

*MATERIALS AROUND IN
SOME FORM OF LAZY PLAY.*

IN CONSIDERING THE JUDGE'S CRITERIA

By M.E. "Mike" Bailey, NWS

On a recent jaunt through my email, I received a letter from an artist acquaintance in Canada, Mr. Robert Genn, who has a terrific website about painting. I highly recommend his thought provoking weekly letters to anyone interested in painting. There, on that site, are archives of letters and replies which go back a few years. Certainly, the site and the archives are a book full of information, wisdom and opinions worth mulling over.

When asked to judge a show recently, he was asked about his judging criteria. He listed them, forthwith, and immediately drew questions about each of their meanings, some more than others. Before offering those points for your own consideration, let me warn that to take all of these to heart at once would paralyze the most ardent and proficient artist. There is complete distinction on every point and each of those speaks to one aspect of the artistic compulsion to paint: originality!

*ARTISTIC FLAIR. ARTIST DOES
SOMETHING BEYOND BLIND
REPRESENTATION AND/OR
JUST MOVING THE*

Those of us who have learned to paint later in life and did not study it in the old academic fashions of centuries past probably did so via workshops and examples in the huge selection of "how to paint" books. And through that learning process, we have all become somewhat robotic in our approach to art and what we each think of as "good art."

His list startled me because of its articulate method of getting to the truth of giving completely of one's self in making an original painting. It is that truth which spears directly to the heart and causes me to question, yet again, my own originality and ability to step away from the influences of all those workshops and books and "examples."

Here are the points he measures. Before reading quickly onward, may I suggest that each one be considered momentarily and to summon up what you think Mr. Genn might have meant. Then I will recount his own explanation.

- Compositional Integrity
- Sound Craftsmanship
- Color Sensitivity
- Creative Interest
- Design Control
- Gestural Momentum
- Artistic Flair
- Expressive Intensity
- Professional Touch
- Surface Quality
- Intellectual Depth
- Visual Distinction
- Technical Challenge
- Artistic Audacity

Now, don't these make you wonder a little bit about what each one means? Don't, at least, a few of these make you consult your own thoughts about how you paint and if you are displaying artistic audacity? Or compositional Integrity?

These are his explanations for these points. Maybe printing this out and keeping it at easel side for reference a few times a month might cause us all to take still another insightful and honest look at our own work.

Compositional integrity. A composition that knows its edges, balances internally and "works" in the "big picture." The superior creative eye often simplifies and is not distracted by minor elements or extraneous detail.

Sound craftsmanship. No sloppy craftsmanship detected. Artist appears to be grounded in accepted means of application, order, and seems to have knowledge of media chemistry. Work looks like it is not liable to fall apart shortly.

Color sensitivity. Appears to have understanding of color choices—complementary, analogous, etc. Often shows color paucity and attention to sophisticated grays. I hate to use the word "taste," but I will.

Creative interest. Subject is creatively different so that it attracts, leads and holds my

attention to the artistic and creative elements within the work. I often become aware of a greater creative mind at work.

Design control. Artist appears to have an understanding of how the eye is managed and led by the design, flow and activation of a work—effectively 'seducing' me. I often have the feeling of a masterful eye managing mine.

Gestural momentum. Brushwork or line-work is often expressive and has bravura, bravado, courage and élan. It often shows variety of stroke and is generous in the "hand made" conveyance of visual energy.

Artistic flair. Artist does something beyond blind representation and/or just moving the materials around in some form of lazy play. Work has style and panache and captivates in its artistry. "Wow, that's artistic!"

Expressive intensity. All stops are pulled to enhance the central idea or general motif. It can be a "look," a mannerism or an illusion, but the intensity convinces me of the presence of a non-jaded, passionate, particular author.

Professional touch. Artist avoids amateur methodology and gives a direct, confident,

seasoned look to the work. Some people seem to know what they're doing, others do not. Professionals often, but not always, tend to leave their strokes alone.

Surface quality. Up close and personal the surface is intriguing and a joy to cruise. This may be because of the texture, handling of pigment, or the complexity of surface abstraction, gradation, or other quality—anything that makes the surface fascinating.

Intellectual depth. Artist gives me something to think about. There is an enduring resource here—not just a pretty picture but a thoughtful metaphor or other device that has staying power without retreating to sentiment or kitsch.

Visual distinction. The art has a look of uniqueness, either with style, subject matter or handling. It looks different from what I've seen before, or if similar, arrests the eye with a unique feeling or look that denotes "character."

Technical challenge. Artist has chosen something that requires above average skills or technical ability. Not just something that anybody could do. I love to see artists challenge themselves, take the technical risk, and win.

Artistic audacity. Artist is "in

your face" with some element that dazzles—skill, idea, technique, or some other in spades of the above mentioned points that makes me sit up and take notice.

He declares these points to be 'personal prejudices' and subject to change at any time. He also alludes that someone else may argue him out of the position he has taken with one or another painting.

He does, in a very articulate way, speak to the personal nature of the art and how the hand of the artist shows through the work. It is certainly worth mentioning that subject, or selection thereof is not noted anywhere in this list. His method of jurying is one which focuses on the artistic merit and the originality of the piece . . .certainly something many of our esteemed art societies might start to emphasize and applaud, rather than to contain painters in "traditional approaches."

Consider these points and weigh them carefully as you plan your next painting. They may just cause you to reach new depth and accomplish still another breakthrough.

Copyright, M.E. "Mike" Bailey, Jan 2006