By: Jan Matěják

REALISTIC OIL PAINTING

A CONTEMPORARY GUIDE TO OIL PAINTING, UNDERPAINTING, LAYERED AND DIRECT PAINTING METHODS.

Jan Matĕják focuses on teaching and painting oil paintings with the layered technique of the old Flemish masters and their direct painting methods. He specializes mainly in the Renaissance layered painting technique and the study of technical aspects of old master techniques.

His goal is not only to rediscover the qualities, skills and knowledge of the old masters, but above all to spread this knowledge and skills across regions, countries and continents to people who desire as he once did to paint a classical work.

Driven by an inner urge, he created and operates websites on his own, where not only instructional texts, but also, PDF files instructional videos are available free of charge. Thanks to this philanthropic approach, those interested in this art can not only begin to learn the basics of these skills, but above all avoid the oversteps, mistakes and dead ends that are inherent in all beginnings.

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1 CONTENTS

During this introductory chapter, I would like to allow you one last time to decide freely whether you want to delve deeper into oil painting or not.

However, I must warn you in advance if your decision is YES, a difficult fate awaits you. You will become an artist with everything that goes with it. You will be an outcast a fugitive you will not have a moment of peace. You may even think about suicide (aren't artists usually more famous after death?). With this technique, you can take your art to an award winning level and become the envy of your peers.

This book is different. It's not reading on vacation. It is not a book on killing free time. On the contrary you will lose a lot of free time due to the information contained in it. You will have to learn new terms, and absorb more and more information. It is not a walk through the rose garden, but rather a way of penetrating into the rosehip. However, the result is worth it.

To start:

1. Say goodbye to your loved ones - you won't see them for months.

2. Cancel your social network accounts (you won't have time for that anyway).

3. Unsubscribe from a membership in a fitness club.

(Because if you turn to the next page there will be no going back.)

Your curiosity is already a sign that you have it in you. Want to know what it's like? Wonderful!

You paint a painting that breathes on you, the flower you will paint is so vivid that you can smell it, the heat of the sun from your painting forces you to put it aside, and the fruit will be so, so fresh, just take a bite…

All right You can't say I didn't warn you. You have embarked on the journey of the artist ……… 3, 2, 1…Let's go!

Looking at the magnificent works of the old masters, have you ever wondered how they did it? How is it possible to paint something like that? After all, today's times provide us with much better, more readily available materials and aids than they had available. What was their secret? The answer to these questions is simple, the old masters simply "KNEW"! Being a good artist means constantly studying theoretical knowledge and laws, which we then transform into a work of art through practice.

NECESSARY KNOWLEDGE

A quality realistic work of art is a comprehensive visual synthesis of knowledge and observation. The artist perceives the world around him with different eyes than people in everyday life. He or she is interested in the essence of the things he wants to display and penetrates the natural laws that determine the appearance of things.

While everyone around you is moving over the arc of the rainbow picturesquely straddling the valley, you see the decomposition of light into a color spectrum or colors of their full chroma. You are able to justify what, why and how, and with all that you manage to "Little Prince" in you. In the words of Henri Matisse, "The artist looks at the world through the eyes of a small child."

"The artist looks at the world through the eyes of a small child."

HENRI MATISSE

TALENT

In this section I would like to dwell on the often-inflected word "talent". Many times, in my life I have come across the opinion "I can't paint or draw because I don't have the talent for it". Can I even learn to paint when I don't have talent? This crucial feature that predetermines my ability to create a work of art. The answer is **YES!**

Painting is essentially a craft like any other so I am deeply convinced that painting can be learned! Of course, a person endowed with "talent" learns faster than one who does not have talent, and the learning process is easier for such a person than for another. However, without the will to learn new things, without hard work and tenacity, the word talent means nothing at all.

Oil painting easily and quickly is, in my opinion, a contradiction in terms. Another great artist in our history, Edgar Degas, summed it up in a beautiful quote. "Painting is easy when you can't paint. Once you know how to paint, it's just the opposite. "

As in other areas of human knowledge, the more you study an issue, the more you find out how much you don't know yet. However, it is this awareness of self-ignorance that is and will be another driving force on the path to the knowledge and skills that await you, and whose detection and acquisition to full mastery is wonderful, seductive and desirable.

This book will reveal to you what is behind the unrivaled beauty of classic realistic art.

1 PAINTING TECHNIQUES

During the long development of oil painting an inexhaustible number of different techniques have emerged. Almost every great artist created his own process which was in a sense original and different and thus pushed the boundaries of oil painting further into development. This book introduces you to the basic general procedures of layered oil painting direct painting techniques and a combination of both.

When painting in oils it is important to follow the basic rule, fat over lean. Each oil painting is a three-dimensional body, composed of several layers of different character. Drying or hardening of the layers is always associated with volume changes. If the rule is not followed, the bottom layer dries more slowly than the top layer and early cracks may occur, and eventually the top layer of paint will wrinkle.

OIL PAINTING CROSS SECTION
CREDIT TO: Stephen Bauman

Each oil painting is a three-dimensional body, composed of several layers of different character.
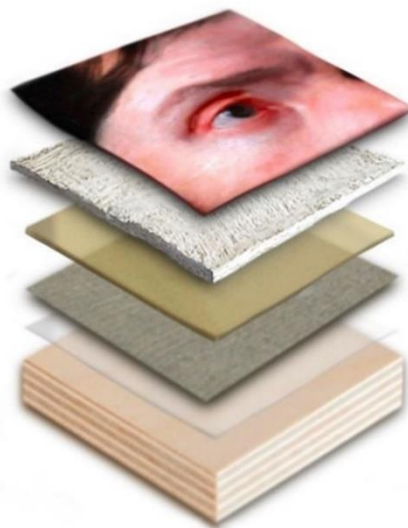
1.1 LAYERED TECHNIQUE

Why is it good to start a painting with an underpainting, and what is the purpose of such an underpainting in the classical painting technique? One might argue, why do we have to devote so much time to underpainting and layers, which will be repainted with another layer of paint in the future? You can find the answer to this question in the world's galleries. Despite their old age, the paintings of the old masters are well preserved and some of them look like they have been painted recently. This condition is essential precisely because of the quality of the preparatory layers and due to the technical process of creating the painting.

If you compare the works of old masters and modern paintings, it is not surprising that paintings that are 100 years old are in a worse condition than paintings created, for example, 300 years ago. However, this fact results not only from the process itself, but also from the materials used in the individual artistic epochs. It should be noted that oil paints and other materials have changed over time. The quality and color range of the pigments used showed considerable differences during the development of the materials used such as oil paints and brushes.


UNDERAPAINTING
Peter Paul Rubens
(1577–1640)
A Lion hunt, National
Gallery, London
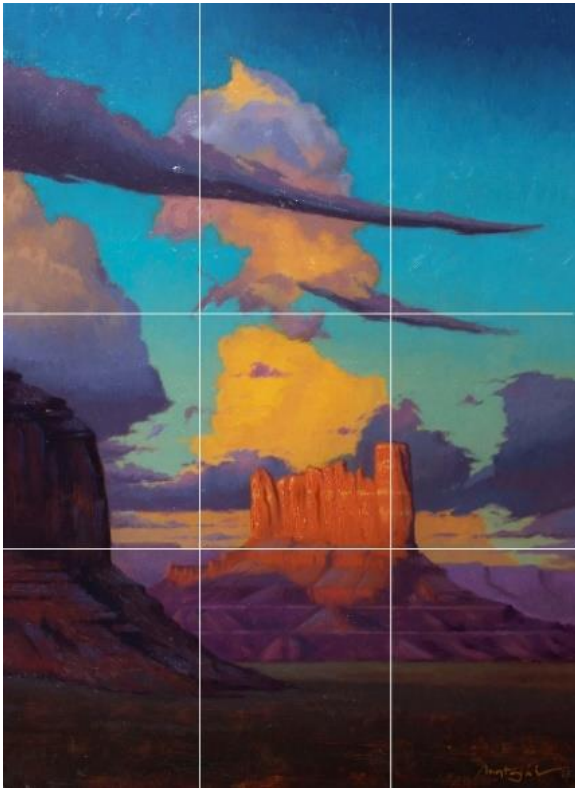
To make it even easier for you to decide where to place a painted object, use the rule of thirds, which is derived from a much more complex composition system. This approach tells us that the central point of the image should be located at one of the intersections. In addition to perspective, other factors also affect the illusion of image depth. Among the most basic ones is contrast. Contrast includes, 1. value contrast, 2. hue contrast and 3. contrast of more or less chromatic hues. In general, objects with higher contrast come forward in picture plane and vice versa. The most effective of these three elements for achieving depth and capturing the volume or distance of bodies is knowledge of the contrast of tonal values.

To emphasize the depth in the painting, paint the background objects with lower contrasts than shown in the front plane. Knowledge of contrasts thus leads us to the important role of values and individual tonalities of the displayed subjects.
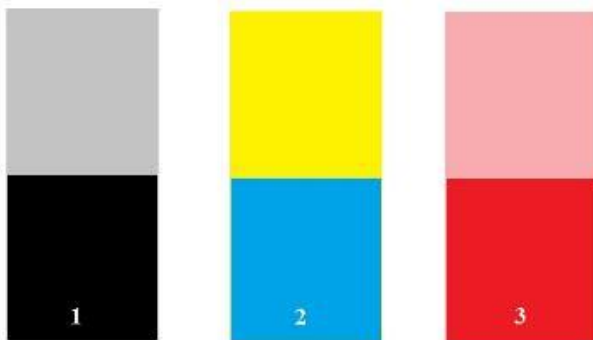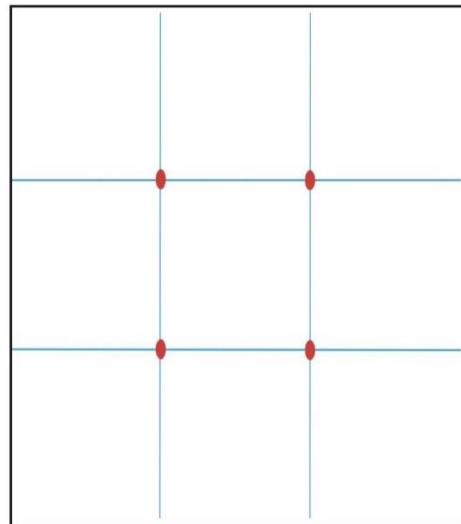
In the case of composing still life, it is possible to successfully follow a simple principle. The vast majority of classical works have a more or less scheme of a right triangle. All-important objects usually lie inside the triangle. Sometimes the scheme is supplemented on the opposite side by another object, to balance the whole composition. The still life should tell a story and the objects in it are connected in some way. For example, a western-style still life includes a pistol, a belt, and a picture of a skull. The country style still life includes items such as bread, an ear of corn, etc.
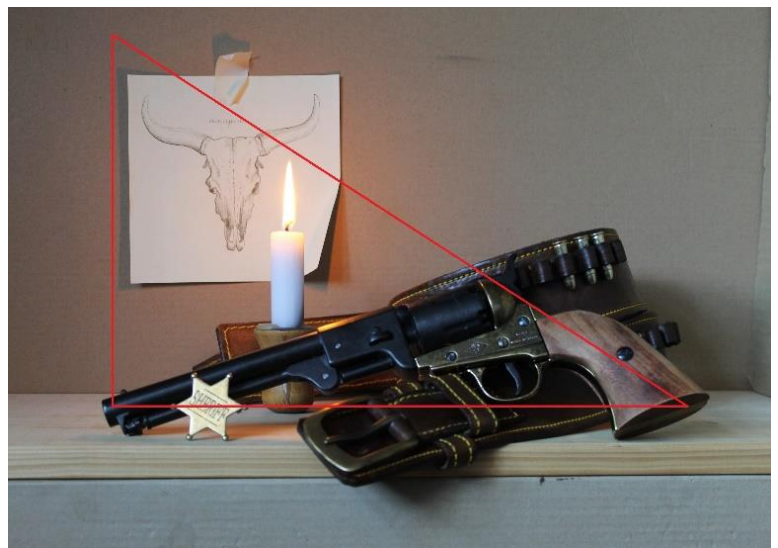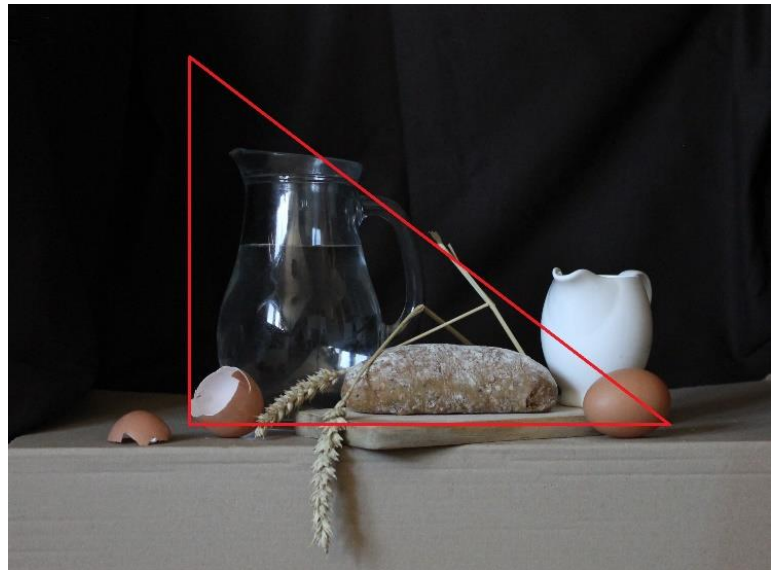
During composing, it is good to try several different variations and if you do not paint according to a live model, each variation should be well photographed. Later, you can choose the one you like best from the photos you took.

2 COLOR MIXING AND COLOR THEORY

For many beginners, mixing colors seems a very difficult discipline. This is not compounded by the fact that there are currently an inexhaustible number of color hues on the market and it is difficult to choose which colors are most suitable for your own needs. At first glance, mixing colors itself can seem very complicated. However, it is necessary to realize in the first place that mixing right hue is only one part of the problem. If I don't know exactly what color I want to mix, the actual color mixing can't turn out successfully. In order to be able to get a concrete idea of the color that I need at the moment, I need to know the basic properties of colors. The final appearance of a certain hue is influenced by many factors. The most essential of these is the play of lights and shadows. Therefore, before we start mixing all sorts of hues and values, we will explain the basic rules of shading. How light falling on specific objects affects their appearance, the distribution of lights and shadows and so on.

2.1 BASICS OF SHADING

The quality and quantity of falling light on a particular object affects its final appearance. As you probably know, there are many ways to illuminate a motif that will be painted. You can use lighting from the side (lateral), from below, or zenith lighting, etc. The choice of each type of lighting depends on what the artist wants to achieve in the resulting painting. Colorists, for example, use frontal lighting with minimal shadows in the painting. However, in classical still life painting, lateral frontal lighting is preferred in most cases, which is best suited for capturing the volume of bodies. For simplicity, let's omit color from our thoughts and focus on the distribution of lights and shadows. All the shading rules we will now explain can be applied to any object or shape in different variations. Each color has a certain tonality or value in the black and white spectrum. Some colors are light, and others have a darker color. Each artist has values available for their work, which can be easily sorted to a scale of several grays, as shown in the picture
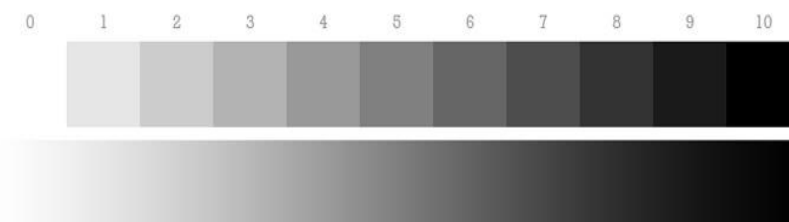

VALUE SCALE
Value is defined as how light or dark something is and is used in drawing to depict light and shadow.

Because every change in the inclination of the plane to the light source is also reflected in a change in the value, we have a theoretically infinite number of surfaces with different tonality in the real world. In practice, however, it is necessary to simplify these gradations and the artist usually works with a limited range of tonal values. In our case, for simplicity and clarity, we will limit ourselves to 10 specific values. 5 for the light area 5 for the shaded areas We will explain everything on an ideally curved surface, eggs and a ball. First, however, to make it easier to understand our sphere, we divide it into several basic planes and create a polygon. Each of these planes has a different position relative to the light source and thus reflects more or less light.

POLYGONAL SPHERE

During shading, remember the basic rule, changing the inclination of the plane from the light source means changing the value! Because it is a curved surface, the individual planes of the illuminated polygon are differently inclined relative to the light source and thus have different tonal values. We now know how the tonality of a plane is affected. Next, we will explain all the changes on a smooth object, in our case on a white egg, which is illuminated from a half-profile, so that its volume and shape stand out.
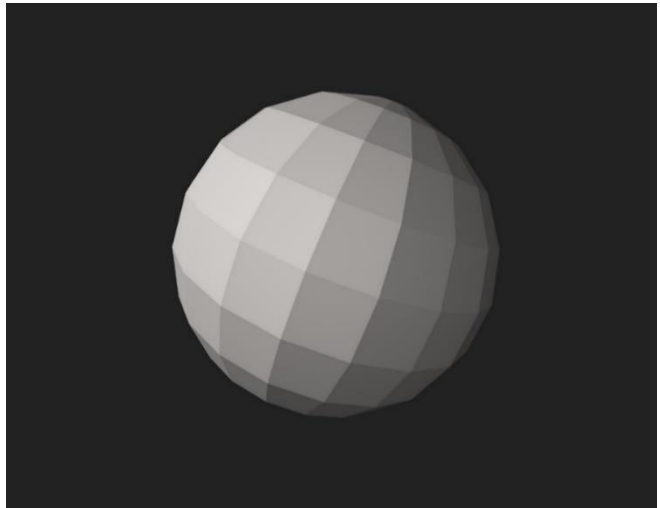
Light coming from one particular direction divides a generally illuminated body into an area of light and an area of shadow. Furthermore, shadows can be further divided into shadows of its own object and a cast shadow. The shape of the boundary dividing the object into areas of light and shadow, called the terminator, depends on the direction of the light source on the shape of the object and its curvature. In our case, the boundary appears as an ellipse.
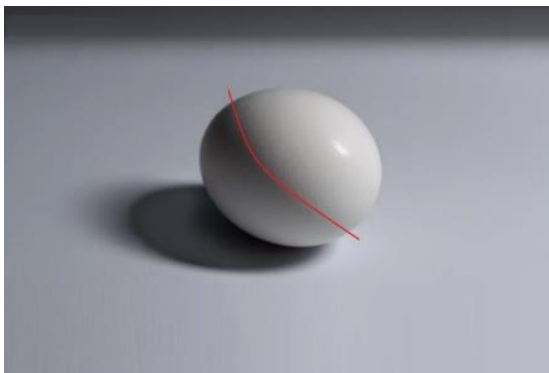
THE TERMINATOR

The terminator, or 'bedbug line', is the area where the form transitions from light into shadow. It occurs where the light rays from the source are tangent to the edge of the form. If the source is soft and indirect and the object is slightly curved the transition from light to shadow at the terminator will be more gradual. The form shadow begins just beyond the terminator.

From the beginning, I recommend limiting the range of colors you will use to the basic hues. Choose one blue, e.g. ultramarine blue, one yellow, e.g. cadmium yellow medium, etc. Later, when you are perfectly familiar with the issue of colors, you can add other colors as needed.

A beautiful example of a limited range of colors is the well-known limited palette of Anders Zorn. With only three basic colors (cadmium red, cadmium yellow and black and white), a wide range of colors can be achieved that will be suitable for painting a portrait or figure composition.

LIMITED PALETTE

Zorn reduced his palette to the rather earthy colors of Yellow Ochre, Cadmium Red Medium, Ivory Black plus White.

Many art teachers have found the Zorn palette to be a great learning tool for students, as it limits the number of possible decisions but allows a wide-enough gamut of colors to create a stunning painting.

If you use a harmonic range of warm colors, use the selected cool hue from the opposite side of the color wheel on the painting. This enhances and enriches the warm hues and balances the whole color composition.

Color harmony is generally enhanced if you place some hues used in the background on the half-tones of your model in the foreground and vice versa.

2.2 BLACK AND WHITE COLORS

Now let's talk about the role of black and white color in realistic painting. In the days of Impressionism, a rule emerged that taught us not to use black directly from a tube, but rather to mix it from complementary colors. It is necessary to realize that the Impressionists worked mainly in the open air, with strong daylight. Their shadows were rich in color and black did not suit them in this respect.

BLACK AND WHITE SCALE

The most common black I use is ivory black. After lightening with white, it is evident that this black color has a very cool bluish tint. Adding black to any color will reduce the chroma of the resulting color. Black is therefore a great helper in reducing color saturation where needed. If you want to use black for dark shadows, mix other hues with it such as burnt umber etc.

Adding white also changes the hue and value of the default color. Notice on picture below how white, when mixed with red, removes red saturation and cools its hue. If you want to lighten a color, in our case red, by mixing only white, you must be aware that the default color is not only lightened but also cooled, desaturated and its shade changes from red to pink. If this is your goal, the use of white is justified. However, to merely lighten the red, additional colors of the spectrum need to be used to maintain the same hue within a particular color space.

RED AND WHITE SCALE

For more saturated colors, the decrease in chroma by mixing white is more noticeable than for less saturated colors.

2.3   WHITE COLOR PROBLEM

There is no pure white color in nature or in painting! The light always has a specific color. If everything that receives light is also a source of light, it must naturally reflect color. Sunlight has a warm yellow hue, at sunset a warm reddish hue, the blue sky produces light with a cool bluish tinge, etc. White objects, such as snow, clouds, a tablecloth or a refrigerator, cannot be painted in pure white from a tube in a realistic painting. An illuminated white object has several different values depending on how its planes are inclined to the light source. Using gray does not solve this problem, as gray will still look gray and not white.

WHITE COLORS

The key to mixing "white" colors is therefore the color and temperature of the light. On the practical example of a snowy tree it can be seen that the lightest values, snow on the illuminated part of the branch, has a slightly yellowish warm hue. It is therefore necessary to mix the white color with this warm yellow-orange tinge. Conversely, darker values in shadow and half tone are more inclined to the blue sky. Therefore, the color is not gray, but has a cool bluish tint. Thanks to the color, temperature and tonal contrast of the surrounding colors and values, white appears really white in the light, even though the local color actually has a certain hue and value.


The area of half tone generally reflects the immediate surroundings. Simply put, if, for example, you paint a still life that has a background with a green hue, this color tendency should also be reflected in the half tones of your subject.

2.4   TRANSLUCENCE

In the case of translucent subjects, the effect of so-called scattered light appears when they are illuminated. Light entering the translucent object is scattered inside, thus affecting areas in the shadows. In the case of opaque bodies, the light in the shadow is blocked by the object's own mass and shape, so the area in the shadow is dark and the color has low saturation. Conversely, in translucent objects, due to the presence of light in the shadow areas, the color is saturated, and the value goes up.
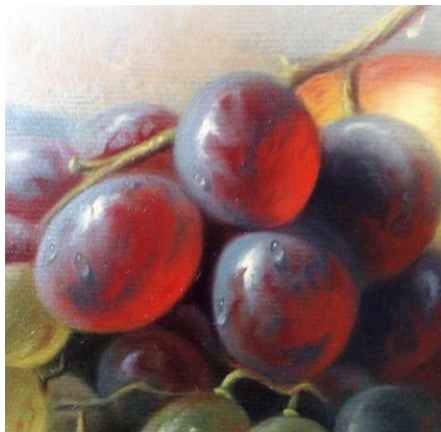
SUBSURFACE SCATTERING

Subsurface scattering is a mechanism of light when penetrating an object or a surface. Instead of being reflected, like metallic surfaces, a portion of the light is absorbed by the material and then scattered inside.

SCATTERING OF LIGHT THROUGH THE SKIN

The described effect is widely used in portrait and figural painting. Human skin is very thin and translucent in some parts of the body. The light thus affects the local color of the skin and shifts it to a richer red spectrum. A very illustrative example can be seen on the left picture. The local color of the hand is deep red at the point of penetration of light through the skin.

After drying and application of the final varnish, the work on the painting is completed.

Varnish should be applied not earlier than six months after completion of your painting. After the painting is varnished never expose the painting to direct sunlight.
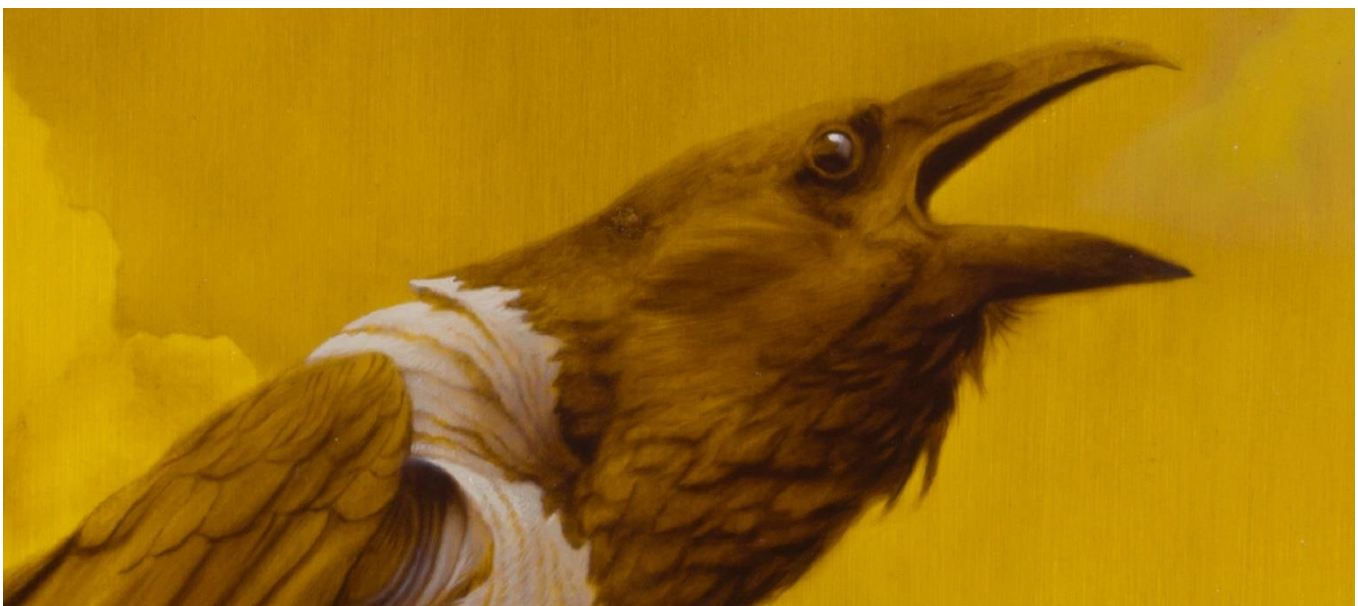
2.5   JOKER

Painting the Joker was a very interesting challenge, mainly due to the range of local colors. The model has practically 5 basic colors, namely white on the face, blue around the eyes, red around the mouth and nose, green hair color and in a small part its own flesh color. All of these colors needed to be modified and adjusted by mixing their value, hue, saturation and temperature. I painted whole painting in two layers. Some paints are very transparent after the first application and had to be repainted with another layer. I really enjoyed the process of this painting.

First layer

I started the work on a tinted ACM panel by transferring the drawing, as described in the chapter on instructions. It is wise to first determine and paint the darkest parts of the painting. The white local color of the Joker's face would appear too dark on a light background. Therefore, I first applied a part of the dark background to make my estimate of the values more accurate.

Always start painting with the darkest values. Comparing light and dark values will be much more accurate.

Subsequently, I determined the white local color of the face on the illuminated part of the face. In addition to the dark background color, it is already easy to estimate whether the color is too light or dark.

Furthermore, I determined and mixed the local red around the nose and mouth and the blue color around the eyes on the illuminated side. When mixing, it is necessary to pay attention to correct saturation and temperature. Mixed colors are basic hues, which I then further adjust according to the change of light and shadow.
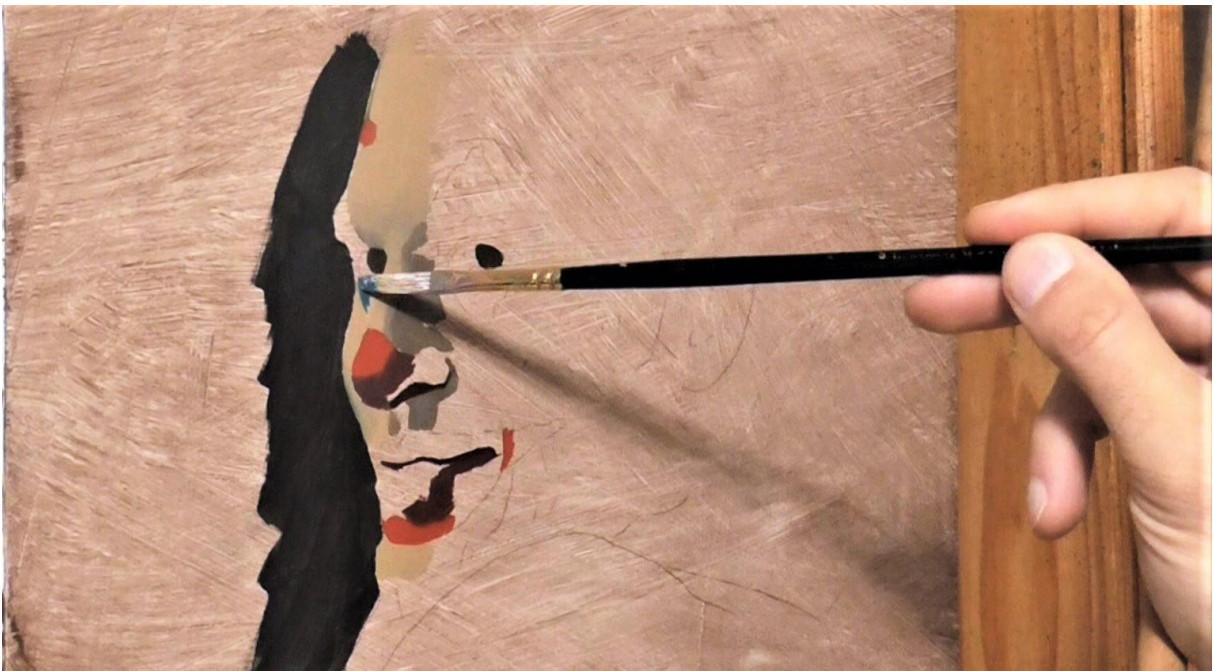
2.6   CREATING TEXTURE IN THE PAINTING

Every painting can be considered a three-dimensional object. Strong deposits of paint can literally simulate the texture of the depicted object and thus enhance the realistic representation of the painted subject. Strong deposits of color protruding from the canvas also enhance the impression of a spatial effect. When painting the texture, apply thin layers of paint in the shadow areas, and vice versa. In the illuminated parts, apply thick layers of paint. Another reason why painting should be done in this way is the change in the refractive index of oil paints during their hardening and aging. The oil paints become more and more translucent over time. If areas in the shadow darkens, this is not such a problem, however, paintings painted on dark backgrounds later darken light areas. Heavy paint on light areas and light reflections eliminates this problem.

The thick layer of paint not only simulates the texture, but also enhances the feeling of a three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional surface. If you want the texture to be even more visible, apply a glaze layer of a darker color over it, such as umber, and let the color fade a little bit. Then wipe the paint off the surface of the canvas with a dry brush or a clean cloth. A certain amount of umber remains trapped in the unevenness of the underlying paint application, resulting in an even greater rendering of texture.

However, not every oil paint is suitable for the formation of thick pasty deposits. Some colors can crack after drying and this will degrade the entire work. This is why the function of the underpainting comes into play. Not only does the underpainting serve as an optical basis for other color layers, but it also forms the material foundation for future texture and weaker color deposits. For this purpose, it is best to use lead white deposits. Another variant for making thick layers are various modeling pastes, which can be later covered with oil paints.

2.7   HOW TO PAINT LIGHT REFLECTIONS

With the painting of light reflections, the type of texture, and especially the type of material that is displayed, is literally born. A mirror reflection on a shiny polished object will reveal to us what is close to our subject. Without light reflections, it is difficult to determine whether the surface is glossy or matte. I always save the painting of light reflections for the end. As with the actual modeling of volume and local color, it is first necessary to consider what kind of light falls on our model. Other factors that affect the appearance of reflections are the properties of the displayed material. For example,

polished silver, which has a highly reflective surface and almost mirrors the surrounding environment, will reflect the light source almost in its undistorted form. It can be said that the same applies to wet surfaces. On the contrary, dry and matte materials, to a certain extent, dampen the intensity of light reflection. The appearance, value, color and temperature of the reflections are also influenced by the actual local color of the surface, which reflects the light. Thus, in general, reflections can be divided into light source (specular) reflections and mirror reflections.

SPECULAR REFLECTIONS

As usual, let's assume that our model is illuminated by natural light on a clear day. As we already know, this type of lighting consists of primary sunlight and a blue sky. Thus, the sun provides bright light with a touch of yellow orange, while the blue sky provides diffuse illumination with a bluish tinge, which to some extent cools the primary light source, the sun. These facts must naturally be reflected in the light reflections. For simplicity, we will explain everything on the practical example of a small silver milk jug. Because it is a high-gloss object, the light reflection is very intense. The color of the specular reflection essentially corresponds to the color and temperature of the primary light. I mixed the color from cadmium yellow deep, white and a small amount of red hue to warm up the whole mixture. Also notice how this reflection is surrounded by a bluish hue, which has lower saturation, value and temperature and represents secondary light i.e. the blue sky. Such an approach must be considered when painting any light reflection.

If the painted subject is to be illuminated by another type of light source, this fact must also be reflected in the appearance of the light reflections. For example, on the reflections of the teapot you can see a warm reflection of light, which is surrounded by a reddish hue, which probably represents the setting sun.

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