

The Profound Step

By M.E. "Mike" Bailey

There are few turning points in an artist's growth that have as profound an impact as to shift from making "pretty pictures" to expressing ideas and emotion with visual means.

It is in this sort of questioning that a painter graduates to "Artist." . . .or from Recorder to Commentator.

Most artists begin their development by focusing on reporting and visually cloning a subject. That is to say "to make it look exactly like a photograph" as we have heard so many times before. In that quest, the person painting becomes infatuated with subject and technique. Questions, such as "how do I paint trees?" or "What color should I use for skin?" or "Explain how to make fur look like fur, please" become the central motive in achieving artistic growth. All too often, these painters remain stuck in that mode and never free themselves to make **the profound step** in their development.

"A picture is worth ten thousand words" is a concept that we have all heard many times. Because it is a cliché in nature, we tend to not look deep into its meaning. The sight of a child suckling at a mother's breast arouses so much feeling in some people as to bring tears to their eyes. Those tears may take ten thousand words to fully explain while

also attempting to verbally delineate what, exactly, the image looks like. Said another way, beyond the image of the subject there is feeling and meaning. In short: Content.

The profound step in an artist's development is when the person who is painting becomes concerned with ideas and emotions rather than replication.

This is a major turning point for every painter. "How shall I express this skin tone if my intent is to melancholy?" might be the sort of question that shows up after making that turning point. There is more than "What does it look like?" going on in this sort of questioning. There are concerns about communicating a mood or feeling without stating it. It is in this sort of questioning that a painter graduates to "Artist." . . .or from recorder to commentator. Political ideals, revelations about character, imagined effects of light, fantasized reality or some special emotion are all the sort of content to which an artist might become devoted. The communication of these thoughts and feelings demands a new level of understanding of how to put paint on the canvas or paper. The elements and principles of design become uppermost in the artist's thinking.

"What Mood Do You Want?"

It is at this juncture in the artist's growth that the artist realizes how different

emotions are hinted or suggested by a single color and its value and intensity. The artist becomes primarily linked to painting relationships of the elements of line, color, value, shape, direction and texture in order to express their intent.

When does this happen? In my opinion, it usually occurs when the artist becomes bored. This is the “danger zone.” Many

would be artists find another subject or even another pursuit to work on at this place. Instead of looking for another subject, the real artist will seek new ways of using this subject to say something about emotion or mood or fantasy. This is the essence of creating.

When will you make the profound step?