



Painting Course for Your Whole Being!



Förträstan 2009 äggoljetempera

Pictures as Language

## Images in their time and culture

People have, as far as we know, always amused themselves by painting pictures. The oldest known cave paintings were found in Altamira and are 15 000 years old. Why those pictures were painted we can only guess. Maybe to tell a story of something that had taken place, like a rewarding hunt. Or they could be some kind of prayer; a conversation with the spirit of good hunting, asking her for protection. They might also be painted for entirely different reasons; as decoration, documentation, entertainment, for pleasure or to influence someone or something, out of spiritual reasons or profane. In other words, for the same reasons that we create images today.

In those days, 15 000 years ago, the means for painting were fewer than today. You used what you found in nature and created directly with almost unprepared materials. Today there are countless numbers of materials and techniques to choose from if you want to express yourself through images. Maybe the art of painting has already had its time of greatness, in a way. From the Middle Ages to the 19<sup>th</sup> century painting in oil was the main technique for depicting inner or outer reality. The artists' goal was to depict the material world as closely as possible.

Techniques were refined and passed on from master to disciple. There were recipes and methods for creating skies and seas, which were followed down to the last mark. Customers came from the wealthy gentry or the church. So, up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, motives were often limited to religious ones or to portraits and landscapes aiming to bring out the client's actual or wishful advantages. Free art was not on the agenda, merely a very few masters had the authority to stretch the boundaries a little, without losing customers.

The industrial revolution that took place during the 1800s influenced art dramatically. Firstly a completely new social class of traders grew and they wanted what had traditionally been reserved for kings and gentry. So the number of art clients grew rapidly. They wished to have their families, houses and animals portrayed.

Secondly the camera arrived! Portrait photographers popped up like mushrooms from the ground. In central Paris alone there are supposed to have been more than 300 portrait photographers during the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some people believed the art of painting had played its part in history. The camera was judged superior in its ability to depict reality.

This crisis in the history of painting opened up for new ways of painting. Monet chocked art critics with his painting "Impression: soleil levant" in 1872 and this speeded up the development of art which was already taking place; from mechanical portraying to free personal interpretation.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century art has to a great extent been about breaking boundaries and making new discoveries. Movements in art are in constant relation to developments in society. Artists who succeed are usually they who strongly express something about their contemporary society. It is not unusual for artists to feel tendencies before they become officially known and perceived by the great mass. Therefore artists, through history, have often not become famous until after death.

## Don't you have to be talented to paint?

"A child has a hundred languages", according to the people at the Reggio Emilia schools. Most of them we lose as we grow up. During my years as an art teacher I have met many who already while they were very young decided they cannot draw or paint. The common way for small children is to enjoy drawing, painting, singing, playing and dancing.....but very soon the judgments start coming. First from the surroundings. It doesn't have to be direct criticism; it can simply be appraisal of the creation by the next child or the fact that contemporary culture is greatly targeted towards achievement and expertise. Soon demands start growing from within the child itself. "Make or break" seems to be the general motto.

If a child draws the conclusion that it can use this creativeness to impress the surroundings and thereby achieve appreciation and affirmation, the inclination to draw and paint will survive. But if the child questions painting as a road to success, interest soon fails. Sometimes I have met extremely talented children who still don't like to paint, as well as a few who are totally unaffected by surrounding criticism and won't be inhibited. They draw and paint to their heart's desire, regardless of surrounding judgments. However, out of the thousands of students I have met, only a handful have worked in that way. We constantly shape and adjust ourselves to find our role in society.

Sometimes it is easy, sometimes we make a great effort and conform away big chunks of ourselves. Some choices we **want** to make, but a great deal takes place unconsciously; so quickly or so long ago that we have forgotten how we once made a choice. Which parts of yourself have you chosen to let go? Which ones would you wish to regain?

## Why do I want to paint?

What kind of a question is that? Do I have to put it?

Yes! I think it is a very important question, but I don't think it is possible to give a clear cut or permanent answer. Even so, it is important to think through the reasons behind the desire. Otherwise there's a risk of being inhibited by performance demands and unnecessary disappointments. Is your reason for painting that you nourish dreams of becoming famous as an artist, well, bring your dreams out into the light. Perhaps it is possible to realize, even if the work will be substantial! If it is the identity as an artist you are yearning for, you may not have to invest very much; perhaps a beret is enough! Or maybe you have discovered how something inside you savors the delight in painting and you simply feel good while doing it. You forget time and space with brush in hand. Wonderful! Remember how this is the reason why you paint. Don't get drawn in by performance anxiety if it comes whispering in your ear: "this has to become something special". Allow your act of painting to be a source from which you draw strength. Such sources are infinitely valuable!

## True feeling and technical skill

If you let your inner urge to discover lead your steps, while also keeping in contact with your own creative joy, you will, if you are attentive, increase your technical knowledge by every hour of painting. To sometimes feel frustrated from not being able to successfully express what you desire in the picture is a good sign! You have taken yet another step in developing your picturing skill. The progress of seeing is usually faster than the art of doing. Sometimes it can be rewarding to consciously practise something specific in order to learn. For example to draw still life or do model painting, perhaps concentrate on lines, shadows or the space in between. To be able to mix exactly the wanted shade of colour is something you can practise a whole lot.

## Pictures as language

Through pictures we may be precise and relate clear, crisp facts or express the obscure and ambiguous, which can be difficult to convey in words. Pictures are a way of communicating, a language of its own. Pictures are direct and can sometimes take a short cut directly into our nervous system and place themselves there. If you learn to express yourself through pictures you have enriched yourself and your soul's ways of expression have increased. Imaging is a language which is spoken and received firstly by the soul, your subconscious. After this it becomes clear and possible to analyze for the conscious mind, subsequent to the heart's understanding of it. To become more conscious of the language of pictures is to become more attentive of your soul.

As I see it the grammar of picture language consists of four main parts:

Colour  
Shape  
Composition  
Message

Each of these four fields is a vast area. That is why I have chosen to divide the teaching into four parts. If you attend the weekend course we focus on colour. If you partake in the five-day-course there is time to look at all four parts.

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-Paint and enjoy!

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