

## LEARN PAINTING IN AN HOUR

*Is there a shortcut to acquiring the skill?*

Our previous analysis ended with the conclusion that painting is not an inborn talent but an acquired skill powered primarily by the intellect and secondarily by the eyes and limbs. End of story? Not by any stretch of your imagination! Several consequences can still flow from it. First, since painting is acquired, **anyone can learn it**. Second, since it is a skill, it is **acquired through repetition of actions**. Third, since, essentially, it is an intellectual operation, **adults can and do learn it faster**. Finally, since, secondarily, it is a manual action, it helps, although not a necessity, to have **dexterity of hands**. We do have quite a mouthful here, so, in this issue, let us focus our attention only on the first and third which pertain to learning and leave the other two for the next.

### Shortcut to Mastery

Is it important to declare that painting is not a talent? No and yes. For those of us who have been in the trade for a long time, such a statement seems to be common knowledge and my previous article was nothing but an overkill, if not an exercise in triviality. But, for those of you who have aspirations of one day decorating your homes with your own paintings, it is very important, if not an absolute necessity. Why? Because the greatest stumbling block to your ever trying is precisely the preconception that painting is an activity solely and exclusively for the talented. Belief on this myth is a major, if not the only, cause of paralysis in your artistic endeavor. Such a categorical enunciation must be made to shatter this prejudice to pieces, thus liberating you from the shackle of inaction and giving you the feeling of confidence that you too can do it.

Yes, you too can paint. And this is not an original concoction of mine. Expert artists have said this before and I am just echoing it for the *n*th time. I don't belong to the species of people who read introductions of books but the other day maybe by some cosmic coincidence I did. Helen van Wyk, to whom I give credit for all my technical knowledge in painting, states this doctrine as the first line of the introduction to her book, **Welcome To My Studio**: "Anyone can paint. Mainly, you have to want to."

You have to want to. This means getting rid of all the other



### Race Against Time

*(Oil on Canvas, 60 cm x 80 cm)*

*I had always wanted to paint galloping horses but never had an appropriate image to start with. So when this picture appeared in the Wassenaar Courant, I immediately cut it and rushed to my studio to begin the job. Of course, I modified the colors, opting for an almost monochromatic scheme, and replaced the busy background with an atmosphere that hints of a setting sun. The horses, therefore, appear as if they are in a hurry to finish the race while there is still enough light and time. The quality of the newspaper photo was very poor though, so in some parts of the horses I was just guessing. I might have missed or added some muscles here or there, but I don't think the horses really mind.*



### Helen and Paris

*(Oil on Canvas, 150 cm x 120 cm)*

*This is so far my biggest painting in terms of size. I did it a couple of years ago beside my makeshift tilapia fishpond in Alabang. The original by J.L. David shows a big bedroom as the setting but I was merely interested in making my first attempt at figurative painting so I settled with a trimmed version. But, a slight miscalculation in the placement of the figures proved disastrous as Paris' right toes ended up outside the canvas, a big no-no in painting. To hide this mistake, I covered the chopped toes with a bowl that also served to balance the sword. When Carol asked me what it was, she almost killed me when I said it was a foot bowl.*

minor obstacles like lack of time, discouragement due to initial poor results, lack of resources, laziness, etc. A little bit of interest would be ideal and perseverance once you have started is obligatory.

But, it is not enough to want to. **You have to learn to**. And I think this is the most important requirement for the acquisition of any type of skill. You simply have to learn how to do it. You have to understand the basic steps and the manner of putting these steps into action. There is no substitute for this. This is the secret and the shortest path to becoming a painter. Willpower and interest are surely important but they can be at times superfluous. In fact, I'll even dare say that if in your painting you need hard work and determination then you are doing it the wrong way.

How do you learn to paint? Either teach yourself or be taught by another. In both cases, you must learn the basics properly, which ultimately means following instructions properly. The instructions, in turn, have to be clear and distinct and, therefore, care has to be taken in choosing a book, if you are going to self-study, or in choosing a teacher, if you want to fast track your learning. I chose the first method of learning and it took me ten years to get to where I am now. Well, I really could not expect more since I was reading my books only during TV commercials. But, if you choose to employ a teacher and the teacher is good, you can learn painting in an hour.

In an hour? Well, a couple of hours if you insist. Theoretically, according to Helen van Wyk, all the basics of painting can be contained in sixteen pages, that is, if you are expecting a masterpiece at your first try. But, if you are satisfied with merely creating a beautiful first painting, everything you need to know can fit in half a page. Practically, you need even less. No new manual skill is needed to be able to mix five shades of the same color (highlight, body color, body shadow, reflection, cast shadow), to apply each shade with a brush on a corresponding area of the

subject, and then to blend the boundaries where those areas meet. Of course, it's hard to visualize what I'm telling you. But, if a painter can demonstrate these steps to you then you will see how effortless and quick learning painting could be.

In fact, this was the basis of a recent experiment I conducted with Carol. After committing myself to the provocative statement that painting is not a talent I felt compelled to prove it not only through reasoning but also by actual demonstration. In principle, I should be able to grab any person in the street and successfully teach her or him the skill. Well, the prospect of going out and grabbing people in the street was not particularly appetizing, so I just settled with the most accessible resource at hand: my wife. She qualified as the object of my experiment for having no art qualifications. Sure, her academic and professional credentials are quite astonishing but, when it comes to art, Carol does not have a single ounce of it in her blood. This is the consensus among her officemates and friends. She was the ideal candidate.

The challenge consisted in making her sit down in my studio and in guiding her to produce a beautiful realistic painting in the least possible time. However, it turned out the challenge consisted more in getting her to my studio rather than in teaching her. The first painting class got postponed indefinitely not only because of lack of time but also because the attraction exerted by the shopping centers, TV and Buffy books during her spare time was simply a force too powerful to overcome with any promise of future artistic glory. Only after I promised her a dinner of Sashimi and Sushi did she sit down and listen to my dictations grudgingly. The result? Magnificent! At least, her first painting is infinitely better than my first. And the session lasted only a couple of hours! Now, if only I can improve my sushi-making skills, she might just come up with another painting in the near future on her own volition.



**Carol's First Painting**  
(Oil on Canvas 24 x30 cm)

*Using the Sushi Method of teaching, I managed to educate this first-ever art piece from Carol. Clear procedures, economy of strokes and emphasis on praxis over theory did the trick. She could be a master in a couple of weeks if only she had the time.*

want to.

**Age Matters**

You can't teach an old horse new tricks, you might object. True! But, you are not a horse. And, unlike a horse, you have an intellect that can understand new things anywhere, anytime. Besides, certain new things are learned easier and faster when one is more advanced in age. This is especially true in fields of learning heavily laden with processes and procedures. For instance, you normally don't ask your 7-year old kid to decipher and explain for you the installation guidelines of some electronic gadgets, unless, of course, your kid is a genius. Now, learning painting is so instruction-intensive that you simply need intellectual maturity to be successful. This means the older you are the more rewarding and instantaneous the results will be.

Winston Churchill learned painting during the later stage of his earthly life when he was already preparing for the next. Loring Blanco, the wife of my idol, Jose Blanco, started in the trade also at



**Blue Vase and Fruits**  
(Oil on Canvas, 60 cm x 80 cm)

*I came across this vase with a landscape painted on it while browsing over an Antique Encyclopedia. A possible Still Life composition with it as the focus immediately came to mind. I chose the surrounding fruits to be mostly oriental, thus, providing a fitting contrast and support to an object that is, in great probability, occidental.*

Luck was on my side when my cousin, Gayleen Villalobos, a medical technologist living in Essen, Germany, spent a week of her summer vacation with us. In her case, she was willing to undergo the experiment and we managed to hold a couple of two-hour painting lessons. She was so happy with her first two paintings that she remarked I had just created in her my competitor. The first thing she did when she got back to Germany was to buy a complete set of oil painting materials.

Statistically, two people do not constitute a population from which one can draw a valid generalization. But, since I've run out of subjects to experiment on and since my success rate so far is one hundred percent, I'll just go ahead and make one: **if taught clearly and methodically, you can learn to paint in an hour.** If you can follow instructions and if the instructions are clear and distinct, you can become a painter in no time, even if you don't

a mature age, maybe after realizing she was the only remaining member of the family without an artwork on their wall. Cory Aquino must be an expert by now, if not already a master, after plunging into the field at the end of her presidency. Eddie Flores, who, upon reading my previous article, commented "*baka pati ako makamikayat mag-paint,*" could be next in line if only he gives up smoking and tries actualizing his artistic potentials instead.

In other words, serious painting is an activity more suited for grown-ups. In general, children are incapable of quality results. This is not to say that there are no exceptions; some kids endowed with "mature" minds can easily churn out superb art products. Neither does this mean children should be discouraged from painting. Though serious artworks may not be expected from them, painting still has the beneficial effect of developing their mind and intellect, not to mention their capacity for observation and concentration. But, just be prepared to see some

"masterpieces" appearing on your walls or sofas, occasionally

**Hard Work Unnecessary**

Great emphasis has been placed on the role of hard work and determination in any learning endeavor. In painting, these are not necessary. **Clear and distinct guidelines** coupled with the **ability to follow instructions** are all that are needed. And **you are never too old to start.** You don't need a high IQ or an enrollment to an academy to be able to understand and implement the rudiments of painting. You can **learn** everything one Sunday afternoon when you are feeling bored.

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