

What Mood Do You Want?

By M.E. "Mike" Bailey

I teach. But how does one put it across that it is not the *subject matter* of a painting that makes an emotional connection with the viewer?

What do you think it is? Do you really honestly think that the still life with the antique vase in it will haul people from across a big empty room just to get a closer look? Do really think that water lilies that Monet painted were the reason people flocked to his paintings? Was it the pretty flowers and lovely draperies in the Rococo movement that enraptured viewers? Certainly not, is the answer! But wait a minute! Aren't water lilies a metaphor for peace and tranquility and what of the romance of Rococo painting. Is it really the subject that makes us stir inside?

If one wishes to describe something verbally, a writer does so using word pictures or word rhythms. If one wishes to serenade or lull another to sleep with music, it is done with harmonious sounds. If one wishes to arouse our taste buds and cause sensations of delight, fine foods, spices and flavors of various kinds are used. In every case, whether it is sound or words or foods, harmonies and counterpoints are created to make a concert of sensations and emotions. If that is so, why don't budding artists think of things like value arrangements, color combinations, interesting shapes

and adroit edges or lines to arouse us emotionally? Instead, most artists think that *things* or *subjects* arouse our emotionsor they are of the belief that these "things" are absolutely necessary because "they make a nice picture."

Take just a moment and consider a few mental images. First, would you want all your edges in your painting (pick any subject) to be harsh, jagged and sharp? Would you want to have absolute black dominate a substantial portion of your painting? Or would you rather have brilliant, snappy colors yelping from every corner of the painting? Would you necessarily want rough, sandy textures in your painting? Or would you prefer velvety softness where colors and shapes seem to softly transition from one to another? You may very well have answered "yes" or answered "no" to any of these questions because you have an idea, though maybe it isn't openly stated, of how you want the image to *feel*. Yes, I used the word F E E L.

Don't softer edges and shapes give you a different feeling than jagged, harsh, sharp edged shapes? Of course! In other words, you have a sense for what you want to say about the painting you have in mind. You have a MOOD you want to set in the painting.

It surprises many new painters that we need to be concerned about mood. When you really put your mind to thinking about it, it is clear to all that colors less brilliant and toned down are more restful than those of a brilliant, saturated intensity. Yet, when we set to painting, the idea of mood is set aside in favor of 'realism' or, worse, in fear of making a mistake. Mood must be of primary concern and consciously chosen because **every variation** of every design element (Line, Size, Shape, Direction, Color, Value and Texture) **carries with it a feeling or mood**. One must decide ahead of executing a painting one's intention is of mood. In other words, before painting, the artist must answer the question, "What Mood Do I Want?"

For example, if the artist decides, I wish this piece to be restful, serene and elegant without being melancholy, then the artist must make choices about color, value, contrast etc in keeping with that mood. Dominantly brazen oranges and reds would be a mistake when trying to assert that restful serenity. Jagged shapes and jutting diagonal directions would not suit it either. Something more horizontal with, perhaps, softly, slightly curved shapes would be more suitable. Similarly, the contrasts of value needn't be sudden or harsh either. Perhaps this is why Monet's works are so appealing to so many people. There isn't a great deal of value contrast. His contrasts are

tuned to reduced, softer changes in value with stepped transitions between big value changes, rather than jumpy, strident contrasts. In a word, thoughtfulness about each design element and their harmonies together must prevail.

So, with all due respect to every painter out there, what mood do you want? That is to ask what mood do you want. Oh, yes! I repeat: **WHAT MOOD DO YOU WANT?**

Remember, the choices you make in value, color, texture, direction, movement, contrast and rhythm all make a difference in the outcome of the painting's FEELING and the emotional message it sends.

Many painters are painters of beauty for the sake of beauty. Others might want to make a visual statement about some social or political injustice by being confrontational about something. Still others may not be as interested in beauty as a sense of place or a moment in time. Each approach still require an answer to the above question and removing one's self from one's habitual thoughts about the subject matter. Instead, one must pay strict attention to the elements of design and the choices made about each of them. Then, in the act of painting, the painter must remain conscious and diligently follow those choices made.