

Perfect Planning Prevents Poor Performance

By Dalerie Patterson

Our special art tutor in Queensland has prepared this article about fixing problems in unsatisfactory paintings, as the second episode in our regular 'Art Clinic' feature.

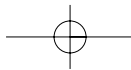


This is the second edition of 'Art Clinic'. I want to thank Artist B who cheerfully submitted her painting. She made the comment that she loved the photograph but was disappointed with the way the painting had turned out. This Art Clinic is

focusing particularly on planning: Planning the composition ... planning the cropping ... planning what stays and what goes ... planning what to enhance and what to obliterate.

Artist B (I will call her 'B' from here on) did some planning and





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consequently made some changes. These changes are obvious when you compare her painting and the original photograph.

I like her alterations: Cropping the right-hand side; deleting the background buildings on the right; erasing the grey post and rail fence that partly covers the building; lowering the brick post and wall so we have an uninterrupted view of the building; adding some golden pines or poplars on both the left and right sides; and introducing some orange bushes to the side of the house.

The problems with this painting do not stem from a lack of talent; just a lack of knowledge.

All the information this artist needed to know has been explained and illustrated in the 'Back to Basics' series. B told me that she completed this painting a couple of years ago before reading the 'Back to Basics' series. Now she knows what is wrong and would make some major changes if she did the painting again. Good for her!

Before we proceed, let's identify the main problems with this painting: The perspective is incorrect in places and that is the main reason why the building appears to be tipping to the left; the colour contrast could be improved; and the purple flowers have totally lost their impact and intensity.

PERSPECTIVE

I am not going to make this a perspective lesson because that has been detailed in 'Perfectly Plain Perspective' (part one and part two) featured in recent issues. I will show you the corrections in the sketch.

CONTRAST

The original photograph gives us the opportunity to showcase and contrast the complimentary colours of purple and yellow. B did enhance the gold in the building but lost it in the purple flowers. For more information on Contrast, see Artist's Palette magazine Issue 44, page 66.

INTENSITY

The reason why the purple colour of the flowers has become muddy and less intense is outlined under the heading of 'Colour Intensity' in Issue 44, page 68. I will demonstrate how this can be altered and enhanced when we get into the flower beds.

Handy hint: Make sure you are holding your camera level – especially when photographing a building. This photograph was level. However, if you have to work with a photograph that has been tilted, print out the photograph, then have it photocopied and enlarged. Those not technically challenged can do this exercise on their PC. Now you can move the image to make sure the eye level line or horizon is level before you proceed with tracing onto the canvas. See 'Perfectly Plain Perspective' (part one) – in particular, the example of 'Finding the level horizon line on Salisbury Cathedral'. If you extend the vanishing points on your photograph as explained in the Salisbury example you can make sure the horizon or eye level line is perfectly level.

I think this is a great subject, so I am going to repaint this picture from scratch. Why don't you join me? We are going to start right at the beginning. Take a good look at the photograph. This painting could go either one of two ways:

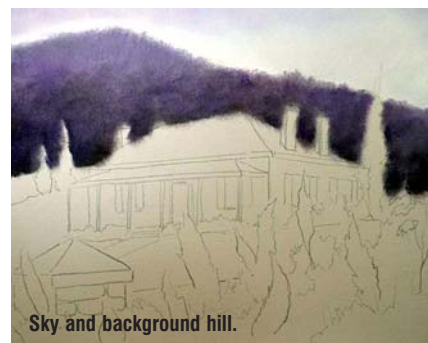
1. The purple flowers are the focal point of interest. The building is the supporting act.
2. The building is more the 'star of the show'. The flowers become 'the backing group'.

The second option was obviously B's choice, so we'll go that way too. However, sometimes a painting will develop a 'will of its own' and we might find at the completion that the flowers have insisted on 'hogging the limelight'.

Do you know, I think this part of the planning process – the composition sketch – is the most exciting part of the painting? This is where you, the artist, get to play God! Wow, how good is that!



My rough sketch.



Sky and background hill.

You have the power to: Create matter that didn't exist before; move huge masses around; shrink or enlarge objects; wipe unwanted objects off the face of the Earth with the swipe of your rubber; and enhance or diminish Nature's colours to create a more harmonious balance and overall effect.

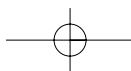
Take a good look at my rough sketch and compare it with B's painting. Apart from the perspective corrections to the lines of the building, let's tick off the alterations I have made to the original.

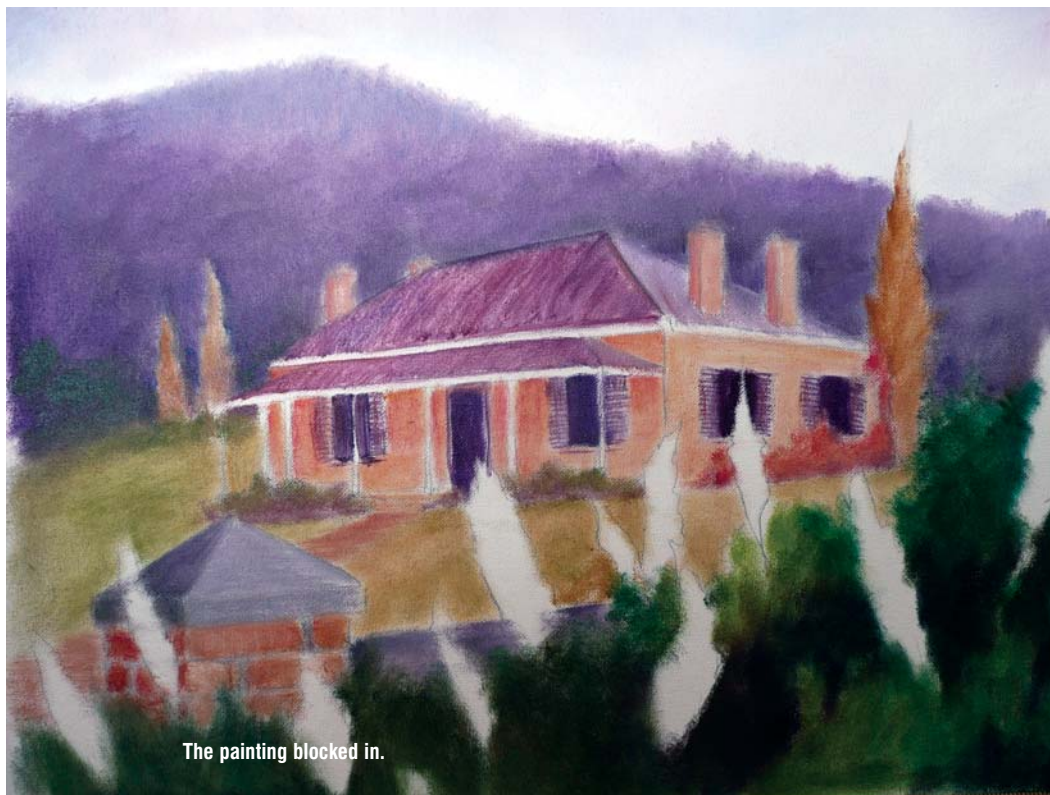
The arrow denotes the light coming from top right. B's light source appears to be from the left but varies in places. The photograph seems to be taken at noon – not good for definition – so the choice is left up to the artist.

I have made a mental note to add a greyed, softer version of the blue/purple of the foreground flowers to the background hill – to tie it into the foreground highlights.

I now have one poplar on the right and two on the left of the building.

I have reinstated the twiggy tree on the extreme right because it balances both shapes and colour in the overall composition.





The painting blocked in.

The tall plant/weed on the right has also been resurrected because the lime green creates a wonderful 'colour bridge' between the dark green and the light ochre of the poplar.

I have shaded in the darks at the base of the hill on the left and counter-balanced that with darks in the green on the bottom right.

The brick fence post has been retained and enlarged. We will reintroduce the orange brick colour to tie in with the orange bushes on the right side of building. As it happens, orange is complimentary to the foreground green.

I have scrapped the red bush in the background on the left. This is just an unnecessary distraction and does not enhance the composition.

I have decided to use a more mellow gold for the building (similar to B's foreground garden wall) rather than the yellow in the original photograph.

I have corrected the front of the building. We now have six posts instead of five. Five would place a verandah post directly in front of the door that has now returned to the centre of the front wall.

I have given all the windows green shutters and made only two in the front.

The verandah has been opened up at the far end to correspond with the opposite side.

The step up to the verandah was moved back to the centre and a path was added across the front lawn.

I have also made a mental note to tone down the green on the front lawn to further enhance the brighter green foliage in the foreground.

I have cut down on the number of foreground flowers and made them larger.

Finally, most important of all, I have endeavoured to portray the pink halo and rich ultramarine colour of these flowers without making them too fussy and detailed.

Sixteen! Yes, 16 alterations to both the photograph and the original painting in this sketch ... before we have even picked up a paint brush.

This is a 'wake-up call' to all those artists out there who just grab a photograph or plop down in front of a subject and start to paint without first considering:

CONTENT ... COLOUR ...COMPOSITION ... AND CONTRAST

Next comes the mental designing, followed by the scribbling, until you have a sketch that will be the basis for a far superior painting than you would have produced without 'prior planning'. Please pick up and run with this. I guarantee your creative painting will improve beyond belief.

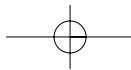
THE PAINTING STAGE

Now it's time for the painting to begin. I am using Frederix Tara canvas on 3mm MDF 400 x 300 mm (or A3). I have just enlarged my sketch to A3 and traced it onto the canvas with grey transfer paper (not carbon paper). This painting is suitable for any number of paint application styles from the 'detailed realistic' to the 'quick sketch' approach. The former would probably take weeks of painstaking work. I have only a small window of time, so I am definitely locked into the latter.

Handy hint: If you are at all concerned that you will lose these outlines when you start painting (and that usually happens), remember the previous hint I gave you in Portraiture. You can tape together two A4 overhead projection transparencies, place this film over your drawing, and trace the outlines with a permanent pen. Then – later – you can sit this over your painting to check if your lines are correct.

I will be using Genesis Heat Set Oils, and my palette for this painting is: Titanium White; Ultramarine Blue; Dioxazine Purple; Phthalo Green; Burnt Sienna; Genesis Red; Sap Green; Yellow Ochre; Quinacridone Magenta; and Genesis Yellow.

First mash the white to soften, then apply an even, generous coat in cross-hatch strokes across the whole sky area with a 15mm bristle bright. You must have enough paint applied so that these next applications will just glide smoothly into the white. Use

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this same brush to pick up a tiny amount of Ultramarine Blue and a little Dioxazine Purple to stroke into the top part of the sky. With the minute amount still remaining in your brush, tenderly stroke into the white lower down. With a clean brush, pick up the smallest pinprick of Quinacridone Magenta and lightly stroke this into the white paint above the two closest chimneys.

On to the hills – and I'm back to my original brush. Looking at the photograph, the highest part of the hill on the left seems a softer blue-grey. Pick up a little white, Ultramarine Blue, a tiny amount of Dioxazine Purple and a smidgeon of Burnt Sienna and block in the hill – commencing at the highest point. To give the tree-line effect, I turned the brush on the side and gently edged this colour into the wet white sky. The hill was blocked in with the 'dry brush'

technique (see 'Mediums and Methods' in Artist's Palette magazine Issue 47, pages 69 and 70). The deeper colour is achieved by adding a little more Blue, Purple and Burnt Sienna. Burnt Sienna is used to tone down the intensity of the colour.

Why 'block in' a painting? This was explained in Issue 47 on page 69. B did not 'block in' her painting. Probably the majority of artists don't bother ... but I think it makes a difference.

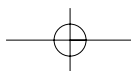
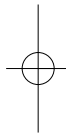
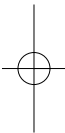
'Blocking in' a painting: Covers the white of the canvas; lays down the applicable base coat for the next layer; is perfect for scumbling where this layer is allowed to peek through the next; and gives the artist a glimpse of the overall pattern of colour in the painting that was, previously, only a mental image.

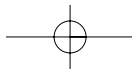
As you can see from the illustration, my 'blocking in' looks pretty rough. However, this is all that is required. It

is the ensuing applications that actually make the painting. I have left the canvas white for the large blue flowers. The reason for that will be revealed later.

It's time to dry this painting now. I look forward to you joining me next month when we continue with this exciting makeover. In the meantime, please send in photographs of ailing paintings or projects that have 'passed away' under the bed. Remember, Art Clinic is for everyone and your contribution will help many others who might be struggling with similar symptoms.

I cannot stress how important this is for your development as an artist and your possible future career in painting. To emphasise this point, take a look at the two versions of this painting below. The original, with its obvious problems, featured in an earlier article last year on 'Composition'. Later, the



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complete makeover appeared in a promotion for Art Clinic.

The rejuvenated painting was one of the first to sell for a substantial amount in the highly competitive 'Ekka' exhibition recently at the Brisbane Show. Remember, the original version of this painting was initially tossed aside in the garage.

Make sure you have the full set of 'Back to Basics' that have been

published since Issue 43. Back issues can be ordered.

Back to Basics 1 – including Content, Composition, Contrast, Colour; The Tools of the Trade; and Mediums and Methods – has now been re-edited onto a CD with full screen illustrations – available for \$20.00 (including postage and handling). Contact me to obtain your own copy of this valuable resource.

Please continue to send your photographs for Art Clinic to yooralabigpond.com or info@artist-tutor.com

The websites of Dalerie Patterson ... your personal on-line art trainer ... can be found at www.artist-tutor.com and www.artstudio91.com ■

