# Basement Picasso Art School

A GUIDE TO LEARNING CREATIVE SKILLS

# Part 1 Introduction

# Part 2 Learning about Art

# Part 3 The Artist's Process™

### Part 1 - Introduction

Welcome to Basement Picasso Guide to Learning. This guide has been produced to help you get the most out of the materials on the website.

It will provide an introduction to the broader issues that you may face as you learn about art and try to develop your artistic skills.

The guide is intended to be a pre-cursor to any coursework that you undertake on the website, however, you may also find it useful to revisit later in your studies to remind yourself of the bigger picture.

The amount of information to assimilate while you are studying art is mind-boggling so it can be hard to keep the notion of the bigger picture in your mind.

The Artist's process™ helps with that concept of the bigger picture by providing a well-defined framework for the studies you undertake.

I hope that you find the guide useful and that it helps you with your development and lets you use the material on the site to its full potential.

## Overview - Content

- What is this guide about
  - o Takes away the mystery around becoming an artist
- o Provides a structured framework that will guide your learning
- Provides you with an explanation of the "artist's process"
   a model of how to think and work like an artist
- Explains how artistic development typically progresses (particularly if self-taught) and shows the common pitfalls
- $\circ$  Helps you to assess where you currently are on the artistic development path

#### Overview - Content

- Who is the guide for
- o Anyone who wishes to become an artist or to develop their creative skills
- People who are primarily learning on their own (i.e. not at art college) or only have limited access to face-to-face tuition (e.g. occasional evening classes)
- o People who do not have a lot of time to spare

#### Overview - Content

- What will this guide give you
  - $\circ$  An understanding of the artist's process the way to think and work like an artist
  - o A structured framework for learning that will enhance all the skills needed to support that process
  - $\circ$  The ability to focus on the areas and skills that will best support your development

### What do you want

- An important question ... what do you want from being an artist?
  - Relaxation
  - Enjoyment
  - Satisfaction
  - Attention
  - Credit
  - Sense of Achievement

- Do you want ...
  - An income
  - o A hobby
  - o A career
  - o A lifestyle



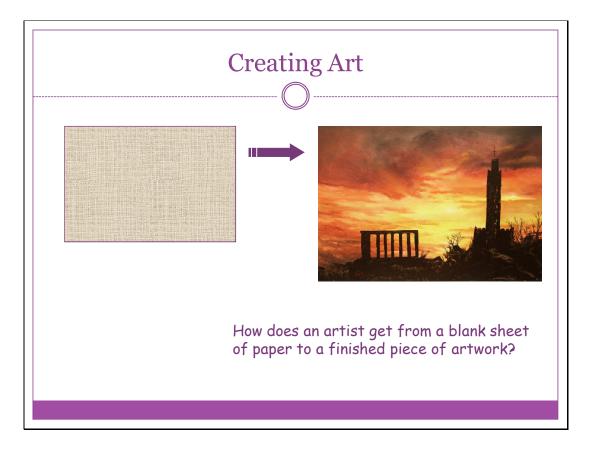
It is never too early to decide what you want from becoming an artist. Why have you signed up for this course? What are you looking for in the short term and in the long term? If you are purely in it purely for the enjoyment and satisfaction, then I hope you will find that, as your skills develop, your sense of pride and satisfaction with your results increases substantially. Hopefully you will enjoy learning about art, and hopefully you will keep going on the occasions when you realise that art can be hard work as well as fun!

If you are looking for more, maybe a paying hobby or an ambition to make it your career one day, then you must be realistic - you can have anything you want as long as you plan for it and work for it. It is a long haul to the top, even if you are blessed with natural talent to begin with, and it will take a huge amount of effort. The only person that can make that effort is you. If you keep your plans realistic but challenging, you should find that the personal rewards you experience at first can become more substantial rewards in the longer term.

# Part 2 - Learning about Art

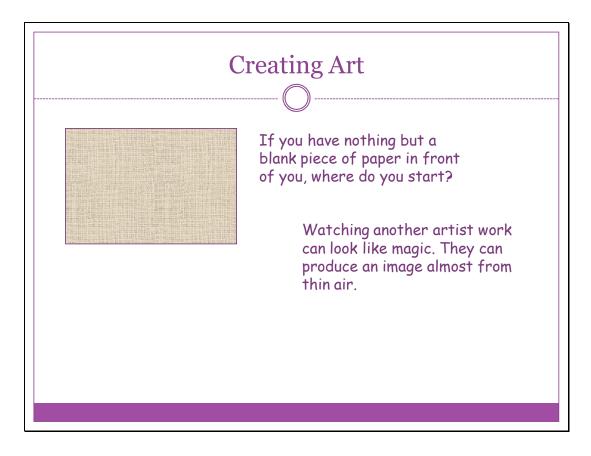
This section takes a look at art from a beginner's perspective and breaks down the daunting prospect that a new artist faces. The module shows the overall learning process and introduces some of the problems that may arise, particularly for someone who is trying to learn on their own or with very limited tutoring.

By showing a picture of the overall development path of an accomplished artist, it should help to lay a positive foundation for the courses and material that are on the website.



For people starting out drawing and painting, or for those with limited experience, the production (by an experienced artist) of a picture or painting can seem daunting, almost magical. Many people can find themselves staring at the blank canvas with little idea of what to paint and a lack of confidence in how to do things.

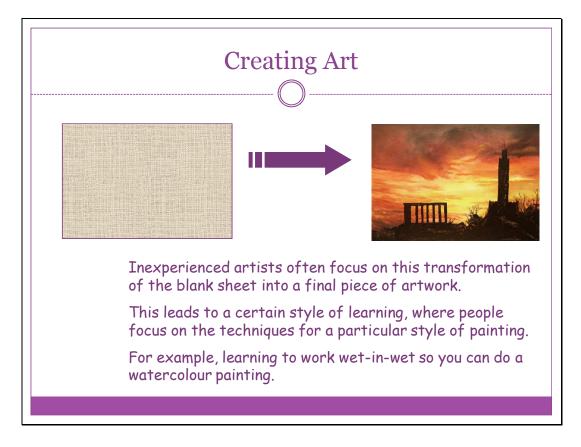
You may be fine in an evening class when a tutor sets everything up and explains what to do and how to go about it. You may make good progress when the tutor can help and give advice but, left to your own devices, it suddenly becomes a much more daunting challenge.



The "blank canvas" syndrome is very real to new artists and is a real barrier to people starting to create images and original artwork of their own. The new artist will sit down with their materials – maybe a set of watercolours (possibly brand new and unused) with a blank sheet of paper, and think – "What now? What on earth do I draw or paint?"

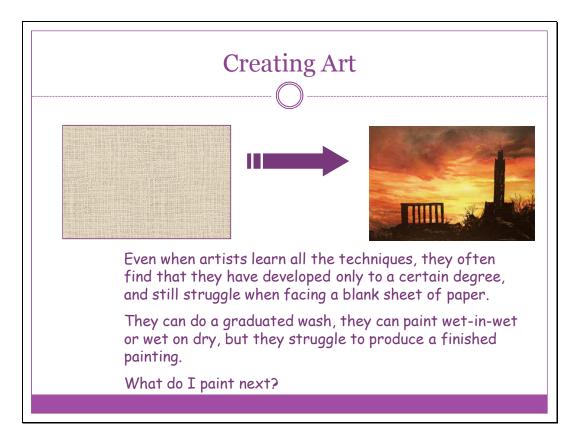
The obvious question is "How does an artist do it? After all they start with a blank canvas, just like I have in front of me." This feeling is particularly reinforced by many tuition videos that show an expert artist doing a demonstration. Typically you see just the painting process that they use along with all the particular techniques that they favour. They just start with a blank canvas and produce a wonderful piece of artwork with rarely more than a photograph or two to glance at.

Well, actually, by the time the experienced artist gets to a blank canvas they have usually done a **huge** amount of work, as this guide will reveal.

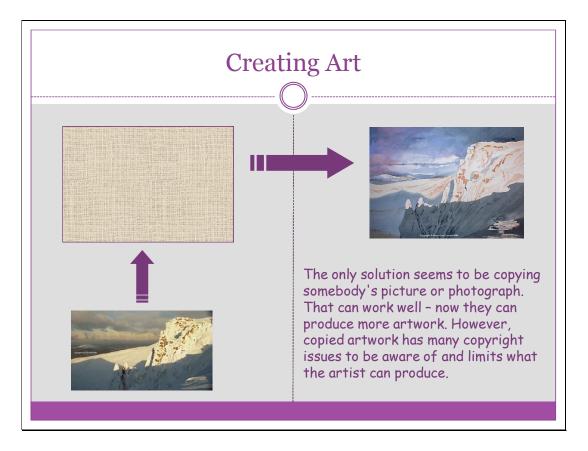


Focussing on this transition from blank canvas to finished painting often drives the developing artist to focus on a certain set of techniques. For watercolour, the artist may start to learn all the techniques like washes, wet in wet, and maybe more advanced techniques like masking, sponging, salting, spattering etc.

Another problem is that the developing artist tends to focus on the production of the current picture. They paint to produce that picture. More advanced artists paint to learn how to do the next painting better. More experienced artists haven't "learnt it all" — every artist is developing with every picture. Experienced artists have understood how to learn from each painting they do and how to develop as an artist. Ultimately it is always down to the individual to develop.

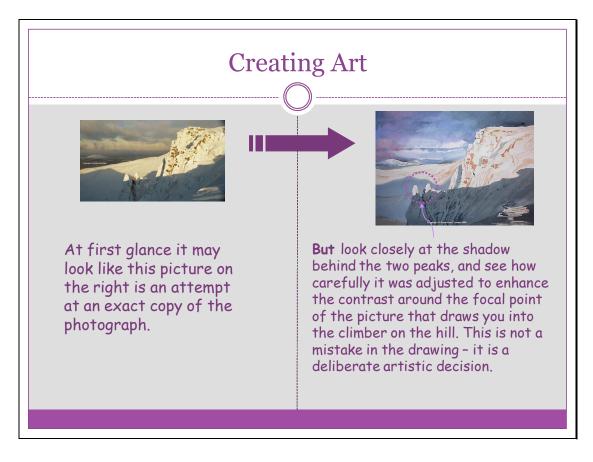


The developing artist may learn a lot during this phase and make improvements but, particularly for self-taught artists, development may seem slow and frustrating.



This doesn't mean that photographs are a bad source for creating pictures. On the contrary, they are a great source and they are part of the process that will be taught in this course. The problem that developing artists tend to have with photos is that they make the mistake of slavishly copying the detail. Photos have a lot of detail. The trick of a skilled artist is what to adjust, what to move, what to leave out, etc. to make the desired final picture.

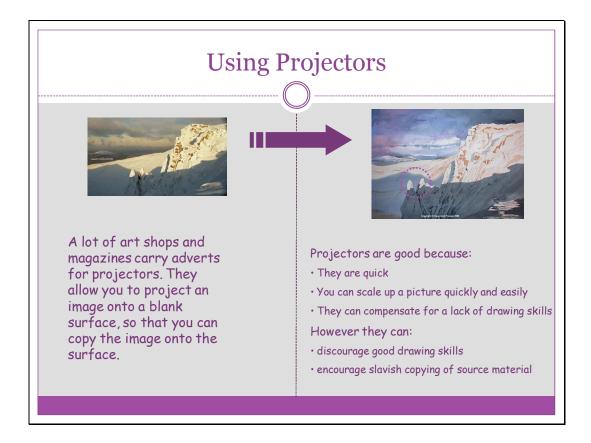
As the artist struggles to produce artwork, they will typically look for "short cuts" – things that will help them make art more quickly and successfully. Using photos as reference material and using projectors or tracing materials look like inviting solutions.



This example photograph was taken by a good friend and keen photographer, Duncan Smith. The final picture is a very close copy of the photo however, if you take a closer look at background shadow you will notice how I have moved it up to provide more contrast with the foreground rocks that are bathed in light. I wanted to avoid the co-incidence of bright areas touching that appears in the photograph in the same region. This kind of small adjustment is a key part of working with reference material and part of the process you will learn. Some paintings can be done with small changes like this, others need much more work.

One thing to bear in mind though is copyright. I had full permission to use this image to produce the painting. If I did not have permission this painting would be a breach of copyright because it is basically a copy of the original material.

One of the benefits of Basement Picasso is that it provides you with reference photos that you **can** use without infringing copyright. Copyright issues should be taken very seriously! Substantially copying a photograph, where you do not have permission, is copyright theft. Just because your picture is not identical (i.e. a "photocopy") does not mean you are free from copyright infringement.

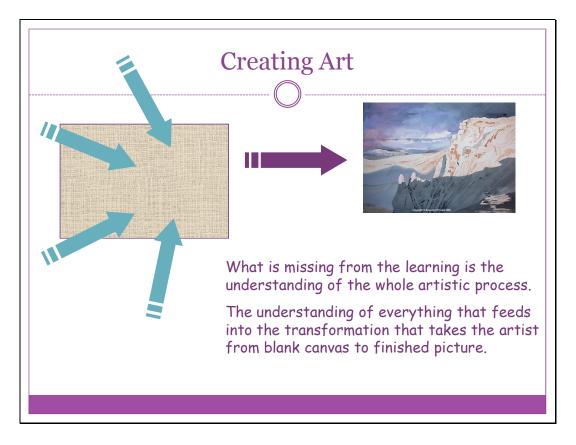


When people are at the stage of turning reference pictures into artwork they may be tempted to turn to projectors to solve a number of issues. Although projectors are useful they do have a number of issues as well.

Projectors are very good at allowing you to scale a picture up or down quickly and copy or trace it onto a blank canvas or paper. Even if your drawing skills are poor, you can get a reasonably accurate image onto your canvas or paper.

The downside is that your reference picture must be exactly what you want. Even if it is exactly what you want (and there are no copyright issues), there is the danger that you copy (maybe badly) rather than draw creatively and that you may get sucked into the detail of the image rather than focussing on the artwork.

Projectors can be part of the process but should definitely **not** be considered the whole preparation process. With care, knowledge and skill projectors, photocopier and other "short cut" devices can be used effectively and constructively. However if they are used solely to shortcut the lack of artistic skill, the results will tend towards the amateurish.



This guide is designed to introduce the developing artist to the elements that feed into the whole artistic process. Once this is understood it is easier to make sure that what you learn covers all the parts of the process and avoids the problems that you get if you focus your learning and development on only a few areas.

This work is sometimes referred to as research or preparatory work or studies however, the artistic process covers much more than that.

## Learning to be an Artist

- One of the Aims of this guide is to show you how to learn like an artist.
- If you understand everything that you need to know as an artist then it is much easier to learn the right things
- It is important to understand that learning a lot in one area does not necessarily help you overall – you need to learn the right mix of things

Probably the hardest thing to get right when you are learning by yourself is the balance of different skills and knowledge and the relationship between them. It can be easy (or tempting) to focus more on one area (maybe out of interest) and not appreciate that work in another area may actually support and improve what you are trying to achieve.

## Learning – Three Phases

- Learning can be split into three phases
  - Phase 1 learning mainly by copying examples and following demonstrations from other artists
  - o Phase 2 Deriving from and experimenting with copies
  - Phase 3 Producing original artwork
    - ➤ Note that Phase 3 is still learning. Artists always learn every picture should teach you something

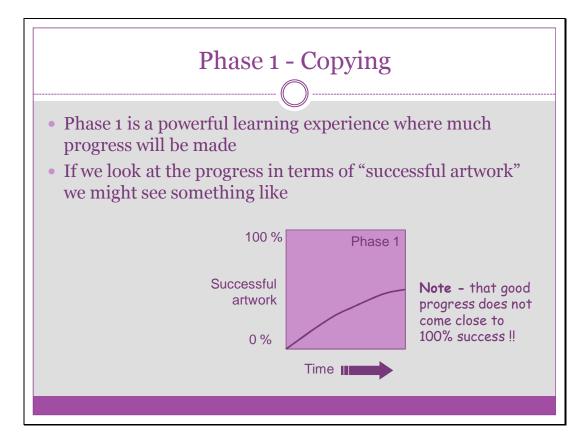
It is useful to spend a little time thinking about how artists (particularly self-taught artists) learn and develop. If you already have some experience then this will help you gauge what stage your development has progressed to. Hopefully it will show you some areas where you have not developed as much and help you to see why it is important to balance out the different areas.

## Phase 1 - Copying

- During phase 1 new artists are mainly
  - Learning techniques such as:
    - **×** Drawing
    - **×** Perspective
    - × Washes
    - **×** Blending
    - **×** Colour Theory
  - o Learning by:
    - **▼** Doing Exercises
    - **▼** Reading Books
  - Copying
    - **▼** Pictures or photographs
    - ▼ Other Artists styles or pictures

Copying is a very powerful method of learning for artists as it gives you a chance to understand how an image has been produced. It will also typically throw up challenges and difficulties that are not immediately obvious (for example – how did they get that light shape in the dark wash – did they mask it first or did they paint it with solid colour afterwards) and solving these issues for yourself will quickly take you forward.

Copying is a very traditional method of learning and many great artists in the past have themselves copied the works of earlier masters to learn and develop. It is a method still used very much in basic art school education today. If you have access to places like national galleries then you have a potentially excellent resource available to you to learn from.



I have chosen the term "successful artwork" carefully because many developing artists focus on the one picture that they are working on and judge it as good or bad, a success or a failure. Of course what you term "success" is completely individual to you, but the principle is there and, for now, this concept is useful to help explain the typical development path you will experience.

One of the long term goals of the course is to drive you past focussing only on the picture that you are currently working on and to make you look at the whole process of learning to be creative. At the start this can be a difficult mind set and it is not **wrong** to judge the works that you produce. You will find material on the website to help you **effectively** and **realistically** critique your work, which should give you a much more useful insight.

Copying is a powerful tool and, along with the work in developing techniques, much progress is usually made. The progress is usually obvious and noticeable and this helps drive the developing artist forward.

I learnt a huge amount originally by copying other artists (never to sell – purely to learn). My first artistic work was as a colourist for a comic (Judge Dread Megazine) where I took black and white artwork and coloured it to produce the final camera-ready artwork. I learnt this by copying the black and white artwork of other artists (because I was unable to draw the original black and white myself) – so that I had a piece to colour. My development was strongly based on copying. These are a few of my comic portfolio pieces which are black and whites by Cam Kennedy.







My first oil paintings were all copies of Bob Ross paintings – again to learn. I would never sell those paintings because that would be breaking copyright but as a learning experience it was very effective.







When I wanted to learn more about pastels and try out some new materials I did a series of pastel pictures that were copies of images, some of which were not mine – again there is no intention to sell, purely to learn.









#### Phase 2 - Deriving

- During phase 2 developing artists are mainly
  - o Refining the basic skills such as:
    - **×** Drawing
    - **×** Colour Theory
  - Experimenting
    - \* New styles (e.g. abstract instead of realistic)
    - \* New mediums (maybe oil instead of watercolour)
  - o Creating first original works

Phase two has a number of activities. As well as refining the skills developed so far, the artist will typically be tempted into different media.

Art catalogues and shops are full of so many bright, vibrant materials that will tempt the developing artist.

Another reason for trying new materials is to solve problems. You maybe find that doing something in one medium is difficult (maybe

painting clouds in watercolour) and look to another medium such as oil to see if it solves your problem.

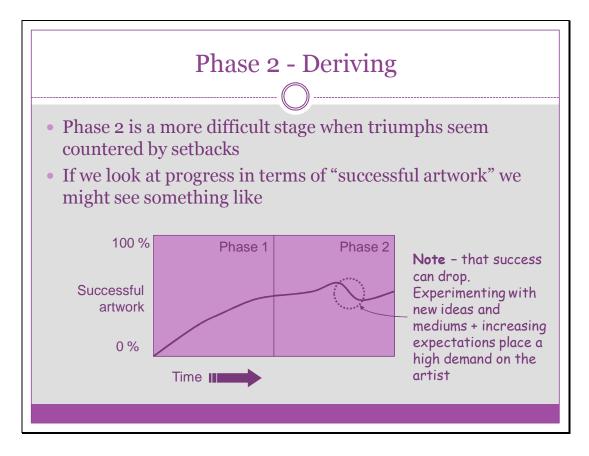
I have experimented with most media and have experimented with mixed media too. I have completed a number of pictures that use airbrushed backgrounds with Oil painted foregrounds – a technique that I have not seen anywhere else.

The important thing is that the experimentation is the key part of learning. Most people will need to try a number of different media and many techniques before they settle on something that they are happy with. Some will continue to use a number and pick a certain media for a certain subject.

There is no such thing as "Jack of all trades, master of none" when it comes to art – the goal is "master of all things related to art that allows you to achieve your goal".



If your art or your style needs different media then embrace them. If you find one media and style is for you then stick at it and work every bit as hard to develop it.



This phase of learning can be difficult for the developing artist. Artists tend to range from self-critical to downright paranoid! Any self confidence that has been built up can be shaken by failures to overcome problems and the disappointment of failing to meet increasing expectations.

Artists can usually see where they are getting things wrong but can fail to appreciate what they are doing well. This is the most likely stage for an artist to give up. One of the hardest things to do is to compare your work realistically with that of others. As you wander around a gallery or flick through an art magazine images flash before you. You might only look at a picture for 30 seconds and you probably decided in the first few seconds whether you like it or not. You have probably compared your work to it and judged your abilities accordingly. But you take into consideration:

- How much training/development had that artist had compared to you
- How long did it take them to create that image?

It is likely that you will judge yourself unfavourably, even if you are comparing yourself to a hugely more developed and experienced artist who spent days, weeks or even months on an image.

To be fair to yourself when you compare your work to others it can help to realise that there are essentially two ways to look at something:

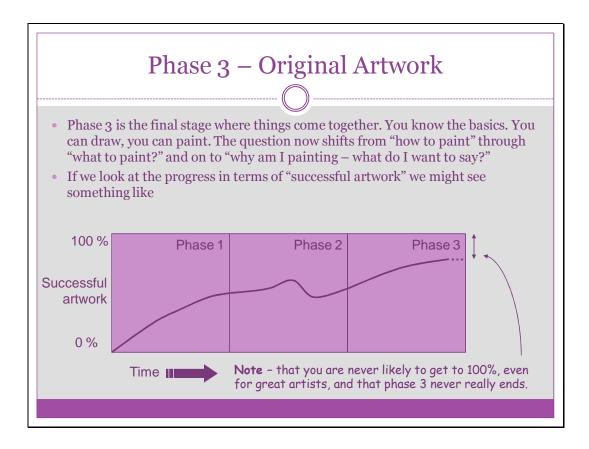
- Looking at the positives when you first see a new image, particularly if it grabs your
  attention, you will tend to focus first on what you really like about the image such as the
  overall colour or the composition. If you keep looking at it you will then start to analyse the
  image more and you may find that you start to lose the attraction that you had to it as you
  see things in it that maybe aren't quite as pleasing.
- Correcting the negatives when you are working on your own work, particularly towards the end of it, you tend to engage in the mode of "correcting mistakes". That means that you tend to look at what you don't like in your work and then do something to change it.

This different way of looking at work tends to reinforce any perception that you might hold about other work being better than yours. The artist's process material contains a guide on effectively critiquing your work which can help you to critique your own work realistically, positively and effectively.

## Phase 3 – Original Artwork

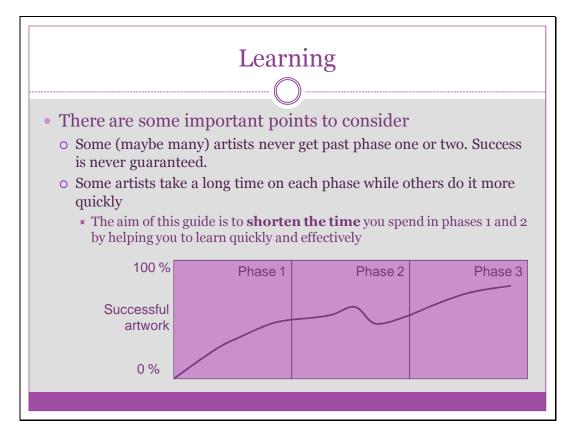
- During phase 3 artists are mainly
  - o Producing original artwork
  - o Settling on a style or two
  - o Deciding on favourite subjects
    - **×** Landscapes
    - **×** Portraits
    - **x** Life drawing
    - **x** Still life's
    - **×** Animals
  - Looking to the future
    - **x** Selling pictures
    - **▼** Is this the start of a career?

Stage three takes you into the realms of the accomplished artist. Whether you wish to draw and paint for pleasure or are intent on making it your career, you should now have more confidence in your abilities and in the work you produce.



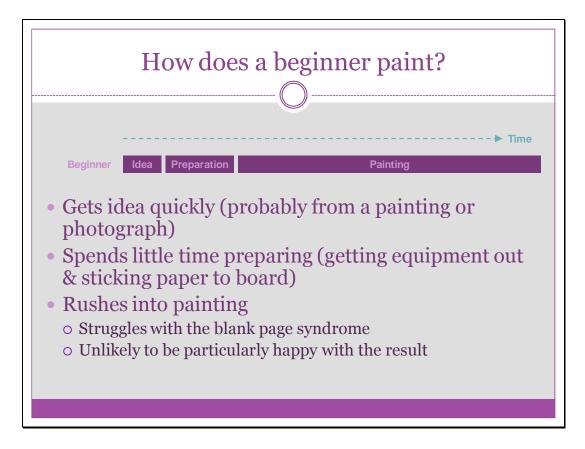
You will now get more satisfaction from producing your artwork and will produce many more paintings that you are happy with.

You will also find that you learn as much, if not more, from your unsuccessful pictures as you do from the successful ones and are better able to take positive elements from the "failures". The work that you have to struggle with will tend to be just as rewarding as the work that flows easily from the brush.



Once you get to this stage you are effectively "self-sufficient" as far as learning is concerned. You will become your own tutor and master. You may still go to classes or work beside other artists. You will probably still read art books and magazines, go to galleries and view other artists' work. But you will be in a position to guide your own development and learning. You will be able to decide what you want to do, what areas or skills you want to develop. You will be clearer on what things interest you artistically and what you want to spend your time doing.

Your learning is not complete but you now know **how to learn**. You have learnt **how to learn like an artist**.



Typically a new artist will spend very little time creating an idea or doing any preparation work and will be desperate to dive into the painting. This is typical of somebody in phase 1. They focus very much on the finished painting and, because of that, they rush to try and produce that picture. Any pre-work is viewed typically as slow, frustrating, boring, etc. and the real enjoyment comes from the actual painting. That is until about 2/3rds of the way through as it starts to go wrong and then the painting itself becomes difficult, laboured and frustrating.



As an artist develops (and enters phase two) there is usually more consideration put into ideas and preparation. The core skills which are developing allow for more time to develop preparatory material and also allow the artist to express more of their intention in the actual painting.



The expert artist understands the value and necessity of research and development work. A good painting is much easier to produce when an idea has been moulded into shape and then researched meticulously until it is deeply understood.

With strong core skills such as drawing, colour theory, perspective, anatomy etc, the ideas of the artistic creation can be more effectively realised. When difficulties arise in expressing that artistic vision, the experienced artist brings an intensity and determination that finds a way through the problem.

#### Learning From Books Many books focus on skills and Tonal techniques and maybe cover a few studies other items such as Tonal studies Perspective Paint the Colour studies picture • This course provides a framework for a more complete tuition for those who are primarily learning by themselves. Skills and

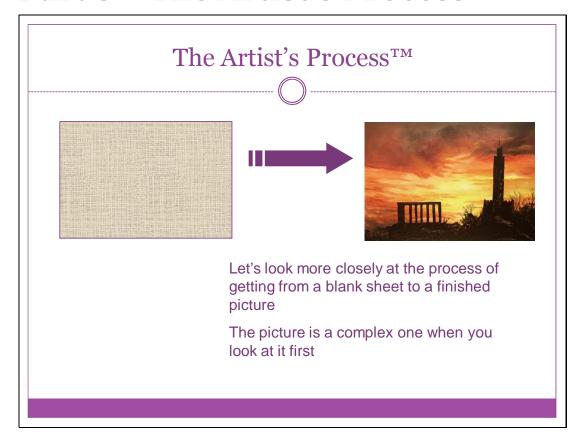
That's not to say that books are a bad source of information or not of use. On the contrary, this course is based around a number of carefully chosen books that, together, support the whole process. Careful work through these books, in conjunction with the course material, will provide a full and comprehensive training.

# Part 2 - Summary

- Hopefully this guide gives you a sense of the potential development, allowing you to understand that:
  - Your development will take time but you can make the best use of that time with good material to learn from and by learning the right things within a solid structure.
  - You will take strong steps forward but may occasionally suffer more testing periods
  - You can develop the skills to teach yourself and can become your own best critic

Being able to teach yourself and becoming your own best critic is, in many ways, your broader goal, beyond simply learning the skills required. What a really good tutor provides is the ability to walk up to your work, assess it, then provide you with constructive feedback about what is working well and how you can continue to develop and resolve the other areas. A good tutor will understand what you can do and what you are trying to do and can provide advice from a depth of knowledge that will help you move the work forward. Becoming that tutor to yourself will force you to strengthen your understanding and knowledge much more deeply than you might otherwise realise that you need to do.

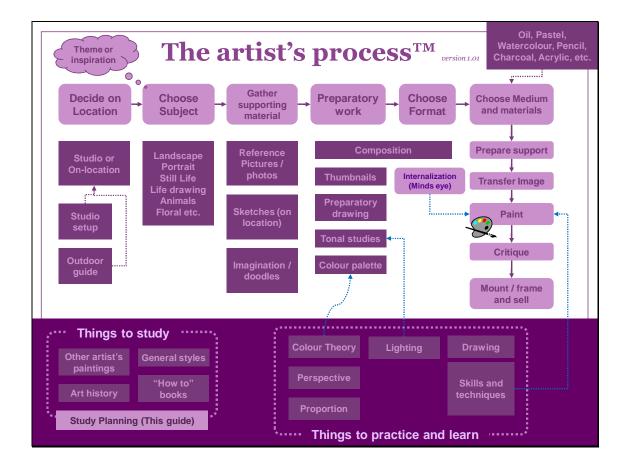
### Part 3 – The Artist's Process™



The artist's process is a model or framework which describes the process that an artist goes through when they produce artwork. Art is frequently taught by people who have practiced and developed to the point where many elements of the process are second nature, making it difficult for them to explain effectively what they are doing. The most common method of teaching is demonstration. The artist will demonstrate how to paint a picture or two, talking through it.

To me, this is like demonstrating how to play one tune on the piano. It does little to teach you the underlying skills and, if you are asked to play a different song, you will almost immediately be completely lost. Effective teaching breaks down the key skills underneath that – chords, notes, rhythms tempo, scales etc.

This is what the Artist's Process is about – covering each element that will be a core to producing, consistently and repeatedly, the kind of artwork that you want to create.



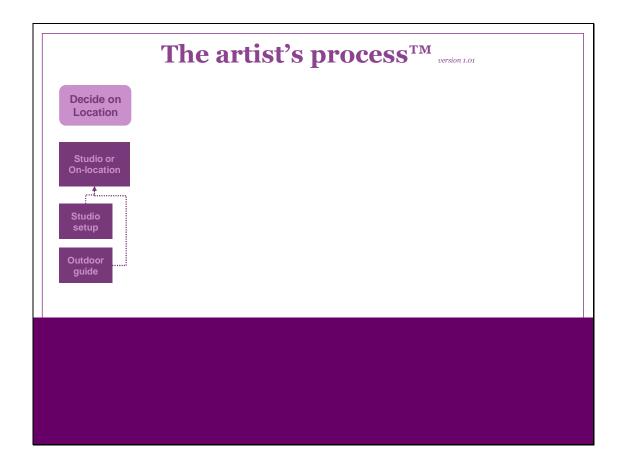
This looks like a fairly complex diagram to begin with but it will be explained step by step. The first part to look at is the section at the top in the white box. This part of the diagram deals with the more immediate parts of the process and is focussed on the steps taken to create a single piece of work.

The second part to look at is the purple section at the bottom. This is the longer term elements that need to be studied, practiced and developed. These items support one or more of the items in the white section.

On the website, items in the white section are explained in the Artist's Process material or through related articles in the Studio section of the site.

Items in the purple section are covered by the courses that are offered through the School of Art section of the website.

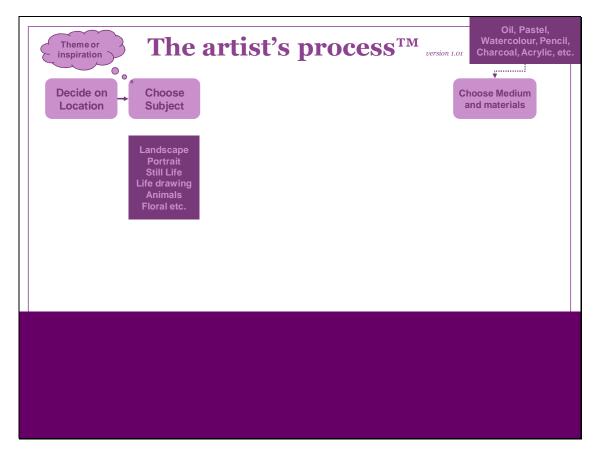
Let us look at each section in a little more detail:



Deciding where you will produce your finished piece is a fundamental decision.

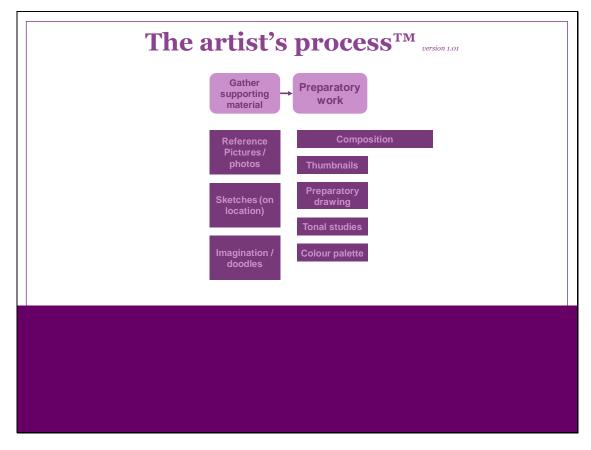
Information on studio setup is provided in the studio section. The <u>studio space guide</u> provides information on setting up studio space and things to consider when working indoors versus outdoors.

If you intend to work outdoors for your finished piece (plein air) you have some extra difficulties to face in terms of materials, storage and transport. If you are simply doing preliminary work outside there are less issues as the materials tend to be simpler and easier to carry but there are still some things that you should plan for.



Finding your theme or inspiration is the first step towards breaking down the barriers to producing original work. In classes a tutor usually makes all these decisions for you – your theme, subject, materials and methods are already worked out for you.

Guidance for this part of the process is provided by the Artist's Process material on <u>theme and</u> inspiration.

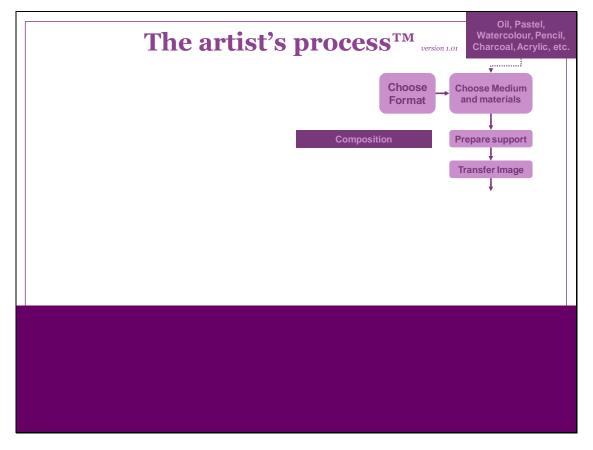


Research, preparation and development are fundamental to the creation of the work.

Research is the initial consideration of the idea or theme and may involve visiting locations, sketching and taking reference photos. On the website the artist's process material provides a guide to <u>gathering material</u> covering reference photos including the <u>reference photo section</u> available on the website.

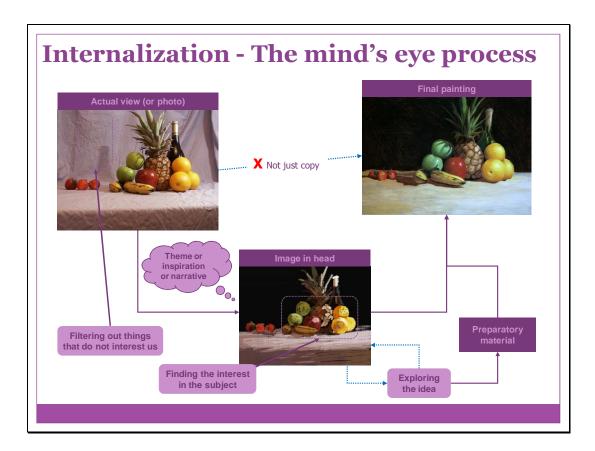
Preparatory work develops these ideas into a body of supporting material that will be used during the actual painting process. The techniques used in the preparatory work are covered on the website in the Artists Process material on <u>preparatory work</u>.

Development is the refinement and reworking of this initial material to strengthen the emerging work to a point where it is ready for the final painting. This is covered in the Artist's process material (TBD).



The first steps in constructing the final painting involve choosing the format (ratio of width to height), if not already decided, and then choosing the physical support for the painting (paper, canvas, MDF etc). This may be dictated to some degree by the choice of materials that is appropriate for the painting. This information is covered on the website by the <u>Studio guide</u> information.

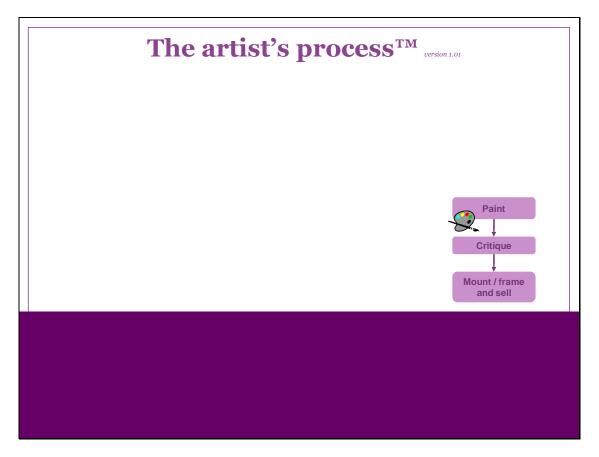
The artist's process provides a guide on <u>transferring an image</u> to the support where this is appropriate.



When we start our painting we are actually painting our internal image of what we see, as much as the subject or object that sits in front of us. If we are painting completely abstractly then our internal image may be feeling or response, rather than a literal image, but if we have an object or subject in front of us we will have started the process by filtering what we are seeing (or have seen) and will be starting to focus on what interests us about the subject. We can explore this idea mentally and we can explore the idea by creating preparatory material.

As we start to paint we begin to have a similar dialogue with the painting itself. We see things that we like and that interest us and we find things that we are not happy with or that don't interest us. The painting itself becomes a major source as we refine our internal image.

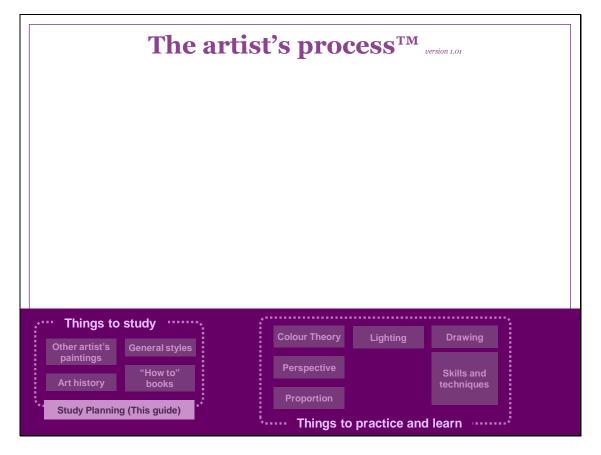
When an artist paints a picture onto a blank canvas with little or no apparent preparatory work, it is because that artist has developed a very strong ability to internalize the initial image and to then respond to the painting as it develops by refining that internalized image. That, along with the technical skills to handle and control the materials, plus a depth of knowledge of the basic skills (such as tonal depth and colour relationships), allows an experienced artist to conjure a painting seemingly from thin air.



The actual painting process is covered in a number of ways on the website. The studio section on <u>demonstrations</u> provides step by step examples of the techniques in action. The mind's eye process introduced on the previous page provides an internal view of the painting process.

The <u>material on critiquing</u> your work applies towards the end of the painting process. In the mind's eye view it helps with the dialogue between you and the painting as you bring your painting to a close. It also helps you to learn from that painting and take those lessons into your future work.

Lastly, the <u>online gallery</u> on the website allows customers to view virtual mounts and frames to help them evaluate your work.



In support of the process for creating an individual picture there is the more general material. Things to study are covered by the <u>course material</u> and also by <u>book</u> and <u>video</u> reviews.

The things to practice and learn are covered by the course material in the School of Art.

I hope that this guide has been a useful introduction and has helped you to consider where you currently stand within your own development. I hope that it helps you to get the best from the other material on the website. Please feel to refer back to this guide as you continue to develop.

End of Guide