

If inspiration flags, experience helps

This is another in a series of lessons on art and drawing by special columnist David Messing. He has taught for eight years and operates an art store, Art Store and More, 18774 Middlebelt, Livonia. Messing encourages questions and comments from readers. You may write him at his store or c/o Observer Newspapers, 2332 Farmington Road, Farmington MI 48024.



By David Messing special writer

As we drove home from church Sunday, I found myself tremendously inspired. The music was terrific and the sermon was great (maybe a little long). But what really inspired me was my gray suit.

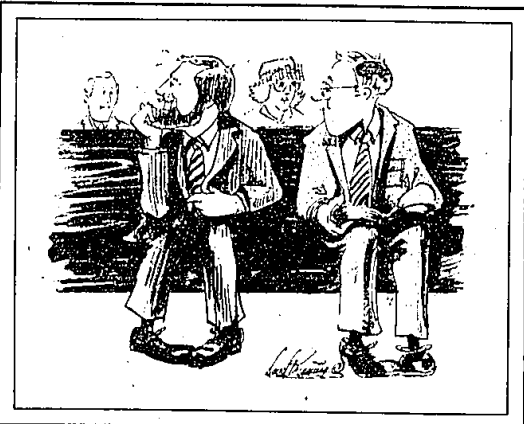
You see I haven't worn it for a while, and I think it shrank hanging in the closet. It was so tight that my feet began to swell during church. I struggled for relief. Finally I quietly unbuttoned the only button of my suit pants and listened as each tooth of my zipper began popping under the pressure. Within minutes the top inch of my zipper was toothless. Trying desperately not to be obvious, I managed to rebutton my suit pants.

So by the time we reached the car I had received my inspiration to start yet another diet. All caught up in the moment I vowed to make mental projections, set goals and even came up with a slogan: "People Who Diet Expect Less of Themselves."

AS MONDAY morning approached, I was still inspired. I even gave my all during, most favorite, candy to my boys. Normally, I would probably break the law for those chocolate covered peanuts, but by reason of my inspiration I gave them away. By Tuesday, however, my inspiration had lifted and severe hunger had set in. I tried to sneak a cookie but the plastic wrapper was so loud, when I reached for the bag it gave away my intentions. By Wednesday I just plain missed chewing food. I mean good food. The stuff that chokes your arteries and puts clumps in your fat globules. Then I found another old stash of chocolate peanut clusters. I ate the whole box, but I did wash them down with diet pop.

The real problem with my diet was that I couldn't keep my commitment after the inspiration had lifted. Many times in drawing or painting artists begin their work in an emotional high. Inspired to the nose holes, they begin an "incredible work," probably their "best," but soon find themselves with half a drawing and no inspiration whatsoever.

Let's look at the meaning of the word, inspiration: "to breathe life into." So when you lose your inspiration, your idea suffocates and the artwork falls dead on your easel. You see, inspiration excites the mind to create the work of art. As this inspiration fades your creativity



lessons and the work dramatically suffers. The stroke of brush or pen become tentative and halting. You doubt your choice of color, ques-

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tion your shading and soon abandon the work altogether.

Here is where the amateurs and the pro separate. Like the stone amateur that I am in golf, when I hit a ball into the woods I fall over stiff on the fairway. A better player or pro would confidently walk into the woods to better plan his next shot.

PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS do not require inspiration to work out a decent piece of artwork. And indeed many commissions are 180 degrees from inspiration. A professional artist knows that if he or she is going to sign the work it has to be worthy of their signature and indicative of their ability. Every single week at least one of my students looks at me with eyelids at half mast and asks "can I be done now?"

The "push" required when inspiration is gone only comes from years of experience and technical skill. This is why art lessons are so critical for students hoping to excel in the field of art. Few works done by a student at home with the usual domestic distractions can be rendered before the inspiration lifts, however, the

teachers technical knowledge should help the uninspired student push his or her work to completion.

So when faced with a commission, seek to be inspired. First consider the object of the commission. Remember the word, "consider" means to take thought of. Perhaps your commission is of something that appears to be boring. If so, your careful consideration of it may somehow spark your interest and thereby initiate creativity. Next appreciate the object of your commission if it is inanimate. Study it closely for its basic shapes. If it is manmade, look for the craftsmanship or technology within its construction. If it is of nature take thought of the power that fashioned it, and automatically it will increase in your opinion. Don't seek to copy, seek to re-create.

I was looking through a wildlife magazine and noticed a photo of a baby cheetah attacking a little impala. What caught my eye was that the baby cheetah seemed to be looking at its mother as if to seek her approval. And the baby impala seemed so calm as if to say, "so this end was I created." So after considering this scene and appreciating the structure and beauty of each animal, I began to re-create this scene which ultimately caused it to be original expression even though it was taken from a photo.

Q: "When will my son or daughter be able to draw without looking at something for reference?"

A: "Hopefully never," is my usual reply. Accuracy is the goal and originality need not be threatened in its pursuit. Let's use the painting I mentioned as an example. I'll bet I could draw a great looking cheetah without looking

Artifacts

at a photo. But I would also bet there would be inaccurate placements of features which would ultimately haunt me. I changed my painting enough that it is my own expression. For example I lengthened the legs of the impala, painted in larger claws than were actually on the cheetah. As a matter of fact any painting or drawing taken from a photo is greatly abstracted as it is reduced to simple lines and shapes in the rendering.

With the proper approach to any subject your own feelings will come through on the paper or canvas and the expression should be even greater than the photo used for reference. After all a camera is limited to record only what is seen by the lens. So you the artist are free to not only be accurate with what is seen but also express visually what is felt. Any artist is pleased when viewers appreciate his or her technical skills. But the artist is doubly rewarded when viewers "feel" his expression in his re-creation.

Q: Shirley ask's "how do you shade something like a glass of wine?"

A: Glass and chrome are a little difficult to draw because there is no definite color. All you really see is the reflections of light and surrounding shapes and colors. In the example of a glass of wine the glass where the wine is held would appear to be the purple color of the wine. But the reflection of light and objects around the glass highlight and shade its smooth surface.

So even though the wine is purple, its color is secondary to the reflections on the outer surface of the glass. Anything wet or glossy or even chrome must have a strong white highlight to appear shiny. Where you see only the glass the surface reflects the whites, grays and surrounding colors. It is interesting that in drawing shiny objects that the whites must be surrounded by black shades of gray or dark colors in order to make the white appear bright and sparkling. One easy trick to help in drawing shiny objects is to always place the darkest darks right next to the lightest lights. One of our lessons at the art store is to draw a name or logo on black mat board then color the letters so that they look like chrome. The colors that appear to give the best chrome effect are: non photo blue at the top, tinting to white in the middle of the letter. Here white stops with a very clean line and black begins. As black moves down to the base of the letter it gradually fades into a slate gray or bluish gray. Try this at home on your own with black paper and colored pencils.

If you still haven't received your "Artifacts" booklet there still are a few left. They sell for \$3.25 and you can pick them up at the Art Store and More, 18774 Middlebelt in the Middlebelt Plaza, Livonia. I will keep you informed as to when the new booklets will be out, with articles No. 10 through No. 20.

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