

# Chapter 10

## Artist in Residence

I am an artist by profession and a teacher by occupation. I teach within my profession and my professional development must be within my chosen profession in order to develop and produce greater achievements in my teaching employment. Teaching is both communication and the facilitation of the acquisition of knowledge and skill. Learning is the passion to know and to achieve what only an individual's special learning interest can generate and sustain for a lifetime.

One of the major premises of this book is that learning is the result of an individual's special interest which is generated by the individual's genetic predisposition that creates an operating intelligence as described in Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences. The attributes described by Howard Gardner's category of Spatial Intelligence accurately describe my learning characteristics and priorities. It is neither a surprise nor a mystery as to how or why I am a visual artist and not a mathematician or English teacher. No amount of the prized scholastic content learning was able to divert my predetermined and chosen interests in visual art.

As I have stated countless times, learning in the arts requires knowledge and countless hours of constructive practice. The mistake I made in my art education was being a passive learner who expected to be educated by attending classes in art schools, colleges, and universities. At the institutions I attended, most of curriculum was based upon experiential learning and creativity was stressed over academic learning. We were encouraged to create the new without the constructive benefit of the knowledge of the past. The diploma I received for my accredited course of study meant that I was a credentialed artist, regardless of what my work might indicate. The reality was that I could have produced the same quality of work without having attended the accredited, irrelevant academic courses. What education has taught me is that it is the responsibility of the individual to educate himself through his own special interest learning initiatives.

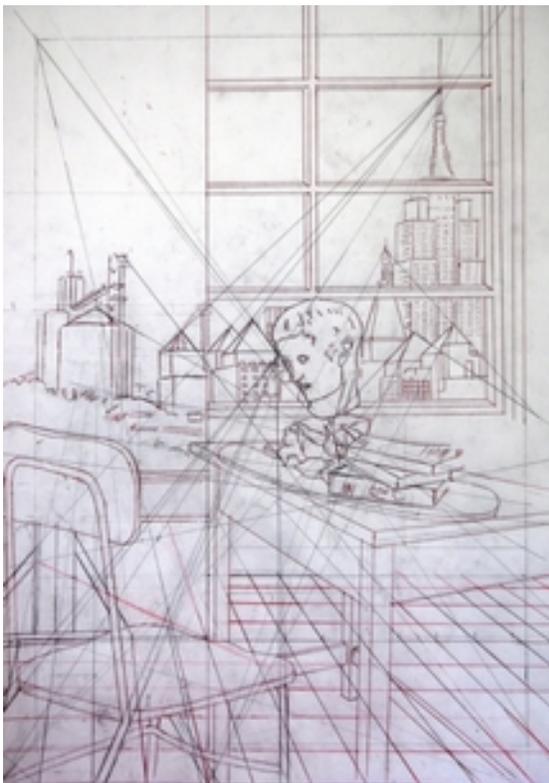
Most of my art production and teaching knowledge has been attained outside of formal learning institutions, and I now teach what I wasn't taught in the programs I attended. Through experience I have discovered that the most successful form of teaching is the apprenticing format. It requires a knowledgeable and technically skilled artist working with interested visually intelligent students. The apprenticeship dynamic creates a learning trust between student and instructor by diminishing the risks of student production failure. Students learn more when they are assured that solutions will be found for whatever learning problems they might encounter. The most reassuring influence that learning can and will occur in the classroom is having quality work on display by the instructor and his students. The apprentice method of teaching is the definition of the artist in residence.



When I began teaching at the Academy of Mount St. Ursula, the position was half-time. To make class scheduling easier for the administration, I offered to be available the full day in exchange for the use of the classroom as my studio. Over time, the position became full-time, with unlimited access to the school and my classroom studio. From the first day of teaching my work had become a learning resource for my students as they watched it progress from drawing to finished painting. A large body of my work can be seen on my website [gjustpaintings.com](http://gjustpaintings.com).

I have discussed composition in Chapter 3, and will now use samples of my work to further discuss and illustrate the compositional techniques I use, as well as the thought process and influences in constructing my paintings

The still life painting on the left was meant to be a self-portrait, without a direct reference to my physical appearance. I am influenced by the 17<sup>th</sup> Century narrative still life paintings of Dutch painters and the surrealist concept of overlapping realities often displayed by 20<sup>th</sup> Century artist Rene Magritte.



The still life objects were a reflective representation of my spiritual, intellectual, and productive thinking at the time of the painting. The objects were set on a student's desk and chair, rendering my perspective of self as a student involved in learning. The view in the window is a distinctive New York City cityscape, juxtaposed and flowing seamlessly into an Iowa landscape painting that is placed on the artist's easel. This juxtaposition of realities differs from Magritte's similar use of overlapping realities. My interpretation is that life is a bridge that spans time and space or place, and the time and place of my origin flows into the current time and place of the artist and painting.

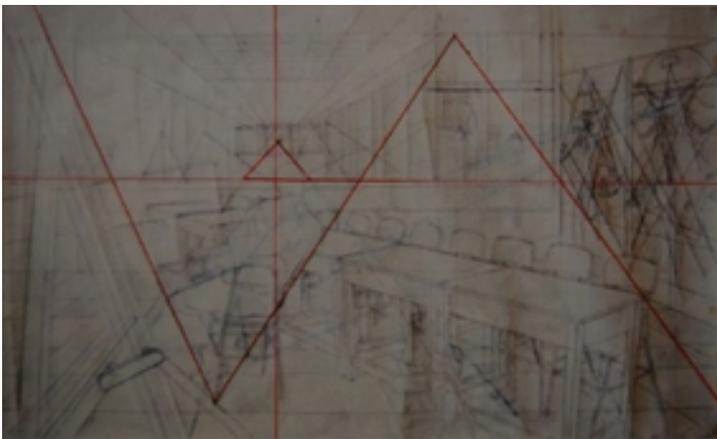
On the left is the compositional drawing of the painting. My goal was to create directional visual connections between objects. One way of achieving that goal was to alter the structure of objects, converting them into a visual device that directs and controls the viewer's eye



movements, leading the viewer through the entire composition. For example, in this painting, since the chair occupies the bottom left corner of the painting, the legs of the chair were altered to point the viewer back into the center of the painting and to the bust in the still life.

In this drawing, the key to understanding my compositional formula is in the structure of the window in the upper right side of the painting. The window is divided by the Golden Mean rectangle and the square. The combination of the two shapes together immediately identifies the use of the Golden Mean or Golden Section formula. The predominant red vertical and horizontal lines represent the golden section formula being applied to the painting and the vertical line is the divide between past and present

Below left is the compositional drawing of Night Journey 24, which can be seen on my website [gjustpaintings.com](http://gjustpaintings.com). The painting encompasses a religious theme based upon the reduction of Leonardo's Last Supper to compositional triangular forms. The Christ figure forms an equilateral triangle that is placed on the horizontal golden mean line and centered on the vertical golden mean line.



The upward and downward triangles, symbolic of the spiritual and earthly existence, become the compositional structure of the painting, echoed by repetitive smaller triangles throughout the entire composition. The seated figure forms the downward pointing triangle, signifying the earthly existence of the

individual juxtaposed to the upward pointing spiritual triangle of what would be the Christ figure in Leonardo's painting. The narrative is placed along the Golden Mean lines and the head of the earthly figure is seeking spiritual enlightenment, signified by the head being placed within the spiritual triangle. The spiritual triangle continues to completely encompass the entire figure in a same but larger scale upward pointing equilateral triangle.



On the left is the compositional drawing of Night Journey # 26. In this drawing, radiating circles and triangles were used in forming the compositional structure. The standing figure forms a triangle that echoes the many triangles compositionally created in the partial reproduction of Michelangelo's Last Judgment Ferry and Ferryman Charon.



At the center of the radiating circles is the right hand of the ferryman in the foreground. The hand is pulling the trigger of the gun that kills Vietcong insurgent Nguyen Van Lem of the infamous Viet Nam war photograph of General Nguyen Nqoc Loan executing Nguyen Van Lem. The



symbolism is meant to state that by allowing war we all had a hand in the killing and creating the hell on earth we must live in. The interior view is juxtaposed to the window view of the destruction of the World Trade Center.

On the left is the drawing for Night Journey 32. The compositional structure is the radiating circle that radiates from the figure's head that is centered on the horizontal and vertical Golden Mean lines. The viewer is inescapably drawn to the individual in the painting.



In the above drawings, I scarcely mentioned the thinking process that I go through to create a painting. Composition was meant to take center stage for the presentation to illustrate how I use the Golden Mean formula and the reliance of geometrical shapes to create compositional structures. I don't always adhere to the strict mathematical



formulas used above, but generally always use the Golden Mean as a starting point to begin each visual idea.

Another characteristic of my work is that I often quote other artists. For example, in the painting on the left, *Night Journey 49: Abstürzender /The Twilight of Idolatry*, I quote Max Beckmann's painting *Abstürzender* (falling man on the left side of the painting). The center figure holding the mask with a heavy glove, though not a direct copy, is referencing

Yasuo Kuniyoshi's clown juggler in his painting *The Amazing Juggler*. A representation of two artworks joined into a George Washington and Venus de Milo combination, and Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* light seen through the window, are all on the right side of the painting.

While I was painting *Night Journey 49* I was also fascinated by musician Brian Wilson's concept of mosaicic composition and so fitted multiple visual ideas mosaicically into one composition, having the separate parts create a whole, revelatory, narrative meaning.

My interpretation of the mosaic narrative I have constructed is that on the left is an image of Max Beckmann's painting *Abstürzender*, meaning falling man. At the time of the 9/11 World Trade Center attack, my mind instantly flashed to Beckmann's painting when I learned that the victims were jumping from the World Trade Center. In my painting, I combined the burning buildings of the World Trade Center with the burning buildings of the Beckmann painting by use of smoke traveling through the deconstructed space that separates the window cityscape on the right from the Beckmann painting on the left. The view through the window establishes the historical time and place, while the Beckmann painting provides the emotional expression of the event. I visually suggest a cause for these symbiotic images, along with many other tragedies, in the form of a worshiped false gold idol. The love of money, represented by the George Washington head of the dollar, and the body of love (Venus de Milo), standing on a power symbol pedestal (dragonfly table), stands in view of a fallen dream and nightmare we have created in the light of *Guernica* (Picasso's light). The flag itself has become an idol complete with mythology and chameleon leaders who disguise special and self-interest greed as patriotic national interests. The theme does not revolve around the depicted events, but rather around the individual(s) who construct the policies of division and destruction. The mask they wear (a reference to Kuniyoshi's painting *Amazing Juggler*) can't disguise their lies, and the torch they carry for liberty and freedom is not real.

The above thoughts and imagery reference the features of my productive thinking process that originates new works of art. The work begins with free associations of words, events, images and art. It is seldom a conscious, premeditated act, but rather a reaction to a stimulus. Ideas flow from the subconscious mind, which presents chaotic, disorganized, ghost images and memories, creating the mental state of agitation necessary to convulse phantasmal ideas into an organized visual language essential for quelling the inner chaos and confusion of the creative mind. Thomas Wolfe states that the

artist creates out of necessity and the creative process is “a process of spiritual and emotional evacuation,” which I feel can be extended beyond the initial ignition of an idea into the long-term progression of the inner necessity to project into the reality and existence of a work of art.

The descriptions of the above works and processes of art clearly indicate that I am less inventive and more dependent upon assimilating and bisociating images and ideas. In my symbolic imagery I try to uphold the artists’ notion of not presenting actual facts, but as Thomas Wolfe suggested, “something truer than facts—something distilled out of my experience and transmitted into a form of universal application.” Failure to find that universal application decipherable by others results in failure.

In my view, art is a communication or a transmission of ideas through visual imagery. I agree with Wassily Kandinsky’s philosophy that decorative art, or art without meaning, is wallpaper, and I find it impossible to just paint a meaningless landscape or still life. The artist must have something to say that is best expressed visually rather than through words. To create and express is to release hope and doubt about one’s abilities that must be judged with each creation of thought. The validity of idea and the means of communication are weighed. Once a work is completed and released, it is separate from the artist with its own reality and cannot be withdrawn. It is when the artists construct and release a work that it is most apparent that they stand apart from a collective and become judged as individuals. Discerning whether or not the individual is an artist, and whether or not the artist and art legitimately and recognizably exist within the culture and society, becomes a trial.

In his book *You Can’t Go Home Again*, Thomas Wolfe expresses his ambivalence and certitude of the creative process through the book’s protagonist, George Webber. Webber’s experiences of solitude and doubt shroud the process and the individual in the act of creation, as evidenced in his proclamation: “These hideous doubts, despairs, and dark confusions of the soul would come and go, and George knew them as every lonely man must know them. For he was united to no image save that image, which he himself created. He was bolstered by no knowledge save that which he gathered for himself out of his own life. He saw life with no other vision save the vision of his own eyes and brain and senses.”



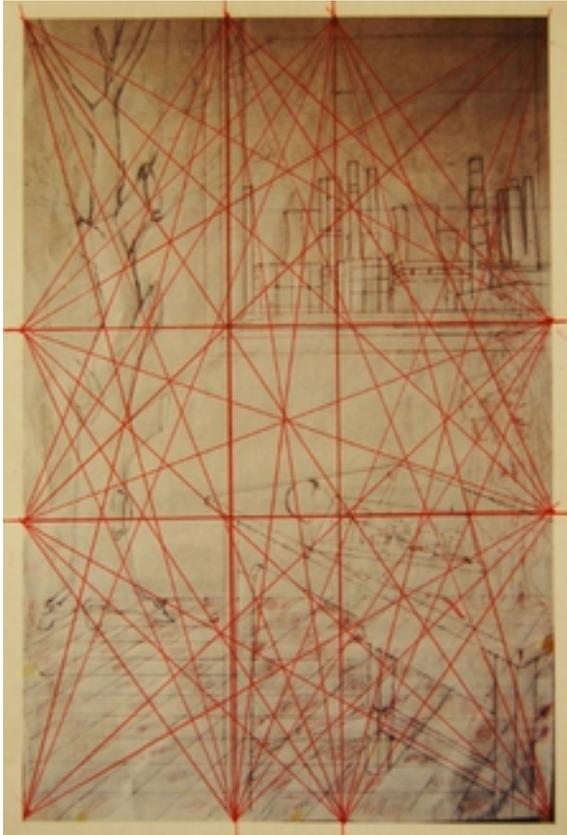
My intention now is to reproduce the working model of the artist in residence that my students encountered in my studio/classroom by illustrating the steps that they would have witnessed and discussed when or if they were interested in the painting’s subject or when a technique applied to their assignments.

***Night Journey 55: Liquid Anxiety; River of Darkness Filled with the Death of Life and the End of Joy***

The central theme is power, the fossil fuels we consume, the militaristic foreign policy created to ensure our energy and resource consumption is maintained, the selfish greed responsible for the destruction of the environment and climate change.

When I am creating, I am always in a state of free-associating, and images get connected to other images, ideas, and

thoughts. Pictured on the left is the drawing for Night Journey 55. The drawing began when I encountered a picture of a power plant on the internet, which sparked the thematic ideas listed above. I associate the power plant with environmental destruction and climate change, which immediately brings to mind Salvador Dali's painting *Liquid Anxiety*, which depicts a cypress tree with a hole in its foliage ejecting a clear fluid. My translation of this image is a mutilated tree spewing darkness into the world. When I look at the image of the power plant I think of the military bases around the world that



are deployed to protect and sustain America's energy consumption, as well as the oil and pipeline wars of Iraq and Afghanistan. When I look at the power plant I think of America's role in environmental pollution and climate change. These ideas I visually sum up with the image of the Statue of Liberty polluting with her torch, while casting the forceful militaristic shadow of national interest.

The red lines on the left depict how I usually begin a drawing. The four vertical and horizontal lines that extend beyond the edges of the drawing are the application of the Golden Mean formula. In the second step I draw diagonal lines from one point to another, as exemplified in the drawing on the left. The formulated lines are a way to break the blank page into a visual pattern onto which I can form, shape, and overlay my thoughts constructively into a compositional structure that creates a visual dialogue from my formless thoughts.

I sometimes use this mathematical formula/structure, extensively changing the form, position, and shape of objects to coincide with the foundation structure. In other drawing like this one, I use it only to position major elements and objects of the composition. In this drawing I used the formula to block in the window on the upper right corner, the placement of the left front table leg, the right diagonal line of the table top, the placement of the floor, and the placement and angles of the tree limbs. While I was finishing the last stages of the drawing, I cut and toned the canvas in preparation for transferring the drawing.

The most commonly used oil painting substrate is a cotton duck canvas, which can be purchased primed or unprimed. Cotton duck canvas comes in differently textured surfaces, and I prefer the smoother portrait grade canvas. When painting with oil paint, the canvas must be protected from the acidic binding oils in the paint. Oil paint that is painted directly on canvas will over time cause the canvas to decay and fall apart. If the canvas is primed, it is ready to be stretched and painted on. If the canvas is unprimed, it must first be stretched on stretcher bars and then primed.

The best primer for oil paint is an oil primer. When using an oil primer, the canvas must be sized to protect the cotton fibers from the acidic linseed oil in the painting ground or primer. The surface to receive the oil primer must be sized by applying an animal skin glue and water mixture. The sizing will also shrink and tighten the canvas on the stretcher bars. In applying the oil primer, it is best to do it in

two to three coats, with sanding between layers. The application of the oil primer is time consuming, and is usually beyond the patience of most beginners and students; it is best left to the most professional of artists.

What is commonly used today is an acrylic gesso primer. The acrylic gesso is a plastic flexible ground that has a suitable tooth (texture) for the oil paint to lock into and remain stationary. It is not acidic, and can be applied directly onto a stretched canvas without sizing. The acrylic gesso needs to be applied in thin layers, as smoothly as possible, and sanded between layers. If the wetness from the gesso causes the canvas to expand and sag loosely on the stretcher, the back of the canvas can be dampened with a sponge, which will allow the canvas to shrink and tighten on the stretcher. The stretcher bars can also be expanded to tighten the primed canvas.

The quickest route to painting is to purchase the pre-primed canvas, either as a panel or stretched on stretcher bars that are primed and ready to paint. In the past I made the effort to experience the mixture and application of chalk grounds and lead white oil grounds to unprimed canvas and panels, but now I prefer to use the acrylic gesso pre-primed canvas. I usually purchase the sixty-inch width roll and cut the size I need to match the drawing size of the current painting. I stretch the canvas using staples on a flat, one-half inch thick foam board. I can then either work on the canvas flat on a table or vertical on an easel. When the painting is finished, it can be removed from the foam board and stretched on stretcher bars.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is easy to go online and find countless books with art production medium formulas and techniques, as well as websites dedicated to illustrating and demonstrating the “how to” for just about any material or technique imaginable. Learning begins by being active, curious, and solution-oriented. My only caution is to be wary of the self-aggrandizing TV evangelist artists selling miracle methods and products for self-profit. There is a reason why they are on TV and the Internet and not in museums.

When working with any medium, the artist must have knowledge of material and the techniques to apply the materials. Ignorance of materials and techniques always assures production and project failure. One of the best ways to learn how to paint with oil is to read about the traditional techniques used by artists for centuries and then make repeated visits to art museums to see and understand how the techniques have been applied by our culture’s greatest practitioners. I have found that the viewing of great paintings in museums illuminates the learned knowledge from reading, making the practicing of painting an effective learning experience. The reading and viewing of technique can be more effective when combined with an apprenticed learning experience with a knowledgeable and practiced artist.

After the canvas has been prepared and stretched, it is time to start painting with oil paint. In modern times, oil paint is generally purchased in tubes, unlike the traditional method of grinding and mixing pigment with the most often used linseed oil as a binder. The oil paint in the tube is suspended pigment in linseed oil and, although it can be used directly out of the tube, it is best when used with a paint medium. There are many formulas, but the most often used is a mixture of dammar varnish, stand oil, and turpentine. There are many paint and medium recipe books available, and there are several ready-made mediums available for purchase in art stores. The most economical medium is mixing your own by using one part dammar varnish, one part stand oil, and four parts turpentine. Adding more turpentine to the mixture diminishes the oil and varnish ratio, making the medium leaner (less oil content); it also speeds up the paint’s drying time. The less turpentine used, the higher the oil and

varnish ratio, making the medium fatter (more oil content). The higher the oil content is, the slower the drying time. It is best to do all of the underpainting stages in a lean mixture of medium. The later stages can be painted with a fatter (higher oil content) medium. The painting rule is fat over lean. Oil paint contracts as it dries, so if a lean, fast-drying mixture of paint is applied over a fat, slow-drying paint mixture, the result will be cracking on the paint's surface. The lean mixture on the surface dries first, while the slow-drying mixture below contracts as it dries, pulling the top lean surface apart, creating the surface cracking.

A common misconception held by beginning students is that oil paint is a heavy impasto medium. This misconception inspires the mistake of painting in the spirit of Rembrandt or Van Gogh, with a heavily paint-laden brush, usually with pigment straight from the tube, without medium. The untrained student's ambitious efforts nearly always result in a costly mess. Oil paint, with its variety of medium formulas, is the most versatile of the painting methods. It can be applied as thinly and transparently as watercolor, or as a thick and heavy opaque impasto. It is very pliable, and is easily mixed, blended, knifed, and brushed onto the painting surface. Oil painting is also the most forgiving medium when

mistakes are made. It is a simple process to scrape or wipe off and begin again, or to let dry and paint over. No matter what process is chosen, a medium must be used. For those wishing to paint thickly, there are impasto mediums that can be used to speed drying time and ensure elasticity in the paint during drying time.



I have mixed and worked with a variety of mediums, but now, for production expediency, I primarily use the medium product Liquin Original, by Winsor & Newton. When mixed with the tube paint, it keeps the paint flowing and pliable during the application work stage and dries in less than twenty-four hours. What I paint in one day is dry enough the next day to over-paint and add more layers.



Once the drawing is complete, I begin the process of making an oil painting by toning the canvas with burnt sienna. I first began creating my paintings with the burnt sienna undertone after attending an El Greco exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Met had a few El Greco paintings in its permanent collection, but it wasn't until I saw a large collection of his work that I could see the blazing, fiery, burnt sienna undertones that radiated from beneath and between the applied surface colors. The excessively warm undertone creates a unifying influence on all colors placed over it. The undertone is often visible in paintings in thin, transparently painted areas, and occasionally when the undertone remains as the top-paint surface on the painting. El Greco's paintings influenced and changed the way I paint. What I saw in El Greco's paintings could not have been seen in reproduction photographs. To learn and be instructed by artists, especially in painting,

students must directly observe the paintings. The more paintings available for viewing by an artist, the more learning is possible from the collective record of productive thinking exhibited in the paintings.

After the underpainting, the drawing is transferred to the toned canvas using vine charcoal. The vine charcoal is easily rubbed off for making corrections and is also easily absorbed or dissolved into the oil paint being applied over it. Pencil should not be used in drawing for an oil painting. It is believed that,



over time, as the painting ages, the graphite may migrate to the surface of the painting. I have noticed this happening on a painting once, and now only use charcoal when drawing an oil painting.

When painting, it is always best to paint the background first. In the next stage of the painting, the window, floor, and table-top are marked off with masking tape, allowing me to manipulate and freely blend the paint while maintaining a hard edge line. Air pollution and CO2 emissions are part of the theme in this painting, and the gray-blue sky is painted first, because it is the farthest background in the painting. For the sake of production efficiency, the back interior wall was painted a blue gray undertone.



In the above left painting, a transparent burnt sienna has been applied over the wall, window, and tree. The transparent application of the burnt sienna neutralizes the blue backgrounds, making them grayer. It also makes the transition to darker value tones easier in future paint applications. In the center painting, the floor tile was painted while the transparent burnt sienna dried in the background. In the right painting, the sky had been repainted over the burnt sienna layer. The burnt sienna tones the blues being used for the sky and makes the task of transitioning from dark to light easier.

In the painting on the left, a transparent burnt sienna was added to the floor and table, and the back wall was painted with a warm gray. When I added the transparent burnt sienna and additional layers to the wall and sky, my mind was in a neutral state, waiting for something to materialize visually from within the painting, to provide direction or to strike a harmony between what I was seeing on the canvas and what I was seeing in my mind.

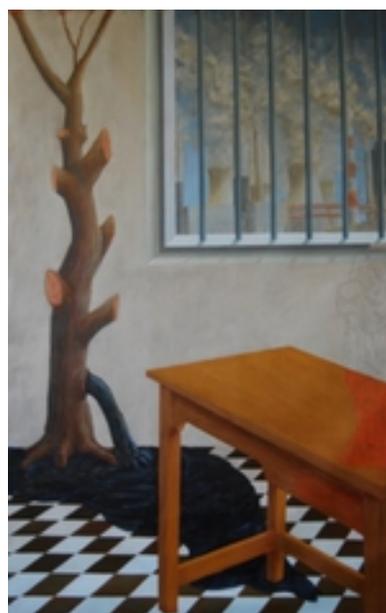


At



this point, what I want in my mind isn't clear, so the searching must take place on the canvas with paint during work sessions, and during a moment of time when my conscious mind is occupied with another activity, or in sleep, when the subconscious mind can more easily search and find solutions that are not consciously seeable. I often find solutions the following day after a problem presents itself the previous day. Upon returning to the easel, I begin to solve the problem without thinking, simply knowing what to do. Through many hours of practiced painting experience, I have come to know that this method of production action and reaction and unconscious searching will uncover an unforeseeable solution and a stronger conclusion to the painting than any preconception that might exist at the painting's inception. A writer will testify that a story tells itself, all the writer has to do is begin.

A painting will also paint itself, and expand the painting's narrative; all that is required of the artist is to start painting, knowing the conclusion or ending will surface. The idea of waiting for inspiration is a myth created by non-artists who are ruled by their limitations. The painting process, once begun, must



always be open for change, and preconception must be abandoned in favor of unconscious reflection and the constant production occurrences of action and reaction.

In the above left painting, the power plant has been added by placing the drawing over the painting and transferring the drawing with vine charcoal. It was easier to paint the sky's atmospheric transitions from light to dark, without the obstruction of the power plant structures. The power plant was

painted in muted colors, with low contrast to indicate a distant position in the background. In the middle painting, the window sill is painted and a greater density of smoke has been added to the background. In the painting on the right, bars are drawn and painted on the window, and the table has been started. Once again, it was easier to paint the entire view of the window without the obstruction of the window bars. In the three paintings above, the focus was on the completion of the background window scene that remains unchanging throughout the rest of the painting. The view of the power plant from the window now recreates the phantom memory of the initial idea of the painting. A

thought has been made visible and will now anchor and guide the remaining pictorial ideas toward the completion of the painting.



In the above left painting, additional layers were added to the table and the first layer of color over the undertone was added to the tree. The Statue of Liberty was transferred and drawn onto the painting. In the above right painting, more layers were added to the tree and the liquid anxiety was painted, flowing from the distressed tree. The opening in the desk was left unpainted because, at this point in the painting, I decided the world's largest polluters and exploiters of human resources needed to be represented in the painting. The symbols I needed were the Chinese and American flags. At this stage of the painting, I was waiting for the Chinese flag to arrive in my studio to use as a model for the painting.

In the painting on the left, I drew and transferred the two flags, and completed the underpainting of the Statue of Liberty and the two flags. Underpainting is essentially drawing and constructing form with paint. The underpainting of the flags and statue

needed to be painted opaquely, to create an evenly toned paint base to insure a uniformity of color to the objects being painted. The underpainting of the two flags was created by mixing a value scale of burnt umber for the red and blue part of the flags, a gray value scale for the white parts of the flag, and a burnt sienna for the yellow stars in the Chinese flag. The Statue of Liberty was painted with warm and cold gray value scales. The cooler grays were used in the light areas of the statue and the warmer grays were painted in the darker shaded areas of the statue. The use of the warm and cold contrast scales adds to the three dimensional visual appearance of the statue. The cool tone advances while the warmer tone recedes.





Above right, the statue and flags were painted with their local (actual) color. Above center, the paper for the child's painting on the table was added and a transparent glaze was applied to the wall. Layers will be added to build up darkness on the left and transition to a light tone on the right around the statue. Above left, the child's painting has been added and additional dark, transparent paint layers have been added to the wall.

The painting on the left is the final state. The shadow cast by the statue is a shadow of a soldier representing the militarism in the American

government's foreign and domestic policies that protects and defends our energy and resource consumption.

When painting, I usually have a working title and, if not a title, a working idea. The actual title of the painting will evolve over time and it will have many titles until the painting is completed. My paintings all begin with the series title Night Journey, a surrealist term for dream, signifying the painting is of a dream state of reality. The second

the title is specific to the idea or of the painting. In Night Journey 55, the title Liquid Anxiety from the title Salvador Dali painting. In the title segment "River of Darkness Filled the Death of Life and the End of am quoting a line from Thomas novel *Of Time and the River: A of Man's Hunger in His Youth*.

I discovered Thomas Wolfe through study of Jack Kerouac. At this time, I



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interested in Kerouac's work, but was interested in his style and his influences. Artists do not just spontaneously explode, becoming full-fledged artists. They are created by experiences and by influential resources such as the works of previous artists. Without the interest in Kerouac, I would have never encountered Thomas Wolfe, who has greatly influenced my productive thinking.

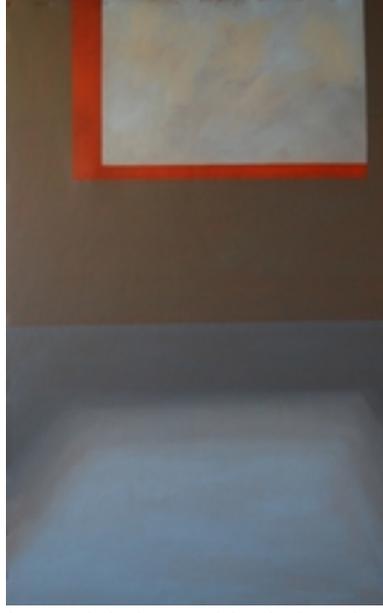
While reading Wolfe I often write down quotes and phrases that strike strong images in my inner vision that I think I may want to turn into paintings. For the narrative description of the painting, I combined a few phrases I had jotted down from my readings of the more poetic Wolfe. The narrative is as follows: Individuals affected by greed and power use the poisonous congestion of their own lives to create a future of dark times where the earth will no longer be beautiful and friendly, becoming a wasteland and a prison of protracted gray days where the life man had known will become a lost and broken dream. These poetic pronouncements were written in the nineteen twenties and thirties, long before our environmental crisis was recognized and acknowledged.

### **Night Journey 56: The Phantasmal Light of Memory of a Lost and Forgotten Time.**

Prior to the painting, I had been watching a lot of documentaries on the Civil Rights movement, the Weather Underground organization, Black Panthers, and the organized protests of the World Trade Organization. Added to these visual experiences of human events was the rioting in Ferguson Missouri. The riots in Missouri produced an image of overly militarized police officers on the Internet, which became the initial spark and image for the painting. I had been looking for a reason to paint my all-time favorite hero and symbol of courage: Tank Man. After China's brutal crackdown on the Tiananmen Square freedom demonstrations of 1989, where many unarmed demonstrators were murdered, a convoy of tanks performed a celebratory, snaked dance down a large boulevard. The tanks were stopped by a lone courageous, and I would assume, outraged citizen with a shopping bag standing directly in the path of the lead tank. When the tank tried to navigate around the individual, tank man would reposition himself to continue to block the tanks. This was all caught on film as an astonished world watched the courage of one man's stand against the indignation of tyranny.

At the time of the beginning of the painting, I had also watched a number of documentaries by political activists focusing on the social and reactionary political aftermath of the events of 9/11. They were highlighting the aggressive military actions perpetrated on perceived and declared enemies of the state, both at home and abroad, and the erosion of civil liberties through the consolidation of power to the executive branch of the government that required less legislative and judicial oversight. In my mind, the images and information of the documentaries translated themselves into the diminishing validity of one of our nation's symbols: the Statue of Liberty.

The documentaries, from the 1950's to the present moment, implied, if not stated, the large "silent majority" of Americans had no voice and assumed a position of avoidance to the injustice perpetrated to



others while being blinded to the dangers of their submissive compliance. Thomas Wolfe, during his departure from fascist Germany in 1936, effectively had written a poetic summation of the dangers of submissive compliance to governmental power. "They all felt that they were saying farewell, not to a man, but to humanity; not to some pathetic stranger, some chance acquaintance of the voyage, but to mankind; not to some nameless cipher out of life, but to the fading image of a brother's face."

In the movie *Vendetta*, the protagonist profoundly declares that citizens should not live in fear of their government; instead, the government should fear its citizens. Maintaining human rights and exercising civil liberties is a challenging task when the police are heavily armed with their oppressive military gear.

The start of the painting is the burnt sienna undertone, as seen in the above left painting. In the center painting, the window sill was masked with masking tape and the outside teargas atmosphere, wall, and floor were painted. In the right painting, the window sill was painted. In this painting, I needed a light value to contrast the dark value of a person hiding in the shadows of the desk. By creating a light pattern on the floor from the window, I would be able to establish the contrast I needed for the figure while maintaining an ambiguous dark space within the painting.



In the below left painting, the three police officers were transferred from the drawing to the painting. Once the drawing had been transferred, the figures were painted monochromatically, using a warm and cold gray scale. After the form of the three figures had been established with the grays scale, the uniforms were toned with burnt sienna, and the faces, masks, and guns were toned with blue.

In the painting on the left, the hiding figure's clothing was painted with a burnt sienna scale, while the face, hands, and boots were painted with a blue scale. The prison clothing will become blue, and the use of the burnt sienna will both tone the blue and make it easier to transition to darker values. The blue in the faces will also tone the flesh colors, as well as make an easier transition to darker skin tones. In these pictures, the brown had already been painted over the blue underpainting of the boots.





The tables will be a raw sienna color, and to insure an easy transition to dark tones, I use a blue underpainting for the tables.

In the three paintings above, the greens of the uniforms and the blacks of the masks and guns have been painted over the burnt sienna and blue undertones.

In the far left painting, the first color layers of the table top have been applied. In the painting on the left, the first layer of flesh figure, as well as the blue and

white stripes of the pajama/concentration camp clothing. After the figure was painted, more layers of paint were added to the top of the table, and then the sides and legs were painted. In the window, the



first transparent layer of teargas was added.

On the far left, more teargas haze was added to the window scene. The tanks and the Statue of Liberty were drawn, and cast shadows were added to the floor around the desk.



In the painting on the left, darker values have been added to the figure beneath the table and the tanks have been painted. The tanks are meant to be a ghost-like dream image and are painted transparently, without an underpainting, making the table line visible through the tanks.

In the below left painting, the Statue of Liberty and Tank Man were painted transparently, without underpainting, and Liberty's torch is extinguished, contributing to the hazy atmosphere



of the teargas. In the below middle painting, the chair was drawn and painted with a burnt sienna underpainting, to provide a uniform surface for the wood and metal colors to be applied. In the painting below right, the local colors of the chair had been painted.

On the left is the final state of the painting. The shadows were deepened on the chair, hand, and face of the person hiding under the table.

What I felt I had achieved visually was a poeticized lyric and a surrealistic reflection of the world I live in. Pioneers in abstraction, like Kandinsky and Klee, refer to painting as creating a harmony, as in a musical chord. The musical chord consists of notations that are projected through a medium that creates an inner

vibration and harmony within a receiver. The painting strikes that harmonic chord within me. The outcome of the painting is in harmony with my inner feelings and the intent of the painting.



The painting is now a separate entity and has its own reality. Its visual notations have struck a chord and it is now up to viewers to listen, to see, and to feel if it is harmonic or dissonant to their being.

## Summary

In secondary education and above, the quality of art education is dependent upon the production skill and knowledge of the artist teacher. If the teacher is not a practicing artist capable of a high level of skilled production, then chances are the quality of art programming is quite poor and students aren't receiving adequate instruction. The most effective and appropriate form of teaching is the apprenticeship relationship between the highly skilled artist teacher and visually intelligent students. In order for the apprenticeship method to be effective and beneficial for both students and school, class sizes should be restricted to around fifteen students. The smaller the student to teacher ratio, the higher the production and learning quality for the students. Stuffing thirty students into a classroom for a forty to fifty minute class period may be adequate for the standard mass production core academic lecturing, drilling, and testing classes, but it is wholly inadequate for the individual responses required to meet individual student needs in an art classroom. Teaching in the arts is far more subjective than presenting math equations, sentence structures, or historical facts that require a single, uniform student response. Oversized classes deny art student legitimate learning opportunities. Oversized classes indicate that the administrative commitment in general is to meeting more practical educational requirements and not to individual learning needs. Oversized classes translate into less teaching opportunities for the artist instructor and less learning opportunities for art students.

When the art teacher is a competent artist with work on display, the students can immediately and visually acknowledge the artist's authority in the classroom. Without word ever being spoken, students can immediately recognize that the person giving instructions is a knowledgeable artist. Respect is earned by visual achievement, not by titles or words. Those students wishing to take the advanced classes do so because I have knowledge they want to learn. They attend, not by force, but by their individual self-interest and learning needs.

The studio classroom transforms my work into a teaching and learning resource for my advanced students, and a learning resource for me, with the non-artist Basic Art classes. In the Basic Art classes, discussions and questions enrich my understanding of how students see art and how they form and translate visual dialogues. They give me a chance to see and experience how my images are being translated and received.

For the advanced students, my work becomes a production technique model to visually help them understand how to construct a work of art. The students are also able to witness missteps in production and how they are corrected or used to create a greater unity in the art work. Even though the advanced students aren't involved in constructing visual images around thoughts of expression, they benefit from my modeled productive thinking process in visually formulating idea expression.

In this chapter, I used my work, not as an example of work of great achievement or status, but rather as a learning tool or model which students may use and from which they might learn. An artwork must be an individual expression that is generated by knowledge and experience. There is no clear definitive method for producing an artwork. The idea or the source of creativity is just as elusive as determining being and consciousness. No one knows where it comes from - it just happens, and it happens more frequently and intelligently when the mind is filled with experiences and knowledge that can be churned and mixed into ideas that create the tumultuous inner chaos necessary to organize and express a form of insight and truth and a poeticized reality that can only exist in art. What I have written is my productive process that may be informative to some and inconsequential to others. What I have tried to show is how my work is directly connected to the resources I have read and am reading, as well as to current events in the news that I often associate with past experiences or past events.

When students complain of not having sufficient experiences in their young lives to form visual expressions, I advise them that their current job is to be a student and their focus should be on learning techniques and understanding how the more skilled artists have structured the expression of a visual dialogue.

Art is also a shortcut, or indirect form of receiving experience. Art requires the projection of oneself into the experience the artwork provides for the viewer, reader, and listener. In projecting into the reality of a work of art, one feels and obtains the experience of the artist that had been encapsulated in the well-crafted act of artistic expression. The life experiences of feeling emotions, forming ideas, and building personal character can be formed and advanced through reading, film, music, and visual art, or anything that requires a projection into a different reality and a new experience. Everyone is formed by their experiences and art is always a part of the experiences that shape and define an individual.