

PAINTING

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I am going to *paint*! Isolated during this relentless pandemic I am determined to do something productive with the luxury of my extra time. My hobbies to date have been listed as writing, reading, photography, gardening and cooking, all of which I have a passion for. I love the visual arts and have always held *artists* in high regard. My cousin has outstanding talent as a painter and also displays her unique creativity in mixed media pieces. Her work is of professional quality. Perhaps there is some family gene we share? I have always felt that it would be worth exploring, "If I only had the time!" This was an opportunity too good to squander.

I am a keen observer of nature, I have often wanted to try to recreate a landscape or transfer the images that I have in my mind of the perfect garden to paper; to extract a tiny slice of the environment and memorialize it with the stroke of a brush and scrape of a pallet knife; to duplicate translucent skies and diamonds dancing on water; to successfully freeze an atmosphere and mood in time. I choose a location on the verandah where the mountains and forest, our tranquil lake rimmed with bulrushes, the Clematis covered trellis and grape vines growing on the cedar rail fence are all in view. This, as the day progresses, proves to be an enormous error. Had I used the least iota of common sense I should have realized that for a first attempt, it might be wise to limit my subject matter to a manageable segment of this panoramic view.

I have made sure that all of my necessary work has been completed so that I will be able to concentrate on this new activity without interruption. I choose an early morning when light has started to cascade down the slope of Mount Ida and the mirrored reflections of the forest float on the surface of the lake. With anticipation I set my supplies out on a folding table covered with the grandchildren's plastic art cloth. I have a variety of brushes, rags and jars of water, a paint tray with divisions for mixing paints and a variety of paints that I have acquired over time (having no knowledge of their proper application). I have invested in some actual art paper for use with watercolours.

I am going to take my time despite the fact that I want to just start applying paint to paper. That word again, *time*. Start with a sketch. How to frame my scene? Don't attempt too much. I don't think the sketch needs to be realistic but it does need to block out areas of colour; the sky, prominent features in the landscape, the lake. I try different orientations and sharpen my pencil several times as if the problems I am encountering are somehow the responsibility of the pencil. Finally, I think I have something workable. I begin to transfer the outline onto my canvas. Of course, I have difficulty translating the scale of my sketch onto the larger area resulting in a significantly different image than I had started with. It would do. This was, after all, only an experimental exercise. I am starting to appreciate how complicated this activity will be.

I am a loyal fan of *Landscape Artist of The Year* and its companion program *Portrait Artist*. As I watch the competing artists create there seem to be no strict rules as to technique, no mandatory requirement for style or vision. Some of the works selected are stunning, others perhaps just not my taste

and among them are a small few that I believe a monkey could produce. How difficult can it be? The initial difficulties I am experiencing are simply lessons being learned by a novice through trial and error and my enthusiasm for the project does not waiver.

I am not sure how long I have been sitting here but I do know that I am relaxed and that I have reduced the world into the view stretched out in front of me. I am content and feel absorbed in my project.

I am sure I can now dive into the core of my work and apply paint to paper! I squeeze dollops of colour onto my pallet; white and black, red and ochre, a good green and a light blue. I begin to experiment with combinations of these few and produce small areas of a nice charcoal to highlight the trunks of Birch, a taupe and beige that closely resemble widespread areas in the bulrushes and a variety of greens woven into the forest. I feel hopeful.

Bravely, I load a brush selected and begin to apply the paint which will eventually become my sky across which wisps of lavender-bellied cloud will be scattered. In the area designated for forest I stroke on my base green, over which I can add the lighter and darker shades of groves of growth that are clearly visible. Next I address the lake and shoreline. What I see on my paper in front of me is far too *dark* overall. I take a small area and try to lighten the colour by adding a paler shade. It was immediately absorbed into oblivion in the dark base. "Oh, oh....," I heard myself murmur. "Well maybe," I thought, "I should try adding my wispy clouds to my reasonably satisfactory blue sky and deal with the rest of this gothic image later". I had seen things painted over. It could be done.....but apparently not by me. I

began to feel true concern when my clouds, with their muted pastel highlights, gradually dissipated as well.

My next experiment (and I was beginning to acknowledge that this was in fact an *experiment*), was to paint in some trees. A bold stroke produced the trunk of a dominant Fir; a smaller brush, the pattern of its branches. Silver Birch appeared sporadically, their white bark starkly visible against the evergreen. Once again I felt promise. Perhaps it was detail work that would be my niche. I obviously needed some tutelage in how to work with these paints themselves. I smudged reasonably recognizable reflections on the surface of the lake. I thought the tangles of bulrushes across the bottom edge of my scene would not be difficult as they did not require such precision of form but once again I was totally wrong! My representation was nothing other than impressionistic.

Throughout this process I studied my subject closely. I had wanted to present something light and hopeful as the new day arrived over these mountains. To the contrary, despite all of my efforts, my product was suitable only for dark corners in dark attics. I have a newfound appreciation for those who create visual art. I do not consider my efforts a failure however. As with most endeavours, every experience teaches us lessons and I will be moved on another occasion to try painting again. In the meantime I will try to acquire more knowledge and perhaps find someone with talent to paint with from whom I can learn. My Granddaughter comes to mind.