

Problem Solving Checklist For Landscape Painters

This checklist covers some of the most common problems you will face in landscape painting. If your painting does not look right, then you can run through this checklist to narrow down on the problem.

- **A lack of atmospheric perspective.** As a general rule, an object will take on the appearance of the atmosphere as it recedes into the distance.
- **Too many hard or soft edges.** You should have a mix of hard, soft and lost edges. If all your edges are hard, then your painting will most likely appear unrealistic. If all your edges are soft, then your painting will most likely appear blurry and out of focus.
- **Painting with too many values (not simplifying the value structure).** Nature is not so kind as to organize all the values into a neat structure. You will usually need to simplify the value structure to some extent. This means grouping areas which are within a similar value range together or compressing the value range. So instead of trying to paint a scene with values all over the place, you are only trying to paint 3 to 4 dominant value groups.
- **Using too much detail.** This is one of the most common problems. You need to think very carefully about what the most important features are in your painting and simplify the rest.
- **Timid painting.** If you paint in a timid and hesitant manner, then that will show in the finished painting.

- **Painting too fast.** You should paint without hesitation, but not so fast that you start to get reckless. I like to try and work efficiently, rather than fast. Also remember that when you are watching professional artists paint, what may seem like fast to you may actually be slow and calculated for them (as they have had so much more experience and are able to make quick decisions).
- **Not painting what you see.** Try to break the scene down into visual elements (shapes, lines and colors) and paint those elements, rather than what they represent. For example, instead of painting a tree, try to paint the shapes, lines and colors which make up that tree.
- **Not using enough paint on the brush.** This can result in timid strokes of color.
- **Using only small brushes.** You should start most of your paintings with relatively large brushes and leave the smaller brushes until the later stages of a painting.
- **Using too many highlights.** You need to earn your highlights, so do not introduce them too early (unless you are using watercolors, in which case you often start with highlights and then paint in the darks).
- **Using too many saturated colors.** This may result in a painting which seems very jarring and uncomfortable to look at (not many artists are able to pull it off like Vincent van Gogh).
- **Not stepping back from the painting to observe the *big picture*.** If you only look at your painting up close, then you may focus on the small details whilst ignoring the more important big picture aspects.
- **Not utilizing the physical texture of paint appropriately.** Visible brushwork can be a powerful feature which can help create the illusion of form in your painting. I generally like to build up texture around my focal points, in the foreground and when painting trees, grass and rocks.

- **Working under poor lighting (too bright, dull, warm or cool).** You need to give serious consideration to the light you are painting under, as it strongly influences the colors you see in the painting. For example, if you paint under a warm light then your reds, yellows and oranges will appear normal but your blues will appear washed out. As a result, you may try to overcompensate by using too much blue in your painting. The opposite happens when painting under a cool light.
- **Poor subject selection.** Many paintings fail before a brush is even picked up. It is extremely important that you take care with your subject selection. Paint something which you are *inspired* by and actually *want to paint*. You should be able to look at the subject and picture what your finished painting may look like (it rarely turns out like what you imagine, but it is important to have a vision).
- **Not using a sufficient range of colors on the palette.** Even though I always recommend using a limited palette of colors, it is also important that you have enough colors to mix what you need for the painting. Usually in landscape painting that means having a cool and warm version of the primary colors (red, blue and yellow) plus white.
- **Not knowing when to finish.** If you finish too soon, your painting may appear unfinished and not reach full potential. If you finish too late, then your painting may appear overworked.
- **Not starting.** Don't let procrastination, fear of getting judged or any other insecurities or hesitations hold you back from actually painting. Just pick up a brush and get started.