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15 Effective Steps to Learning Oil Painting

The ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS of a GREAT WORKSHOP

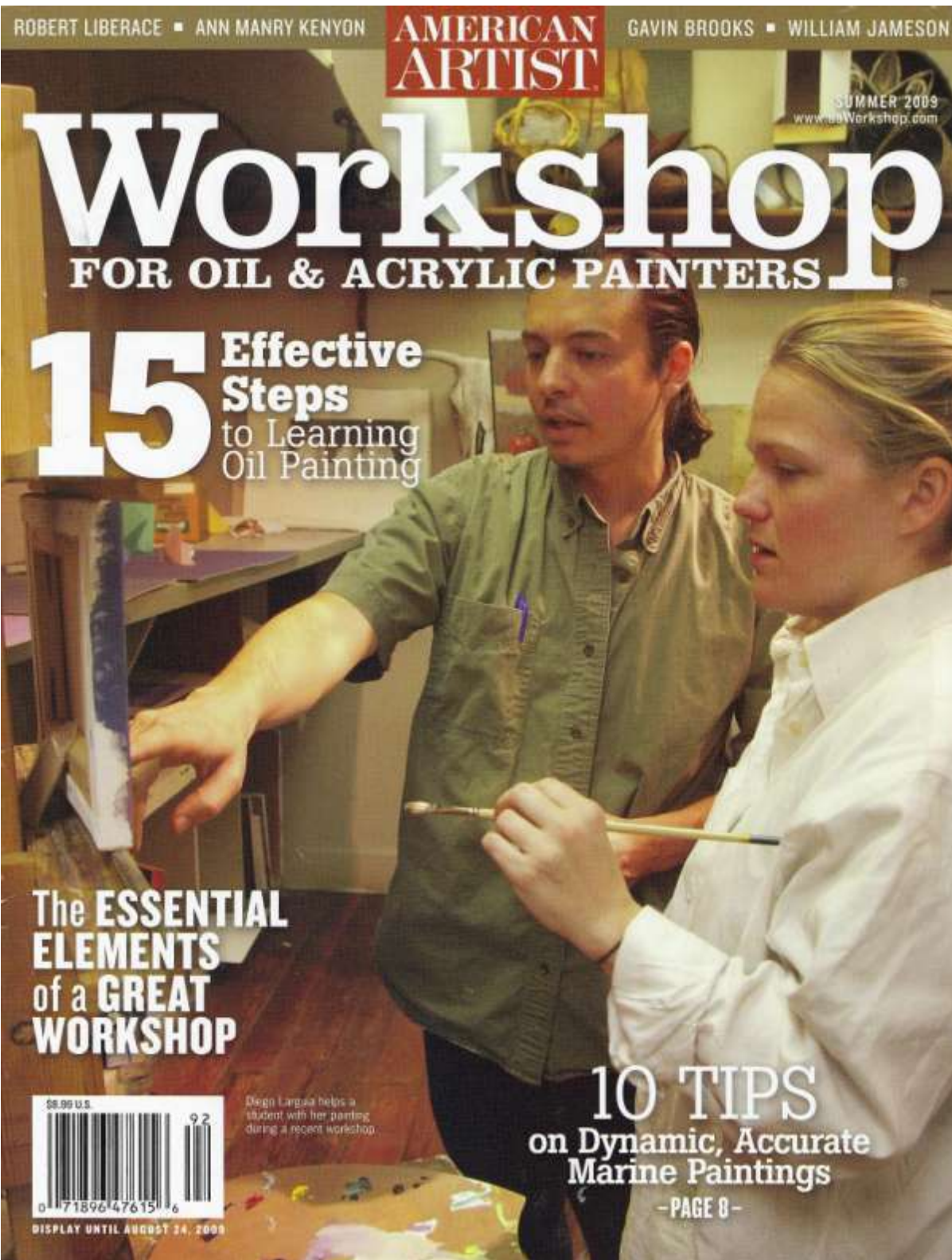


DISPLAY UNTIL AUGUST 24, 2009

Diego Largaia helps a student with her painting during a recent workshop.

10 TIPS on Dynamic, Accurate Marine Paintings

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During a recent workshop in the Lowcountry of South Carolina, William Jameson provided instruction in plein air oil painting, but he knew it was just as important to offer encouragement and direction to students while they enjoyed the experience.



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Diego Larguia:

15 Tips

on Learning to Paint in Oil

Simplifying the painting process makes it easier to work and make judgments about color mixing, paint application, and edge control. Here's how Diego Larguia does that in classes on still life and landscape oil painting.

—
by M. Stephen Doherty



During a recent course on beginner oil painting taught by Diego Larguia at the New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts (NOAFA), the instructor recommended that students follow an exercise of painting folded pieces of colored paper so they would learn to simplify the process of judging relationships between shapes, values, and colors.

"Generally speaking, people sign up for the class because they long to paint landscapes, still lifes, or portraits; but before they can tackle the specific skills associated with representing those subjects, they have to get a feel for oil paint, become acquainted with the principles associated with all painting, put aside their egos, and sharpen their skills of observation and analysis," Larguia explains. "There are times when we are too sure of what we think we see. Painting from direct observation challenges this belief. It is in the process of painting, gathering information, that we realize the full complexity of what we are trying to capture."

"A painting is a document," Larguia goes on to say. "Even though art is subjective, it shouldn't prevent us from searching for order and accountability. In life we make decisions based on our perceptions, and when painting from direct observations we exercise that concept. We learn in plateaus, and the learning map shows us that it is through confidence that we gain access to higher standards. In order to gain confidence, students should set their own expectations and avoid frustration as much as possible."

According to NOAFA's website (www.noafa.com), the school is dedicated to the advancement of the fine arts in



the New Orleans community. It was founded in 1978 by Auseklis Ozols for the serious study of traditional drawing and painting. Dorothy J. Coleman's interest in the school led to its incorporation as a nonprofit institution in 1980 and to a substantial enlargement of its facilities at its present location on Magazine Street.

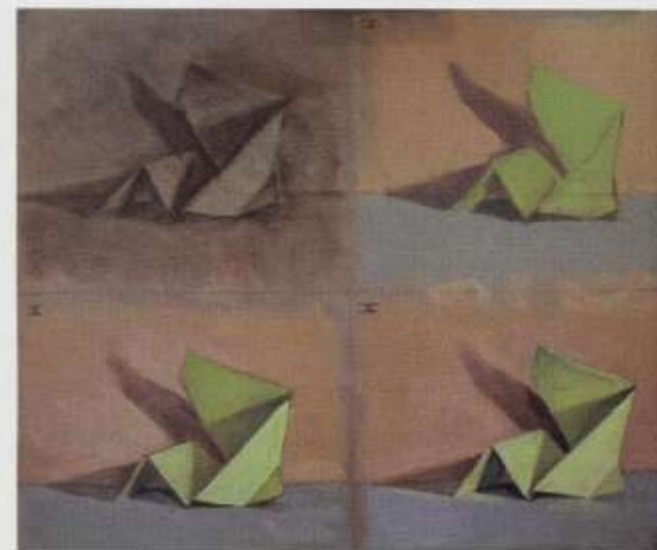
"Of paramount importance is the study of the human form in all its attributes and applications of the fine arts," a statement on the academy's website points out. "Portraiture, landscape, sculpture, and their corresponding technical disciplines are included in the course of study. The academy

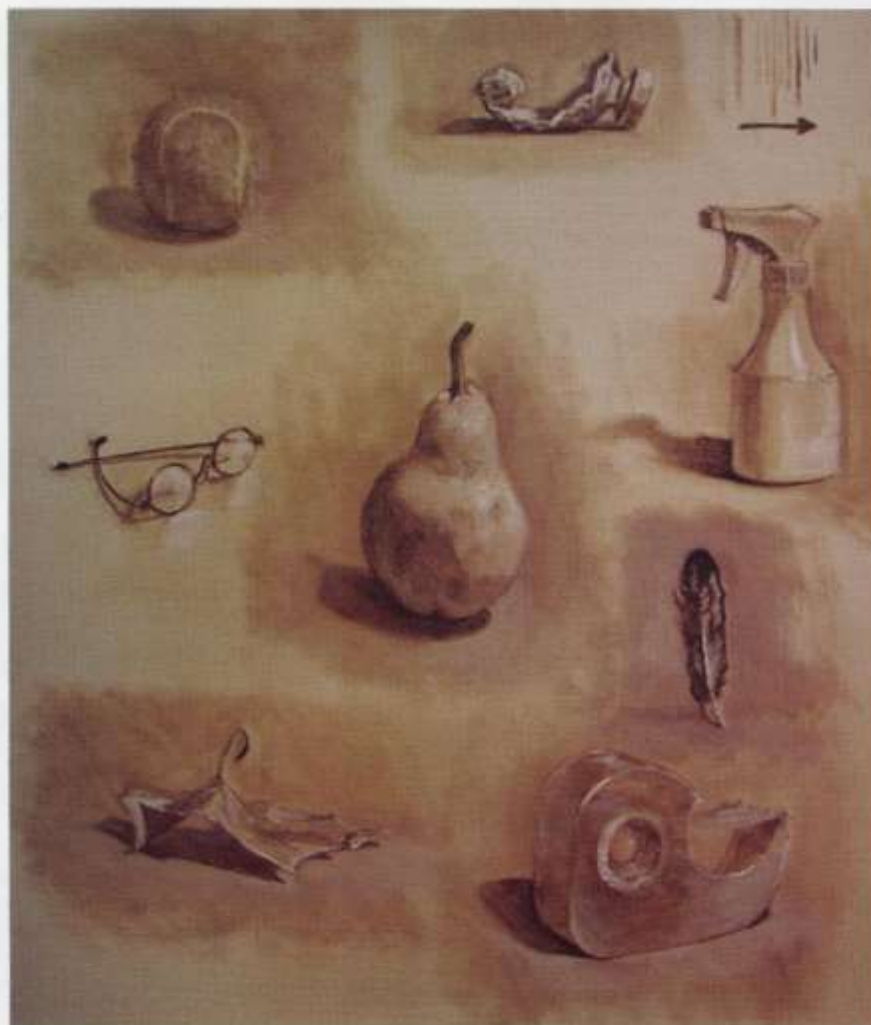


ABOVE
A step-by-step demonstration of how to develop an oil painting of one object.

LEFT
A demonstration of how to paint a folded sheet of colored paper.

OPPOSITE PAGE
Larguia demonstrated at the New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts.





LEFT
A recommended exercise in painting simple objects with burnt umber and titanium white.

OPPOSITE PAGE
A study in painting an object with this mixture of burnt umber and titanium white.

believes that a reinvestigation of traditional aesthetic values forms the strongest foundation for eventual creative expression and stylistic development.

"The New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts and its faculty are dedicated to the concept that an artist—any kind of artist—must be firmly grounded in the fundamentals of drawing and painting from life," NOAFA's website states. "The novice works alongside more advanced students in a spirit of cooperation and fellowship. The student may be in search of a vocation or profession, regardless of age. Entrance requirements are none other than a desire to learn."

Larguia studied at NOAFA in the 1990s and now teaches there. Here are 15 specific tips that he offers students in

both his beginner oil painting classes and in his lessons on plein air landscape painting:

Initial Exercises

"Drawing is fundamental to all art because it helps improve a person's ability to judge the relationships between shapes, lines, values, and colors," he says. "I strongly recommend that students spend time making graphite and charcoal drawings on paper. Drawing is responding. There is seeing, and there is draftsmanship. Seeing comes first."

Start the painting process by making value studies of single objects (a tennis ball, a pear, a spray bottle, etc.) with raw umber and titanium white thinned with odorless mineral



Larguia's Materials

PALETTE

- cadmium lemon yellow
- cadmium yellow medium
- cadmium orange
- cadmium red deep
- alizarin crimson
- ultramarine blue
- viridian
- titanium white

BRUSHES

The artist works with at least three flat bristle brushes—one loaded with the dominant color in the subject and the others available to create variations on that color. He doesn't wash and clean the brushes at the end of each painting session because he finds they last longer if he wipes off some of the paint, wraps them in plastic, and stores them in a freezer.



LEFT
An exercise in painting a green apple with oil colors.

OPPOSITE PAGE
The instructor helped a student improve her still life painting.

spirits. These studies can be small and grouped together on one large stretched canvas. The point is to become familiar with the brush and the paint, to learn how to develop a range of values with one tube color and white, and to begin making judgments about the relationships between shapes and values.

First Studies

Make small studies of folded sheets of colored paper. The advantage of starting with an object that doesn't have any useful function is that you won't fall into the trap of painting what you *know* or *feel* about the object and will only focus on what you actually *see*. Also, it will be easier to understand how one folded edge relates to another. That is, one fold might appear darker or lighter than another, and the color of a fold facing the light will appear to be warmer than the folds in shadow.

To begin these studies of folded paper, draw the shapes with thin mixtures of raw umber and titanium white, as you did in the previous exercise. Adjust the drawing to make sure it

is accurate, and then paint the actual color of the folded paper.

Paint from dark areas to light ones, using thin mixtures of the oil color to establish the shadow shapes and thicker mixtures for the highlights.

Remember that you are seeing color relationships, not pure color. A green appears to be bright or dull because of the way it relates to the colors around it.

Always work from the general to the specific. That is, paint the dominant overall shapes first, and then gradually focus on what happens to the colors and values within each of those shapes.

Bring each area of the canvas to the same level of completion before you start refining any one section. Don't finish one part of the painting until you are ready to finish the entire picture.

Don't spend a lot of time refining your sketches. It's better to do a number of studies of different sheets of colored papers, the backgrounds, and the angle of the light. You can sharpen your skills by resolving each set of challenges.





ABOVE
A completed still life of three pieces of folded paper.

RIGHT
A young man in the class decided to paint the image of his folded paper on a large canvas.



RIGHT ABOVE
A student in the beginner of painting class developed her painting of a folded piece of colored paper.

RIGHT BELOW
Larguia pointed out how a student could improve her still life painting.

Further Exercises

When you are ready for further advancement, paint two or more pieces of folded colored paper. The process should be the same, but now you'll have a more complicated set of shapes, colors, and values to evaluate.

Paint a still life of functional objects that have different surface textures, colors, and sizes. Analyze and paint these in the same way you drew and painted the folded paper. That is, think about them as just shapes and surfaces.

The Act of Painting

Take the same approach to painting landscapes or figures by starting with drawing and moving on to color, shape, and value.

Remember that painting is a way of being accountable—you make decisions about what is right or wrong and





About the Artist

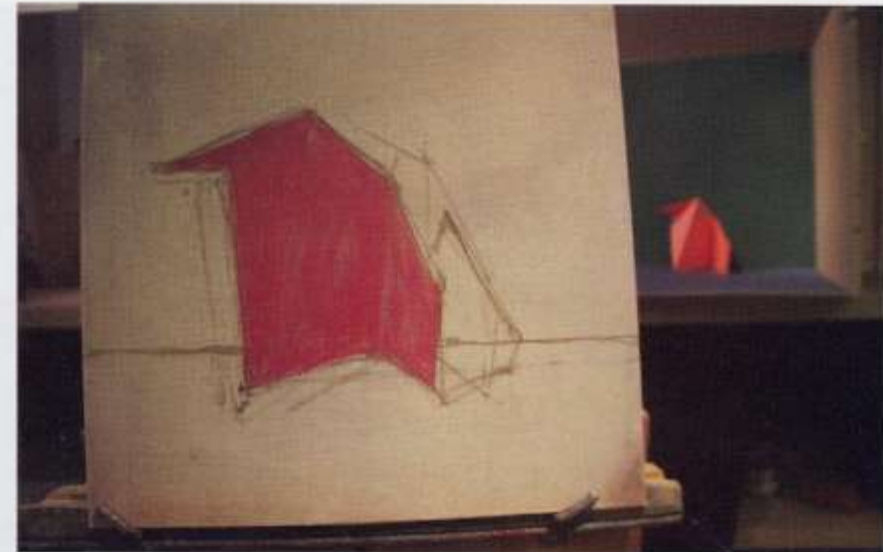
Diego Larguia was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and studied advertising before moving to the United States in 1991. He studied with artists Don Anderson and Jerome Weinberger, and he worked closely with Phil Sandusky at the New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts, where he now teaches. His paintings have been included in solo and group exhibitions in Buenos Aires and at the Alexandria Museum of Art, in Louisiana, and at D.O.C.S. Gallery, in New Orleans. For more information on Larguia, visit www.diegolarguia.com.

accept the conclusions.

In the beginning stages painting is a rational act, but it quickly becomes intuitive. We start by making objective decisions about what we see and how that can be translated with paint, but we end up responding to the way we feel about the subject and our representation of it on canvas.

As you gain confidence and skill, you will start painting subjects that have greater significance to your life, whether you fully understand that significance or not. "The wonderful thing about painting is that it gives artists the opportunity to present subjects that appeal to them, that work well compositionally, and that stand as metaphors for their ideas and feelings," says the artist.

Larguia actually spends most of his time painting on location rather than in a studio. His most recent solo exhibition, at D.O.C.S. Gallery, in New Orleans, included 30 landscapes measuring from 10" x 14" up to 30" x 24", all of which were painted in and around New Orleans. "I have to race against time to capture my subject," he says when describing his methods. "Managing all that visual information in one image without losing its cohesiveness is a real and exciting challenge. One may succeed or fail, and the outcome is never certain." ■



RIGHT ABOVE
After first drawing the shapes made by folding the paper, Larguia began to paint the largest areas.



RIGHT BELOW
A view of the instructor's palette, demonstration painting, and subject.

OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT
Larguia advised a student who was about to complete her painting.

OPPOSITE PAGE, RIGHT
Larguia demonstrated how students in his beginner oil painting class should approach the exercise of rendering a piece of folded colored paper.

Larguia's Work



LEFT
Big House on Royal St.
2008, oil, 20 x 20. All artwork this article private collection.

BOTTOM LEFT
Philip at Constance
2008, oil, 20 x 26.

BOTTOM RIGHT
Constance at Philip Street
2008, oil, 14 x 11.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP
On Constance Street
2008, oil, 8 x 16.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM LEFT
Short and Willow
2008, oil, 16 x 16.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM RIGHT
St. Phillips at Barracks Street
2008, oil, 16 x 16.

