out Lights.
5. Re-darken darks.

Week Two:

- I. Painting first layer from live model set up: discussion and demonstration of palette.
- II. Begin by observation
- III. Oiling out with thin Medium
- IV. Start painting in the darks—thinly
- V. Discuss Thick over Thin (Fat over Lean)
- VI. Reestablish Lights
- VII. Drag lights into turnings

II. Homework discussion for Master copy:

- a. Learning color relationships by studying the palettes of great painters. How does a color turn as it goes into light or shadow? How to match the color.
- b. Examining application and how to imitate layering techniques, transparency vs. opacity for color and texture effects.

Homework:

- Work on master copy: Begin first layer of master copy by imitating application of the artist

Week Three:

- I. Continue painting first layer from live model set up: discussion and demonstration of palette.
- II. Begin by observation
- III. Oiling out with thin Medium
- IV. Start painting in the darks—thinly
- V. Reestablish Lights
- VI. Drag lights into turnings
- VII. Add Light Mid-Tones, Add Dark Mid-Tones
- VIII. Demonstrate handling scumbling, creating turnings
- IX. Demonstrate making paint from raw pigments

II. Homework discussion for Master copy:

- a. How to match the color.
- b. Examining application and how to imitate layering techniques, transparency vs. opacity for color and texture effects.

Homework:

- Continue work on master copy: Begin first layer of master copy by imitating application of the paint by the artist.

Week Four:

- I. Continue painting from live model.
- II. Begin by observation
- III. Oiling out with thin Medium
- IV. Start painting in the darks—thinly
- V. Reestablish Lights
- VI. Drag lights into turnings
- VII. Add Light Mid-Tones, Add Dark Mid-Tones
- VIII. Demonstrate variation of colors from various manufacturers (6-Row Umbers)
- IX. Demonstration of mark-making: creation of surfaces and textures.

II. Homework discussion for Master copy:

- a. How to match the color.
- b. Examining application and how to imitate layering techniques, transparency vs. opacity for color and texture effects.

Homework:

- Continue work on master copy: Begin first layer of master copy by imitating application of the paint by the artist.

Week Five: THE MAGICAL WEEK

- I. Continue painting from live model.
- II. Begin by observation
- III. Begin with Glaze to Unify
- IV. Re-establish darks—thinly
- V. Re-establish Lights
- VI. Add more Light Mid-Tones, Re-establish Dark Mid-Tones if needed
- VII. Begin adding “Masters’ Touches”: lips, nostrils, ears, highlights, eye lights (if any), jewelry (if any)
- VIII. Unify background

Demonstration: Glazing

Demonstration: Using a Mahl stick

Homework discussion for Master copy:

- a. Matching colors.
- b. Examining application and how to imitate layering techniques, transparency vs. opacity for color and texture effects.

Homework:

- Continue work on master copy.

Week Six: MORE ALCHEMY*

- I. Continue painting from live model.
- II. Begin by observation
- III. Begin with Glaze to Unify, or Oil-In with Medium
- IV. Re-establish darks—thinly
- V. Re-establish Lights
- VI. Add more Light Mid-Tones, Re-establish Dark Mid-Tones if needed
- VII. Begin adding “Masters’ Touches”: lips, nostrils, ears, highlights, eye lights (if any), jewelry (if any)*
- VIII. Unify background with figure, clothing*

Demonstration: Masters’ Touches

Homework:

- Review of Progress and continue work on master copy.

Week Seven: Refining the Image

- I. Continue painting from live model.
- II. Begin by observation
- III. Begin with Glaze to Unify, or Oil-In with Medium
- IV. Re-establish darks—thinly
- V. Re-establish Lights
- VI. Add more Light Mid-Tones, Re-establish Dark Mid-Tones if needed
- VII. Demonstration: Masters’ Touches

Week Eight: Last Chance- final changes & detailing

- I. Continue painting from live model.
- II. Begin by observation
- III. Begin with Glaze to Unify, or Oil-In with Medium
- IV. Re-establish darks—thinly
- V. Re-establish Lights
- VI. Add more Light Mid-Tones, Re-establish Dark Mid-Tones if needed
- VII. Master’s Touches

Some notable points which will be discussed in depth during class:

Remember, we are not making a photo-reference or copy of the model; we are making a painting. Interpretation is more important than exactitude, although some accuracy is assumed. You are the artist, and the decisions you make in the painting are reflective of the model, the pose, the lighting, the way you, as the artist, sees the model, and your preferences in expression.

To make the model have 3-dimensional volume, there are a few basics to keep in mind:

1. As objects recede into space, they get “cooler” and their edges are softer.
2. Objects closer appear “warmer”, and may have crisper edges, and more visible texture.

We will stress repeatedly:

- Warm vs. Cool
- Watching your edges.
- Painting the whole canvas.

Have a look at the following artists, and see how they painted: layers, warm vs. cool, thick vs. thin, handling of the paint. Most are at the Met:

- Vermeer
- Rembrandt (look very closely at his self-portrait!)
- Rubens
- Titian
- Giorgione
- Bouguereau
- Caravaggio (not his best work, for that go to the National Gallery, London)

Certainly the subject, composition and styles are no longer current; but look at the way they painted, the handling of the brush, the richness and depth of the image.

To compare technique and variety in paint handling (as long as you're at the Met) see:

- Van Gogh
- Monet (later works)
- Manet
- Cezanne
- Sargent
- Pissarro
- Cassatt