

4 Painting Fears and How to Overcome Them

When I teach workshops across the country I often see students paralyzed by fear - so fearful they find it difficult to paint. I am not talking about all workshop students, just a small percentage. I believe all have some degree of fear when beginning a workshop, there are only a small group that let the fear overtake them. I also hear it from other artists (not workshop students), particularly in online forums or discussions about painting.

After studying these fears for awhile, I believe they all originate from 4 types:

1. Fear to Try Something New. Even though students are taking a workshop to learn how to do things in a different way or learn something new, some are so fearful to let go of how they always do things, that they have a difficult time trying anything new. It is easy for them to fall back into old habits rather than pushing themselves out of their comfort zone to learn something new.

All of these videos that I have been doing for the last three months were scary for me at the beginning. The only videos I had previously filmed were just me painting with the camera to my back. I had never really faced the camera before to film a video of me talking. I knew, however that it was the key to me making a more direct connection with my audience, so I put away my fears and got to work.

I think that is what you must do. Compartmentalize the fear or push it away so that your will to accomplish a goal is greater than your fear.

2. Fear of Making Mistakes. I don't really believe there are any mistakes in painting, only choices. You choose to do this or another thing and that takes you down a path, but I'm not sure there are really mistakes. You may make a choice that doesn't align with your intentions for the painting, but likewise that is not a mistake. We have to remember we are artists working with paint, canvas and paper; not heart surgeons who literally hold someone's heart (and life) in their hands. If we do something we don't like we can simply paint over it or throw it away - no one gets harmed in the making of art! Everything we paint can be reversed, unlike many other things in life. So please don't be afraid to make the wrong choice - you can change it anytime.

3. Fear of What Others Will Think. This is a big one, because we all feel or have felt peer pressure at sometime in our lives. The herd mentality can be very powerful. Most of my workshop students are women over the age of 45. I must confess that I hear too many times that their spouses say things like: You spend too much money on painting supplies; I don't think your paintings are very good; I don't know why you are taking an abstract painting course you aren't good at those; and on and on.

To remedy a situation where a family member or friend has that attitude, I would not show them the work or talk to them about my activities regarding painting. Most people are uneducated in the process anyway and their opinions, while maybe well-meaning, are only negative and hurtful. I try to distance myself from that and surround myself with those that are supportive, encouraging and helpful - and that is what I attempt to do in my workshops.

What I have learned over the last 26 years of painting is to paint for myself and not for others. I am not concerned that some may dislike my paintings - I have thousands of people that love what I do, and for that I am very grateful. Learn to paint for yourself because you love it, because it makes you feel good, because that is the way you express your feelings and because it is part of who you are. Please don't let others make you afraid to express the real you.

4. Fear Their Work is Not Good Enough. Not good enough for what? Not good enough to be interesting? Not good enough to put on the wall? Not good enough to get into a show? I sometimes think we, as artists are the most results oriented people in the world because they think everything that they paint has to be a masterpiece. That is such nonsense! There are no masterpieces and no perfection in art. If you are a perfectionist, don't be an artist or you'll be constantly disappointed.

I think we need to change the narrative from painting for results to painting because we love the process of painting. If you focus on the joy that you bring to painting by enjoying the process of making the work, then those joyful feelings will come out in your paintings. The work will be a reflection of your emotions - the real you. If you take this approach you will never have to worry about the results, because they will be a reflection of your love of the process of making art. And isn't that what we as artists are looking for?