



artifacts David Messing

Mistakes become learning experiences

IF YOU remember from my last article, I have been discussing "tendencies to error." Believe me, I am qualified to talk about this subject because I tend to make errors.

I remember a student once asked me, "How did you ever learn all this about art?" and I quickly replied, "Oh, easy. I have made lots of mistakes, but tried learning something from each one of them." I guess you can ease the pain of mistakes by calling them "learning experiences."

But at some point in your art experience, mistakes become a plain ol' pain in the neck. The better you learn from mistakes is when you learn from the mistakes of others. And since so many of us tend to make similar mistakes, it would be most beneficial to list some of them.

One of my most cherished goods was a cartoon that I did for a magazine. The cartoon was of a big crowd of people, some of whom were holding up signs. I carefully drew the first row of people head to foot. Then I began drawing just the shoulders and heads of everyone behind them.

This cartoon was published nationally and in 14 foreign countries. I was so proud, I quickly opened it up to find my cartoon and gasped when I found it — I had forgotten to draw the legs and feet of all of the rest of the crowd. I just stood there and got real hot. I guess you could call it an international bluish!

BUT I'LL TELL you one thing, I always counted my heads and feet from that day on. Later that year, one of my marker renderings was chosen to be in a Pantone calendar. On one of the other months, an artist drew a chorus line; there were six legs kicking high, six legs touching the ground. Six ruffled skirts showing six rear ends, but wait... there were only five heads. Believe me, I know how the artist felt. So in keeping with my "tendencies to error" topic, let's continue.

Before I finish anatomy (from the last article), let me state that I could write a book on errors in anatomy and many of them are from my own experiences. I am here merely mentioning a few.

Smiling mouths seldom turn up at the corners. We think they do so we draw them turning up when in reality they most often rise to be simply straight across with a shortened upper lip.

When drawing people with clothes on, you must first draw the human figure and then add the clothes. Similarly when drawing cloths, with make-up or men with beards, you must draw a human face then add the make-up or beard.

IN SCENERY or still life, watch for what I call the mailbox tendency. Just about every drawing of a mailbox with the door opened has one major error.

Usually the door is bigger or smaller than the opening of the mailbox. Rarely does it feel that the door actually fits on the mailbox.

But it doesn't have to be just mailboxes. Does the bucket look like it's the right size for the well? Does the handle on the wicker basket really feel like it is the right size? Does the open barn door fit the doorway opening in the barn? Etc., etc.

Because of my lack of animals, I could write an article on drawing every animal there is, but obviously I will be very brief and just skim the surface.

Birds usually have feet much bigger than people think and their eyes are most always round. The feathers around the eyes make them appear out of round. Wings like the feet are usually drawn too small. The eyes especially in predatory birds are very close to the beak.

WHEN DRAWING dogs or cats, it is very common to get the eyes too close together, the ears too close to the eyes and the chins too big. Fluffy dogs and cats are actually more difficult to draw.

You must show some structure under the fluff or your drawing will look like a muppet. Any animal with a muzzle can be a problem.

Artist tend to look at the muzzle as round shapes. When in fact they are round shapes built on a square foundation. The end of a muzzle is usually flat. The nostrils open somewhat frontally. The nose, however, bends over the top of the muzzle and fades quickly into the fuzzy hair of the upper muzzle.

Wild cats have more angular eyes, massive chins and very square muzzles.

Don't ignore obvious subject

Did you know there's a photographic subject of great potential that is often ignored, frequently taken for granted and yet is used without exception in every photograph we take?

What I'm referring to is plain, old fashioned, all-important light. Isn't it time we gave it more respect?

Obviously, light is used to illuminate all our photographic subjects, but now let's turn the tables and use light as the subject itself. If you do, your pictures will be dramatic and exciting.

To begin with, those beautiful sunset photographs we all shoot showing the sun as a brilliantly descending fireball surrounded by a rainbow of clouds are in reality photographs of light as the subject. We've all been shooting sunsets for years but didn't realize we're photographing light itself.

In a backlit subject showing a striking silhouette, the lighting is the direct cause of the silhouette and is therefore indirectly the subject.

What about lens flare, the usually unacceptable reflections of sunlight bouncing off the glass elements in the lens?

Of course, in most of your shots, you want to eliminate lens flare by preventing the sun from entering your camera's lens. But how about

deliberately allowing some lens flare in order to add an unusual and exciting effect to your picture? In doing so, the flare, or light, becomes your subject.

Here's an idea to help make light your subject. With slow speed film and a strong foreground subject, shoot pictures with the sun directly in the viewfinder. But instead of heeding the meter, use the camera's smallest aperture and fastest shutter speed. In other words, underexpose as much as you can. Also, for safety's sake, don't look at the sun through the viewfinder — look alongside the sun.

This "underexposing" procedure will produce absolutely sensational photographs showing the sun as a "star," the foreground subject as a dramatic silhouette, and, depending on the lens used and the time of day, some exciting lens flare. What have you really done here? You've made light of your subject.

In the photograph shown here, I've done exactly what I've just described and you can see the result.

So, begin to think in terms of using light itself as the subject. It's a fine opportunity to acquire a better understanding and appreciation of light. After all, as oils are to the painter, light is to the photographer.

©1988, Monte Nagler



This Monte Nagler photograph, taken at the Uffizi Art Gallery of Florence, Italy, illustrates how underexposing can create a star effect and make the light itself the subject.

briefly speaking

- **STUDENT ART EXHIBIT**
A student art exhibit will be held at Madonna College, Livonia, through Sunday, April 17, in the Exhibit Gallery, Library Wing.
- **CHORALE CONCERT**
The Dearborn Community Chorus, under the direction of Nancy Cox, will present its spring concert, "We're Doing a Show," at 3 p.m. Sunday, April 17 in the Dearborn High School auditorium. Tickets are \$4. For more information, call 943-2354.
- **FORD TRIBUTE**
The International Opera Theatre will present a concert at 4 p.m. Sunday, May 22 commemorating the 125th birthday anniversary of pioneer automaker Henry Ford, and paying tribute to the Ford Dynasty. The concert, in the Henry Ford Centennial Library, will focus on Ford, the agriculturist, the nature

- lover, the businessman and the music lover. Tickets are \$10 and will include a chance in a benefit drawing for a getaway weekend for two at the Hyatt-Regency Dearborn. For more information, call Dino Valle, 525-1111.
 - **SCARAB CLUB EXHIBITION**
The Scarab Club will hold its 1988 advertising art and design exhibition April 10-29 in the club's gallery. Hours are 10 a.m. to 4:40 p.m. weekdays and from 1-4 p.m. weekends. Admission and parking are free. The Scarab Club is at 217 Farnsworth, at the corner of John St. just east of the Detroit Institute of Arts. Admission is \$15. Proceeds benefit the ongoing restoration of the club's building, listed on both the state and national historic registers.
- For advance tickets, send check or money order payable to the Scarab Club/Art Directors Review to the Scarab Club, 217 Farnsworth, Detroit, Mich. 48208 or call John Stapleton, 831-1250.

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