

by Ratindra Das



Quite often I am in a situation where workshop is held in a classroom setting and subjects for paintings are not so inspiring. Not every location is like coastal Maine, or Alaska, or Mexico where there is an abundant source of subjects to paint from. This article is not about whether to use photographs or not to use. Reality is –students do not have much choice. Here are some guidelines that may help in selecting photographs as well as taking photographs for studio or classroom approach to painting.

- Use your own photographs. Picture postcards, calendar pictures are pretty to look at but they fail to connect with the artist often resulting in sterile paintings.
- Do not bring stacks of photographs in a workshop. This could be overwhelming and selection could be very time consuming. Bring photographs of subjects that are relevant to workshop theme (e.g, landscape, florals, portraits, figures, animals etc). Experienced students make preliminary research about the instructor's favorite subjects. It makes it difficult for the student as well as instructor who is conducting a workshop on landscape to guide a student who wants to paint family portrait or pets.
- Take as many pictures as possible from different angles and the surrounding objects of a particular scene that you like. This is solely for the purpose of gathering information. Much of the information may not be used in one painting. Taking multiple pictures is a lot easier now with digital cameras. It's very easy to forget about little details or interesting objects once you leave the scene.

- Do not wait for the perfect lighting, or perfect composition. That's a job to be done in the studio.
- Avoid large panoramic views.
- Make one (or more) composite out of several photographs selecting various components. Always look for interesting shapes (oblique, irregular, unequal)
- Exaggerate, borrow, lie or do anything for the sake of a painting. You don't have to be truthful to the scene.
- Do not try to paint the whole world in one painting.
- Do not be a slave of local colors, otherwise we will all end up with thousands of paintings with pale blue skies. Use local color when it helps. Remember 'a farmer doesn't care if you paint a picture of his barn in blue. He's not out there to buy a painting!'
- Do not try to copy a photograph and paint like that. There's no creativity there! Usually it ends up in frustration.



There are just too many objects and too many values hidden in a photograph. Reduce the number of values to 4 or 5 to simplify the process.

Crop a photo to find an interesting design.



My approach to a painting is always same-whether I paint outdoor on location, or in studio with the aid of photographs. I make several thumbnail sketches where values and shapes are organized.

The pattern sketch to the left is made up of several photographs. I took liberty in shifting, adjusting sizes and shapes and their relative position as I pleased. I painted two versions from the same value pattern sketch.





In my DVD workshop,
Painting a Personal Reality in Watercolor,
I used a combination of photograph and some
field sketches to make value pattern.





I eliminated most of the clutter on the hill and simply painted the shape of the mountain. Two arches are exaggerated and similar shapes are repeated in other areas.

Entertain yourself! The hands of a clock do not have much of a life. Add a little pizzazz.



I looked at this boring photograph (below) and for some reason it tickled my funny bone. I knew that the fisherman had no intention of decorating his boat. I started drawing interesting and funny graphics. My funny bone was still tickling, so I made another painting - a bit funky, and I loved it!



"An artist is a shape maker, symbol collector and entertainer."
(Ed Whitney)



Just being funky!!!

Elison Bay Fun Days (22' x 30")