LESSON PLAN

American Landscape Painting in Oil

Inspired by Artists from Joslyn's Collection: Albert Bierstadt & Hans Hofmann as well as professional artist, JK Thorsen

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Grade Level Open

Overview
While using environmentally friendlier materials, this oil painting lesson will assist students in developing a landscape composition with a focus on spontaneity, expression, and color. Students will combine oil painting practices while be encouraged to paint in their own-style. Instincts will be encouraged, and compositions will be assisted by either producing studies/sketches outdoors and using their own sketches as references or studying/sketching painting images provided by Joslyn's art collection, including Albert Bierstadt and Hans Hofmann, as well as painting references by artist JK Thorsen.

Anticipatory Set

As students become closer to nature, they also begin to appreciate their own process and artwork. Students will be encouraged to think for themselves while creating paintings that exhibit their individual expression. In turn they will be asked to treat their artwork like jewels, like their own beating hearts.

Objectives

• Students will produce simple sketch/study.
• Students will set-up their own palette.
• Students will produce an authentic painting focusing on spontaneity, expression, and color.
• Students will collaborate in the demonstration and assist each-other in the process.

Materials & Resources

Room Set-Up:

• 1 standing or table easel for each student.
• 1 table or shared table for every 2 students
• Blue work paper towels for each table
• 1 paper grocery trash bag for each student
• 2 tables for paints and palette-prep
• Tape available to tape studies & refs on easels

Workshop Supplies

• 1 canvas board per attendee; 16" x 20" or larger.
• 1 small surface for sketch/study.
• Oil Paints (Alkyd Free) Blick Student or Artist Grade.
• Prussian blue, Cobalt blue, Lemon yellow, Transparent or Indian yellow, Orange, Alizarian crimson, Phthalo green, Light green, Transparent or mixing white, perelyne black.
• Whole Oil Medium, (2 parts fine art quality linseed oil, 1 part fine art quality walnut oil, 3 parts spike oil of lavender or Eco-House Extra Mild Citrus Thinner).
• Dropper bottles or small squeeze bottles for medium
• 3 large - 1in chip brushes each
• One liner brush each for study
• 1 large palettes and/or large palette paper taped to a hard surface for each student. One that can be moved and held. The larger the better. Must be heavy if working plein air. Please no small foam plates.
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- One large mouthed glass paint thinner jar filled with Spike Oil of Lavender or Eco-House Xtra Mild Citrus Thinner. No petrol-based or chemically refined thinners please.
- 1 cardboard mat strips for painting 1 per attendee
- Palette knife or knives for each student for mixing and painting
- 3-4 sets of gloves for each student
- Name Tags and Markers
- Albert Bierstadt Image
- Hans Hofmann Image
- JK Thorsen Images

Instructor’s Resources

- Painter’s Craft, Tad Spurgeon
  - JK Thorsen Web site [www.jkthorsen.com](http://www.jkthorsen.com)

Vocabulary

- Palette
- Medium
- Alla Prima
- Push and Pull of Color
- Color Temperature
- Light, Object, Shadow
- Composition
- Authentic

Lesson Outline

I. Review images (from hand-out & power point) & ideas for relevant landscape paintings
   A. Albert Bierstadt, Hans Hofmann, and JK Thorsen
      a. Where are the lights and darks?
      b. Where is there a focal point in the painting- or is there and order to the painting?
      c. Was the painting built one layer at a time or alla prima? Was it completed in the field, or worked in multiple sessions?
   B. Ask questions while reviewing memory, mind’s eye and instincts.
      a. What is the composition going to be?
      b. Where will the focal point be?
      c. Horizon high or low?
      d. Using the rule of thirds, can you place a tree, lake or other focal point at one of the four “sweet spots” on your painting surface?
      e. Paint in big shapes of the painting. Work loosely. Where is the darkest dark? Set it down. Where is the lightest light? Set that down. Once you have established these two values on your painting, every other brushstroke is going to be in RELATION to your darkest and your lightest light.
   C. Ask questions while discussing a paintings essence, a painter’s influences, and “jumping-off points”.
      a. Are the brushstrokes blended together or put down one at a time? How does this affect the energy of the image?
   D. Briefly mention abstraction. More importantly emphasize the allowance of a painting to assume a life of its own. Share the concept of a painting sharing the lead with the artist and painting from “within”.
      a. Ask the students to be open to shifts that are likely to occur as they paint.
      b. Remind students to allow the guiding idea or theme to change as often as they like.
      c. Explain to students that if they feel they are at a dead-end or frustrated with one concept, go on to another, or allow surprises within a painting to further your growth.

II. Invite students to choose a painting, memory or a concept to reference as they produce a study and then a painting.
   A. Offer students the opportunity to choose a word from the list, (or any other open-minded idea), when beginning their study sketch and painting. Ask students to keep the word in mind as they go through the
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initial stages of the painting. Allow it to float there – don’t over think it, allow it to guide your intuitive choices, and stay with it as long as it is working for you.
(Solitude, earth, climb, fragile, connect, rooted, journey, watery, ancient...)

III. Provide palette-prep and color-mixing demonstration with full student participation, (limited palette).
   A. Provide information through questions about color and temperature and transparency.
      a. Generally speaking, is yellow warm or cool? When is yellow cool? (When a very small amount of a cool color is mixed with yellow, such as green.)
      b. Generally speaking, is blue warm or cool? When is blue warm? (When a very small amount of a warm color is mixed with blue, such as yellow.)
      c. Mix a small amount of medium with each color on palette. Enough so that the viscosity of the paint is moving.
      d. Allow several students to mix oil with the paint. Have one student assist the next student.

IV. Provide study demo with full student participation & collaboration
   A. Sketch loosely sketch from concept or provided images. Mention rule of thirds and going beyond academic, (beyond rules).
   
   B. Sketch together briefly on a small surface with pencil or one paint color.

V. Provide painting demonstration with full student participation & collaboration
   A. Have easel set-up.
   B. Using study sketch or painting reference begin painting using a fencing-type position
      a. Paint from shoulder not from wrist or fingers; stand an arms-length from surface.
      b. Tone the panel or canvas-board. Choose a color and thin it with thinner; pick-up some of the color with folded or crumbled work towel.
      c. Use yellow or pale color to pull composition forward, use dark color to push composition back.
      d. If there is a focal point, place in one of four "sweet spots".
      e. Allow students to place paint on surface with brush, knife and fingers. Have one student assist the next student, and so-on.

VI. Allow students to set-up and paint.
   A. Remind students to use image or study as a "jumping-off point.
   B. Remind students to be spontaneous and courageous.
   C. Remind students that this is the perfect safe-place to explore, grow.
   D. Remind students that there are no mistakes just new journeys.
   E. Remind students to allow paintings to take-on a life of their own; using their study or chosen painting reference for a limited time only.
   F. Allow quality time to observe, listen and to paint from within.
   G. Ask students to consider applying a glaze to their paintings.
      a. Provide brief glazing demonstration using a quinacradone or transparent yellow or rose.

VII. Closing, life-long follow-up “homework” suggestions.
   A. Observe a sunrise & sunset at least once a month.
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a. While observing, face the opposite direction of the sunrise or sunset to view the light and shadows.
b. If unable to view sunset or sunrise, allow time to watch the light change and move around your surroundings.

B. Remind students to treat, transport and value their paintings as if their paintings were their own beating hearts.

Extensions
- This lesson could be applied to abstract expressionist painting.
- This lesson could be applied to plein air painting and alla prima lesson plans.

Academic Standards
Available on online version at www.joslyn.org/education/teachers/thursdays-for-teachers [select Lesson Plans, then Art of the American West]

About the Artwork

After World War II, an extraordinary group of painters, now known as the Abstract Expressionists, advanced an approach to painting so radical and different from earlier schools that New York City became the international center of art, a position Paris had held for more than two centuries. Hofmann was part of this American vanguard, whose aim was to eliminate recognizable or naturalistic representation in favor of a new, universal visual language. Their non-objective approach to image-making emphasized the individual artist's personal response to the current moment, as well as to the act of painting itself.

Hofmann, unlike many of the other Abstract Expressionists, veers away from mining the subconscious self, and instead embraced a lively style that was less psychologically intense. One of the first artists to drip and spatter paint, Hofmann juxtaposed contrasting hues and thickly textured paint, resulting in a vibrant interplay between pictorial depth of field and the flat surface of the canvas. For Morning, rather than mixing his paints on a palette before applying them with a brush, Hoffman blended colors directly on the canvas using a palette knife to scrape the paint.