Winter 1951

An approach to motivation in primary school art and one original oil painting

Edmond M. Mietzner

University of Iowa

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AN APPROACH TO MOTIVATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL ART

and

ONE ORIGINAL OIL PAINTING

by

Edmond M. Mietzner

State University of Iowa
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, in the Department of Art, in the Graduate College of the State University of Iowa

February, 1951
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my thanks to Mr. Frank Wachowiak for his suggestions concerning both form and content of this thesis, to Professor Stuart Edie who instructed me in my thesis painting, to Professor Mauricio Lasansky for his help in prints, and to Dr. Lester D. Longman for his guidance in my work as a whole. I also wish to thank Mr. Harold Swenson for his cooperation in presenting the word-pictures to his classes, and to express my appreciation to all the other members of the Art Department who have encouraged me in my work.

E. M. M.
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Part I

AN APPROACH TO MOTIVATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL ART
INTRODUCTION

Ideas, consistently and clearly carried out by the teacher in order to give his art students ideas about what they should draw and paint, require some effort. For students, especially young students of grade school age, need to be stimulated often in order to exploit their own creative resources satisfactorily. If there is any subject in the school curriculum to which the factor of stimulation applies most, it is the study of art. Most parents and teachers recognize the child's needs of expressing and doing, and generally do something about these needs. What they do, however, especially the parent with the less broadened education is so often of little efficacy in allowing the child real expression. They provide him with color-books. Here the child is set to the mechanical process of applying color to a rigidly outlined form. He is praised if none of his color escapes beyond the outlines of the figure. Often, too, the objects are labeled as to what color they should be. The child is not even given his choice of color--unless he is so young as not to be able to read the directions. Certainly the child is not indulging in self-expression here. True, he is contented and kept out from under mother's feet, but such are not the goals of creative activity. Parents -- and some teachers,
too, I fear -- probably leave the child to these color books from laziness, lack of any real knowledge about art, or because they have little conviction of the importance of art and artistic activity as developing factors in the child's personality. From the standpoint of stimulation the color books are bad because they allow little room for the stimulation of the imagination. There are no questions in them. The child just "does." He needs questions and it is important that he find the answers for them himself. The creative expression, after all, is but a solving of important problems. Of course, there must be a starting point, preferably a subject with which he has had experience or one that is especially exciting to him. Into the category of subjects that interest the child fall those things he sees about him every day and encounters in his schoolwork. One might name the more important ones as family, home, school, friends, animals, and the world of make-believe. In the latter it is difficult to tell where the "real" leaves off and the "make-believe" begins. Therein lies the artist that would burgeon forth in every child. When he is told of wonderful lands under the sea, it registers much the same as the circus he saw the day before -- that is, in its apparent reality. When they come out in the drawing with sweeps of his brush or pencil, the denizens of the deep waters are as true to life as the elephant or
the tiger, which is to say they are very real. The factors of imagination and interest equalize them all. It is you, the teacher and parent, who provide the questions and the frame of reference, but it is always the child who answers them. I have written these four word-pictures, then, to be read by the child or to the child by the parent or teacher. They are intended to inspire him to draw and paint, incorporating all the knowledge of nuances of color, form, line and texture that are at his command. They are to be used over and over again like bedtime stories — like them, always sure to interest and excite. Actual technical terms of the various components of art have been left out, of course, as being beyond the child's comprehension, but the net result is the same. The child is to gain a sense of color, form, line and texture from descriptions and questions concerning the "red leaves" or the "bumpy starfish." It is my hope that these four little "word-pictures" stand up as creative works (though in a small scale) themselves — partly from a desire to be creative myself and partly because it is the creative that stimulates the child as well as the material with which he creates. Read these to the students. A creative awakening of artistic intelligence is the best reward for his work that an art teacher can receive.
GOING TO SCHOOL

How would you like to draw or paint something you saw on your way to school? All kinds of questions should enter your mind. What did you see? What did it look like? Of course, you saw a number of things, but which of these interested you the most?

The large tree in your front yard with its leaves slowly turning all the colors of autumn?

A group of your schoolmates laughing, talking, on their way to school?

A squirrel eating a nut? A dog? A dog chasing the squirrel?

These should give you an idea of what you might have seen. When you recall what you have seen, are you able to tell how you felt about it? Were you excited? frightened? amused? or just interested?

Suppose you saw the tree:

Was it tall and slender? Thick and stout?

What colors were its leaves?

Was the bark smooth or rough?

Did you notice interesting patterns such as the lacy tree branches?
Was the tree bright or dark against the sky and ground?
Was it so close as to hide part of the house?
What made it stand out from the other trees - its color? brightness? size? difference in leaves and trunk?

Maybe you could tell us about the other children you saw:

Were they big children or little children?
or are all children little?
Was there a large number of them or just a few?
What color was their hair -- red? yellow? brown?
What colors and patterns did they have in their clothing? stripes? plaids? polka-dots?
How did the different colors look together?
How would you draw or paint the children hurrying to school?

Don't forget to put in the books.
If you are especially interested in animals or pets of any sort, you will want to paint a picture of the dog and squirrel, or something like it.

How would you draw a dog chasing a squirrel? How would you put a feeling of action and excitement into the picture? What colors seem exciting to you? What colors seem calm? Would you have a tree in the picture? Which of these words seem to fit a dog or a squirrel or nut -- soft, hard, round, furry, smooth?

Would you paint the tree, the dog, and the squirrel the same way? Why not?

Perhaps you saw something else that pleased you. Something you would like to draw or paint. What was there about it that interested you a great deal? Remember to ask yourself questions about it like those above.
If you were to visit a place you had never seen, as different as it could be from any place you had ever been, what would it be like? There are so many answers to that question that we must choose one we think is the most beautiful and strange. If we are going to stay on earth, our choice is easy. It is the land under the sea. Can you imagine anything more exciting and lovely? What is the first picture that forms in your mind? Think of the cool green depths of the water. Imagine yourself living in this world. You are a fish with blue and gold stripes and a long silken tail. Gliding smoothly about your watery home, you see that it is as beautiful as any place could be. There are big banks of red coral in all kinds of shapes, hard as granite. There are many strange sea plants — some long and stringy, some thick and thistly — in all colors — from the palest lavender to the deepest reds. Many fish, kinds you have never seen before, swim about. There are large striped ones, small spotted ones, long skinny ones, short fat ones. There are shy fish and curious fish, mean fish and friendly fish.

Suppose you were to paint a picture of this world and its creatures. You must let your
ideas flow freely, as if they were gliding through deep blue and green waters....

What do you see?
A sea plant round, rough and prickly?
A strand of sea weeds like long ribbons waving in the flowing water?

Two or three spiny looking little seahorses?
A brown bumpy starfish? or was it purple?

A small school of fish colored like the rainbow -- reds and blues and yellows sliding into each other?

A spotted snail?
A smooth shining eel?
A golden rubbery sponge full of holes?
A huge hungry shark?
Small bright-colored shells, shining like pearls?
A piece of sunken ship grown over with seaweed?
A treasure chest?

Doesn't everything look beautiful and unreal with these strange creatures floating in the oily smooth water with bubbles rising to the top? The scene is always changing. Try to make your brush float over the paper like
the water of the sea. Look at the pattern of light and
dark. Can there be anything more exciting than the bright
water creatures against the dark sea bottom? It is
brighter near the top. Why? Let's not leave this wonder­
ful world until we have made a picture as a reminder of
what we have seen -- down there at the bottom of the ocean.
III

AT THE CIRCUS

It is circus time, and the big train of circus people and animals is moving into your town. You are thrilled because you know that this very day you're going to see the big show. Your mother and father have promised to take you, or perhaps an uncle you like very much has asked you to go with him. You can hardly wait, and later, when you are buying your tickets, the roar of the lions and the squeal of the elephants are music to your ears. It is noisy and crowded inside but finally you find a seat way up near the top. You look down at the ring and the show begins. Can you imagine how you would feel just then? Does everyone feel the same way? Anyway, you are very excited and laugh as much as anyone else when the clowns come running into the ring.

What are the clowns wearing?
Do clowns always wear bright colors?
Do they wear red? white? yellow? all colors?
Who comes after the clowns? The bareback riders?

Yes, there they come on dozens of big beautiful horses -- white, black, brown -- If the clowns are the funniest part of the circus, the bareback riders are the most thrilling, don't you agree? Or do you feel that the
trapeze artists are the most thrilling? It would be hard to say which one was the most important. While the trapeze artists are wearing tight, bright colored costumes, the bareback riders are dressed in short pale colored dresses -- or is it the other way around? While the people on the trapeze are being very brave way up there in the air, the riders are doing many tricks. They ride standing up, turn somersaults, just about everything.

Don't they look tiny on the big horses?

Right after them come the trick elephants who sit and stand on gaily colored drums, the trainer coaxing them all the while. Don't the huge elephants look funny standing on the tiny drums? Try to form a picture of them in your mind. After the elephants come the big brown lions -- some people would say they were golden -- would you? Also, there are the striped tigers in huge cages. What colors are the stripes in a tiger?

Are they the same as a zebra's?

Of course, there are the monkeys and the bears and the trained dogs, too, and while all the exciting stunts and shows are going on, the band is playing, the colored banners are flying, and the crowd is laughing and talking. It is truly a three ring circus.

Have you ever seen so much color in one place before? The clowns, the animals,
the bareback riders, the trapeze artists, the music, the banners, everything is so big and gorgeous. Try to see it as a whole. Imagine yourself way up there looking down upon it. Around you on all sides sit the crowd of people. Over all is the big brown tent held up by the tall poles and ropes -- or did the tent have red and white stripes? The spotlight is on the circus people. Can you imagine how bright it looks against the dark mass of the crowd on the sides? Make a picture of the circus and put in everything that you think ought to be in a circus. Going to the circus is a thrilling experience and the color and shapes in your picture should be thrilling, too. Fill your picture full!
IV
HELPING AT HOME

Although you have spent a number of exciting days going to school, to circuses and other places, there is one place to which you always want to return. That place is the best of all. You don't even have to guess what it is. It's your home, of course. Perhaps you have never thought much about the place where you live. You're so used to everything you see there that you don't realize what an interesting place it is. Your home is a little world all its own. Everything in this little world belongs to you and your family. These thousands of little worlds all over the earth make the big world that you read about in books, see in the movies, and hear over the radio. Therefore, you can easily see how important it is to you and everyone else. Of course, you do your share in keeping your home in order. Your help is important. Very likely -- if you think a little bit -- you can recall all the little tasks you do when you help around the house.

Do you set the table for meals?
Dry the dishes?
Sweep the floor?
Get the kindling for the fire?
Put your room in order?

Can you picture yourself washing or drying the dishes? You are standing there wiping the bright china, the gleaming glasses, and the silver. Probably, your mother is also working in the kitchen. The kitchen is very cheerful looking, don't you think? Often it is painted in gay colors. There may be bright patterned curtains at the windows. The sun streams through and lights up the whole shining room. What does your kitchen look like?

Are there bright cupboards, sparkling plates, gleaming pots and pans? Are there potted plants on the window-sills? What are the colors of the leaves and flowers? What colors are the walls, the stove, the icebox, the sink? Do you remember the designs on the table clothes or dishes? What color is your mother's apron? What do your working clothes look like?

Draw a picture of yourself or your mother -- or both of you -- washing dishes in the kitchen. Try to
make it cheerful and colorful with strong patterns.

Maybe you would prefer to draw yourself doing some other task at home. You may have a chair or table or bed you like that you would like to put in a picture. You could draw yourself dusting it. What do you especially like about its shape or color? If you enjoy sweeping the floor and watching things come clean under your broom or mop, you will want to draw a picture of that. Can you picture yourself holding a broom as if you were sweeping with it? This picture could be very simple, don't you think? Or would you like to put in something else besides the broom, yourself and the floor? Painting a picture of yourself putting your room in order might be harder to do, but it would be fun. Can you recall how your toys, books, and furniture are arranged in your room?

What are the colors in your room? The patterns in the rug, the curtains, the bedspread?

Do you have an attic room?

What things do you like best in your room?

Here is a chance to draw your own room showing your favorite toys or books, using your favorite colors. Will you put yourself or a sister or brother in the picture? It
really doesn't matter, does it? For if you paint your picture and show the things you want to in it, everyone will know it's your room, anyway. The picture will be yours as much as the room is.

Pick any one of these little tasks around the home to use as a subject for your picture. There may be others that have not been mentioned. Maybe you will have time to do more than one. Draw your picture as you would do your tasks around the house, busily and cheerfully.
Part II

ONE ORIGINAL OIL PAINTING
Figure 1. "Winter Landscape"
Medium - Oil