

John MacDonald

August–September 2015



UPCOMING WORKSHOPS

2015-2016

NOV. 22, 2015 (3 HR. DEMO)
FALMOUTH ARTISTS GUILD
Falmouth, Mass.
www.falmouthart.org

FEB. 6–13, 2016
CASA DE LOS ARTISTAS
Boca de Tomatlan, Mexico
www.ArtWorkshopVacations.com

APRIL 4–6, 2016
COLONIE ART LEAGUE
Colonie, New York
www.colonieartleague.com

MAY 17–19, 2016
FALMOUTH ARTISTS GUILD
Falmouth, Mass.
www.falmouthart.org

JUNE 9–11, 2016
WEATHERSFIELD ACADEMY
Weathersfield, Conn.
www.wethersfieldarts.org

JULY 6–10, 2016
**HUDSON RIVER VALLEY
ART WORKSHOPS**
Greenville, New York
www.artworkshops.com

AUG. 23–25, 2016
THE GIBSON HOUSE
Haverhill, New Hampshire
www.gibsonhousebb.com

Your Recommended Drawing Books

Thank you to those who sent me the names of your favorite books about the art of drawing. As promised, here are the results:

Top choices:

1. *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* by Betty Edwards

The overwhelming favorite. Nearly half of you mentioned this book.

2. *Lessons in Classical Drawing* by Juliette Aristedes

A distant second. Published by Watson-Guption

3. *The Keys to Drawing* by Bert Dodson

A few of you mentioned this book. Published by North Light Books

4. *The Artist's Complete Guide to Figure Drawing* by Anthony Ryder

Received three mentions. Published by Watson-Guption

Other recommendations:

Complete Guide to Drawing by Giovanni Civardis, Search Press.

Life Drawing by Robert Barrett, North Light Books.

A Guide to Drawing by Daniel M. Mendelowitz, Wadsworth Publications.

Drawing, The Creative Process by Seymour Simmons Marc Winer, Prentice.

The Ultimate Drawing Course, by John Raynes, North Light.

Drawing Lessons from the Great Masters by Robert Hale, Watson-Guption.

Drawing: The Complete Course by Stan Smith, Reader's Digest.

Lifelike Drawing by Lee Hammond, North Light Books.

Drawing Sharp Focus Still Lifes by Robert Zappalorti, Watson-Guption.

Your Artist's Brain, Learn to Draw What You See, Not What You Think You See

by Carl Purcell, North Light

Experimental Drawing by Robert Kaupetis, Watson/Guption Publication

Drawing: A Contemporary Approach by Teel Sale and Claudia Betti,

Thomson Wadsworth Publication

Drawing, Space, Form and Expression (3rd Edition) by Wayne Enstice and

Melody Peters, Pearson, Prentice Hall Publication

The Practice and Science of Drawing by Harold Speed, Dover Publications.

Drawing from Observation by Brian Curtis, McGraw-Hill.

Drawing the Human Form by William Berry, Pearson

Accompanying her book recommendations, Kathy Weinberg included a painting exercise which would also work well for drawing. "Set a 4 minute timer and do repeated painting sketches of the same subject. Eventually the brain gets tired and gets out of the way! The goal should be to capture the gesture or essence as notes to oneself, not finished paintings."

—Thank you, Kathy, for passing that along.

Topics in Landscapes: When Sky Meets Ground.

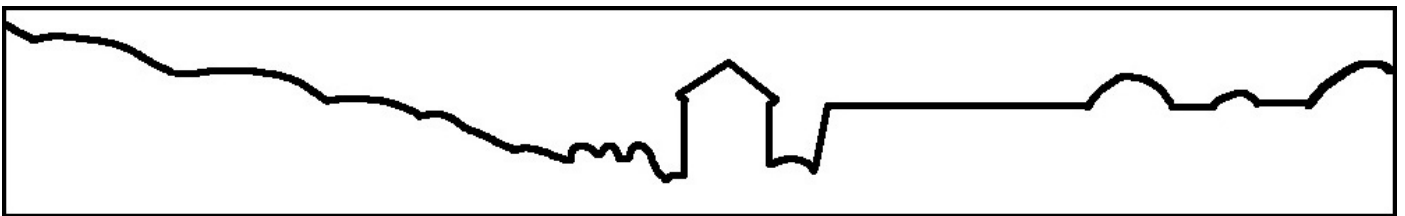
When beginning a painting, nothing is more important than establishing a successful composition. We do this by choosing, editing, and manipulating the large, essential shapes—and the edges between them—that are found in the landscape. Among these edges, the most crucial is often the line formed where sky meets ground. Unless you're painting intimate scenes, your landscape paintings will often include the horizon line. The nature of the objects that comprise the horizon line is irrelevant. It may include mid-ground trees or buildings, or distant mountains and hills, but it is first and foremost an abstract *edge*, that must be varied, rhythmic, and interesting.

First, we'll look at a few of my recent paintings and the photos on which they're based. Then I'll give some examples from some of my favorite master painters.

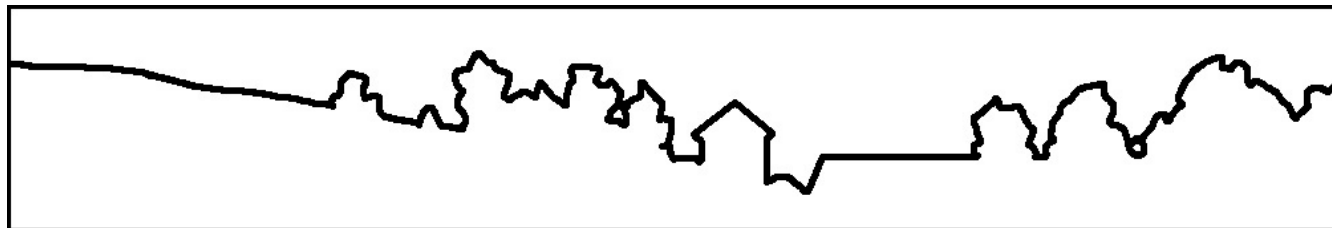
Here's the photo on which the painting, "Caretaker, Winter Sunset," was based:



The horizon line, copied below, isn't bad, just not particularly interesting. Notice the uniformity of the angle of the distant hills and the regularity of their rounded shapes. The two trees on the far right are similar in shape. The entire painting is split in half by the angle of the hills and the horizontal line of the barn—those two lines dominate the sky-ground line—and the silo and tree barely break it up. It's predictable and a little boring.



The composed edge, taken from the finished painting, is below.



In order to break up the hill and barn lines and reduce their lengths, I enlarged the trees. The silo, which in the photo is too large and too central, was reduced in size and moved slightly to the right. The changes are subtle and just a few of the variety of changes I could have made, but they're crucial to making the line work.

And here's the finished painting. (Notice that I also enlarged the buildings left of the silo, which reduced the size and therefore the importance, of the background hill. I wanted the eye to stay in mid-ground.)

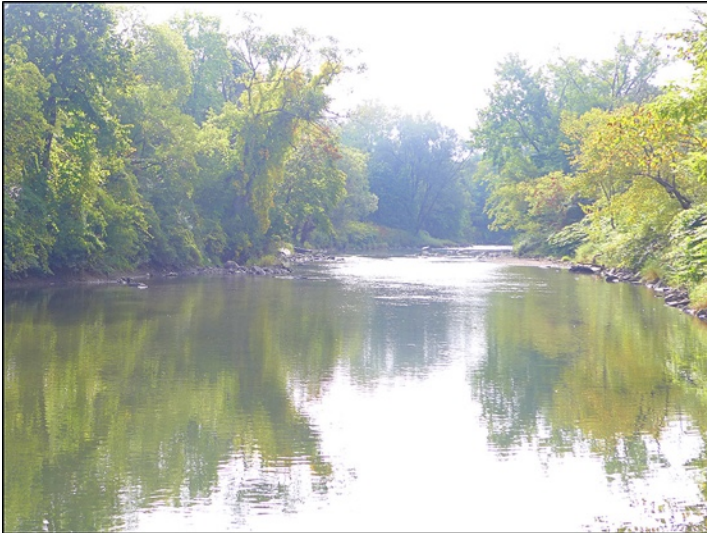


Below are two more examples, showing the photos, the sky-ground edges—both unchanged and composed, and the final paintings. I made the changes based on what I felt was necessary to create a more interesting and dynamic composition. Other artists would have composed the sky-ground line differently. That's fine. There's never a single, correct solution. In workshops, when stressing the importance of variety, I'm often asked about whether a specific edge or form should be soft or hard, light or dark, large or small, etc. More often than not, my answer is simply "Yes." That is, it's rarely important whether this or that element is adjusted this or that way. What's important is that the elements differ! Visual interest in a painting is rooted in variation.

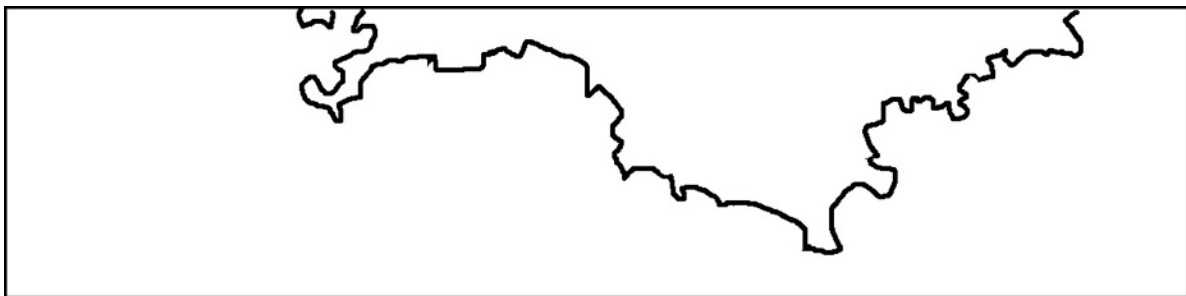
There are few inviolable rules in landscape painting, or in art making in general, but one principle that approaches the status of an Unbreakable Rule is this:

Compose the major shapes in a composition to create unity and rhythm and then vary the forms and edges of those shapes to create variety and interest.

Here are the photos, sky-ground lines, and finished paintings. How would you have composed the scenes?



Here, I felt the tree-sky edge was too uniformly broken up and chaotic, with the pattern of sky holes being similar throughout the length of the line. The chaotic quality of the edges made it more difficult to identify and establish the large, simple masses of the trees and confused the position of those masses in space.

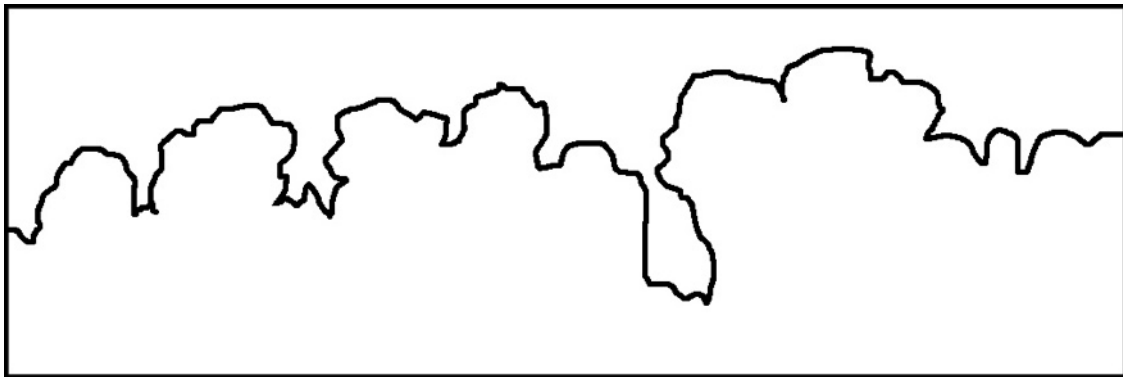


In the finished painting, the masses are clear and simplified. I've tried to balance the rounded but solid edges of some trees with others that are more broken. (In looking at this now with fresh eyes, I could have introduced even more sky holes in selected areas to add a little more variety.)





In the photo, there's plenty of variety in the sky-tree line but it needed organizing. Most of the sky holes were confined to the right, leaving the left side a little heavy. I also wanted to make the masses of the trees more solid, giving me more dark values to offset the lighter values of the snow and sky.



This is the painting after the initial blocking in. It's still very much in progress and the trees will no doubt be tweaked as I continue to work on it. But the edge now has both a greater unity and enough variety to make it interesting. At least, that's the intention.



In the examples below, study how the artists composed the sky-ground line, how they balanced unity and variety and created an interesting rhythm along the length of the line. Ignore everything but that sky-ground line.

J. Francis Murphy



Curt Hanson

Willard Metcalf



Fritz Thaulow



Claude Monet



. . . and the master of the beautifully composed horizon line, George Inness.

When composing a landscape that includes the horizon line, don't rush to copy what you see. Study and compose the line, always working to balance variety and interest with unity and rhythm. It'll be time well spent!

Painting for Sale.

At the insistence of my spouse, Debbie (who is much more of a practical businessperson that I'll ever be), I'm now offering a painting for sale in my newsletter. These will be small paintings—8"x10" to 12"x16"—which were created in the studio or en plein air. Some will be personal favorites or will have served as studies for larger paintings. If you're interested, contact me for more information.



Slow Water, 2015, oil on canvas panel, 8" x 16," studio

study for larger painting

2016 Workshops



February 7–14

Casa de los Artista, Boca de Tomatlan, Mexico

artworkshopvacations.com

This will be my third trip to this venue. The studio is perfect, the food delicious, the village charming, and the scenery exquisite. It's the perfect workshop experience: a week of serious and focused **plein air** painting paired with a varied, fun-filled, and fascinating exposure to Mexican food, people, landscapes, and culture.



April 4–6

The Colonie Art League, Colonie, NY

www.colonieartleague.com

Sorry, but this workshop is now full.



May 17–19

Falmouth Artists Guild, Falmouth, Mass.

www.falmouthart.org

This three-day workshop will focus on painting in the studio while using photographs, sketches, and/or plein air studies as reference. We will explore the limitations of the camera and ways to compensate for so them so that our paintings have the life and spirit of paintings done en plein air. Open to all.



June 9–11

Wethersfield Academy for the Arts, Wethersfield, Conn.

www.wethersfieldarts.org

The focus of this workshop will be painting landscapes en plein air and then moving into the studio to complete them. Open to all.



July 6–10

Hudson River Valley Art Workshops, Greenville, NY

www.artworkshops.com

In this workshop, we will be painting in the studio while using photographs, sketches, and/or plein air studies as reference. We will explore the limitations of the camera and ways to compensate for them: while photographing and then using them to paint.



August 23–25

The Gibson House, Haverhill, New Hampshire

www.gibsonhousebb.com

Painting plein air, rain or shine. The Gibson House is a New Hampshire bed and breakfast that overlooks the beautiful landscapes of New Hampshire's pristine Upper Connecticut River Valley. Meals are included.