

“ The Structure of the Visual Moment ”
a 3-day outdoor painting intensive with Stuart Shils

slide talk the night before the first day:
**“The Perceptual Moment: The Nature of Perception and
The Perception of Nature”**

General Orientation:

During these three days we'll focus on cultivating perceptual discrimination and visual clarity by engaging in close, critical looking out at nature and the relation of that to constructing a drawing or painting. We're asking ourselves exactly what we are seeing, how we are seeing, and then what to make of it on paper, panel or canvas.

The class is designed to push the mid range to advanced painter (alas, not for beginners) further into a kind of visual boot camp, each day a concentrated and comprehensive work schedule, but also fun and productive. Outside, not because there is any virtue necessarily to the outdoors in terms of “subject matter”, but rather, with light and time moving, there is a heightened sense of urgency, a parenthetical compression between beginning and end that forces a kind of attack or posture of alertness within our state of mind.

In the tradition/spirit of “first strike” or *alla prima*, emphasis will be placed on 1) examining the processes of perceptual discrimination in front of nature; 2) the editorial response that follows in the head of the painter and how that takes form graphically; and perhaps most importantly, 3) on shaking up and/or questioning what is meant by “finish”. We are more concerned here with conceptual clarity – using the brush and pencil – than with making anything “pretty”, sale - able or “trophy” like. With painting, one never really gets a trophy anyway, it's always a work in progress.

In addition to the daily outdoor sessions (8:30 – 5:00 ish), on the evening before the first day there will be a 90 minute slide talk presenting paintings and drawings made by past and modern masters, to lay out a foundation of visual themes for the next three days. (All participants should please attend, as it will be impossible to go over the same ground the next morning.) Within those slides I'll discuss how, via graphic organization, how we look at/and or make sense of construction, how we develop paint and drawing language, and how different artists have used the processes of working outside (both directly and in the studio) to achieve *visual unity* in their responses.

On the second day, either at lunch or in the evening, there will be another slide talk describing the evolution of my own work and influences over the last 28 years. Please note: it is not my work per se that I'm interested in

you seeing with any thought of “how to”. But, by describing a progression or sequence of experience, I’ll discuss what I’ve done, what has been on my mind and how this relates to what we are doing outside, with the hope that it has some relevance to or resonance with your own questions and inquiry.

Also each day there will be a demonstration, and again, the point of those will not be to teach you how to make a painting that looks like a Stuart Shils – that is hardly my intention and I discourage that approach. But rather, to discuss via demonstration, a cluster of concerns: 1) how to enter into the work and establish an immediate formal direction; 2) to suggest what is *perceptual unity* (as opposed to an inventory like description of objects) and to examine what is *editorial discrimination*; and last but not least, 3) to lay out an approach to the development of color on the palette and its relationship to the painting.

Also, there will be two short chapter like focuses on, 1) methods of and purposes of drawing in the sketch book in preparation for painting; and 2) color unity within the painting.

During the morning of the second day we’ll address the issue of *color unity/color complexion* as the other critical component of composition. Color is not a matter of using or just putting down a bunch of colors. More important is nailing distinct *chromatic mood*, recognizing at once what a particular place consists of in terms of the large *color chord and complexion*. We’ll make 15, 20 and 30 minute color studies directly from nature to understand what is out there in that moment and then how to hold that relationship together in the painting.

Drawing and compositional strategy will be our primary concern for several hours on the morning of the last day, reinforcing and strengthening drawing skills, which are really perceptual motor skills. Without drawing there can be no painting - how the hand holds a pencil or crayon is how the hand holds the brush. And, the energy of drawing informs the energy of painting. Where and how the eye travels, both through nature and through and around the work being produced is dependent on a process of seeing and inventing structure. The division of the sketchbook page graphically is the foundation of the painting to follow. Strength of composition is always the bottom line.

Regardless of what we think we “know”, before nature each one of us is reminded how much there is still to do and how substantial one’s muscles need to be in order to contend with the complexity of what we see and then with what we invent. This class is designed to rationally/verbally examine a sensory read of the material world, the structure of the perceptual moment.

“I must impress upon myself that I know nothing at all, for that is the only way to make progress.” DEGAS