



ART

JUDGING ART

OIL, WATERCOLOR, AND PENCIL DRAWINGS

Presentation made by Mary Fleming Streaker for the MAAFS Convention Judging School, November 5, 1998 at Hagerstown, Maryland.

A GOOD PAINTING SHOULD:

1. Tell a story
2. Create a mood of feeling
3. Convey a sense of time and place
4. Shows creativity in ideas, use of materials and techniques
5. Does it appeal to you? Do you like it?

WHAT YOU SHOULD LOOK FOR IN THE ART WORK:

1. Balance
2. Harmony
3. Composition
4. Use of light and shadows - Chiaroscuro (the arrangement or treatment of the light and dark parts in a pictorial work of art?)
5. The use of abstract shapes and spaces
6. Excitement or calmness in line, color, value
7. Perspective
8. Rhythm
9. Dominance
10. Color - Is it pleasing, harmonious
11. Quality of the work, material, technique
12. Does the artist understand the use of the medium and the techniques
13. Is the medium suitable for the subject

BE CONSCIOUS OF YOURSELF WHEN JUDGING:

1. Be receptive to the unique, the unusual, the different. We have seen the same subjects presented the same way in thousands of paintings. Look for a new or slightly different way the artist may have presented their work.
2. Keep an open mind. Curb your personal bias from entering your opinion of any exhibit.

ENTRIES AT THE FAIR:

Entries at fairs are usually the work of amateurs, though the range of talent, experience and training is often broad. Our interpretation of amateur/professional is not yet clearly and uniformly defined in fair catalogues, but you are unlikely to find anyone who is a working professional artist exhibiting. True professionals do not have the time and showing is not financially worthwhile for them on the local fair level.

When judging at fairs, remember that exhibitors are seeking approval and recognition for their work. To win a ribbon is important to most. This is apparent when we see how eager exhibitors are to find out they have won a ribbon.

GIVE OUT AS MANY RIBBONS AND AWARDS AS YOU CAN:

You have probably been told not to award ribbons that you genuinely feel are unwarranted, however, remember we want to encourage exhibitors, so be generous. If there is only one entry in a class and it is of

ENTERING EXHIBITS AT THE FAIR IS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE:

Entering work at a fair can and should be a learning experience for the exhibitor. If you, as judge, have constructive criticism, on the back of the tag or on a separate sheet folded and stapled to make notes on the back of the tag where the remarks will only be seen by the exhibitor.

It is often difficult for the exhibitor to separate themselves from their work and criticism must be carefully given, lest they interpret remarks as rejection rather than constructive criticism. There was a very unpleasant experience at a fair where the judge's critique was plainly written on the front of the exhibit tag. It was demeaning and apparently unwarranted and the exhibitor, a relative of the artist, the artist's teacher, and the whole organization affiliated with the artist were outraged and expressed strong feelings of indignation.

CRITIQUES AND COMMENTS:

I urge you to be very sure of yourself and your knowledge of the subject you are judging before you presume to be too much of an expert.

Choose your words carefully. Keeping your comments and critiques positive in nature will prove a much safer approach. Your remarks will be much more palatable and encouraging to the exhibitor.

For example: A piece of work is poorly framed. Rather than say, "The framing is poorly done" you might try to express its shortcomings this way. "The way art is framed and presented is an indication of your value of your work. Work of this quality will show much better if you improve your framing."

UNDERSTAND THE CLASS CRITERIA:

Clearly understand each class criteria by carefully reading the premium book that describes each class and specific guidelines. It is the responsibility of the judges to abide by each class criteria in making decisions. The fair committee will present whatever you are to judge, but you, too, must be totally aware that the medium, subject, presentation and site, if indicated, are adhered to. Making judging corrections at a later time is difficult, if not impossible to do.

WHEN YOU ARRIVE AT THE FAIR:

When you arrive at the fair where you have been invited to judge, make yourself known to the chairperson. Take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with the surroundings, scan the work, and talk with the fair personnel about their expectations. If you are not told, then:

1. Find out how many ribbons are available to be awarded in each class.
2. Inquire as to championships and any special awards.
3. Ask if you will be required to record the results or will you have a scribe.
4. Are you expected to attach ribbons, etc.? You will probably not be required to do #3 and #4.

YOU ARE NOW JUDGING:

The management will indicate or present to you the work in each class. Give your undivided and complete attention to the work to be judged. Look carefully at each exhibit. If the class is very large, select the pieces that you feel are worthy by first impressions. Put these aside. Then give all remaining pieces another look to make sure you didn't overlook something.

View the work both up close and at a distance. You will be amazed at how differently artwork reads from these different viewing stations.

Choose artwork for the first, second, third, etc. awards, carefully considering you're judging standards. If you are uncertain of ties, set the pieces being considered side by side. With great care, make your selection. After this, review your placements and then make your choices final and known to the scribe.

You will probably be invited to work with a second judge, as this is usually a fair policy. If you are judging with another judge, make every effort to be receptive and show a high regard for that person's

opinion. You will likely agree on most placings, but will have to graciously make some concessions, for no two people always see eye to eye. You both have been asked to judge, so make it a cooperative effort.

Very often, the exhibits will judge themselves for ratings of poor, good, better, best, are clearly apparent. But never be fooled into thinking judging is easy. Your judgement and knowledge will be tested. Many classes will have several excellent pieces and you will need all your experience, knowledge, and judging skills to make good and fair decisions.

Do not discuss your decision making with fair personnel or allow them to discuss the art or artists with you. Also, remember the art exhibits may be the work of some of the fair volunteers or their friends. Be extremely careful with the whatever you say, especially any negative criticism. If you find that the volunteers or staff is trying to influence your decisions you should feel free to quietly ask the Department Chairman to rectify the situation before you continue your work.

However, relax! Any time anything is subjectively judged, you are getting that particular judge or judges opinion at that time. Another time, even the same judge may see it differently.

JUDGING CHILDREN AND TEENAGE ART:

In judging children and teenager's art note the age of the exhibitor and make judging adjustments according to the person's age. A young child would be judged more leniently, whereas a high school student should be considered slightly less than an adult.

PREPARE YOURSELF:

I urge you to familiarize yourself with Fine Art whenever, wherever, and as often as possible.

It is fair to assume that if one seeks to present oneself as a knowledgeable judge, it would indicate that they have a strong interest in the subject and are fairly knowledgeable on the subject. For me to attempt to go deeply into the many aspects of Fine Arts, in a couple hours, would be impossible.

I am not going to discuss or demonstrate how to do or use any medium, to paint, to draw, etc., but rather to touch on what we look for and the actual process of judging.

Go to art galleries, especially the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C., the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, MD. Galleries such as these are full of the best art in the world, which illustrate the best diversion in Fine Art. Visit your local galleries, attend art shows and art fairs. Avail yourself to the array of books about art and artists in the libraries and bookstores. Talk with artists that you know or meet. Artists almost always like to talk about art and are willing to share their ideas and knowledge with you.

Explore your own art interests and take classes, experiment, and work with friends or colleagues to explore your own creativity. The more you know, the broader your experiences, the better equipped you will be to fairly evaluate that which you are invited to judge.

Above all be fair, consistent, and careful. Balance the scales of judgement.

NOTES FOR THE JUDGING OF LANDSCAPES AND SEASCAPES:

As a general rule, the horizon should be located so that it divides the painting into unequal parts.

Is the perspective convincing?

Has it conveyed a feeling of time and season?

Is there atmospheric perspective - values grayed in the distance?

The placement of lines keeps the eye in the painting.

Do you feel you could or would want to walk into the painting?

Does the composition keep your eye moving around the painting?

Was the artist careful in orchestrating a balance of color? Movement, perspective, composition?

Can you imagine the painting as an integral and welcome part of some interior?

Does framing add or detract? Is it too powerful, too weak, inappropriate or suitable?

Is the use of light and shadows convincing?

BALANCE:

Balance in terms of line, value and color is an absolute must. Balance in terms of placement of objects is critical. Informal balance (unlike objects whose placing appears to violate the requirements for formal balance) is often preferred over formal balance.

LINE:

Refers to the edges of objects in a painting. Paintings should include both straight and curved lines to lead the viewer's eye from one area to the next.

Generally we think of straight lines as adding strength, whereas curved lines add softness and gracefulness. Look for straight lines in a generally curved line; i.e., an apple is considered round, but for character and strength there are short, straight lines that interpret the curved line, but will give it strength.

COLOR:

Color is actually the quality of light. Without light there is no color. Turn off the light at night and see how much color you see. What we are really seeing when we see color is the way light is hitting an object and reflecting off of it.

We think of an orange (citrus fruit) as being orange in color. But in interpreting an orange in a painting to show it as a sphere, the local color of orange will only appear in the middle value. The lightest value, where the light hits the orange strongest, will be light orange, the middle light will be true orange, the shadow side will be dark orange, and the reflected light which is bounced back from surrounding colors around the orange on the shadow side will be the reflected color, but only slightly lighter than the shadow side value. Here's a case where you should be able to squint the reflected light away, because even though the color is different the values are very close.

Color is tricky. Most any color can be used, as long as the value is correct. In painting a face, for example, you will see blues, greens, violets in the skin tones, as well as the color of skin, depending on reflected color and the warmth and coolness in the face.

Remember colors are either warm or cool. Red, yellow and orange are warm colors. Blue, green and purple are cool colors. To be confusing, you will find cools in warm colors and warmth in some cool colors, depending on how they are mixed. This depends on the proportion of balance of cool or warm colors used in making the secondary colors.

Red, blue and yellow are primary colors. Purple, green and orange are secondary colors.

RHYTHM:

Every painting needs to have a few repeating elements - typically repeating line and color to tie things together. Since our eyes need to organize shapes and spaces into regular intervals, the artist must guard against this in painting as it is really boring to have too many evenly placed spaces. Mismatched or uneven repetition creates a more interesting rhythm.

DOMINANCE:

Typically, one element, shape, color or value dominates a composition, giving it greater prominence or importance.

SPACE:

We think of positive and negative space in a painting. Simply speaking, positive shapes are the objects themselves and negative shapes are the spaces and shapes of the space around the object.