

Good Drawings lead to Good Paintings

Written by Joan

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Light and shade in the correct variance can make a very good painting from a well drawn sketch that has had thought and planning behind it. As anyone who paints from Nature knows, the light changes usually more quickly than the time needed to finish the painting. It is a good idea to make quick sketches of the viewpoint and mark in the shadow areas.

Taking a photo will of course also assist you in noting the shadowed parts but it is not the ideal way to improve your drawing skills! Use your eyes to observe carefully how and where the shadows fall, their depth of tone and their colour and write notes against the areas in your sketch to remind you later on. This is what brings a painting to life, giving it depth and substance. Foreground detail will stand out but recede as it goes into the distance.

When drawing indoors with an artificial light source, the light remains constant so giving all the time you need to observe and draw in shadows and the light areas. Draw what you see and try putting the shadows in first.

So do prepare your paintings with sketches first to create the varying tones you will need to give that special touch! These can just be in charcoal or soft pencil and will give you practice in learning how tones work against the white paper so you can apply it when you are ready to paint.

Take a selection of fruit or vegetables for example. The lightest in colour such as bananas would be in the lightest tone whereas an aubergine would be done in dark tones. Highlights, especially against the dark tones, will show up well by leaving the paper white, but do check where the light is shining so you put them in the appropriate places. This is important. Just remember that a highlight is not always a stark white!

A building can look very different in its character in varying light conditions depicted in pencil or charcoal. If the one side of the building has bright sunlight shining on it, leave the white of the paper. Tones for shadows from the roof or plants can be added later. If the light strikes the building from the right, the opposite side will be in shadow. You can continue in this way and this will help you to understand tone values in different light situations. By altering these tonal values different effects can be created which brings interesting and often striking results to your work. Effects of sunlight against dark shadows can produce amazing results. After some practice you will probably want to use this technique more and more in your work.

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Just keep it simple and have fun and don't forget to keep practicing!!