

Day 1 - Immersion Retreat

This week is all about cultivating curiosity through your painting process. Curiosity allows you to approach painting without the “should be’s” and “should not be’s”, and curiosity (and therefore play) drives your creativity. This is the place we want to be making paintings from.

We tend to paint because it quiets our minds somehow, and to invite our viewers to do the same thing is a powerful thing.

This week, we’re also going to challenge the notion of what makes a nice painting. We tend to choose subjects that tend to be overly technical and complex, and we need to get out of our own way. We’re going to explore how to create a powerful painting using a simple image, with simple processes.

We spent some time talking about our goals for the week, with people expressing a desire to be freer, to have fun, to be more disciplined about the process. To learn how to dance, to create depth and to come away with a painting (or two) they are proud of.

It is great to have an intention to play with, but we also need to **not be too attached** to that outcome, as that will stifle our curiosity about the process, and fear of “failure” then comes into play.

You don’t have to change the world with every painting - you are allowed to just play with a pretty image.

We will follow a sequence to make our process more efficient, and introduce some simple concepts to help that happen. We’re going to start with the [3 concepts](#) that make a painting:

- Physical skills - your ability to move the paint around
- Perception skills - your ability to observe and distil the information you need
- Conceptual skills - the story YOU want to tell with this painting

TIP: Lose control of your palette - lose control of your painting!

TIP: Free up your painting technique by changing how you hold your brush - hold your brush further back; or try painting with your less dominant hand, or change your painting tool to something unexpected.

Painting is sometimes a chaotic process. When you get a bit lost, this is all part of the process - this is where curiosity comes in. **Apply curiosity to the parts of your painting that are not working.**

Set up your palette for success - dish out your paints across the top of your palette and manage your colours in columns underneath those colours. From R-L Mark sets up: Burnt Umber, Dioxazine Purple, French Ultramarine Blue, Pthalo Blue, Forest Green, Cadmium Yellow Light, Cadmium Yellow medium, Permanent Alizarine, White. Dish out more paint than you think you need. Your palette is your workspace - make your mistakes with mixing colour here rather than your canvas.

Keep your brushes and water clean too. The more you free up the practicalities of your process, the more you can stay in the creative “zone”, without being pulled out by practical “distractions”.

Mark talked about the properties and uses of [Atelier Interactive](#) and [Atelier Free Flow](#). Click [here](#) for a demo on Youtube. And click [here](#) for a demo on Unlocking Formula.

TIP: Expectations get in the way of curiosity!

We talked about glazing for a little while too, click here for some more info on [glazing](#).

We spoke about the different types of perspectives in a painting and how you need to apply these in order to create depth and realism:

- Structural perspective
- Atmospheric perspective
- Personal perspective

Click [here](#) for more info on perspective. And [here](#) for a video demo!

TIP: You know when you've finished a painting because all the questions are answered.

TIP: Use three sources of light for realism and depth. Direct light, reflected light and one other (could be backlit for example).

TIP: Paint what you see, not what you (think) you know!

TIP: Look for opportunities to add as much colour as possible to your paintings.

Your paintbrush needs to work *for* you. With this in mind you need to understand and get to know your brushes and the functions of your paintbrush. Click [here](#) for a webpage all about this.

Most of the rest of the day was spent on [exercises and demonstrations](#) - showing how you can make a painting using [gradation and some detail](#) to make a compelling painting.

Day 2 - Immersion Retreat

Today we are going to start on the journey of choosing an image you'd like to focus on painting for the week.

With this in mind, this morning we're going to go through Mark's roughing in process so you can start looking at the world closely, whilst holding the roughing in process in your head as you go.

You need to start thinking about what it is you want to say with your painting - what is the essence of something you'd like to convey? For example spaciousness, the light, different greens in the grass etc.

TIP: Whatever you want to say will inform the image that you pick.

There's a lot of information out there that we're trying to cram into a canvas. We have to decide what information we want to leave out or exaggerate, to tell the story you want to.

TIP: Give yourself permission to move away from the photo reference.

TIP: Enhance your painting with a ground colour.

[Click here](#) to see the infographic on sketching and roughing in the "Morning Tree". (Or click on the tree image below).

TIP: This is always, only ever, just paint. You can't really make a mistake. You can always re-paint it.

TIP: Set an alarm so you don't get too caught up in it!

TIP: Use glazing techniques (a thin wash of generally pure colour) to "fix" any areas of colour that aren't quite right from roughing in. Make sure you consider the time of day when doing this, and the colour that corresponds to that.

TIP: Use Impasto Gel (Atelier Heavy Gel Gloss) to "lock in" your paint layers and create extra luminosity in your paintings.



Day 3/4 - Immersion Retreat

We had a lovely excursion over to the Bay of Fires on Day 3, and on the way Mark outlined the elements that make up the appearance of [water](#). These are:

- The substrate (what the water is sitting on eg sand, rocks etc)
- The colour of the water
- The surface of the water (windows and mirrors)
- The light - (reflections on the surface and refractions under the surface)

At Bay of Fires we observed how these elements interacted with each other, particularly as the light was changeable. Refractions were evident when the sun was shining.

The difficulty with painting water is generally the ability to break it down into manageable chunks so as to not overwhelm your brain. The four elements above help with that.

We also talked about composition, and how simplifying a composition can also be a way of justifying any technical limitations you may currently feel you have. The ability to crop an image in an unusual way, or change your perspective from a high angle to a low angle for example, can add to, or change the [story](#) you are trying to tell in your painting.

Back in the studio on Thursday (Day 4), Mark demonstrated a water painting showing how you can paint one gradation representing all of these elements in the colour mixes. When dry he added rocks under water and refraction, as well as finally reflections. See the infographics [here](#) for the paint recipes, image progression and techniques used.

Click [here](#) for a video tutorial from shallows to dry sand, and [here](#) for a video tutorial on tropical water. This is slightly different from the way Mark demonstrated in class, but will be helpful nonetheless! If you would like to purchase our (currently downloadable only) Beachscapes Paint Recipe Book, you can do so via our website [here](#).

Mark also showed how you can tell a story with a simple image of granite rocks. This can be a story of transience, of resilience etc. Compositionally it's interesting because of the structure of the rocks as well as the texture. He used watercolour paper to enhance the gritty granite nature of the rocks.

TIP: You can distil your experience right down to one thing. For example the Bay of Fires makes us think immediately of the red rocks. It's about what you want to say.

In this painting Mark wanted to convey the feeling of Bay of Fires with the orange colour on the rocks. To enhance the cool shadows Mark went in with thinned, neat Pthalo Blue, which introduces coolness into the picture as well as another colour, and luminosity = dynamic realism.

TIP: Warm and cool colours depend on context. It's all relative, each colour relates to the other!

The rest of the day was spent working on the "real" paintings :)

Day 5 - Immersion Retreat

We spent this wild day indoors working on our exhibition paintings with diligence and persistence in the face of a power outage and crazy weather!

We had some time in the afternoon chatting about the week and whether or not our goals had been met.

Nikki wanted to paint rocks and she said she learned a lot about this.

There has been a lot of information given this week, and you'll find over the next little while this information will filter through to your practice so that you will see the world differently.

Managing the palette was quite tricky - Greta found she was fighting the palette as she went, especially as the week went on. But when she was able to manage the palette, it was easier to manage the painting!

TIP: Keep Dioxazine Purple and Pthalo Blue away from everything else if nothing else!

Martyn was happy with the two paintings he did, and understands that the paintings he makes going forward will have the information from this (and other) workshops filtered through.

Greta learned that adding more layers, despite this approach being outside of her comfort zone, is effective in creating realism. She pushed through discomfort in order to create this depth in her paintings.

Removing pain from the painting process is a big deal. This suffering gets in the way of your motivation, your creativity and your curiosity. Frustration is the biggest inhibitor with your process. Knowing there is another process, another layer, helps take away from that pressure. If this is the only thing you take away from this week, it's worth it!

Your brush technique (especially gradation) is such a powerful technique to practise when you are not sure what to do. Brush technique is a skill, and can be improved just with practise.

Mark suggested blocking in a few pieces all at the same time, as a loosening up exercise, but also as an exercise to choose which image to paint. This blocking in process teaches you to find solutions quickly.

Cath learned about high expectations being a trap, and also about using different tools. Also that it is ok to relax with what you don't know, and just play. Creativity is found in play.

Greta also found that the storytelling concept of the painting process was really powerful. Finding a narrative about the painting you want to paint is key.

We finished the week with a little exhibition and a few bubbles showing all the incredible images our crew painted!

Thanks everyone for a fabulous week :)

We are super interested in any feedback you have for us about your experience this week, whether it is with us, the venue, the programme or anything else; positive or negative, it all helps us curate the most valuable workshops we can for you, which is our ultimate goal.

Make sure you email Frankie at frankiesharman@bigpond.com with your thoughts.

