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We all feel inspired from time to time to paint a gorgeous sunset, the perfect point break, perhaps beautiful flowers or that long winding road that leads our imaginations to worlds unknown and oh-so-exciting destinations. But most of us also have NO idea where to begin, what supplies to buy, if we even have the talent to paint—thus, is it even worth it to start?

After a second painting session in New Smyrna Beach with our good friends, the Levy family, and their gifted teacher, Heather Pastor, I felt more inspired than ever to really make 2015 the YEAR that I would learn to paint AND not be critical of myself, my work, or progress in it.

Heather has a way of teaching that makes it so easy to learn. She breaks it down step by step of how to look at that blank canvas (without freaking out and running out of the room before you even start), and decipher what colors should be painted first (background? foreground?), where to put the main subject (this really does make a difference), and how to blend colors without it becoming a big, muddy mess. You know, the A,B, C's of painting.

Our first session, we painted one of my favorite flowers, a Hibiscus (see photo). During the process, she encouraged us to experiment with colors that were non-traditional, if that is what inspired us. As you can see, I took her literally. Excited with the results, our next session was to paint a wave. It's a LOT harder than you think, but Heather made it easy, and with her encouragement to really paint what moves us, we all came out with a different style of wave-- each incredible in their own way. This made me realize that we ALL have a painter inside, waiting to be discovered. We just need a teacher to help us find our way. Won't you help us, Heather?

Sandra Olson

The A,B, C's of Painting

An interview with Heather Pastor

To get started in painting, what are the basic supplies needed, that can be purchased pretty much anywhere, and don't cost a fortune?

Let me start by saying not to allow the search for the perfect art supplies – paints, brushes, or a “proper” surface –discourage you from following a creative inspiration! Art can be created with a variety of supplies. If nothing else is available, use the most basic items you used as a kid like crayons and markers! Recycle things that would normally be thrown in the garbage like the back of a cardboard cereal box and use it as your canvas. You can sketch beautiful landscapes with a simple pencil on the back of a return envelope.

► PAINT

For the classes I've been teaching, I choose to use low cost acrylic craft grade paints (Americana, Folk Art, Martha Stewart) you can buy in bottles of varying size at any local box store. They come in a phenomenal array of colors. If you have a very limited budget know that you can mix most any color you can imagine with just red, blue, yellow, black and white paints. Though I hate to admit it, places like Walmart have a great selection. I have purchased student grade acrylics, but truthfully I didn't see much difference in the coverage they provided for the price. They do have a nice sheen to them that you won't be able to achieve with craft paints whose finish is flat. They are easy to clean up (with water and a little soap), are inexpensive and have a quick drying time that make them perfect for 2 hour painting classes!

► BRUSHES

I use brushes with synthetic Taklon (derived from nylon) bristles for classes. They wear well and clean up nicely even after multiple uses. I prefer short handled brushes, personally. Brushes are best chosen based on the size of the canvas you'll be painting. For instance, when painting on a 16" x 20" canvas in classes, the ¾" brushes work nicely. I keep it simple with a filbert or round wash brush and a flat wash brush. The rounded head is good for blending and the flat makes it easier to create clean lines in your composition. I always include a small detail brush as well for signatures or adding minute touches. The ends of the brushes are great for making circular shapes like pupils in eyes. There are all kinds of brushes for specific uses. Most stores offer combo packs that will let you experiment with which one fits your style best.

► WHERE TO BUY CANVASES

I purchase almost all of my supplies at a local box store – Michael's or Hobby Lobby- only because I like to be able to see and feel the products in person. I usually buy the economy, back-stapled canvases that come in multi-packs and are ready to paint for classes. The more expensive canvases have more tooth to them where these are a bit smoother. There are lots of online art supply retailers (i.e. Dick Blick, Jerry's Artarama) if you don't have a craft or independently owned art supply store in your community. Other ideas are to use a scrap piece of wood (old pickets from torn down fencing are cool) or pick up previously painted canvases at thrift shops or garage sales for coin and repaint them. You can purchase a gallon of Gesso at an art supply store, coat the surface in that thick white paint and create a “brand new” surface to paint on.

► OTHER SUPPLIES

Again, you can get really fancy about this, but you could just as easily use common household items as “tools” of the trade. We use paper plates as paint palettes and plastic cups (could be one that you rinsed out after a stop at a local eatery) to hold water for cleaning your brush in. Paper towels or a hand towel come in handy when you're trying to get excess paint off of your paintbrush bristles too. If you want, small tabletop easels are available at the local box stores I mentioned previously. But, you can always just lay the canvas on a table top or on the ground. I like to prop it up in my lap for some projects! Depending on your subject, you may want to sketch on your canvas before you begin painting. In that case, a standard No. 2 pencil will do the trick. Or if you don't have one, use a light colored paint to “sketch” with a small paint brush.

When teaching, what are the biggest obstacles your students encounter, and how do you help them get past them?

Most of the people who take my classes have never picked up a paint brush.



Clockwise: Bobby Levy, Dan Olson, Michelle Olson, Valeh Levy, Heather Pastor, Sandra Olson, Carolyn Palma, Sydney Levy | Photo by Bob Levy

A lot of them had an interest in school, but weren't encouraged to consider art as a viable career. Some will come in accompanied by a friend who claims that they "can't even draw a stick figure". Sometimes people will come in with a photo or will have done some research on an artist they admire before they attend. If they are stumped, I suggest students to do some basic, simple thumbnail sketches to begin...It helps get the ideas flowing. I offer encouragement to let them know they are on the right track. They are more afraid of doing things wrong...In reality there is no "wrong" and showing up in class is the first step beyond that fear. I want them to find their own style and not to simply copy my every action. It's always amazing how with very little "instruction" everyone will begin to develop their own individual brush stroke. The ability and desire to create is innate and it takes all forms.

How should we choose a subject matter? Is there anything that you feel is too difficult and should be avoided?

Choosing a subject is very personal... Begin by thinking of the things you love, scenery that evokes a specific emotion or something for which you have a passion. These subjects will usually translate to the surface best because you already have an affinity for them. I wouldn't necessarily avoid anything, but be cautious in trying to paint human faces or other things you want to have a photorealistic quality. It can lead to frustration, as those present challenges to even the most seasoned professional artists. I teach Pop Art style and Picasso style (cubist) portrait classes that let people learn basics about proportion and portrait drawing, but break things down into geometric shapes and color to start. There are lots of tutorials for every level on YouTube for specific techniques and help if you have a subject you want to concentrate on. Check local listings for art schools and instructors that specialize in what you're interested in learning. Don't be afraid to try anything! But also keep in

mind that perfection does not exist...

So we're sitting in front of a blank canvas. Now what?

I keep several notebooks by my bedside, in my car, in my purse and flip through magazines at any chance I have of collecting ideas and looking for inspiration. If you are constantly making notes of things you find interesting or unusual, you will never have a question when you sit down in front of a blank canvas as to what you want to create... I think the best artists are those who are the best observers of their environment. Watch people, their interactions, their facial expressions. Look at what they wear and the colors they pair together. You become a better artist as you become better at noticing the details in the world around you. I notice when I have classes in retail stores that people automatically will look for their choice in color combinations and ideas by checking out what is around them or on the walls. Life is a study of the things around you and art is just a manifestation of that. Look at the way light hits the trees, the shadows it makes, the shape of the leaves, etc. All of those details make your composition more believable and pleasing to the eye. It only takes a single stroke to get started... ♦





Photo by
Kimberly Cline



Photo by Terry J. England



Photo by
Kimberly Cline

Artist

Heather Pastor

How did you discover you were an artist?

As a kid I was always very creative and entered all kinds of art and coloring contests. I remember winning (positive reinforcement that I had talent) a book sale poster design contest when I was in 5th grade. Though I concentrated my studies through high school in graphic and commercial arts, and was accepted to University of Michigan art school, I didn't pursue a degree in fine arts. I had taken various art classes throughout my life, but it wasn't until I was laid off at my corporate job and was invited to read "The Artist's Way" by Julia Cameron with a supportive group of ladies in 2012, that I reignited my interest in creative pursuits. As soon as I opened the door, opportunities began to appear from all directions. I created a body of work and had my own show, entered pieces in local exhibits, and joined organizations that would allow me the opportunity to show my work.

Are you a full-time artist?

I'm a full-time artist with another part time job! I have expanded my class offerings and continue to find new creative outlets that pay. My hope is to soon merge my paycheck earnings with my passion. I was encouraged by my mom (Thanks, Mom!) to teach a painting class similar to one we had attended together. I began to piece together the items I would need to start my own business and approached locations in my area about teaching. It's taken some time and good marketing, but things snow-balled from there.

What are your favorite subjects to paint and why?

My preference is for pop art. I incorporate "mystery" elements and recyclable pieces into my work to encourage the audience to see the world a little differently. I use paint as a medium to help me convey my message, but I also enjoy paper collage and photography. I am drawn to (and have been since I can remember) layout and graphic design elements. I am fascinated with type and font styles, the way you can convey specific emotion or a message with a few lines of text. I love the works of Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Wayne Thibodeau. They took basic everyday things like food and flowers and made them interesting with bold, unexpected color combinations.

What are your fears as an artist and how have you overcome them?

It's always scary to show your work to the general public. It opens you up for critique, and artwork is an expression of yourself, personal. When people don't appreciate your interpretation, it's tough. I'm always learning and much of what I've done is self-taught. So, it's intimidating sometimes to be involved in shows where there are fine artists who have prestigious degrees. My greatest fear is not being able to support myself doing something I love, to be trapped in a cubicle in front of a computer all day instead of creating art! ♦

Learn more, follow, purchase!

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