



artifacts
David
Messing

Don't worry — even pros make mistakes

OOPS! NITS! Oh, bunnies! "Hey Dave, you got a waste basket around here?"

These are just a few of the exclamations I hear every week at the art store. They seem to emit freely as the art students' intention and technical ability do not coincide. In other words, when they go up. And goofing up is common to both student and teacher, prospective artist and professional artist.

Every artist sweats out every picture while entertaining feelings of enthusiasm and satisfaction. He or she shuns fears of failure and discouragement. And so it is on every level of ability.

These with little apparent ability striving for their best representation and those more able are expecting their normal capabilities and hoping for excellence.

SO TO ENSURE that art will always be fun to you, I would like to list some of the common goofs in several media. Perhaps some of these tips will act as road signs to warn you of some common hazards.

First, let's start with graphite or pencil drawings. Usually the most common problem here is getting too dark too quick. Save the darkest darks for last. Instead of using only one soft pencil, use many hardnesses of pencils. Start out your gesture drawing very light so that if you must make corrections, they can be erased.

Also, clean your paper as you draw. Often the oil from your skin mixes with the graphite smudges and permanently stains the white drawing paper.

PEN AND INK: Don't draw every detail. When doing a pen and ink from a photo, many students are overwhelmed by the multitude of details. In the effort of drawing, for example, every hair of a dog, the student soon finds that the light areas have become gray and the middle tones are lost in the black areas. The artist is expected to choose which areas are to be black, gray and

white. The white or light areas, therefore, must have little or no lines at all.

Another tip is to change your technique as texture changes. Also try to stay away from solid black, rather cross-hatch your way to 70, 80 or 90 percent black. Solid black often attracts too much attention.

SCRATCHBOARD: The leading mistake in scratchboard is pushing too hard with the scratch point. This causes the point to go through not only the ink and clay coating on the paper, but also rips up the paper backing. The ink dust from scraping then lodges into the rough surface of the paper. So your finished scratchboard loses these bright clean whites that are so vital to the medium.

PASTEL: Probably the biggest error in pastel is that students are hesitant to push the color into the paper or board. This results in a washed out, faded looking picture. Also, when blocking in the base colors of your pastel, your beginning sketch loses many of its details and is often a shock to students.

Don't quit at this point. Push yourself to re-establish the details.

WATERCOLOR: The same problem exists in watercolor as in pastels. The beginning wet washes tend to overflow pencil guide lines which is often upsetting. Remember to carefully wet, with clear water, areas where you intend the color to flow. This way the water acts as the vehicle for the flow of color.

Save your dark areas for last. Since you don't add white to a "legal" watercolor, you should slowly work your way up to the darkest areas. I also recommend you do your beginning sketch lightly with a "hard" pencil. Often the soft pencils muddy up the usually toothy watercolor paper.

Count on a few problems in whatever medium you use. And don't be discouraged. Every problem and mistake you encounter or commit is common to us all. Those who succeed learned from their problems. Those who fail used problems as an excuse.

Etching her way

EMU prof examines work of artist

As she leafs through the pages of the book, she unknowingly wears a faint smile. And each page is turned with so careful a hand that even the most casual observer cannot help but sense the satisfaction and reverence that Sharon Harrison holds for her creation and the art it features.

Harrison, professor of art history at Eastern Michigan University, is the author of the recently published book, "The Etchings of Odilon Redon: A Catalogue Raisonné" (DaCapo Press, \$110).

Heralded by John Russell in the New York Times Book Review (June 1, 1986) as a necessity for anyone "who loves French 19th century prints," the 125-page book on this major artist features more than 100 reproductions, including 32 plates and 33 supplementary illustrations, with all but four larger works reproduced in their original scale.

THE BOOK IS THE first definitive study of Redon's etching since 1913 when Andre Mellerio published a catalogue featuring the artist's lithographs and etchings. Harrison's study, however, expands on that publication. Not only has she discovered three more Redon etchings unknown to Mellerio and illustrated four which were only described by him, but she also checked and verified all

of the previous author's measurements and dates, making additions and corrections as needed.

In addition, Harrison has studied the paper and signatures of the various proofs, enabling the reader to distinguish one from another, even in the presence of fake signatures. She has listed the locations of unique proofs and written extensive technical notes on many of the plates. She has included four previously unpublished letters from Redon to Rodolphe Breslin and a letter about the etchings from Madame Redon. Perhaps most importantly, she has described the state changes and transformations which Redon made while working on his etchings.

To say the least, the compilation of such extensive information on this 19th century French artist did not always come easily or quickly.

"It took me 10 years to write this book," Harrison said. "I made four trips to Europe, spent a summer in the Art Institute of Chicago's Print and Drawing Room and visited numerous museums and private galleries."

ACCESS TO THE information also wasn't too easy at times. For example, the French were somewhat protective of Redon as one of "their own" artists and according to Harrison, "occasionally made things difficult."

Harrison, a 19th and 20th century European art historian and EMU faculty member for the last 18 years, earned her doctorate from the University of Michigan in 1975. Her thesis then was on Redon's etchings, but her interest in etching traces back to her graduate years at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, where she earned her master of fine arts degree, and her undergraduate days at U-M, where she studied with Emil Weddige.

"I'm not sure I can explain why I chose to study Redon," Harrison said. "It's sort of like explaining why we choose to marry whom we do."

I think I fell in love as a student and the feeling never went away."

For Harrison, the feeling of "rightness" in choosing to study Redon is best explained by one of her favorite photographers, Lisette Model, who once said, "Don't shoot 'til the subject hits you in the pit of the stomach." Harrison said she could really relate to that statement when she first saw Redon's etchings. "I was standing on Madison Avenue in New York looking at Redon's work in a gallery window and I got 'hit' in the pit of my stomach," she said.

According to Harrison, the etching technique, that of producing designs on metal for reproduction by printing on paper, was historically used by a number of painters during Redon's period for reasons that were partly experimental and discovery oriented. As written by print scholar Peter Morse in the foreword of Harrison's book, "In the era when Redon was making prints, quite simply, etching was a considered a medium for art, and lithography a medium for reproduction."

Morse also wrote, "Redon surely began in 1865 with the idea of etching as real art. Though he and the artistic world later admitted lithography to this exalted level, the process of etching probably always held a superior position in his mind."

In all, Harrison studied Redon's etching from his earliest in 1865 to his last in 1914 and is now in the process of studying his lithographs. She holds a kind of intimacy with that artist which only such study can spawn.

"Redon thought in black and white and I think in black and white," she said. "After such an intensive study, you almost feel like you've created some of the works yourself," she joked. "Seriously though, I have always felt a tremendous rapport with his work."

Information for this story came from Eastern Michigan University's public information and publications office.

briefly speaking

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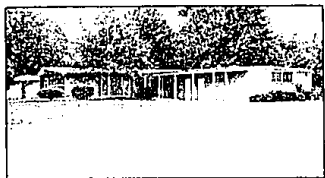
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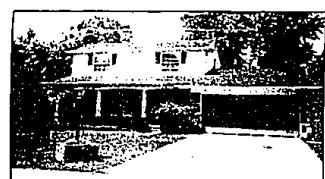
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