

Painting the Center of Interest.

Many of us are using our own photos. If one has a photo and really likes it, one can crop it and even paint it with different lighting. The subject matter may be pleasing but how to make it “pop” requires using and placing a good “center of interest”. Center of interest is often tossed around but knowing how to incorporate it into one’s paintings is an important technique to use to create that dynamic painting we all long for. The painting is no longer “flat” with the viewer wondering where to start looking.

The center of interest is usually placed in an upper or lower quadrant on either side. This is not a hard fast rule, but a center of interest is almost never in the dead center of a picture. Often the center of interest is related to the light source.

Review the picture below taken from the cover of the last issue of Color magazine



The center of interest is on the left eye and ear. It is the first area the viewer goes to. The right-hand side is more muted and not as sharp.

Here is a picture I took and may want to turn into a CP painting:



To turn this into a painting I would transfer only the flowers and bush and add my own muted background. I would brighten the top two back left flowers and leaves with bud. I would diminish the bright green bud below the big right flower and darken the lower flower.

In this picture below I would make the folded over flower the center of interest. I don't have to do any adjusting as the bright area is that folded over amaryllis, and it is in the upper corner. Notice that the other flower is darker and the background somewhat blurred.



Now let's look at a professional painting:



Notice how bright the white pitcher and the front white lily is? Your eye goes right to it (at least I hope so). The peaches in the dish are a darker tone with the colors close in value. While the edge of the white pitcher is against a blue bowl and the front lily petals are against dark backgrounds. The center of interest contains the lightest lights against the darkest darks. The main horizontal line is not across the middle but well below the center.

Someone once told me when almost finished with a painting "Close your eyes and open them quickly". The center of interest should be the first thing you see in the painting. I use this often. If you have painted a white dog resting on its paws, close your eyes and open them quickly. Do you see the paws first and not the face? If so, mute the color of the paws with greys so they do not dominate the picture. One most likely wants the viewer to see the dog's eyes and face first and not the paws.

Go to Google Images and search Still Life of the Dutch painters. They were masters in bringing the viewers eye to the most important area of their paintings. One should see this first and then travel through the picture to see the more muted but still interesting areas secondly.