

Squint Your Way to Success!

We all have the most wonderful optical devices attached to the most profound computer in the universe. Our eyes and brain are a staggering combination. Unfortunately I sometimes do not use them as well as I could – don't laugh – I am in good company! So we have to keep reminding ourselves to SEE and SQUINT at the scene we are painting.

Master the habit of squinting to simplify what is out there, mix the colours, follow the values and apply to the canvas. You will be amazed at the progress of your art! No it is not simple and it requires repeated practice, but it is important (understatement) for the representational painter to master this skill.

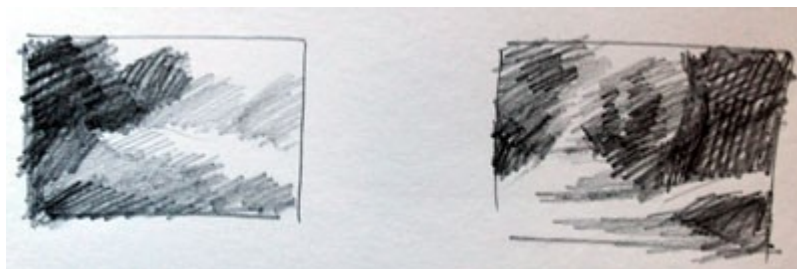


Consider the above two reference photos. Look at them with your eyes open normally and you can see twigs and branches, some grass, muddy patches and so forth. Many details that can confuse and lead you down the path of fussy and fiddly painted details. Mother nature is far better at harmonising all these details than us. So lets forget about trying to paint everything.

Now squint at the photos by closing your eyes just enough to eliminate the details. You are filtering the image to see the major shapes and values. See how it helps to sort out light/dark/mid-tone shapes?

Start with a quick sketch in a small landscape shaped panel in your notebook. Using monochrome quickly sketch the main light/dark shapes. See how this simplifys the image and helps you design the composition?

Please remember – only squint at the scene and not at your sketchbook or canvas. Funny how often I used to squint at the canvas too!



You may have a similar sketch to the one above. This is the start to the simplification process and it is how you can take a complicated scene and transfer the biggest shapes to your canvas.

Once you biggest shapes of light and dark are on the canvas continue to use the squinting technique to simplify each object within the painting. In the above examples trees and bushes dominate. They are also very convenient shapes once you squint at them. Use your brush to put down the shapes you see in greater detail and in the colours you observe. With this technique you will not try to paint leaves and grass but rather the shapes only.

Now step back (in fact do this often) and you will see that your painting has a convincing look that is true to the shapes you observe outdoors. You must judge what can be left out so that you do not leave out too much either. This is not a a painting for the poor sighted!

Using this method also keeps the little brushes away until the very end when a few well placed twigs here and there suggest and highlight elements that contribute but do not distract.



Enjoy the freedom that simplifying a scene gives you to produce paintings with more impact.

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