

When reality is chaos how do you see?

An imaginative thinker such as Plato refers to visual artists as imitators. Those who can copy but cannot create. In the 20th century Freud refers to the artist as infantile escapist fleeing from reality. Fortunately there are more favorable thinker philosophers and psychologists for the visual artist to learn and inform their thinking. The philosopher Schelling declares the artist as nature becoming self aware and psychologist Anthony Storr addresses Freud's escapist theory by asserting when the reality of the world does not make sense to the artist the artist will escape into their mind to make sense of the world. Using this concept you can now knock off Plato's imitation theory. When the artist withdraws into the mind what emerges is not imitated but created.

Below is a sampling of Iowa landscape:



Compositionally I see nothing in these photographs. They are resource material of things belonging in Landscape but too unorganized to be landscape composition. There is nothing in these photos worth imitating. How do you see and organize landscape when the vision of seeing landscape is not part of your visual vocabulary or experience? For this I will Take Sir Newton's advice for successful achievement and "stand on the shoulders of giants" or in this case look through the eyes of a genius.

I begin by looking to see how Vincent van Gogh sees landscape. The starting point for my painting was van Gogh's painting pictured below.



The points of interest for me were the strong diagonal line from the right which looks like crops or vegetation. The line leads into the composition and into the two figures and building. This is countered by the furrowed field lines from the left that draw the viewer again to the figures and building. The color of the hats on the figures connects them to the same colored building in the background. The hats and building are earthly possessions signifying the figures as belonging to what is possessed on the earth. The flowing lines and patterns of the figures also match the flowing lines in the cultivated fields and distant landscape. This again reinforces the figures connectedness to the landscape/earth. The composition seamlessly displays how we as humans are interconnected to our environment/world. What van Gogh sees and what can be imagined from his image becomes the foundation to start a painting from the unorganized and un-thoughtful images of Iowa. It is important to keep van Gogh's visual ideas as foundation only. I do not possess his fluid continence nor do I apply paint in the same manner as van Gogh. I am far more geometrically structured in my compositional structuring and more layered in my application of paint. Our one source of agreement is in the application of the often subtle use of the complementary colors.

Below are the first compositional thoughts in response to van Gogh's painting



In composing I begin with the golden section formula. This mathematical formula is used to place the figure's eye on the intersecting lines of the formula making the eye the focal point of the composition. The horizontal line from the eyes separates earth from sky on the left and on the right the roofs from the farm buildings are aligned. The diagonal line of the corn crop on the right diagonals to the eye and the furrowed field uses the eye as the one point perspective vanishing point. The subject is the figure and all else must be connected to the figure. The figure like in the van Gogh figures must also be connected to the earth. The figure is connected to his possessions while being connected to nature. The figure is both a part of and separate from nature.

The drawing is the first visual thought but not yet complete. It forms the starting point for the painting but not its conclusion. What is necessary is to begin and let the Idea evolve to a point of completion. This is similar to the way Virginia Woolf described her method of writing later in her career. She stated that she began with an idea not fully formulated and without a conclusion or ending. The process of working will bring about the body and conclusion of the work. It is an organic process without preconception which allows the work and the artist to evolve. Eventually the process becomes as easy as just beginning knowing the process will yield the answers to the unknown questions.



In the finished painting how the painting has remained similar to the original van Gogh painting is apparent as well as what was not evident or present in the early drawing stages. The diagonals of the corn and fields maintain the same compositional structure as the van Gogh painting. The hat connected by color to the farm buildings connecting the man to his possessions or his physical presence on earth. The fields with their compositional lines leading to the farmer show the other connectedness to the earth that cannot be possessed but cultivated. The cultivated is also shown to be in contrast to what is natural in nature representing the conflict that forms the counterpoint necessary for visual harmony. The final counter point is the contemplation between physical and spiritual. There are many physical barriers we face in a life and often we look to spiritual belief to ultimately become free from these barriers. The fence is obvious as well as the lilies which form the upward pointing triangle. The figure's attention is away from the physical and is focusing on the spiritual which as in the picture is in his hands. The picture is not about a farmer. It is about the spiritual contemplation of the artist. The bucket, clothing and hat are comprised of the primary colors of red yellow and blue. These colors are symbolic of the elements of art and I often refer to them as the colors of creation. The boots are green and reference the temporal physical presence on the earth and with nature.

The painting would not have been possible without the thoughtful eyes of van Gogh nor would it be possible from the many and varied resources I have used to instruct and form my thinking. Creativity is not a gift or a talent. Creativity/talent comes from a source, a source that must be searched for in all of the creative disciplines/ forms of art.

