

Literary Still Life

Week 5: Content Focus: Personal Symbolism
 Technique Focus: Building Color with Glazes

Content:

Symbolism involves using one thing to stand for something else. This week, you are going to use something more personal in the still life setup – an object that represents or symbolizes something specific in your life (a feeling, event, a value, a person, etc.). Your object might be a photo, a piece of jewelry, an old watch, a well-worn stone, a book, etc.

Personal symbolism may evolve into a personal visual signature – an object that appears in nearly all or all of your paintings. Kent Addison uses the King of Hearts playing card in nearly all of his paintings. It is the symbol, to him, of Christ, (the king) and of his love for us (the heart). This painting alludes to the second coming of Christ. What symbolism is he using here to suggest that?



In my painting below, I used a variety of objects to suggest religious symbols (the bell, the candle), some that suggest statuary, and the pattern pieces laid out on fabric suggest that we need to get the right “fit” so that faith becomes the “fabric” of our lives.



Technique:

The technical aspect of painting you are going to use this week is glazing or layering washes to build color depth. *You should use only your most transparent colors.* Opaques (the cadmiums, some earth colors, and many yellows, do not glaze well.

Glazing is usually accomplished by using relatively thin washes of color, applied one on top of the other, allowing each wash to dry completely before applying the next. (Use a hair dryer to speed up drying).

One of my favorite glazing combinations used to be aureolin yellow, rose madder genuine, and cobalt blue. However, the yellow and red are not completely lightfast, so I've substituted Winsor Newton's transparent yellow for the aureolin, and permanent rose for the rose madder genuine when I want to use this palette of colors. I particularly like glazing similar colors to create greater depth. For example, for a red cloth, perhaps beginning with permanent rose, and then glazing with scarlet lake

Pinnance, watercolor by Ellen Fountain, image 22 x 15 inches, private collection

permanent alizarin crimson in the cooler areas.

By the way, you can use this “glazing” technique with an airbrush or toothbrush spatter technique as well as by using washes of color. The advantage to the airbrush or toothbrush is that you are layering color by gravity, so you never risk disturbing the previously applied color.

Painting Exercise:

Set up your still life so that your personal object is your focal point. What other objects can you include with your personal object to get across the “symbolism” you have in mind?

In Kent Addison’s piece, shown right, he uses his license plates (which he collects, and appear in many of his paintings), as a backdrop for the real subject which is in the center of this still life. A grouping of old wooden hand-painted fans. He said this painting was “about his mother”, and childhood memories. Also note that he is taking a very contemporary approach to the space in this still life (very frontal, with very little depth, and highly cropped imagery).



Use glazing in some part of the painting to build color depth.