

John MacDonald

Newsletter ~ February 2015



UPCOMING WORKSHOPS

2015

APRIL 25 (1-DAY)

DEERFIELD VALLEY ART ASSOCIATION

Deerfield, Massachusetts
www.deerfieldvalleyart.com

MAY 19 (1-DAY)

COLONIE ART LEAGUE

Colonie, New York
www.colonieartleague.com

JULY 28-30 (2 1/2 DAYS)

THE GIBSON HOUSE

Haverhill, New Hampshire
www.gibsonhousebb.com

SEPT 8-11

THE BASCOM CENTER

Highlands, North Carolina
www.thebascom.org

“Use the talents you possess, for the woods would be a very silent place if no birds sang except the best.”

-Henry van Dyke, poet
(1852-1933)

News from the studio. . .

I'm just back from the workshop in Boca de Tomatlin, Mexico, a rustic but beautiful fishing village south of Puerto Vallarta on Mexico's west coast. It was a wonderful group and a spectacular location. Above is a plein air study of a home



in the town of Tuito, about 30 minutes inland from the Boca. We painted at several locations, including a spectacular view of the receding coastline (Carlton Manzano painting the view, at top). I'm already looking forward to returning next year. I hope you'll join us.

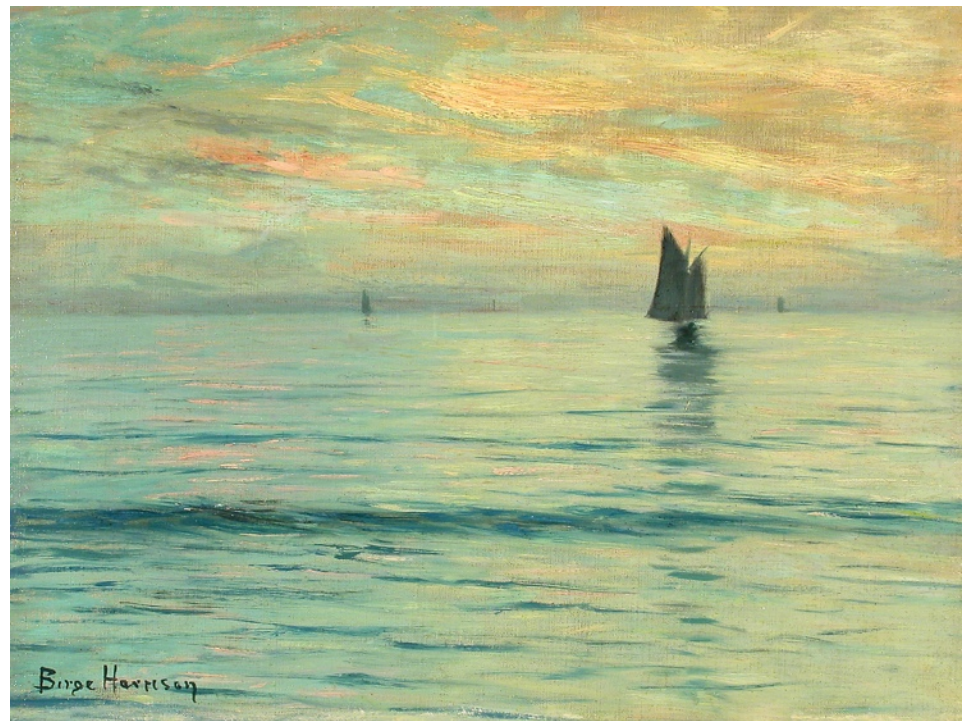
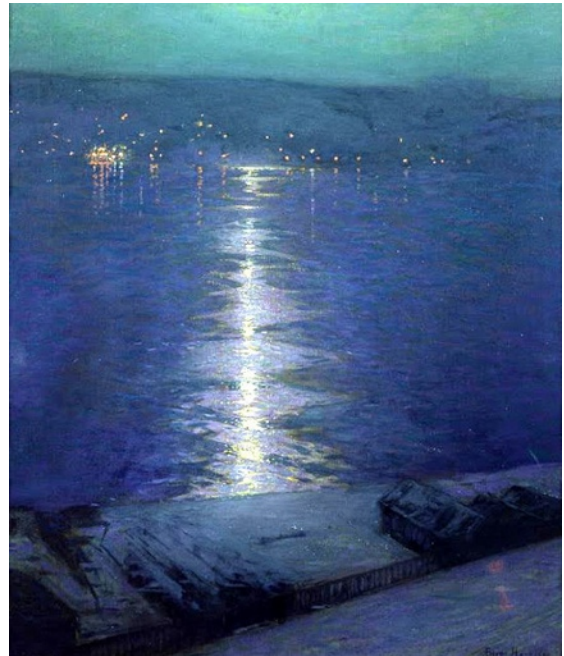
Recommended Artist: Birge Harrison

His book. Two newsletters ago, I recommended the book, *Landscape Painting*, a recently published book by Velatura Press that contained reprints of articles by Asher B. Durand and Birge Harrison. Asher was a leading painter in the Hudson River School. Birge was a prominent artist of the Tonalist movement and director of the landscape school of the Art Students League. A series of lectures that Harrison gave to students in 1909 were later compiled into a

book. It became a standard for the League's artists. I've read it several times and consider it a gold mine of information. It's been a great help to me in understanding color, value, and how they relate to each other.

His paintings. I've yet to find an available catalog of his work but there are ample examples to be found on the internet. Although the color isn't to be trusted, which is true for any online image, enough of the quality of his work comes through to

mark him as a significant American landscape painter. He emphasized painting from life and from intense observation and yet his paintings have the well thought out and planned compositions of studio paintings. His compositions have a beautiful, decorative simplicity to them but never seem overly stylized or contrived. His values are invariably spot on and his manipulation of color temperature within a very narrow value range is masterful. Below are some favorites.



Value + Color: Creating Luminosity, continued . . .

Last month, we saw how the luminosity in snow and skies is created by using contrasting color temperatures within a very narrow value range. The same principle applies to water.

During the recent workshop in Mexico, I couldn't help but notice how the astonishing color contrasts in the clear waters of the Pacific created a sense of luminosity in the water, the same luminosity that is seen in a field of freshly fallen snow. One afternoon during the workshop, I spent my one hour siesta trying to capture that luminosity along a rocky section of the shoreline. Notice in the detail of the water, to the right, how I contrasted yellow/orangish greens against turquoise green/blues in the foreground and then worked upwards with contrasting green/blues against more ultramarine (warmer) blues, all the while keeping the values close together in the entire area.

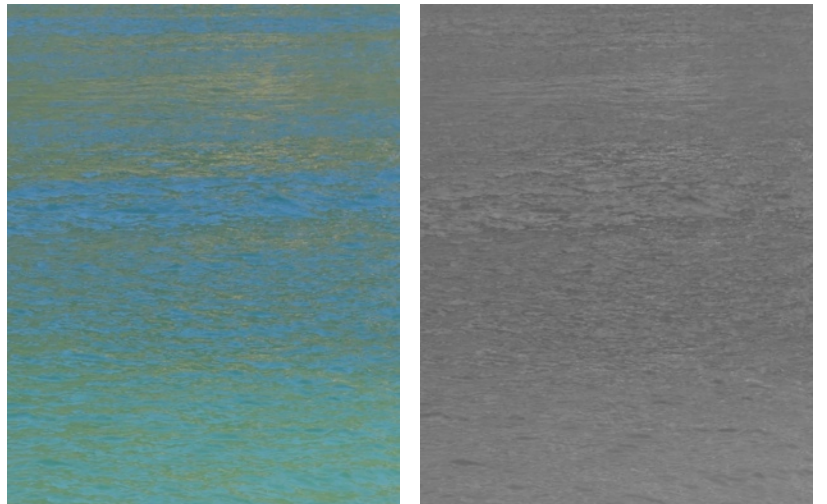


That closeness of the values is much more evident in this black and white copy. By minimizing value contrast, the color contrast is enhanced. In his book, Birge sums it up this way, "Nature deals in broken color everywhere, but she never deals in broken values. The color dances, but the values 'stay put.'"

The color "dances" because of the lack of value contrast.



This principle is obvious in this photo of the water taken from the same location. Look closely and you'll see an intense luminosity created by the bands of blue and yellow-gold moving down into blue and turquoise. Yet when converted to black and white, the image becomes a nearly uniform gray. It is the uniformity of the **values**—their similarity—that allows the **color** to glow!



Let's see how two old masters, Sorolla and Zorn, used this principle to create luminosity when painting water. . .

Joaquín Sorolla

Sorolla painted his canvases, some over 6 feet in height(!) on location, outdoors. No painter has ever captured so convincingly the glow of light on sand, skin and water. Few have used color temperature contrasts so skillfully or to such great effect.

In “Sail Boat” (right), notice the intense color contrast between the water and the reflection of the boy. This color contrast is enhanced by their closeness in value—so close that, when the image is converted to black and white, the reflection is invisible!

In “Children on the Seashore” (below), all the subtle warm and cool notes in the water are nearly identical in value. Even the young girls’ dress is similar! He’s identified a few simple values and stuck to them, making color changes and not value changes when needed. And notice how muted are the colors in the water. Yet they still glow.

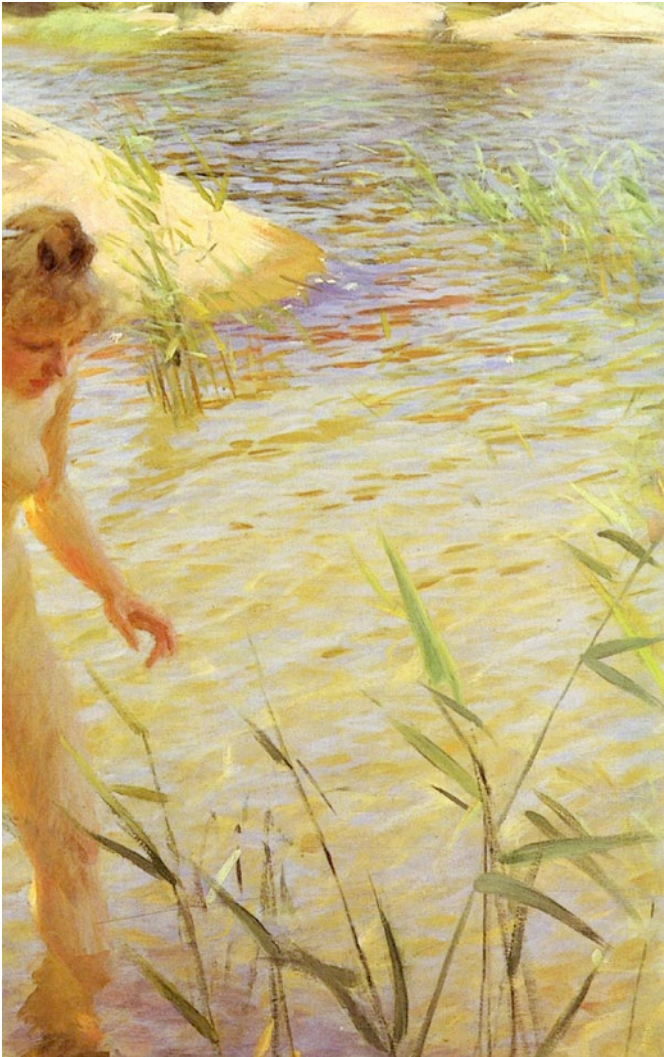


Anders Zorn

Zorn was a Swedish painter, a contemporary of Sorolla, and equally masterful in his handling of light and color.

Here, he used two values in the water: one for the light areas in the foreground and another for the slightly darker reflections in the background. But within each area, notice how he masterfully plays warm against cool while keeping the values as close together as possible. The foreground play of golds against pale blues is particularly masterful.

In the black and white image, the only significant value difference is between the foreground water and the slightly darker background reflections. Within each of those areas, the values are quite close. That's why the color glows.



Now it's your turn. . .

Whether it's a snowscape, seascape, cityscape—the subject matter is unimportant—if you wish to create a sense of luminosity in your paintings, follow these steps:

1. Establish the foundation values by bringing together (massing) similar values so that the entire scene is reduced to 3 to 5 simple shapes of value. This establishes the **value** structure of the painting.
2. In those large, foundation areas in which smaller, secondary values are very close, keep them close! **Look for color temperature changes rather than value changes.**
3. When adding color into a foundation area, instead of painting a single, uniformly cool or warm color, include color(s) of opposite temperature. Play warm and cool against each other, keeping the values similar.

Train your eye to see those color changes. They're in the landscape. Identify them. Paint them.

~ Happy Painting!

2015 Workshops

April 25

The Deerfield Art Assoc., Deerfield, Massachusetts

www.deerfieldvalleyart.com

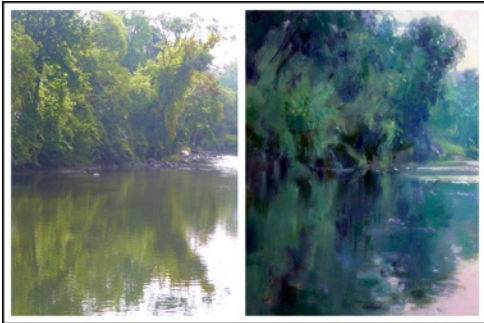


This one-day workshop will focus on studio work: using sketches, plein air sketches, and photos from the field to create larger works in the studio. Enrollment is limited to 12 participants. Members of the Deerfield Art Association will be given precedence. Deerfield is a beautiful, historic town in the Connecticut River valley of western Massachusetts.

May 19

The Colonie Art League, Colonie, N.Y.

www.colonieartleague.com



A one-day studio workshop. We'll address the challenges that arise when painting in the studio using photographic reference. Enrollment for this workshop is limited to 15 participants. Applicants must be members of the Colonie Art League.

July 28–30

The Gibson House, Haverhill, New Hampshire

www.gibsonhousebb.com

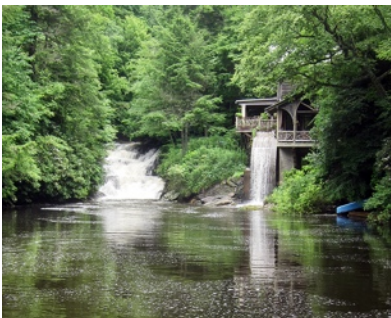


Painting plein air, rain or shine. (In the case of inclement weather, we'll paint beautiful vistas from the comfort of the porch at the Gibson House.) The Gibson House is a New Hampshire bed and breakfast that overlooks the landscape of New Hampshire's pristine Upper Connecticut River Valley. We'll cram a lot of painting into this 2 1/2 day workshop!

September 8–11

The Bascom, Highlands, North Carolina

www.thebascom.org



From Plein Air to Studio. The primary focus of this workshop will be the process of working from on-location plein air sketches, pencil sketches and photographs and then moving into the studio to finish a painting. We'll explore the advantages and limitations of using a camera as well as look at the differences between capturing what is *seen* (a scene) as opposed to creating a *painting*. The Bascom is a wonderful facility in a beautifully scenic area.