

Step-by-Step Art Lesson by Frank Webb

I'm thrilled to bring you this issue's step-by-step lesson put together for us by Frank Webb! Frank has spent more than eight decades immersed in creating and teaching art. The information he shares with us in this article is information he wishes someone had shared with him sooner as, in his own words, he has ruined acres of paper in the meantime. He suggests we consider his observations as descriptive, more than prescriptive. The goal is greater clarity.

I hope you enjoy Frank's lesson! Thank you Frank for your generosity!

Charlene Collins Freeman

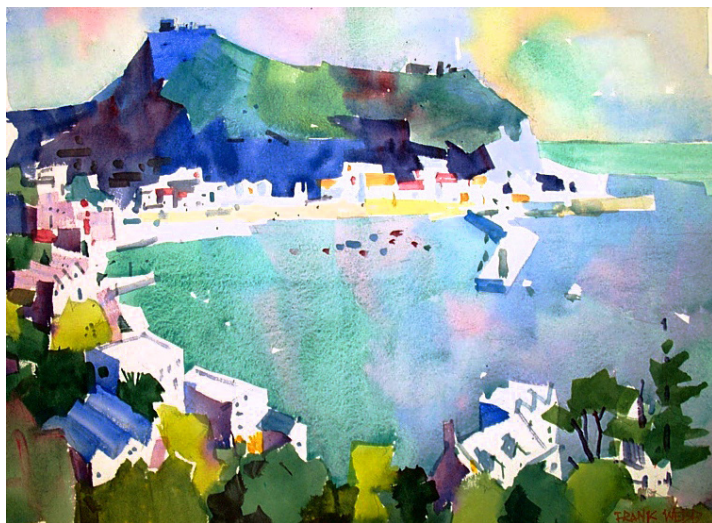
The art student tends to be model bound. It takes no courage to paint what is seen but it does take courage to paint what one feels and thinks. To clarify this, I find the greatest challenge and the more adult aim is to re-create the subject so that it is truly mine.

I tell my students repeatedly that I wish to see them make their own shapes, sizes, values and color. All of my images originate with an encounter with the model or the scene, but only as the starting point. Nature did not go to art school and so a copy of an isolated fragment of nature is chock full of disunity.

In Bernard Berenson's book, *Seeing and Knowing*, he explains how knowing should augment seeing. Don't merely paint what you see, and don't merely paint what you know.

The ancient Egyptians drew what they knew while the French impressionists painted what they saw. These two opposing views need to be combined. George Post said that we should really study the subject and then close the eyes. What you see with the eyes closed is what you should paint.

Beauty in art results from a perfect relationship of the parts to the whole. The deliberate establishment of these bonds produces design. I make my designs in miniature with four tones of soft graphite: white, black, and two middle tones.



St. Ives, 18 x 24

A demo made on location in Cornwall, England.

I call this method, "Patchillism." Broken color is used throughout. I expect to return there in July, 2014 to teach for Flying Colors Workshops



Sugar House, 15 x 22

This is painted on a wet paper as a demo for a class near Halliburton, Ontario. I aim for a crispy hard-edged darks surrounded by hints of foliage made wet into wet.

Typically, I place the important white and where possible I put a dark near to it. The whites are seldom found in the subject, but must be created.

A watercolor without whites lacks sparkle.

Thus, when I transcribe my images to my watercolor paper I know in advance what each brush stroke must accomplish. This process tends to result in an unmolested watercolor. In front of any location I am able to make several drawings instead of taking all the time to paint. Having made several small patterns, I am free to select the best.

While all paintings are abstract to a degree, I am most interested in a synthesis of the representational with the abstract. I like to make a preliminary abstract pattern and then fit the representational or academic drawing into it. Painting becomes abstract to the degree that it departs from nature. You might also say that the painter has an idea and every opportunity is sought to flesh out and intensify that idea or quality while opposing forces are thrown away.

To put it simply, you take from the well of possibilities only as much as is needed to sustain and clarify the idea. I draw from the well only what is need to quench my thirst. This act of drawing means taking from the subject only what is needed. Drawing is extract.

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Demonstration of Layering

The procedure that follows is one of the several approaches I use. I find it a useful exercise in shape making since here I deny myself wet fusions, textures, and variations of edge but must rely almost solely on shape, value and color. It is undeniably flat and decorative. Both my values and my color are achieved with transparent layers. Colors resulting from layers over dry areas are optical mixtures since we see one color through another. They are not truly mixed except in the eye of the beholder. Layered colors will be more luminous and clear than colors mixed on the palette.

Step 1

First I apply my mother color with quinacridone gold. The wash is deliberately made continuous and flat. Only the whites are spared as directed by my designed sketch. The mother wash may be any color. If you must have a blue sky then use blue.



Step 1

Step 2

The mother color has dried. I now paint some of my shapes with alizarin. I deliberately maintain hard edges, stressing the 2-dimensional pattern. The red and all colors to follow are influenced by the mother color. I wait for the lighter red to dry and then apply a darker red.



Step 2

I reach for color intuitively. For me, color comes from the psyche and the palette. I rarely copy local color obsequiously. Inevitably, when one says painting one says color. While that is so, I try to first lay a ground work of shapes, sizes, directions and values upon which to place my color. Many fine paintings are monochromatic, such as Picasso's Guernica.

Step 3

Cadmium Scarlet is added to the bush (with a repeat on the left) and a mixed violet is used for the mountain.

Viridian is painted over the sky and some foreground areas. See the actual color of the viridian on two of the rooves. It takes on a more bluish look due to induction of the warm reds. I aim for decisive, flat brush strokes.



Step 3

Step 4

I add black where needed, and some blues and violets on the silo.

Touches of calligraphy are added to provide snap and decisiveness. Calligraphy suggests the shapes within the larger shapes.



Step 4

Step-by-Step Art Lesson by Frank Webb



Step 5

Step 5

The finished work, *Catskill Farm*, 15 x 22. The only difference from Step 4 is that I have cropped a couple inches from the left. I seldom do this since my sketch normally dictates any adjustment required. You can decide if the cropping helps. I am a little annoyed with the shape of the orange tree at top left as shown in the preceding steps.

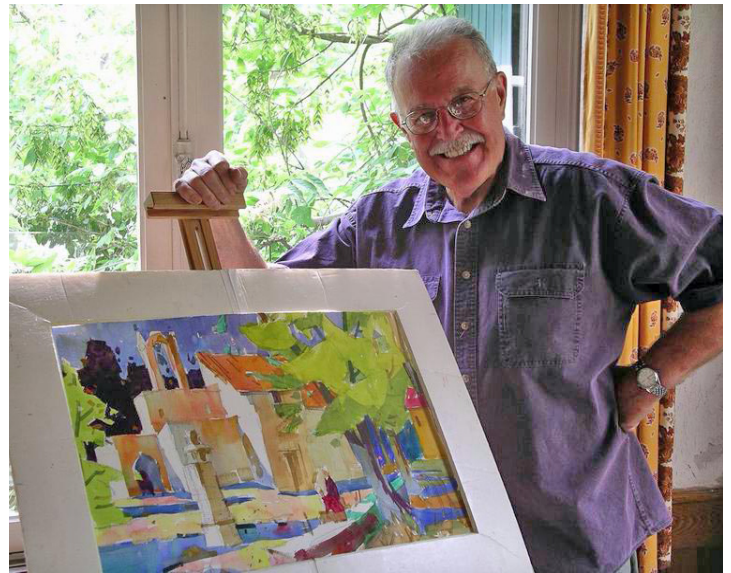
I try to imbue energy in my work by working fast. I do not proceed with a work if the four seven large areas are not the best shape and values. Since expression is almost as important as design, I exaggerate my shapes and use all kinds of subterfuge to forge a magnificent lie. If a few touches of nature are added, no harm is done.

Since watercolor is a simple medium, I enjoy coping with limited means of a strictly transparent, (purist) approach.



The Model, 22 x 30

This full page is a demo made from the model at Grand Junction, CO. I begin making a full size study in soft charcoal tones. I trace this onto my watercolor paper. The whites are lifted with a sponge after the painting dries.



Frank Webb with a demonstration painting in Provence, France.

My favorite watercolor paintings are a partial statement, inviting the beholder to finish the painting. Here again my preliminary sketch becomes my teacher for the work to be made. To know is good. To know that you know is better yet.

Some question if the process of creating a value sketch might siphon off some of the energy and thwart spontaneity. Not for me. I find the small, postcard sized sketch thrilling. It also allows me to focus more on color during the painting process, since the other design problems are solved and I never plan color. The sketch nudges me to paint relations and conditions instead of painting things. I seek verbs and adjectives more than nouns.

To develop your own style, simply work as often as possible. Just as your handwriting emerged as your own, your painting will also be a perfect portrait of you.

The painter should not work with one eye on the market. For 30 years I worked in illustration and advertising art. Every job had to please the customer, and often involved alterations. There is no shame in that, as we all need to make a living. However in the fine arts I think the painter should sing his/her own song. We all have several masters from whom we hopefully synthesize into our own style.

As to my own style, I demonstrate each day of a workshop with a different approach. I don't think of this practice as teaching technique or style, but as the study of selecting various ways of conceiving a painting, using variations of watercolor's numerous voices and characteristics. **Masters are not those who know how to finish a painting, but those who know how to begin.** I don't believe painters compete with one another, but I compete with myself.

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Oft times a show requires the juror to select a best of show. Sometimes this is difficult. In the Pittsburgh Aqueous Open we used to have three equal top awards, a better idea. In art as in love, we are always astonished by what is chosen by others.

Having said that, I am in favor of the juried show, judged by painters, since it helps get our work before the public. There we have a chance to find our work hanging beside some celebrity painter. If your work (or mine) is rejected by a juror then we have a perfect right to send a better picture next year.

Every kid is an artist until age nine. Some of us go on. There was no art taught in my high school, but I worked on the mimeographed school paper. In 1945 I went from High School into the Navy, on to China, then out of the Navy and into The Art Institute of Pittsburgh. There I met Barbara Smith. We were married in 1949 and I embarked on a 30-year stint as a graphic artist.

In 1950, during the Korean War I was recalled to the Navy, this time in the Atlantic fleet. I returned two years later to continue in advertising art, eventually becoming the owner of a firm that had a U. S. Steel account. In all those years I painted and drew on my own time. In 1980 I gave the firm to my employees so that I could paint and teach more often. The design business provided me with a link to the fine arts.

Since then, I have conducted more than 500 workshops in all 50 states and in many overseas locations. A main driver for conducting workshops is that the teacher learns more than anyone.

Teaching keeps me focused on the main principles. Fellow students charge my batteries. Enthusiasms are contagious. Art students are interesting people who are devoted to making beauty.

Also there has been a marvelous opportunity to make friends all over the world. I enjoy selling paintings to students because they are the most knowledgeable of collectors. Many of my students have become noted painters and teachers. Some of them acknowledge me as having helped them along the way.

Frank Webb

For more information on Webb's workshops, books and DVDs go to www.artshow.com/webb. In addition to two books listed on his web site, three of his books are available at Amazon.

Frank Webb, A.W.S, D.F, N.W.S. has been self-employed as an artist since 1958.

Frank is a Dolphin Fellow of the American Watercolor Society, is listed in Who's Who in American Art and has master status in the Transparent Watercolor Society of America. North Light has published three of his books. Also among his many honors are more than 110 major awards and the Medal of Achievement of the Philadelphia Water Color Society.

His works are in many collections, including:

The Butler Institute of American Art, the Taiwan Art Education Institute, the Palmer Museum of Penn State, the Southern Alleghenies Art Museum, the Portland Art Museum, and the Tweed Art Museum of the University of Minnesota.



The Dalles, 22 x 30

I really stress the horizontal direction of the Columbia River. I paint here for several days. I add the fishermen since I am here out of season. The use of pointillism enriches the image.



Wharf and Woof, 15 x 22

Using a somewhat crazy perspective, I also make the shapes a little crazy while overlapping and interlocking every stroke of the way. I achieve depth by making the distant buildings in lighter tones.