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Paul to Sam -- missing pages, date unknown

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Larger one by any work that helped you. After making a first sketch before nature, a rather loose one with just the bare idea shown, the old time plan was to make a study of the subject. A study you know is a work done to gain knowledge about that particular thing, a carefully drawn and worked out picture with emphasis on structure and details. Well, that is the old style way of approach to the final painting of the picture. But most painters nowadays do not do that; the pictures are painted directly on the spot full size, or are made from the sketches in the studio depending on our knowledge to make it a success. We are not as careful workmen as the older artists—I mean back a couple of generations ago.

Of all the technical things that will help you I think that the planes is of first importance. Any book of landscape painting will emphasize the extreme importance of planes. You know the three big planes of nature, the land, the sky, and the trees of buildings. No matter what time of day or night, rain, snow, frost, fog, etc. never forget that these big planes must not be forgotten. They will be more or less distinct from each other under all these considerations, that is, if one can see a little distance. With planes in mind you can know how light will strike in certain places and not in others. When a picture goes wrong and is a mess, in about 9 cases in 10 the planes are cluttered up with some unnecessary detail. Planes are the things that make a picture look substantial and solid. It holds in all kinds of painting, if we wish to have object occupy space, have depth.

Don't be afraid to go at that larger picture even if it is a flat failure as a picture, you will learn by doing it and that is worth the effort. You will have more confidence for the next one, and so on. You will learn how to handle certain problems and then will not bother you later. Remember to have simple values. I heard a teacher of illustration at Art Inst. say one day that a picture was getting complication if it had more than five main values in it. In most landscapes we have the land, the sky, and tree values, that makes three (I mean trees that are close). Then some trees off a little way may make another two more values with a blurring of values at horizon. The lightest light is the sky
(usually) and the darkest dark the trunks of a tree in shadow, so that makes the five values.

One of your hard problems other than values will be the color. In the color treatment there is the reflection of light to harmonize the values. Cool light from the sky in the shadows, warm light through foliage warms, warm light reflected on tree trunks and foliage from the ground and grass. These reflections are small spots of course, (I am thinking of a landscape where we are looking toward the sun.) Reflections are more marked in summer than in winter. I have seen in the summer woods tree trunks getting warm reflections from a large sunny spot on ground as high up as 30-40 feet. Some times very strong on leaves and branches a dozen feet up. In painting these reflections, in landscapes, in figures, in portraits, remember they are seldom as light as they look to us. Warm reflections fool the eyes, they look light but are not. As an example of how warm color fools the eye haven’t you noticed how a plain band of painted yellow in house will look like a streak of sunlight—if seen suddenly and without warning out of the corner of the eye. I have been fooled that way many times. The reflection must start with the mass. In portrait paint the mass, then put the reflection into it, not the opposite. Same with landscapes.

The three large pictures I sent to Decatur were not allowed in the show. I felt somewhat put out by it but am recovering. I will know better next time when I see the list of jurymen—if the same. Queer, I sent three large to Hoosier show in Indianapolis, all were accepted, one sold. Three to Decatur, better I thought, and were kicked out. Jerry Farnsworth of Univ. of Ill. Was on both juries. All the others were distinctly of the modern school, Albright of Chic. And Bolirad, the others I doubt know about judging from the manager of the show, Neal of Milliken, it will always be a closed corporation.

But I have had them all turned down before—a few times.

Soon after the show over up at Decatur a commercial artist in Decatur had an article in the paper telling how bad it was. I intended to write to him but lost track of the article. A former student of mine of Charleston, Mrs. Albert Moore, had one in the exhibit.
I am not absolutely opposed to all of the modern tendencies. Along about 1912 there was an exhibit at Art Inst. of pictures by a Russian, Boris Anirfeld. The first time I saw it I was not impressed but when the exhibit ended I liked some of them. They were not extreme, not abstract as I recall. Most were large figure pictures, life size figures, a half dozen figures like old masters. They were not realistic either. Many were from bible subjects or mythology. I decided that such subjects, way back in imagination and time, were just done in that unrealistic way. Realism, I thought would project them into the present too much. Ainsfeld taught awhile at Art Inst.. I never have heard of him since.

You asked me one day what I thought of abstract painting. After a good many years of helping student and seeing their work, and my own struggles with pictures over the years I think our pictures are well on the abstract side, one girl student who painted beautiful moderns round flat conventional trees, no matter what kind of tree it happened to be. I can't be convinced that what a student can do without conscious effort is any thing worth while. All the valuable things in this world we have to strive for years and years if we ever reach it. The ability to paint nature as it is, or to modify it to agree with our feelings, is something we will not gain in a day, or will likely be born with ready made. So I don't think this ability is any exception to the rules that we must work hard for any skill in painting.

Leonard was a thinker far ahead of his time. He was an investigator in many lines other than painting. I never was thrilled by any of his pictures but I am impressed by his general interest in nature and machines. I suppose you know that he made drawings of plans for an aeroplane that did actually fly some years back. I have forgotten some other things that he drew plans of that were made to function. He deducted that the tops of mountains had been under ways by the fact of shell fish found in their rocks. But you have probably read all this and more in the book about him.

The autobiography of Cellini you should read if you haven't.

You say you sketched a large canvas and gave it a coat of oil and turp. I have wondered if it was bare cloth. If so a better
way to prepare a cloth is to give it one or two coats of thin glue sizing. Carpenters glue with water heated in a double boiler and applied in one or more thin coats is an old method. The glue must be thin, how thin you can best judge after drying. When dry push on back of canvas with finger, if the glue does not crack it is o.k. On this use some white or light gray paint, let dry and you are ready to go. You can paint directly on the glue sizing as did Velasquez if you like. I have made many of them that way. A quicker way is give the cloth a coat of thinned shellac. That is just as good but shellac is more expensive. I though perhaps you put oil and turp. on the cloth. If so you must not be surprised when 5,10, or 20 years from now your canvas will rot away. In common linseed oil there is an acid that rots the cloth. The coat of glue or shellac prevents oil from reaching the cloth. Because of the acid in common linseed oil it is not good to mix with the paint of the pictures but you don’t need to work about permanency yet awhile. I now use, and leave some years, linseed oil that is the first pressing from the flax seed. It is supposed to be free of the acid, which is added later to get more oil from the seed. But don’t worry pictures I painted 30 to 40 years ago with cheapest colors and common oil still show little change. My friend Cariari, in Nashville, Ind. still uses the common oil (or did) which he puts through a process of his own to clear