

7

ARTIST MISTAKES

7 mistakes that make your paintings look amateurish and why some people don't even know their paintings look amateurish

Stopping Too Early

Stopping too early leaves your painting looking unfinished and not professional

Using Black as Shadows

Black is rarely the correct shadow color; plus it dulls down the color on your painting

Paintings that look Cartoonish

No variety of edge work or depth of color can cause paintings to look cartoonish

Amateurish Paintings

Learning the same way everyone learns leads to consistent looking art. This art doesn't stand out from "the pack"

Using Too Much Color

The intensity of the color or chroma is important to control to keep paintings looking believable

No Range in Values or Edge Work

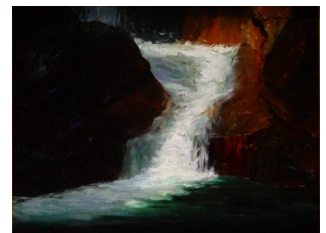
By having a system to ensure a nice range of values, your painting won't look amateurish. A painting may look cut out and cartoonish if there isn't an appropriate relationship of edges

Bright Does NOT Mean White

Commonly artists use straight white out of the tube to paint bright areas. This causes the painting to look unbelievable and amateurish



From Daniel Edmondson's
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AMATEURISH PAINTINGS

What makes a painting look amateurish?

How can we always tell an amateurish painting from a masterful painting? I think the reason for this stems from the fact that most people that go on and want to learn how to do representational painting will generally go through pretty similar steps as they learn to paint. When everyone is going through the same process they create similar looking paintings in terms of style and how resolved the painting is. That's what makes them look amateurish. As they get better and better or progress further and further towards their goal at mastering representational painting they start to refine their values, edges, colors. Then their art starts to pull away from the pack and stand out as a more professional and masterful painting, no longer amateurish.

So this is how we can identify and illustrate that there are amateurish paintings. For these same reasons we see many of these paintings because this is how everyone starts. I've got a closet full of amateurish paintings from my early years because I started from the same spot you did.

Right Image:

This painting is one example from Daniel Edmondson and Oil Painting Workshop's starter course.



CARTOONISH PAINTINGS

What makes a painting look cartoonish?

Before we have a discussion on what makes a painting look cartoonish, what we really have to discuss is what makes a cartoon look cartoonish. What it really boils down to is that when a cartoonist creates a cartoon what they generally do is draw an outline in black and then they fill it in with just one or maybe two colors. By that I mean one value and then another value of the same color. The resulting cartoon has a very flat look to it meaning it doesn't look dimensional. It looks flat, 2 dimensional or like a cut out.



So if a painting looks cartoonish and there's no 3 dimensional feel or look to it , the normal causes of this are not enough value range and the edges are all the same and usually very sharp. These are the two leading factors that make a painting look cartoonish.



Above Image:

In this painting it is evident that there are cartoonish features. You may see the black outlines and the very little variety in the value structure which doesn't give the painting much dimension to it.

HOW TO SOLVE CARTOONISH PAINTINGS

Having a Range of Values

There's a lot of different ways that you can solve this. The easiest way is to make sure you have full value range in the elements of your paintings. When you're looking at your subject matter, whether from life or a photograph, try to see all the value range on a particular object as well as in the full scene. When first laying in a new painting, artists will place the darkest dark in the painting and the lightest light and then they have something to compare to. Then within each element they may place the lightest light and the darkest dark of that particular element. That way you have a reference range for that object and compare values. Then they make sure that they use that full value range when they paint it and that's what makes the painting look dimensional and professional.

Soft AND Hard Edges

The final part to address is edges. If the painting looks cut out and cartoonish it's because there isn't an appropriate relationship of edges. We need sharp edges but we also need soft edges. It's really the soft edges that make the sharp edges look good and the sharp edges that make the soft edges look good. So keep in mind that you want a full range in values AND edges and there are systems you can put in place to do that.



Above Painting

"Zinnia and Peaches" by Daniel Edmondson shows a variety of edge work as well as value

USING TOO MUCH BLACK

How Shadows Work

One common problem that makes paintings look amateurish is that artists use black for their shadows. It isn't black that is the problem, it is that the color is too cool a color for most shadows. When you go outside and the shadows are cool because of the blue sky versus the bright sun, cool shadows are completely appropriate. But when most people paint still life's, figures, portraits or other indoor paintings they tend to use either black or blue for shadows. It is inappropriate because it is not the right color temperature so the painting ends up looking dirty and amateurish. So try avoiding cool colors for shadows indoors unless it's appropriate.



Left Image:

In these hands you notice that black was used as the shadow color. This is a mistake as you can see that the hands appear to be dirty unless that's what the look was intended to be of course.

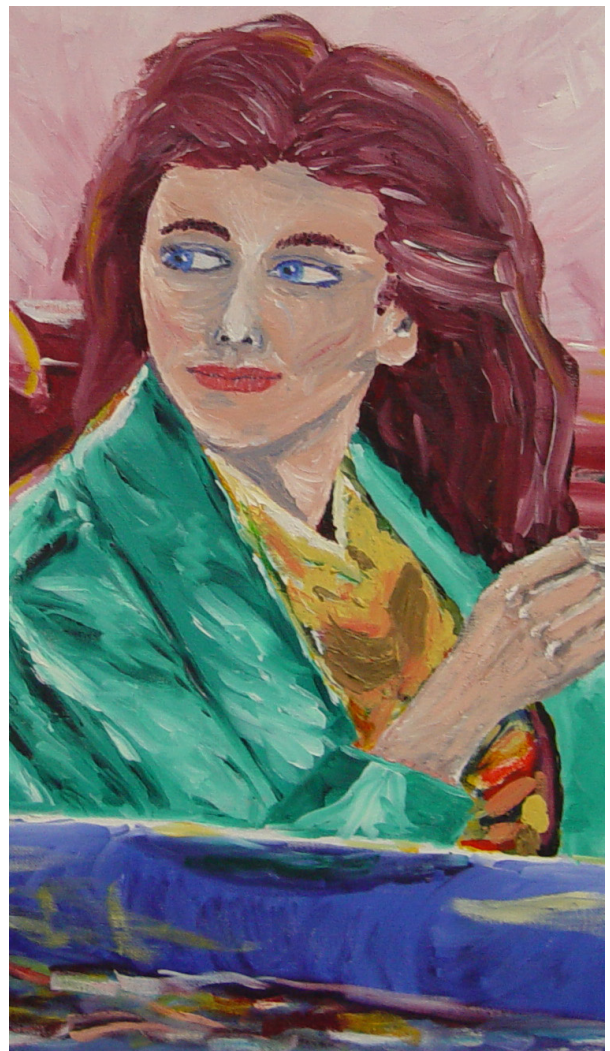
TOO MUCH COLOR ESPECIALLY IN LANDSCAPES

Watch the Color!

One really common problem that makes paintings look amateurish is using too much color. When I say too much color what I mean is intensity of color or chroma. For example, yellow ochre is yellow but it's a dull yellow, its got a low chroma. Whereas cad yellow medium has a lot of yellow, its an intense yellow, a higher chroma. Often times new artists over use intense greens, particularly viridian in landscape paintings. Sure, there's times that you may want to experiment and add a little more color but a typical error occurs that makes paintings look amateurish when they have too much color. It's common to see water that's too blue or trees that are too intense of a green or a face has too much color and looks cartoonish and unnatural. Unless it's a specific style affect that you're going for, really try to minimize the use of those intense colors.

Right Image:

In this particular painting, the chroma is quite high in many of the colors causing the painting to look oversaturated. Of course, if this is the style preferred by the artist, then it's okay.



BRIGHT DOES NOT MEAN WHITE

White is TOO Bright

A common thread in amateurish looking paintings and cartoonish looking painting is overusing white or almost near straight white from the tube. This is a super common error, because white very rarely occurs in nature even in white things (like a white picket fence in a landscape) a very pale blue, yellow, or green. Often we'll put it down on a painting because we'll see something super bright. If it's a small highlight it's probably ok, but if we're representing a bright area, especially on something dark like a fabric or on a car where the fabric is red as in the painting above. If you mix white into it, it will just not read right. It will look like white on top of it whereas if you just mix an actual color and apply it it will feel much more natural and then on top of that use a bit of highlight. It is a common mistake to use just white or straight white for paintings that have a lot of light intensity to them. You can spot one a mile away because it just won't stay on a canvas because it advances and doesn't become a part of the actual object that you're trying to represent. So don't use straight white and when you need to paint something bright and be careful to mix a distinct bright color instead.



Left Image:

This painting shows the extreme amount of bright white colors which makes the paintings look amateurish.

STOPPING TOO EARLY

Finish Your Painting

Another very common problem with developing your art to become more masterful is actually a twofold problem. Number 1 is that artists often quit their paintings too early before they have really gotten the painting resolved to a finished painting that looks professional. This is because of a couple of reasons. The more common of these is that they are just kind of “sick of it” and they have an idea for a new painting and want to move on to the new painting because it sounds fun. Secondly, the painting, often times, becomes difficult to get through because of a lack of experience and a lack of knowing what to do.

What ends up happening in the end is that the piece looks like a painting that had a good start but was really never finished. This is truly a discipline that you develop over time. Finishing a painting is kind of difficult but once you understand the foundations and principles of painting, taking it to a nice finished product is really easy and quite enjoyable. It also takes you out of amateur status and brings you up to museum or profession gallery artist status.

The solution is to keep painting and to take some classes and get the “know how” of what you need. Particularly try to find people that explain the whys of everything you do so that you can really develop your foundation as a painter. You won’t need nearly as many classes because you’ll have a deeper understanding of the whys of what you do. Getting through the problem on your own is a slower process but it is valuable to do that. So if you want your paintings to look professional and masterful keep working on them and refining them until you take them to a place where they look masterful, deliberate and reflect your unique vision as an artist . You owe it to yourself and your art.

Images Below:

Other FINISHED paintings from Oil Painting Workshop's Starter Course





Love The Paint,

-Daniel Edmondson

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