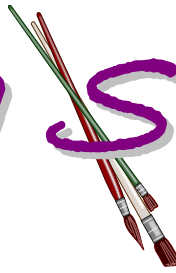




Brush Strokes



By Mary Baumgartner

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WHY VALUES ARE INVALUABLE

The truth of the matter is that all you have to do is LOOK! Here is a painting that says just about all there is to say about values.

However, it didn't get to be this way by accident. For years I have encouraged my students to begin a painting by making a small (thumbnail) sketch of the work to determine placement, the center of interest and where it will be found, and of course establish a foreground, middle ground and background by the values used in the painting.

The preliminary work behind the scenes on this painting is the

part worth writing about. Yes, I once saw a photograph of these swans being fed from a cruise ship, but this painting resembles the photograph only in the somewhat haphazard grouping of the birds. I was so impressed by the values—the strong light, and the darks and lights—that I remember my hands almost trembling with the desire to paint and paint and paint. However, the painting could not have been done without the sketching, the determination of the values and where they were to be placed. I actually counted the swans so that I would end up with an odd number—seventeen, thus the name “17 Swans A’Swimming.” The painting also ended up on a double elephant size sheet of watercolor paper.



After I was fairly certain I had the proper arrangement of the swans on the sketch, I made it larger and into a preliminary drawing. At this time I used my “value pens” to determine the darkest dark and the lightest light, and then I made sure I had at least ten values in this painting. Now it was up to me where to make the lightest light become surrounded by the darkest dark, or at least draw your eye to that swan. I even planned on making two or three of the swans blend together so that you couldn't tell where one ended and the other began. Leaving the drawing a day or two at a time and coming back to it was responsible for the distant swan in the upper right swimming out of the painting. The hardest part of this painting was to color that swan with a glaze when the beauty of its “whiteness” made me have goose bumps. But it had to be done! And the ripples left in the water in the two places, along with the light lavender of the water in the upper left are delightful. The swans all have color, but the color is off-white.

This is where the charts become invaluable. Remember the “off-white” chart? I referred to it constantly and the building of layers of Aureolin, Rose Madder and then Cobalt. Would you say it is successful?