



Brush Strokes



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FINDING YOUR FOCUS (BALANCE)



The word “balance” can be used in this painting in more than one way. The bird needs to balance on the rail, and the painting as a whole must have balance between the dynamic sky and the support system below it.

The artist, Greer Fox, needed a lot of encouragement to begin what was a monotone photograph of a vacation in Jekyll Island, GA. The first thing she had to consider was the horizon line followed closely by the pier in the foreground. The bird on the pier establishes the middle ground connecting with the sky and the light reflections connect both and brings the view into the focal point.

This was a very difficult painting and required a lot of thinking and planning. After painting in a beautiful sky, Greer was puzzled about what color to paint the pier. In the photograph the pier was a cold bluish/brown color, but since it was wood and would represent the closest object in the foreground it had to have a first layer of burnt sienna. This complemented the blue of the water because it has a slight orange tint and the water is quite blue. Now it was up to the artist to figure out how to control this warm and cool and bring it into balance. The water bird at the end of the pier offers a good focal point but of course the reflections of the sun on the water are an integral part of how the lights affect each other.

Remember that in a painting the viewer’s eye is first attracted to the white or lack of color in a painting, and then follows in a counter-clockwise direction around the whole painting looking for more whites. This being the facts, the whitest white in the painting is the bird and it is offset into the upper left quadrant of the painting. Now the eye is led to the white of the reflections and over to the right quadrant and the sun streaking down on the water. Now the eye can follow the lightest light in the sky on down to the lightest light on the pier.

Planning ahead is the secret to all the above. If you decide what it is you want the viewer to see first, then you have solved problem number one. Place this focal point near the center but offset either into one quadrant of the painting. From that point on think about where your eye would travel next. And remember that the focal point is the “whitest white against the darkest dark” or in the reverse, the “darkest dark against the whitest white.” Next time you are in a gallery remember the first painting that really stopped you in your tracks and why. Often this will be the reason.

Watercolor artists are noted for not making these audience-grabbers with dark enough values or white enough whites. This too is a notable point for success. Remember warms and cools as well. The warms represent closeness to the front and cools away toward the back. Photographs flatten but paintings enhance and show foreground, middle ground and background along with correct perspective.