



Arts tip of the week

Painting With Contrasts

An interesting painting is a study in contrasts. When planning a painting composition, the artist considers how to make important parts stand out. The artist might use contrasts of color, value, texture or other elements of art to emphasize the subject or create a mood.

A white flower might be set against a dark shadow. A dark figure might stand near a light wall or curtain. These are contrasts of value: the light and dark of a drawing or painting. The edges of near contrasting elements might be sharply focused or soft edged. Rembrandt's famous faces are often set against a dark background.

Sharp edges of contrasting light and dark are dramatic while softer transitions of light and dark might be mysterious. The contrasts of value are important for black and white or color drawings or paintings.

Remember that contrasting value of light and dark can be a slight contrast or a strong one but it is still a matter of contrasting values. The closer a light source to the subject, the sharper the line between light and shadow.

Contrasting colors are easier to identify. Color can be contrasted with hue as red next to green, or by intensity as pale green next to richly hued green.

When you look at a color wheel you can easily see the hue contrasting (called complimentary) colors as those nearly across from each other in the color wheel. Remember that complimentary colors are those most unlike one another.

There is no color more unlike purple than yellow. There is no color more unlike orange than blue or red than green. Remember also that if you want to make a red even more dramatic, set it against a grayed or less strongly hued color, especially with greens. Renoir used such colorful contrasts to great effect.

Contrasts can be dramatic or subtle, gradual or sharply divided. Consider contrasting straight and curved or thick and thin lines or contrasting shapes or textures.

When you take time to consider art in terms of what is and is not contrasted, you make artistic choices that make the work more interesting: both to create and to view.

These tips are provided courtesy of the Art Cafe Artists Group. Visit her website at www.artcafe.net for more information.