

A LANDSCAPE PAINTING

by
L.L. (Landscape)
Cherry McPherson

An Essay

submitted to the faculty of the
Department of Art
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Graduate College, University of Arizona

1953

Approved:

Andreas Anderson
Director of Thesis

5/19/53
Date

E9791

1952

41

This essay has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced degree at the University of Arizona and is deposited in the Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library. Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgment of source is made. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this manuscript in whole or in part may be granted by the head of the major department or the dean of the Graduate College when in their judgment the proposed use of the material is in the interests of scholarship. In all other instances, however, permission must be obtained from the author.

SIGNED:

Cherry L. McPherson

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I Introduction

II Chapters 1,2,3,4

III Conclusion

Enclosure: Two color transparencies

INTRODUCTION

For the purpose of this essay, it would seem best to state my aims in the creation of an original oil painting of a landscape in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

My aim is to take a segment of nature and to reduce it to a simpler order. My intent is to create order, yet to retain a semblance of reality so that one may recognize the subject matter of the painting. It is not my purpose to abstract the subject to the fullest extent, although all works of art have degrees of abstraction to be sure. However, I hope, that one, on looking at this painting, will not think it merely a naturalistic copy of nature. I have simplified and eliminated much of the chaotic detail that nature always presents. I have changed positions of rocks to lead the eye in and out of the picture space. The result, I hope, has been a more pleasing arrangement.

CHAPTER I

Let us start at the beginning. My first step was to choose a problem. Several things occurred to me. At first I thought I might like to delve into the problems of producing art work suitable for the reproduction processes. Then I thought I might like to work out a problem in portrait painting. Finally, however, with the help of Professor Anderson, we decided to turn to a landscape painting in oil. In preparation, I was to make many sketches in watercolor as well as detailed notes in pen and ink or pencil.

After choosing the problem, my next step, besides making the sketches and drawings, was to choose a suitable subject for the landscape in oil. Choosing subject matter is not the concern of painters of non-objective art, but my purpose was to pick something that would be typical of the Southwestern terrain.

On every Sunday excursion I had taken my sketching materials along in the hope of catching an interesting composition. Arizona landscape was a challenge and a fascination to me because I have spent most of my life in a very different sort of climate and terrain. The Michigan countryside, where I previously resided, has a different light quality, and the greens of the trees

and land are more intense and lush. One certainly cannot see the great distances and panoramic views that Arizona presents. Of course mountains and cacti were new to me. The great distances created a problem in composition concerning the finding of enough foreground and middle distance objects to make a satisfying arrangement. Saguaros alone may indicate distance by appearing smaller and smaller, but they do not provide enough interest for a pleasing composition in themselves.

The Spanish architecture in Arizona is interesting. I had done a few studies of San Xavier Mission and discovered how hard it is to depict true color values on the time-worn adobe walls. The sun is constantly changing its position, thus altering the shadows and reflected light surfaces. Not only that, but the perspective is complicated. In connection with this, it would seem to be best to carefully compose and draw the picture one day and to come back the next day to add the color. It takes two days to become acquainted with the subtle color and value nuances that change on the walls of historic San Xavier.

Sabino and Bear Canyons offer a wealth of material. The problem in each instance is to simplify the great amount of chaotic detail that confronts the eye. This is not easy to do unless a conscious effort is made to see only the planes and large volumes in space. The picturesque

quality of almost every nook and cranny of Sabino Canyon detracts the painter from his basic purpose, i.e. organizing picture space, both two-dimensionally and three-dimensionally.

As a final word about subject matter perhaps it is just as well to look right in your own back yard or neighborhood. If one really looked, a stone could be worked into a large imaginary composition. It is not necessary to travel miles for you will never find the perfect scene in nature. It is up to the artist to take what nature presents and to create from it a work of art. Some of the smallest things in nature, a leaf, a tree trunk, a stone, a bush, can be the starting points for a beautiful painting. Nature is everywhere chaotic, so the artist must create order and beauty.

After getting the first hurdles behind me, and deciding upon a beautiful Sycamore tree as the subject of my painting, I should like to consider the realm of technique and my methods. The first afternoon I spent on the important step of composing and drawing. The second afternoon I applied color in the alla prima manner. There was no underpainting in greys or complements. Although not completed in one afternoon, the painting was kept in a wet state by the liberal application of a coat of linseed oil. As I tend to work in a dry manner anyway, this oil coating should have helped the pigment. I used wide, flat

bristle brushes to apply the pigment in broad, simple areas and tried to establish all the large values over the canvas and avoid picking out any one detail to work over to the exclusion of the composition as a whole.

In the drawing I worked large and simply, thinking of the main lines of direction rather than the minute nuances in outline of tree trunk, rocks, and foliage. Sometimes it is a good deal easier to think of the negative spaces around trees, buildings, etc. For example, if one thinks of the spaces in between the trunks rather than of the trunks themselves one will find how easy it is to get the main lines of direction, omitting naturally the minute details in curvature. One will not draw a detailed outline as a cartographer does for a map of the coast of Maine but should find himself breaking up the space as a whole with main lines of direction much as he did in one of his first problems in art fundamentals or in a similar course in design. It is sometimes hard to get one's mind to thinking of the negative space, and it is all too easy to lapse back into the old way of thinking, but it is worth trying.

Besides working large and simply I tried to analyze groups of rocks and foliage in terms of volumes in space. If one can analyze objects in nature in terms of the geometric solids the problem will be simplified.

I also tried to firmly establish receding planes and volumes in space in order to lead the eye in from

left to right, over and back again to the starting point. This was done by changing positions of rocks, adding a limb here or there, and accenting spots by value contrasts.

The palette was simple. The earth colors were used mainly. The rest of the palette consisted of ultramarine, cadmium yellow medium, vermillion, alizarine, black and white.

CHAPTER II

Before going further with a discussion of techniques and methods, I might give a history of the influences and art experiences that have lead me to the conclusions I now draw concerning all aspects of art. Although I hope to go one learning after this work is finished, and consider myself still a learner, I have had a fair degree of previous training that should stand me in good stead toward further progress. At any rate the maxim "Art is long, life is short" seems to sum up all art activity.

As a child I had always drawn. A tatoo on a man's arm fascinated me then, and I made him sit still while I drew a copy of it. Long since the incident has been forgotten, but the scrap of paper remains as a memento. Of course most every child draws and paints with delight, but because my parents were artists, I was encouraged more than others it seems. I was sent to a children's class at the Cleveland Institute of Arts. Throughout high school I was enrolled in art classes. In the summer months during high school my Mother and I attended outdoor painting classes sponsored by local art groups. In fact we were the nucleus of what later was to become the group called the Birmingham Women Painters. This was my first experience with oils. Mr. Evarts, the instructor, was a capable artist, and a good

teacher. We learned much from him. Scores of landscapes are souvenirs of this period. Most all the pictures contain, as the motif, a red barn.

My undergraduate college schooling was at Wayne University in Detroit and at the University of Tampa in Florida. Many of the art courses I took were comparable to the art courses offered at the University of Arizona, e.g. life drawing, design, commercial art, oil painting, etc.

During a two year interim, however, I attended two art schools in Detroit called The Art School of the Society of Arts and Crafts, and Meinzinger's Art School. I received more intensive experience in art at both schools, for academic subjects did not confuse my curriculum. At Arts and Crafts a well known Detroit artist was our teacher. His name is Sarkis Sarkisian. Sarkisian is an excellent painter, and he inspired most of his students to copy his technique, that of scumbling, in the hopes of achieving the beautiful effects that he got. To paint a year under his tutelage was a valuable experience.

Next I studied for a semester at Meinzinger's Art School. Most of the time I worked in commercial art, but one day a week I painted portrait studies in oil.

After Meinzinger's I took a job to get some practical experience in the commercial art field. For seven months I worked for a firm in Detroit named R. C. Banker & Co. as an apprentice artist. We put out a monthly catalogue of

pictures of furniture of standard brands. Subscribers to this catalogue, mainly retail furniture stores throughout the country, could order stereotypes for newspaper advertisements from us. The experience at Bankers was very educational and practical.

After the interlude at art schools and Banker's I returned to Wayne University to complete my work for a Bachelor of Science in Education degree. Thereupon I began my career in teaching. My first job was at Pontiac High School, but more of that later.

During the summer months I studied further. The first summer I studied at the University of Colorado in Boulder. There, our teacher was Emilio Amero, a nationally known artist whose prints are in the collection of the Library of Congress. Mr. Amero, a most serious man of Mexican heritage, paints pictures with social significance, in a meticulous tempera technique. He is an authority on the techniques of the artist and is a full-time professor at the University of Oklahoma. He was one of the most conscientious teachers I have ever worked under. From him I learned the technique of painting an underpainting in grisaille and overpainting in glazes, much like the old masters. We had to fill a notebook of sketches for outside work in his class, and we spent a half hour each morning drawing from the model before we started to paint.

The next summer I went back to Wayne University to study sculpture and watercolor.

In the summer of 1951 I studied under James West and William MeVey at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Cranbrook is a very beautiful and inspiring place. I marvelled at the beautiful work turned out there. The advanced students were almost in whole producing colorful non-objective paintings in a variety of techniques altogether unheard of in my experience. My work reflected the influence of these students and, while I still painted in a somewhat traditional manner, I began trying out new mediums. For the first time I tried colored inks for watercolors and, in oil painting silver and gold paint, adding sequins to the wet pigment. I did some of my best and most original work at Cranbrook. In fact, three of my watercolors were accepted in three jury shows and won two honorable mentions and a second prize. The prize money was certainly welcome, but the honors really overjoyed me. One watercolor is, at present, a part of a travelling exhibit, and one watercolor was purchased for \$100.00, and so I felt greatly rewarded.

In addition to my schooling I cannot help but mention my five years experience as a teacher. This, I feel, also contributed to my maturity as an artist. When I taught at Pontiac High School I did a good deal of reading to make my teaching more effective. I taught the students basic principles of design, perspective, color theory and pigment mixing. We drew from the model and cast and worked in all

mediums such as tempera, oil, watercolor, charcoal, and clay.

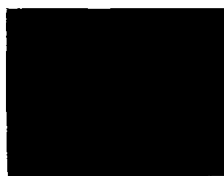
The value of my experience at Pontiac High School was increased by the presence of a very capable and well educated man who was my immediate superior in the art department. He had obtained a higher degree in art and had worked many extra summers as well. He had set up a very comprehensive art program, and, in order to follow it, I read a good many art books, particularly on design.

My fifth year of teaching was at Lockman Elementary School. I taught art for grades kindergarten through six. What a complete change! However the experience of guiding hundreds of children in their artistic endeavors was of value. One constantly learns as one teaches.

I could mention other experiences such as a painting trip to the coast of Maine and Massachusettes and more schooling at the University of Michigan, but I think that the foregoing indicates their variety. Summing it all up I might say that my parents have been the most influential in the long range picture. I have quite naturally gravitated to some phase of the art field as a career, because of my background. My father is a commercial illustrator and my mother has studied art. My father and I have gone on many painting trips together and attended many exhibitions. So, all in all, my rearing and my own inclination have resulted in my art training and the small measure of success I have.

CHAPTER -III

This takes us to a point where I should state, briefly, my own philosophy. I feel that painting is mainly an intuitive and, only secondarily, an intellectual process. Therefore it is difficult to put into words the feelings, emotions, and thoughts, that go into a painting. In most cases I wish to catch a mood or an emotion. Sometimes I wish to put down numerous impressions about a certain place. In that case I work from sketches and imagination. I have tried a few paintings in the non-objective mode. However, I feel these are to be considered very interesting experiments. Painting non-objectively should not supplant a thorough grounding in the fundamentals of the painter's craft. Many students wish to skip these fundamentals, but it seems to me that they can be compared to scales and learning to read notes in music, or, to make another analogy, to the study of algebra, geometry, or physics to the field of higher mathematics or engineering. For a case in point, take the giants of Modern Art, Picasso, Matisse, Rouault. All are very capable of producing an academic work of art. A rounded out and complete art knowledge seems to be necessary before one can paint non-objectively or abstractly with any sincerity or personal aim.



CHAPTER IV

To return to the discussion of the problem of this problem, I found myself using a number of different techniques to achieve those results I wanted. I tried glazing, scumbling, scraping, and repainting on certain areas of the canvas. So the final result is certainly not alla prima, but rather a mixed technique. The medium which has proved most workable for me, especially for the wet-in-wet technique, is a mixture of copal varnish and linseed oil.

My methods for the second painting, "Midway," for this thesis, a watercolor, shall be discussed next. This painting is a more imaginative and emotional creation, having been done entirely from memory and in the studio. Of course I had made many sketches of the midway before, but the impressions of the noise, color, speed, garishness, wandering crowds, and heat were what inspired me.

- The painting was done on a piece of damp watercolor paper in the wet-in-wet technique. After the painting dried I superimposed lines drawn with pen and matchstick in various colored inks. There are no opaque areas. The placing of various buildings, booths, rides, etc. was arbitrary in order to fill picture space. The calligraphy and open pattern might be compared with the

style of Raoul Dufy. However the painting is a genuinely original expression, and the soft blending of colors with overlaid lines were intended to portray the speed and confusion of the situation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, and in summing up and comparing the results of this problem, it might be said that, while the paintings are no great departure from the works of other landscape painters in this region, either in techniques or aims, the working out of the problem has revealed to me more intimately the beauties of nature in Arizona.