

TEN TIPS FOR INTUITIVE PAINTING

Nancy Fletcher Cassell

OVERVIEW

Intuitive or Process Painting allows individuals to travel a private path where they can uncover images of their inner selves through painting.

Intuitive Painting is a tool for beginners as well as advanced painters. Play is encouraged. The goal is not to make paintings for exhibition or to learn specific techniques. Rather, the goal is to allow yourself the space to be inside color, paint, and process while locating the inner core of your creative self. Intuitive painting or process painting emerged out of basic art therapy techniques. What follows are materials I developed for workshops.

TIP ONE: PAINT IN MEDITATION

Set up your environment so nothing physical about your process will fight back, block your efforts, or be inconvenient. As in traditional meditation, let thoughts come and go through your mind. Give yourself free time without interruption. Don't multitask, don't resist. Once you begin, keep putting paint on the paper unless you truly need a break.

Preparation is the key to letting go. You don't want to get bogged down in your materials or by your thoughts. Prepare your painting area and materials beforehand. Pre-mix a range of water-based paint colors in small containers with lids. Use inexpensive tempera or acrylics and have a selection of brush sizes available, several clean-up cloths and two containers for water.

Place all of this on a table or rolling cart near your easel or painting wall. (I prefer to paint on the wall, using masking tape to attach the work to the surface.) Use any quality of white paper you desire, but nothing so expensive that you worry about how much paper you use or the quality of the finished artwork. If you are a long-time painter, try moving away from any painting materials that require heavy techniques. Let go of your normal methods.

TIP TWO: PAINT AS A FORM OF HEALING

Go gently and trust the process of applying paint to paper. Do not sketch out a composition; let one occur spontaneously. The Abstract Expressionist painters often made reference to the painter being aware of what a painting was trying to say and following its lead. These methods push you toward that goal.

Depending on your degree of concern over releasing control, you may set up a check point with a friend or invite a trusted friend to paint with you (suspending normal conversation).

Possible Affirmations: My voice is clear and strong. I openly express myself. I release all expectations. I totally accept myself in this moment.

TIP THREE: PAINT AS A METHOD OF JOURNAL-KEEPING

Use a journal or sketchbook as a part of your process. Make a few notes before you begin to paint. Trust your actual paintings to evolve into series of visual journals.

Begin by asking yourself a question or two. Write down affirmations to act as triggers to begin painting. Don't attempt to force anything or aim for particular results. Let it happen and remember, deep issues can quickly come up. Do not sketch out compositions in your journal; let images occur spontaneously as you take brush to paper.

Picasso once said, "All art is a self-portrait." Over the years, I have found this to be true in surprising ways. While completing an MFA in drawing, I began to

use Transactional Analysis methods as tools for my day-to-day artwork and drawing journals. These methods allowed images to emerge from a much deeper level. Several years after I began to teach, I discovered individuals who promoted and taught expressive-therapy techniques. I began taking time away to participate in courses to enhance my personal development and to gain information to share with students.

TIP FOUR: PAINT TO SILENCE YOUR INNER CRITIC

Conventional opinion is the ruin of our souls. -- Rumi

Give your inner critic the boot. The critic will be available for another time. Know for certain that the art you are making in this moment, in this session, is not for public display or for sharing with anyone.

Listen to your intuitive self. Know this is play. Do not over-think or evaluate anything about your painting or your thought processes. Do not use labels of good or bad. Try singing or humming a favorite song while you move around your work space. Try a yoga pose or a little Tai Chi. Dance a bit. Do anything that frees up your body and your mind.

Accept and allow your responses to flow around you like water, even when they are painful. Defensiveness will defeat you. Defensiveness is an attempt at control that often appears in the form of verbal explanations about the work. Don't describe in your mind or otherwise; just do the work. Release yourself.

TIP FIVE: PAINT AS A RESOURCE FOR LIVING A FULL LIFE

Groove on the eternal now. -- Alan Watts

It's never too late. Know that everyone possesses the seeds of creativity. During open studios and exhibits, men and women frequently approach me to say how they are definitely not creative people. Women especially want to tell me how they were not allowed to paint, or even consider themselves to have any potential as artists, early in their lives. They are sad now, they say, that it is too late.

It is, in fact, never too late. The spark of creativity exists in all of us throughout our lives. Award yourself the opportunity of making and viewing art. Enrich your life.

TIP SIX:
PAINT AS A RELEASE FROM EVERYDAY STRESS AND
COMPETITION

Artists today think of everything they do as a work of art. It is important to forget about what you are doing, then a work of art may happen. -- Andrew Wyeth

Step away from the outside world. Use predetermined messages as triggers to alleviate your fears. Several years ago, I developed and taught “*Paint As You Are!* ©” workshops. I printed and distributed sets of small message cards intended to encourage freedom in the painting process. When feeling blocked or hesitant, each student used his or her cards to help move beyond fear or limitations.

Here are some *trigger cards* from *Paint as You Are!*

Stop searching - you are here. Love the material. Offend yourself. Allow the light. Smile at your painting. Breathe. Add something. Crawl into the surface. Use your anger. Use your fear. Test your colors. Forgive yourself. Forget who you think you are. Steal your own heart.

TIP SEVEN: PAINT TO REST AND RENEW YOUR SPIRIT

Paint as an act of devotion; drop the veil of normal existence. -- Sam Scott

Startle yourself out of your everyday mind to become your instinctive self. Give yourself a vacation without leaving home. Relax and know that from whatever level you are now approaching painting, all is well in this moment. You do not require outside definition. All that you need exists within you.

The current art system encourages overt competition. It also establishes an atmosphere that often turns students into artists who do not demand to learn,

but demand to be acknowledged as “Talents” before they face the unknown and explore their range of abilities.

TIP EIGHT:
PAINT TO FEED YOUR PROFESSIONAL ART PROCESS

Take away all expectations. For the time being, separate the intuitive painting process from the process you use to achieve finished art works for display out in the world.

Don't think about galleries or your fellow artists or even remotely consider what family or former mentors would think of the work before you. This can be most difficult for those of us who are accustomed to possessing a skill, something we receive praise and earn money from on a daily basis. Use all of the steps discussed in this material. Know that whatever the physical results of these intuitive paintings are – even if nothing in them will ever be used directly in your professional work – they will feed your work on a deep and rewarding level. They can be necessary to the further development of your art.

TIP NINE:
PAINT TO RELEASE YOURSELF FROM CREATIVE BLOCKS

Dive deep into this process. Use as many tools as possible to feed your work. These methods will allow work in any medium to flourish. Focus on sound, language, form, color, senses or sensations. Combine your work process with reading poems, listening to music of all types, reading materials and viewing objects from all points of view and times in history. Keep feeding your mind. Stay alive. Awake. Use all of your personal experiences, positive or negative, to influence your creative work. Allow art to happen.

One of my favorite books is, *You Have to Say Something*, by Zen master Dainin Katagri. I have adapted his thoughts on spiritual practice to painting practice in the following manner: The changes that occur through painting practice are not really your business. If you make them your business, you will try to change your paintings directly. If you try to change your painting directly, such as, “How can I paint exactly the landscape or person I see?” no matter how long

you work at it, you will not truly satisfy yourself. So if you want to paint strong pictures, you need to form the routine of doing small things, day by day, image by image, sensation by sensation. Your paintings will be changed beyond all expectations.

TIP TEN: PAINT TO GIVE YOURSELF LIFE

I've been absolutely terrified every moment of my life and I've never let it keep me from doing a single thing I wanted to do. -- Georgia O'Keefe

Don't wait. Painting is only an idea until you begin. Forget about wanting, needing, or expecting support from others. Forget about people liking or praising your art work. Painting in this manner can help release fear on all levels in all areas of your life.

My high school art teacher and dear friend confided she had years of art ideas and work she planned to make upon her retirement. She delayed making the art she planned to make all those years while she was counseling, guiding and encouraging the rest of us, only to pass away the year she retired.

Another close friend, nearer my own age, told me she never painted a single painting in her life that was just for herself. I believe she may have made one or two, but the conflict of making them and dealing with varied responses from family and other artists was more of a burden than she could tolerate. She truly made some beautiful images, but they weren't taking her in the direction she wanted to travel. Sadly, she also came to this realization at the end of her life.

Author's note: Over the years I have enjoyed a wide variety of workshops and ongoing classes utilizing paint, clay, writing, movement and voice practices with Paulus Berensohn, M.C. Richards, Arunima Orr, Stuart Cubley, Mary Pierce Brosmer, Sam Scott, Susan Kammeraad Campbell, Leatha Kendrick, Avia Gold, Julia Cameron and Eric Maisel. I am most grateful to these artists for sharing their time and work processes.

ABOUT NANCY FLETCHER CASSELL

Nancy Fletcher Cassell resides in Northern Kentucky and has received grants in visual art from The Kentucky Arts Council, The Southern Arts Federation/NEA Regional Fellowship Program, The Kentucky Foundation for Women and Art Matters. She has held solo exhibitions at The Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Ohio and The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Ky. Cassell has also received fellowships to Yaddo and to The Virginia Center for Creative Arts and her poems have been published in the *Water-Stone Review*, *Still: the Journal* and *Greater Cincinnati Poets and Writers for Peace and Justice*. Visit her website at nancyfletchercassell.com.

