

I Love To Paint

by **Jim Meskimen**

I love painting. It's a very absorbing activity.

I was trained in Spain and in Northern California many years ago by a Spanish master named Miguel Arguello, who changed my life by teaching me this, and other very useful things.

I studied intensively with him for about three years when I was at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and also in Galicia, Spain. I found it very, very challenging, but I did persevere, and to this day I know what I'm doing with oils and charcoal, thanks to my dear friend Miguel.

Today, I paint very infrequently, but I can get a lot done very quickly when I need to. I'm addressing this subject today because I'm on the eve of completing a commission, and I have been enjoying the process very much.

I've also noticed that I have retained my ability and improved as a painter, even though I haven't painted very much for years and years.

Like a lot of things, painting doesn't really involve luck. I always try and pull in some luck, but the reality is, you have to know what you are doing; the luck sometimes will show up, but it generally isn't anything to hang your hat on. You have to know the rules and understand the materials.

That's what was so rough when I was in Spain, trying to learn how to paint. That, and actually seeing what was in front of me.

The funny thing is, painting is one of those things that even I wonder why anyone does it anymore.

The art of painting would obviously have never gone anywhere if the camera had been invented about five hundred years ago. Most of our modern image making now rightfully utilizes a camera, and painting has never been less necessary to modern society. Still, it holds a deathless fascination.

I told a good friend of mine that I was working on a painting, and I could hear the relief and contentment in his voice when he acknowledged me. I know what that feels like, when someone tells me, for instance, that they spent the day doing something artistic, for its own sake. You're happy they are doing that.

I think that the very thought that somehow there is space and time to work on something as out of step with modern culture as an oil painting, just because it is fun or interesting to do, is one that gives people relief.

The action of painting, for me anyway, is rather rough on the body, since one has to stand for hours, move very little, keep the palette arm immobile and the attention nailed to the canvas a few feet away for hours at a time. Sometimes my arm or wrist is asleep from the stiffness, or hurts like hell when I notice it. But I seldom do notice it, or for that matter, notice the passage of time.

The fastest way I can think of to make time whiz by like in an Olympic swim meet is to pick up a pencil and paper, or a palette and some brushes. Six hours go by in the blink of an eye. It's very dramatic.

There is a secret benefit to the artist, to the activity of painting.

The secret benefit of painting is not much spoken of, and I only within the last ten years really noticed it, and it is this: when one has been painting for a few hours and then stops and looks around his environment, the colors of the world absolutely SING. Even dreary things have a hyper-real, vivid quality that they normally lack.

Everything and everybody gets really beautiful.

Why is that? My teacher Miguel smiled in agreement when I told him about it a few years ago. He might have painted mainly for that reason alone. One thing I never completely grasped from my studies with Miguel was why he did it, and devoted so much time to it. It wasn't the money or the fame. It wasn't even to have an effect on a viewer. Maybe it was to see the beauty in the world and enjoy it for its own sake.

I'm not sure why the act of painting produces this heightened perception. Dali said once, "Dali doesn't take drugs; Dali IS the drug."

Perhaps one, in studying and painting from reality, begins to grant more beauty to reality. As you see something in front of you, you have to "Be" it, to create it. You get into "Being" lots of objects, the fall of light, the textures and colors of the world. Then you stop painting, but you don't stop granting life to what is in front of you.

After I clean my brushes at the end of a day of painting, I look around, and all the hard work I have done, (which might not even look very impressive on the canvas) results in a world that to me appears bright, orderly, colorful and full of life.

I enjoy painting. It may well be an obsolete practice, and paintings may well be a curiosity only to the public at large, without real purpose except to art dealers and museum curators, but something about a painting, and the experience of painting, is worth more than the finished piece. And it's nice to know that that has value to the people

around one, who are just happy to know that somewhere, someone has time and reason and opportunity to paint.

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