

## *WHAT IS MY STYLE ?*

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This question is always one that is controversial, in my opinion. The reason for the argument is that, I believe, "style" has different definitions by different people. In particular, gallery owners and artists have different ideas of what style should be or what "style" is.

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A gallery owner has a single objective when advising artists about how the artist 'should' paint. That goal is to sell paintings. The person on the floor in the gallery hears the comments of potential clients all day long, every day. People wander in, make comments and wander out. Some come close to buying, but there are usually excuses as to why not. Very frequently, the customer who comes into a gallery doesn't know who is hanging on the walls or how the paintings are made. The customer is more concerned, often, with whether the painting will fit in their home, with all its splendiferous colors, drapes and upholsteries. And all of that rubs off on the gallery owner.

He wants a certain "style" because he believes that style is what sells, or so he believes. Furthermore, he wants to see many more paintings similar to the ones that have flown out of the gallery under the arms of his clients. The similarity doesn't end with how one artist prefers

to make shapes versus another. No. The gallery owner looks for the artist who paints the same subject in the same colors, but changes it a little each time.

Now, I have written about painting in series and teach design through the developments in a series. I don't think there is a better way to grow as an artist. In my mind, series work embodies the idea of change for the sake of change and for personal exploration. It is even for the sake of subject exploration. I would expect a long running series to reveal an artist's style by looking not at subject, but by looking at brush strokes, shape similarities, habitual special divisions and a host of other things.

Recently, in painting some completely different subjects in different colors, I was able to see quickly that these pieces came from the same artist. In much the same way that we habitually and unconsciously shape the letters in our handwriting, we do similar things with a paint brush. Essentially, we have no control over our precious little moves and their bias or favor to move always in a similar direction.

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By painting in series, subject becomes less and less of concern and design takes over. But inside that taking over, we, as humans, favor certain trains of thought. We habitually do the same things over

and over and over. And those unconscious, underlying things we do reveals our style. And that style will change over time, but usually not drastically. At least, drastic changes don't happen over night. Style develops as one's taste changes and one's skills improve.

On this web site, you might ask "what is the artist's style?" Or you might go so far as to look at two paintings and say they look like two different painters painted them. Well, in most respects, you are right. I find that much of my series paintings are done with teaching in mind, because I spend so much of my time attempting to challenge and teach my class members different aspects of design. That is no small task.

Over the years of painting, I have learned a few things about my self that truly point to what my style is. One of those things is the lust for challenge and learning. I become bored easily and find that I am continually trying to access new levels to reach in my art. I am a thinker. I rarely can browse by something and not stop to fully taste it and determine all of its characteristics . . . especially in art. So, if I were to be talking with a gallery owner who asked, "What is your style?" I would reply, "Constant change and growth. So don't expect the same thing from me more than a few times." Other artists seek to establish a "brand" that the public will recognize. And that is also important. For me, the brand is in the lower right corner of the painting. I am the guy that lives inside this body and this head, so I guess I am the one I need to answer to about my style. If it was really as important to me as constant growth was,

then a "branded, recognizable painting method" would be obvious.

You? What is your style? It is there. For you (and for me) it is difficult to see. It is not apparent because it is unconscious. Put your work amongst a lot of other artists' work and you might see your personal style immediately.

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Here is a way to assess your style. Look at what you habitually do with values. What colors do you use over and over and over again? Do you use line in an obvious way or unobvious? Whichever way line appears in your paintings up till now, that is how you handle line. It is part of your style. Do you notice that you tend to use a lot of gradation in your pieces? Texture? Is there a trademark brush stroke that you do without realizing it? That is your style.

Want to see what it is or if you can identify it? List the seven elements of design, Line, Size, Shape, Direction, Color, Value and Texture on a sheet of paper. Then lay out as many paintings as you can that have been painted in the last year. Line them in order (approximately) of their completion. Walk slowly down the line and examine what it is you do with each of those elements and see if you can see repeated applications of method, usage and / or technique. It might be subtle at first, but it is there waiting to be seen. Interestingly, if you emulate another artist, many of the aspects of your style will show through. You can't help it.

Start with Line. Include edges of shapes (even negative shapes) and look to see what you do with line. Then take another element and look at all the paintings and what was done in most of them or all of them. It may take a while. It might even take another artist to see with different eyes and point it out to you.

Style does NOT mean being stuck with one kind of image. So, if you are seeking to know your style, keep growing and searching and painting. Your style will always be in the making of each painting . . . even if you aren't conscious of it.

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