PAINTING THROUGH BOUNDARIES

Having too many small shapes tends to make our paintings look fractured. We can avoid this by constructing a few large shapes to build our painting upon. As artists, we can create our own conceptual shapes by painting through the boundaries between adjacent objects. Constructing these new shape patterns will help us achieve a bold, free look.

For example, if our subject includes a tree next to the roof of a house, we could render them as two separate objects: the parallelogram of the roof next to the circle of the tree's foliage--an awkward juxtaposition of two strong geometric shapes. But a much better and more satisfying choice would be to combine the two shapes into one, with no edge separating them. The mind's eye will simply fill in the edges of the tree and roof. Making this subconscious transition from artist-created abstract shapes to perceived reality is engaging and stimulating for the viewer.

And such soft, or "lost," edges are easy to work with in watercolor. They can always be tightened up later with a harder edge superimposed over the top to create a beautiful painterly look. In contrast, especially in watercolor, it is difficult to soften a hard edge without resorting to scrubbing and lifting.

I try to combine objects to create a new shape for each of the values in my painting: lights, mid-tones, and darks. Sometimes this means I will need to shift the value of an object slightly so that it matches more closely the value of an adjoining object for easier combining.

Painting through the boundaries of your objects creates a sense of reflected color, and hence, natural light. Back to our example: the green wash of the tree mixing with the red of the roof, all done in one wash, will give this a bounced-light effect.

It can feel uncomfortable to paint through the boundaries between objects, and the painting may look out of control until the end of the process when detail is finally added to achieve the finished look. It may take a leap of faith to see it through to the finish, but the result can be well worth the effort.

Keep your brush wet!

Eric

AWS Gold Medal of Honor