

Although these Live Online Art Classes are primarily for Watercolour artists, and all the illustrations and demonstrations here are in watercolours, they are also of extreme importance to artists working in any of the other mediums.

How to
SIMPLIFY
A PAINTING

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Watercolour Painting

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Introduction

There are many artists who like to paint in an extremely photographic way – super realists - showing every small detail exactly as depicted in the photograph. Don't get me wrong. It is a perfectly legitimate way of painting and I used to paint that way many years ago and still occasionally do. Painting this way is actually one way in which you have to take note of every detail and to draw and paint them exactly in proportion and colouring. A wonderful exercise to do.

This can, however, be very daunting for a beginner and as this is a beginner's course we will not be going that route at all.

You will notice that the majority of paintings in watercolour are in a more relaxed way as far as detail is concerned. We are going to paint in a more painterly way, in other words, with the least amount of detail possible, but still enough to portray what we want the viewer to see and experience visually.

We will be looking more at shapes and tonal ranges than detail and actual colour – although we will be using colour.

As we progress you will soon realize that this lesson builds upon the previous Lesson on Tonal Ranges and how important these are, and will be, in your future paintings.

Simplification

I don't know if you realized it, but the tonal painting we did in the last lesson was already in the simplified range. There was no detail in the trees and the grassy areas, etc, and only a few grass shapes for interest in the foreground. All I showed was basically the tonal masses in monochrome.

Simplification really only means the reducing of the amount of detail required to produce a very acceptable painting.

How does it work?

Let's take a tree, for example. Just how many times have you seen a tree in your life? Hundreds, thousands,, millions of times. What is the first thing you know of trees? It has leaves on it – of course! What a stupid question! Or is it?



Only on close-up can one really see the leaves properly



See how close to the pohutukawa (New Zealand's Christmas Tree) one has to be to still make out the leaves



The trees are still close enough to fill the screen yet one cannot discern the actual leaves

Let's assume we were going to paint this photograph with the horse (focal point) which stands out perfectly against the building. The natural reaction is to start painting the trees in such a way as to indicate even the far trees with "detailed" leaves. Why? Because one has been drummed in from childhood that trees have leaves – so we automatically start to paint the tree showing some sort of leaf pattern – even if they are half a kilometre away!

I don't have the time or space here to go into the mechanics of comparing the way the eye sees the scene and how the camera sees the same scene. All you need to know is that they both see it differently.

If you want to paint a painting with linear and colour perspective then you have to paint it the way the eye sees it. Later in the series I will go deeper into this subject as it is of utmost importance if you want to become a master artist – no matter what medium you paint in.

In order for us to start painting a scene we need to, basically in this order, first:

Study the tonal ranges in the photograph.

What are the main shapes involved?

Where are the positive shapes and the negative shapes?

How can we resolve colour perspective?

Do we need to modify the composition to make it work?

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There are others involved but these are the main ones to get us going. Remember in the previous lesson we did the Tonal Painting and I emphasized the fact that we need to fully understand the tonal ranges first.

Well, I have a very good piece of free downloadable software that will help you tremendously to see and understand this. It is called Fotosketcher and you can download at the link below. If you like it you may even like to give a donation to the designer for his generosity.

<http://www.fotosketcher.com>

Quote: {FotoSketcher is a 100% free program for Windows which converts your digital photos into art automatically and in just a few mouse clicks. Over 20 different styles are available from pencil sketches to watercolor or oil paintings, pen & ink drawings and cartoons.}

I have only recently come across it and I feel that you will benefit tremendously from it to help you gain confidence in watercolours – or any other medium for that matter.

I will be using Fotosketcher for the rest of this lesson as well as some of the future ones.

Let's take a look at how this program works

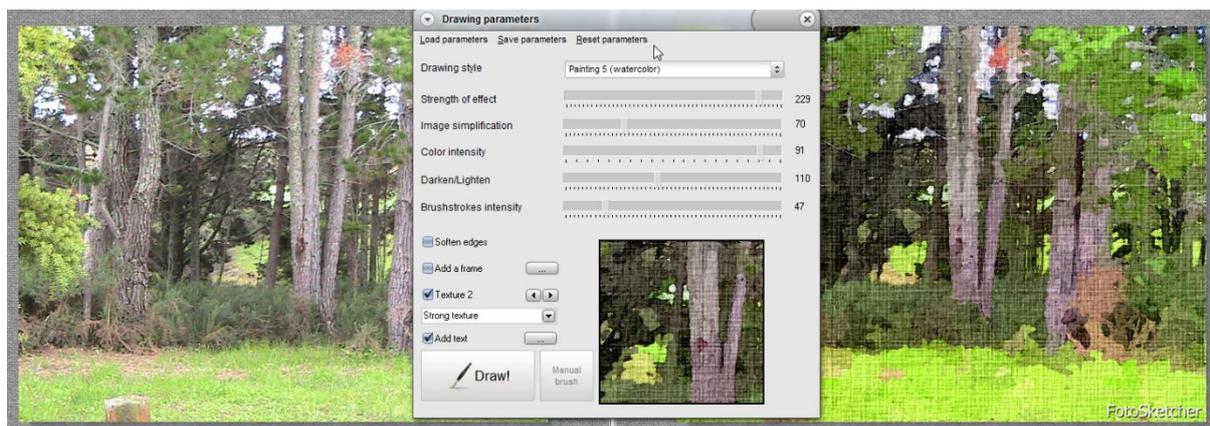


This is an historical Blacksmith Shop at Keri-Keri, North Island.

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See how the program has removed some of the detail and making it ready for painting – It has been set for watercolour painting. Compare the detail in each photograph.



Here is another sample of what it can do. You can enlarge this portion of the PDF and scroll around and see how the detail has been removed and you see mostly tonal ranges and then lots of shapes that make up the final picture on the right.

I've purposely shown the table in the centre for you to see the settings. You can play around from there and come back here to reset again if you get lost in the subsequent settings.



This photograph has a wealth of detail and if one had to paint it all in realistically it would firstly take ages and the viewer's eye would soon tire of looking at it. There is no place for the eye to rest on. Secondly there is no colour contrasts – the whole scene is too grey.



Doesn't this look much better? And there is absolutely no detail here. It has been rendered down to tonal ranges and colour to give it some impact. Which one would you rather paint – the actual photograph, or the one rendered into tonal ranges? Another point – This one suddenly has a lovely focal point – the "tunnel" through the trees! In a painting I would open up some of the foreground shrubbery and have a pathway leading the viewer into the field beyond.



I've used the Fotosketcher example and quickly (approx. 45 minutes) roughed out the above sketch. If you take a look at the original photograph, with its overall greyness, and then to this painting, you can see how experienced artists modify the original photograph and produce something of greater interest. In my humble opinion it is much better than copying the photograph slavishly.

Once again notice the lack of any detail. Detail is not always necessary to produce excellent paintings. This loose style is also excellent when doing en plein air (outdoor) paintings. This sketch is an excellent guide and basis to a larger painting, be it watercolour or any other medium.

As I previously suggested I added in the "gateway" to the distant pasture with the grazing animals. Now the painting has a focal point, whereas it previously did not have.



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Compare these two pictures against each other. Once again see how the background tree's details have been removed and reduced to tonal ranges and shapes. Are you now beginning to see why tonal ranges and shapes are so vital to a good painting?



You can see from this colour sketch that I have not followed the photograph slavishly. You have to leave the minimum of detail – just enough to suggest. Leave other areas in abstract form so that the viewers can add their own interpretation to the painting.

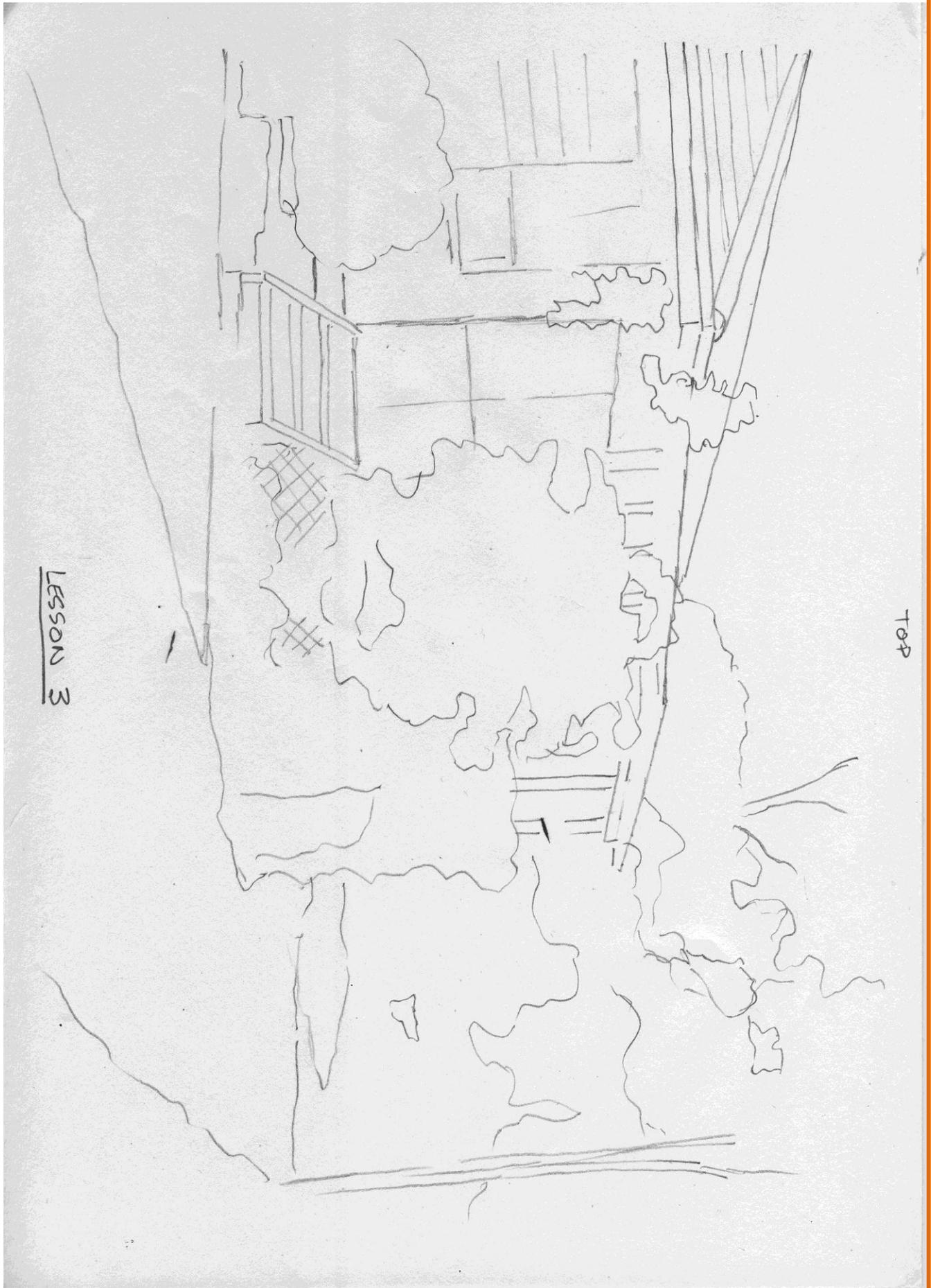
The word **abstract** simply means that detail has been removed. The background bush and trees are in completely abstract form yet your right brain adds the “detail” and tells you that leaves are there.

The greatest problem an artist has is that the left brain (Logical) interferes with the right brain (Creative) and keeps telling you to add every single detail you see in the photograph. Less is more! Wherever you can, suggest detail instead of actual detail.

Notice also that I have purposefully not painted any detail in any of the trees, the bushes and foliage and yet it does not detract from the overall impression of the painting.

Another important factor is the use of hard and soft lines – you can see the use of them in the background tree mass. Speaking of mass – can you see how I subtly merged the individual background trees into one homogenous mass for visual impact.

The template for this painting is on the next page.



INSTRUCTIONS

Preparing the watercolour Paper:

I will be using a 12" x 16" (305 x 406mm) watercolour paper and the template is designed for this size. If, however, you prefer another size then you may either enlarge or reduce it to suit.

Measure accurately a border of 60mm around the paper and mark lightly with an HB pencil. Carefully stick strips of masking tape along the outside edge of the pencilled rectangle with the one edge exactly on the pencil line.

You should now have an open area for painting of approx. 285 x 185mm.

How to transfer the template to the Watercolour Paper:

Print out the template (PDF document).

Turn it with the back of the sheet facing you and holding it against a window pane (with the sunlight behind) rub the pencil over the now visible lines with a soft pencil (3B or 4B) making sure that all the lines are completely covered with some rubbing on either side of the lines.

Turn the paper right way round again and with the rubbed face towards the watercolour paper center the template over the area to be painted. The A4 sheet overhangs the painting area slightly. Take 2 pieces of masking tape and stick the top 2 corners securely to the watercolour paper so that the template will not move during the transfer process.

Now, with a 2H or HB pencil trace over the lines so that they are transferred to the watercolour paper underneath. Check every now and again to see if you have not left out any lines by carefully lifting up the lower section of the paper and comparing the upper image with the lower image.

MAKE SURE YOU DO NOT MOVE THE TEMPLATE OUT OF ALIGNMENT.

When you are satisfied that all the lines have been transferred carefully, go over the transferred lines lightly with the HB pencil. If you do not do this then you may lose some of the lines in the process of painting,

You are now ready for painting!

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This is the demonstration painting done in the Live Online Class (approx. 1 ½ hours).