

I have finished laying out the book on fundamental Graphite Techniques. It is in its final stage of review. By that I mean the text and formatting are being checked by new eyes. Mine cannot see anymore! Then it will go to print. I will let you know as soon as it is ready for purchase.

Back to painting again, which feels so good. I am preparing drawings for a painting of dahlias, at this point I intend the flowers to be standing in individual glass bud vases. I am scheduled to teach Painting Transparent Objects at New York Botanical Garden in the summer, which will include glass, bubbles and water droplets. So I had best get prepared. But compositions have a habit of creating themselves so we shall see how these dahlias want to be painted.

The second painting is of two Tri-colored Herons. It was not until I had worked out the background did these two birds decide they were ready to be painted. I had them in a leafy green 'Florida' like setting, now they seem happy in New England on one of those not quite clear days in early summer.

What I like the most about painting with acrylics is the layering and the ability to correct. I begin with a background; usually a color creating an atmospheric effect rather than a specific scene, I am still more comfortable with simple backgrounds, resulting from all those years of painting in a more traditional botanical format of leaving the backgrounds untouched. I think negative space is equally as powerful as the positive space. Each layer of the background needs to be completely dry before another is added. If the paint is in the least bit damp while adding the new layer of color the brush will drag the damp paint from the previous layer causing deep ridges. Of course this maybe an effect you are intentionally creating. Once the background is completely dry, I transfer and paint the furthest back subject. In the case of the Tri-colored Herons this was the back of the nest, which was not transferred but free handed to keep a looser more abstract effect. I painted this in two layers, the first a very light value with no detail, the second was slightly more intense, still no detail. Then I added the eggs. I layered the color slowly, sanding in between to keep them as smooth as possible, more egg like. Then I transferred the herons. First I turned my tracing paper over on a clean paper surface (not on the painted board) and carefully redrew all the lines using a soft B pencil, then placed the tracing, this time right side up on the board and taped the top using three pieces of tape and redrew the lines using a hard 8H pencil. On paper I use graphite transfer paper, but the transferred lines are too thick and will not erase easily, I have better control with the previously described method.

Every once in a while a layer painted first will have a little too much paint creating a ridge or bump under the top layer. If this presents a problem, before painting the next layer I simply sand very gently the section where the images cross. For instance: Seeing the shape of an egg where the leg crosses in front would be distracting, so before painting the leg I sanded the egg under the leg to remove any raised paint.

In this case final painted layer will be the front of the nest, the branches will be rendered with some detail, not sure quite how much yet, the painting will tell me. This layer is shown in the second image still on tracing paper - not transferred yet.

The third image shows the finished painting (none have been professionally photographed which explains the color differences from one to the next).

I painted the second heron in the same manner as the first, working from the darkest values to the lightest. Working with mixed colors first, adding single layers of primary on

top color to create depth and interest in the colors. To create indicate a single light source which adds volume and form to an object, I use complimentary colors, where light cannot reach the colors to become neutralized. Where light reaches directly the colors are lightened/brightened.

Now I was ready to paint the front of the nest, and this is where I ran into big trouble. I transferred my drawing using white transfer paper, graphite would not have shown on the dark areas. It looked good so I began painting, but soon (not quite soon enough) I thought the branches were too thick (thankfully I had only worked twigs on the right side). I lifted those that were still wet enough and sanded those that were not, now I had to repaint the background. I was not a happy person, so it was time to leave the studio and take a breather break. When I came back the next day I decided it might be a good idea to look at my reference photos, and do some reading up on the structure of Tri-colored Heron's nests. I had had spent a morning with this couple sketching, note taking and photographing. Had I paid enough attention to the nest? Clearly not! It was not the twigs in front that were the problem, it was the back twigs that were too thin. Thankfully I was painting with acrylics and could easily make the necessary changes, all it would take was time. But at least I was calm now. I did not transfer the branches I freehanded them, painting quite loosely, then I used graphite pencil to add detail where I needed it. The final 'layer' will be a thin glaze of Matte Medium to seal the thin layers of pure primaries and the graphite pencil.

Palette. When needed I add gesso to add opacity. I mix my blacks, using any combination of red and yellow and both blues.

Background: Green blue, violet red and green yellow.

Birds: Orange yellow, violet red, violet blue and a very small amount of green blue.

Eggs: Green blue and orange yellow.

Branches: Same combination of primaries as the background.

Now it is time to finish drawing the Dahlias in their glass bud vases. I will post my progress, painting glass will be an interesting journey, but then every painting is an interesting journey!