

Workshop Wisdom / Annie O'Brien Gonzales

Participating in a workshop is an opportunity to hone our skills, no matter our current abilities. Acrylic artist Annie O'Brien Gonzales shares her insights on what we can learn and how to get the most out of the workshop experience.

Q. What are students searching for in your classes and how do you guide them to success?

Annie: Students are often frustrated because their paintings don't turn out the way they want, and they want to know how to develop their own style. I always remind them that learning to paint requires three things: heart, eye and hand (or passion, vision and skill). If they have a passion for painting and paint a lot (my "no excuses, time at the easel" advice) they will develop their own vision and style. They will improve.

Q. What are students struggling with the most and how do you help them find resolution?

Annie: Mixing colors is on the top of the list. My style of painting is intuitive, but I have also developed a library of go-to color schemes. I advise students to develop color-mixing charts that they can reference while painting. I also encourage them to methodically choose a color palette and try to stick with it. If they do this in the beginning, color choice will become easier. If they don't have a plan, paintings can become chaotic pretty quickly.

Q. Are students curious about the vast selection of media?

Annie: Most definitely. They want to learn about all of them, how to use them and how to combine them. The options can be overwhelming and sometimes artists throw everything on a painting, which can lead to confusion. I take students through a step-by-step process of sorting out the types of media beginning with the different thicknesses and finishes of acrylic media, and then transition to textured media. I advise

students to always come back to the painting and let it tell them what it needs next, solving one issue at a time. I am a big believer in shifting between spontaneity and thoughtful process.

Q. What has being an instructor taught you over the years?

Annie: As I am teaching I'm discovering how people learn to paint, and it's fascinating. I couple adult learning theory (which I studied in graduate school) with what I observe from students in each class. While I don't believe art school is necessary to learn to paint I do think there are some basic lessons that can form a foundation of skills and technical understanding that lead to more successful paintings.

It's easy to get lost somewhere in the process; to become unsure of how to improve the work. A good mentor or workshop instructor can assess where the student is in the process, and help to jump-start the progress.

Q. Finish this statement: To get the most out of a class, students should...

Annie: To get the most out of a class students should target their learning. Determine what they really need to learn at this point in their development, and find a class about that subject. Then go to the workshop with the intention of trying everything there is to learn there. When a student is unwilling to try anything new and insists on painting the way they always have during a workshop, they won't move forward with their work. A final word of advice—focus on process and not product. /aa



Take a workshop with Annie O'Brien Gonzales—visit annieobriengonzales.com for dates and locations.

Santa Fe Summer
(acrylic on canvas, 20x16)