

Sensitivity is an artist's inspiration

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, 23352 Farmington Road, Farmington MI 48024.



By David Messing
special writer

I think most artists are very sensitive people. I know I am. Being sensitive, however, is an essential part of being an artist. The problem with sensitivity is that it often gives way to worry, and I am no exception.

I worry about dumb things. I worry about stray dogs finding their homes, and stray cats finding my garage. I worry about scientists discovering that the combination of diet pop and chocolate can be hazardous to your health. I worry about what it would be like to watch a rock 'n' roll video and understand it.

My son's upstairs bedroom light is constantly on. We call it Livonia's eternal flame. I think his bedroom light is listed as a land mark for all incoming flights to Metro Airport. So now when he does turn it off... I worry. In the past I worried about burglars breaking into my home. But with our three-year remodeling and addition mess, a burglar would probably feel sorry for us and leave \$20 on the kitchen table.

Sensitivity is the crucial part of an artist that causes him or her to look and study objects rather than to only "see" them. Something as simple as a draped piece of white cloth can challenge an artist. The artist looks at the cloth and asks, "How would I draw that?" Where is the light source and where will the shadows fall? What me-dium would best lend itself to an accu-

artifacts

rate rendering? And so on.

SENSITIVITY IS our life's blood. It inspires us to look, study and express. Expression, however, is inspired if it is not initiated by the personal feelings of the artist. I was once washing my hands at one of those round wash basins in public rest rooms. Suddenly someone bumped into me. Startled, I turned to find a blind man who was trying to find the wash basin. As he washed his hands next to me I became fascinated with his hands. They were dried, chapped and ruddy by reason of his dependence on touch for sight. I was so moved as I watched this wonderful old guy totter off dragging his hand against the wall that I had to express my feelings. Since I had no art materials with me, I pulled out a folded piece of paper and a pen and wrote a poem that started out as follows: "These cold and calloused hands of mine are reaching out, that I might see. I wonder what the sighted see, when they turn to look at blind man, me..." Again I hurry to say I am no writer nor poet but sensitivity blessed the moment I washed my hands next to that blind man.

So sensitivity is great, worry is not. Sensitivity inspires, which by definition means, "to breathe life into" and worry knocks the breath out of you. Sensitivity spurs you on to expression and worry stifles you for fear of failure. I promise you that every picture you ever sketch, paint or render forces you through a hole gamut of emotions. First you are inspired, then you seek expression.

In artwork you next pick a medium that will best meet the demands of your ability and emotion. It is the execution that caused many a picture to end up in the bird cage. During the throes of expression an artist goes through many emotional "highs" and "lows." Threes is a good word to use, it

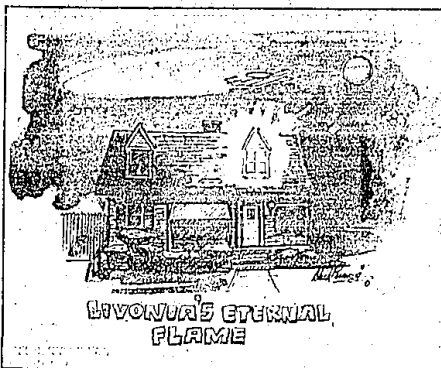
means: "the act of struggling with a problem, task, etc." The "struggle" is to make visual on canvas or paper the emotion that initiated the "task." Sometimes my students will say, "Gee, I wouldn't worry over these pictures if I could draw like you." This is certainly not true because I sweat out every picture just like my students. As a matter of fact a teacher stands to lose face by a failure more than a student. Probably the difference in the teacher and student is that the teacher is sure that the task is worth whatever effort is required and the student is unsure that the outcome will reflect his emotion or ability.

If your drawing or painting forces you to entertain thoughts of quitting and there isn't an art teacher in sight, here's what to do.

First: walk away, have a coffee, change the baby or watch something educational on TV like "Hollywood Squares" or "Green Acres" reruns. Second: when you go back to your artwork

pick it up and show it into a mirror, this will reverse the image and 99 times out of 100 will graphically show your error in proportion, structure or placement of subjects. Third: squint your eyes, this will increase the contrast which is basic for all artwork. Contrast defines the shapes in black and white pictures and reduces the need for outlines. And in color, rendering contrast is essential for not only definition but balance. Remember contrast is the key to color. Fourth: to make necessary changes try placing tracing paper over your artwork and trace only the best of your work. Redraw the areas that gave you trouble then if everything looks good transfer to a new piece of paper or canvas.

If none of these tips help, then take a large marker and write across your drawing or painting, "You can't enjoy winning unless you occasionally fail." Then pin it up on your wall and when you succeed on some future picture you will see how far you have progressed.



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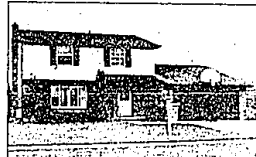
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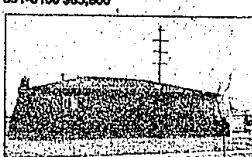
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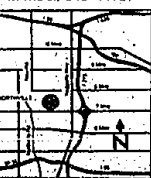
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