

An Introduction to Natural Painting

(Based on the book *Beauty Muse: Painting in communion with Nature* by Lisa Lipsett)

...the “fit” between each species and its “environment” reflects not merely a material dependence, but rather ... a resonance which is affective and spiritual.

- Kidner



Creating naturally strengthens an enduring sense of ecological self. We can create with Nature and find ourselves. We can also dive deeply into ourselves through creating and find Nature. We can see our own natural patterns, colours and forms emerge on the page. Painting clears out old blockages, transforming old habits and making space for new connections. We can see tensions soften and resolve as painting both illustrates and changes how we feel. We learn to melt into change, admire delicacy and vulnerability, accept the unknown, feel our way through and resonate with the energy of the day and the season. We paint ourselves. Not the outward tracing but rather the fullness that lives within the surface. We can return to Nature and connect more deeply.

Through painting we can better understand natural principles and processes like self change (metamorphosis), developmental periods and cycles, part whole relationships, natural pattern, and the creativity that emerges from holding oppositional tensions. Painting soothes the weary soul, deepens our commitment to Nature and helps us to understand Nature's creative processes from the inside out. When we create with Nature we access a rich source of knowledge about Nature and ourselves. When we re-learn this creative language of life and become deeply rooted in its governing creative principles we live in harmony with Nature and self once again.

A painting practice evolves when we commit to following the flow of what fits easily in the moment. We resonate with Nature when we move out of the planning mind and trust what inspires, has life and enhances intimacy. When we impersonate natural processes we feel more natural ourselves and begin to understand how nature works.

The universe lives through us. We are the painter and the painting.

-Thomas Berry

Retreat in Port Burwell Ontario

A general pattern for following a Natural Painting practice is the following:

We set up the paints, water, brushes and paper and let what was meant to happen that day, take place as best as it can. We paint with "No Plan". Since our most direct experience of Nature comes in relationship to our own bodies, we close our eyes and run our hands across the palette of coloured paints to choose a colour. We can paint with our eyes closed, alternating which hand to use, all the while choosing the colours "blindly". By feeling our way through a painting we move from the planning mind to a place where natural body expressions can reveal themselves. So in summary:

set an intention
develop a ritual for setting up
drop into silence and breath
soften body tightness
feel the deep rooting of the feet
choose the paints with eyes closed
with eyes closed trust where the hands lead
follow what fits in the moment
be spontaneous and playful
stay mindfully in the present moment
commune with images as living beings
record the experience
reflect on the experience
close with a ritual
make a small offering to give thanks

Setting up for Natural Painting

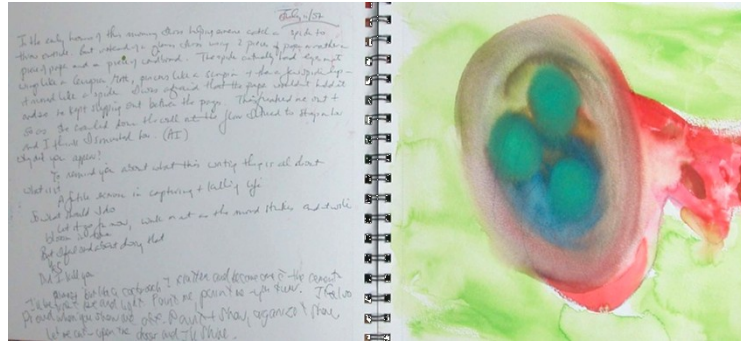
Gather together watercolour paper, a basic watercolour paint kit, water, a wiping cloth, and a quiet place.

Use a pallet of watercolour paints with the colours dried, laid out and ready to go. Each colour section needs to have a big enough surface for your finger to make contact. Set up your materials so that everything is easily available. Include a rag for hand wiping, a small container of water with extra easily available and maybe gloves if you are concerned about dirty hands, although getting dirty can be part of the fun experience.



I start with a small 8-1/2" x 11" painting first and then move to larger sizes later in a session.

Painting Journal



A painting journal is a place to record initial feelings, set intentions, jot notes while painting and to dialogue with images.



The intentions we set before, during and after painting deeply colour our experience. When painting is guided by the intention to open to what is natural it will blossom. Like an arrow launched from a bow, what is experienced, what is created and how it is understood are all a reflection of the archer's original intention. Writing these intentions down before we start to paint allows us to return from our painting journey with fresh insights.

After a few months, my practice of Natural Painting began to include journaling. I now have two writing places available while I paint. Before I paint, I record how I feel and what my intentions for the session are on the back of my watercolour page, often using both hands in sequence. I also have a second process journal nearby that I fill with painting observations, challenges that were overcome, new insights gained, dreams remembered and interesting inspirations for next creations. I also record thoughts, impressions and free associations after a painting is finished. When I feel finished I write a small note to myself about the process and what fit for me. I use my journal as a place to record reflections and poetry. It offers companionship and witnessing. Writing down impressions after painting also helps us to begin to hear the stories images tell.

To start a session, you can write how you feel, set an intention or ask a question like: Where am I at today? How does this feeling look? What more do I need to know? What does this image have to share? Sometimes you can set an intention like: I intend to follow where the paints lead, or today I intend to paint sadness.....

Create a Painting Journal

Take this time to locate a spiral bound watercolour book for Natural Painting. Also find or make a small book that you can use for recording thoughts, ideas, intentions and inspirations while you paint

Ritual

Rituals affirming the interconnectedness of the human and the nonhuman worlds exist in every primitive culture. The existence of these rituals attests to the fact that our sense of separation has ancient roots in our species. Their existence also suggests that effort is needed to maintain our relationship with the rest of Nature.

-John Seed

Is there something special you'd like to say or do before and after each session to ask permission and show gratitude?

To paint naturally involves creating rituals. We can paint in the same place each time, set up our materials methodically, gather water, fill containers with colours, open our watercolour book and select a clean page. There is a smooth transition that happens when painting is ritually set up in this manner.

Being consistent about how you set up helps to prepare for the transition to a different way of being. Painting regularly also helps to make the transition more fluid. It is as though images wait for a chance to be expressed. When given the chance they appear out of nowhere and soon come to expect their creative playtime. So developing a practice involves ritualizing both the way of moving through a painting and the way we incorporate painting into our daily lives.

Where do you plan to work? Can you create a space that is uniquely yours for painting in?

A ritual beginning to a painting session is also a good idea so that the body-mind can relax into pattern. Ritual focuses an intention for the painting session helping us to open to new ways of seeing. It acts like a container of sorts that helps the painter enter a painting. A familiar place and regular time to ease the entry into the process is useful. A cloak to wear, a painting shirt, a painting hat, a candle to light, a signal of sort to self and others that a sacred space is being entered all help to set the stage for a meaningful session. When we're finished, we can leave in our own paintings out to dry and reverse the ritual setting up process clean up.

Take time to develop your own ritual for setting up, creating mood and taking down your painting session.

What are three ways to make a ritual out of how you incorporate painting into your daily life?

What pattern can you develop for yourself? Maybe you like painting in the morning, or after a shower, or after exercising....

