

# John MacDonald

Newsletter ~ January 2014



## 2014 WORKSHOPS

FEBRUARY 1-8

### CASA DE LOS ARTISTAS

Boca de Tomatlan, Mexico  
[www.ArtWorkshopVacations.com](http://www.ArtWorkshopVacations.com)

SEPTEMBER 21-27

### HUDSON RIVER VALLEY ART WORKSHOPS

Greenville, New York  
[www.artworkshops.com](http://www.artworkshops.com)

*If people knew how hard I worked to get my mastery, it wouldn't seem so wonderful after all.*

—Michelangelo, (1475-1564)

*Patience is also a form of action.*

—Auguste Rodin, (1840-1917)

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## News from the studio. . .

Sometimes we must accept the fact that external circumstances can keep us out of the studio far longer than we'd prefer. Between the holidays and the nearly weekly cycle of severe winter storms we've been experiencing in New England, I've had less painting time that I'd like. And it's been far too cold to even think about plein air painting. So it goes. It's far better for our art (and our mental health!) to accept the demands on our time and to work when we can with appreciation, seriousness, and joy, than to become frustrated and upset about not being able to work as often as we'd like.

## Resources . . .

### Recommended Reading.

Staying with the theme of learning to accept our limitations, this month's recommended reading consists of two of the best books by Eric Maisel, considered the father of creativity coaching.

The first, *Fearless Creating*, is a thorough examination of the entire

creative process, the traps and problems that can arise at any of its stages, and suggested exercises and strategies designed to help us learn to manage them. It's a terrific book for artists working in any medium.

The second, *Coaching the Artist Within*, is a succinct, ten-step program for becoming a more productive, self-aware, and happy artist.

Maisel, a psychotherapist and writer, has spent a lifetime coaching artists. He knows our fears, doubts, and blocks and provides sensible and practical advice about how to deal with them. They belong on every artist's bookshelf!

## Tips & Techniques

### Let it Snow!

It's that time of year. . .

When the alarm jolted me out of bed at 5:30 a.m. this morning, the outside temperature was 44°. It's now 7:55 p.m., 18° outside, and on way its way down to a predicted low of nearly 0°. Tomorrow's high will be a bitter 7°. What better time to examine the challenges of painting snow!

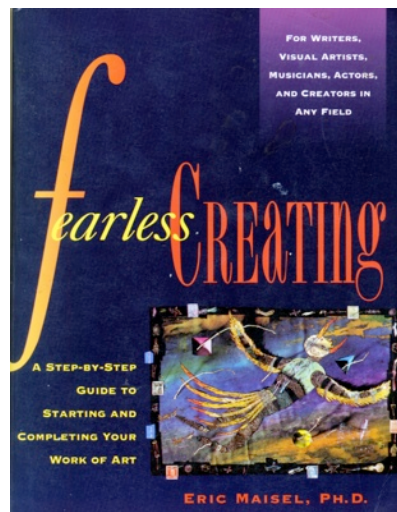
I'd like to go into this topic in much greater detail, but for now let's look as some general rules:

#### 1) It's never pure white.

If you find yourself painting snow with unmixed white pigment, even for the highlights, you've allowed the rest of the painting to become too high-key. Keep some good darks and mid-values in the painting so the snow, even when in shadow, will appear light.

#### 2) It's not that dark, even in deep shadows.

Snow that is in shadow, or under an overcast sky, or at dusk or dawn, will almost always photograph too



dark. And if you use those photos as reference and match the values, chances are the mixtures you use will be too dark, too. Rarely is snow darker than a 50% gray, that is, darker than halfway between white and black.

**3). It's not that blue, even in the shadows.**

Take it for granted that any photograph you take of snow, especially snow in shadows and on a sunny day, will appear much too blue. Yes, it's true that a blue sky will throw a blue light into the shadows on snow, but the color is never as saturated as the blue of the sky. Under an overcast sky, the faint shadows can appear as a warm gray!

**4). There are always warm and cools in snow, in both the shadowed and sunlit areas.**

There are often violet or coolish gray tones in sunlit areas of snow, as well as the warm creams and pale yellows. To make those color contrasts work, keep them very close in value.

Likewise, there are often warm grays or even violets amid the purples and bluish tones in the shadows on snow. Again, keep the values the same so the color contrast will work.

It's these subtle temperature contrasts that give snow its luminosity.

**5). Gradients abound.**

There are always subtle shifts in value or color contrast or both in large areas of snow. The foreground snow will be very slightly darker or lighter and warmer or cooler than areas of snow in the background. There are no rules about the gradients other than they're sure to be there. Look for them!

These gradients create a sense of space and are crucial to prevent the snow from appearing like a cut-out, flat shape on your canvas.

**6). Use hard and soft edges.**

Within a uniformly lit area of snow, it's usually best to keep edges between color changes soft. Where the shadows of snow meet trees, buildings or sky, look for some hard edges (usually at or near your focal point!) while keeping the majority soft. A variety of edges will also help keep snow from looking like a flat shape on your canvas.

## Selection of snow paintings.

During the first two weeks of March, I'll be showing primarily snow paintings with Curt Hanson, at his studio in Cornwall Hollow, Conn. The six paintings below are some of those that I've created over the last two months in anticipation of the show. I've attempted to create a variety of scenes, in which the snow will never look the same but instead capture the endless variety of the winter landscape.













## A gallery of great snow paintings.\*

The chips below each painting are color samples taken from both the light and dark areas of the the snow in the paintings. I've placed them against a neutral, 50% gray to better show the values and color temperatures. It's guaranteed that each color you see on your monitor will NOT match the pigment of the original painting; there are far too many variables as the images were copied from the web, manipulated in Photoshop, and are now displayed on your monitor. What is important to notice is the general value and color temperature relationships and how different the colors of one painting are from another. Snow can be nearly any hue, or saturation.

Remember, ***there are no hard and fast rules about the color of snow.*** It depends entirely on the light and on the color of surrounding objects. Learn to see snow as simple shapes of color. Learn to see the color accurately and you can throw all the rules.

\* I apologize for omitting some of the titles and all the sizes. Most were downloaded from the web and were without titles.

Walter Launt Palmer: title unknown



Willard Metcalf: *Hush of Winter*



Isaak Levitan: *March*





George Inness: *Home at Montclair*



Brian Sweetland: title unknown

