

SUSAN K. BLACK FOUNDATION ARTIST WORKSHOP

DUBOIS, WYOMING ~ SEPTEMBER 2009

David Rankin's "Gray Studies Demo"

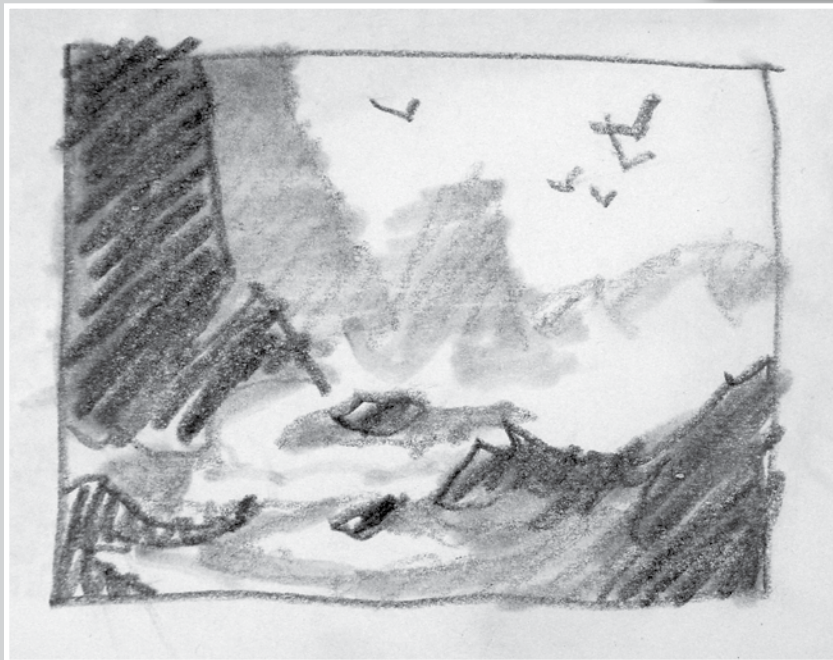
During this workshop David will demonstrate his unique process for developing better Value Relationships in both Studio & Plein Air paintings.

This following PDF Training file is from one David recently designed & used in one of his Artist Training Classes in Cleveland, Ohio. It outlines his basic procedures and shows the 2 different processes that he uses... one using graphite, the other using Paynes Gray watercolor.



In this demo, David will demonstrate both techniques and how to use them in the field or in the studio.

And he will show you can use these procedures to improve the visible results in your paintings by improving your values.



Most artists today tend to start painting before they've evaluated their subject's values & white design. This is a critical step in Watercolor, but it is also a skill-set that every artist should develop, no matter what medium they normally paint with.

David starts painting... with a pencil first!



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Maine Lighthouse/ Gray Study ~ 10 x 14"

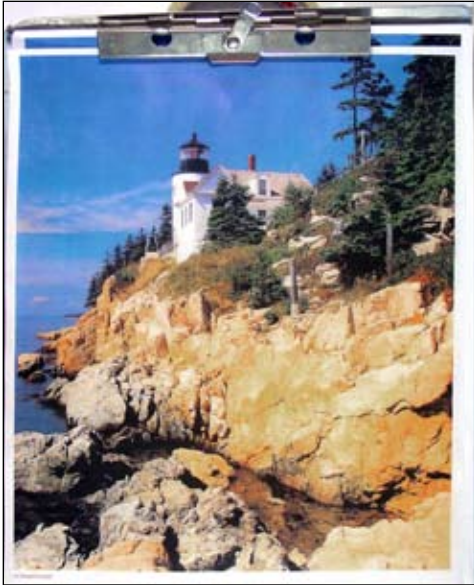
Gray Studies

Developing enhanced Value Skills by working with Paynes Gray Studies

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Bass Harbor Lighthouse
in Maine

Simplify

The Process Let's review the process leading to the finished painting.

Below you'll see my Design & Value Study. This is how I usually start working on a painting... with my eye and a pencil first. This famous lighthouse has a very distinct "White Design". And you will notice in the photo reference that there is very little... if any... actual whites outside of those in the lighthouse itself.



So that is what I focused on. In fact, in my sketch I have eliminated this rocky cliff face. The purpose of these kinds of sketches is "not" to make pretty pictures, but rather to begin testing out the "White Design" and values of any subject.



Gray Studies Although Graphite Studies are my normal 1st step in the initial stage of evaluating any subject, I will often go one step further by knocking out one of these "Gray Studies" to try out the White Design that I have developed in Graphite. I do these in a very simplistic manner using only Paynes Gray on cheap paper. This is in fact a unique skill that all painters should develop, regardless of whether they work in oils, acrylics, pastels, or watercolor, as this stage helps crystallize the overall value structure of any subject.

This one above took about 10-15 minutes, but it has all of the components that will help me paint better & faster without making critical value or design errors in the final. I can then devote myself to the painting skills themselves.

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Evaluating Values Here is a famous Lighthouse in Frankfort, Michigan. My sister's cottages are just 10 minutes from here. And I have painted this lighthouse many times.

But look at this photo of the lighthouse. For many artist's the ability to see & evaluate "Color Values" remains a difficult task under all circumstances. But the place to practice developing your skills in this area... "Is Not" out on location working directly from Nature. The overall impact of the huge expanse of vista will overwhelm one's senses too easily.

The place to practice & refine these skills is not in plein air... but back in your studio.

Then once you have refined these skills a bit, they will serve you better when you do try to work on location.

At first... the easiest thing to work with is Black & White photos. But then... progress to working with color photos.

The objective is to study & evaluate any subject to try and recognize where the lightest areas are. The reason that this is so crucial is because in using my painting methods... we'll then use the middle values to define these lighter areas... in the very first washes and brushwork.

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It's all about the White Design

Remember... in my basic working method I always try to define the "whitest... lightest... brightest" areas of a subject first.

Next week I will send you an actual step-by-step recipe for this method. But you notice here that I've only used a few values to define this subject... a couple mid-value grays... and a couple darker darks... plus of course the white of the paper.

I do these quick Gray Studies in order to establish the "White Design" and to evaluate the overall value relationship between elements... first!

This size Gray Study should normally take only about 10-15 minutes to finish. Fast & Easy!

Start Small

Here are 2 versions of my Gray Study technique. This smaller one is the version I use the most. This is shown "Actual Size"... usually 4 x 6 to 5 x 7".

I do a rapid pencil drawing/sketch of the subject... simplifying everything to only the most dominant features & shapes.

The Objective It is extremely important that you have a clear idea in your mind of precisely what the objective is here. *Why do this at all?*



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Larger Version

Here is the same subject in a slightly larger version... shown Actual Size... about 7" x 9". This size gives me a bit more room for... a bit more detail.

But please notice how little detail is there. It's not about the details... it's about the overall values & design.

This size takes me about 15-20 minutes.

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If you don't try these things out "before" starting a larger full color painting, you can easily make devastating mistakes in values that will be hard to adjust.

Remember... in Watercolor...
the biggest mistakes usually happen in the first 15 minutes of painting.

Using Ted Kautzky

Here's another from Wednesday's class. We used Ted Kautzky's "High Sierra" drawing as reference. But I showed you how by beginning with the middle-values and defining the various whitest, lightest, brightest areas & shapes 1st.. we could then make additional value decisions later in the study in order to try ideas out quickly.

In this case I darkened the sky... and then also darkened the foreground in order to see how this effected the illusion of depth back to the peak.



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GULLS AND SHADOWS



Another Kautzky

Here is the Gray Study I did in class the other night... working from another Kautzky study.

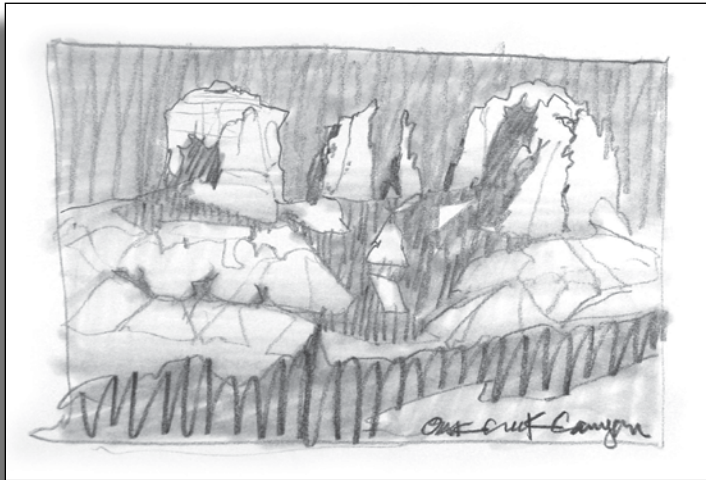
Remember... "all" of the middle value grays were painted first! Then... I used only 2 additional gray layers to develop the darker features.

This took 15-20 minutes. If you can develop this skill to create a Gray Study in 10-20 minutes... then you can use this kind of imaging skill when painting directly from nature. And this will help you create far better plein air paintings faster with more correct & predictable value relationships.



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Getting “UnStuck” 90% of the Intermediate Painters I train have developed their skills by “over-looking” or “avoiding” this skill-set. And in fact this is what traps them in the Intermediate Stage. Expert painters, in any medium, demonstrate a seemingly effortless application of values. But less experienced artists don’t realize that these artists have actually spent years studying values as they relate to their applications of paint. If you seem “stuck” and needing to somehow make visible & tangible progress... this is the fastest way to improve. ***Develop a more functional skill-set that helps you make better value choices in your paintings.***

2 versions / 2 mediums

Here are 2 other studies from my plein air work in Sedona... a Graphite Study above... and a Paynes Gray Study to the right.

The Graphite Study took about 10 minutes... while the Gray Study was more detailed and took about 30 minutes.

My strategy is that I want to make any mistakes, if any, in either of these rather studies rather than in my final full color watercolor. Both styles work fast & easy once you upgrade your value evaluation skills.

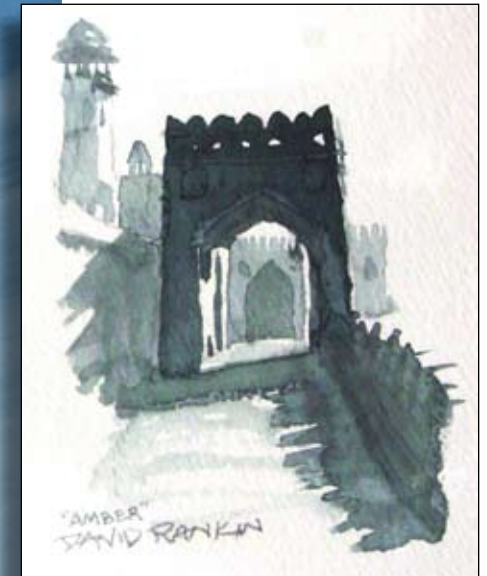
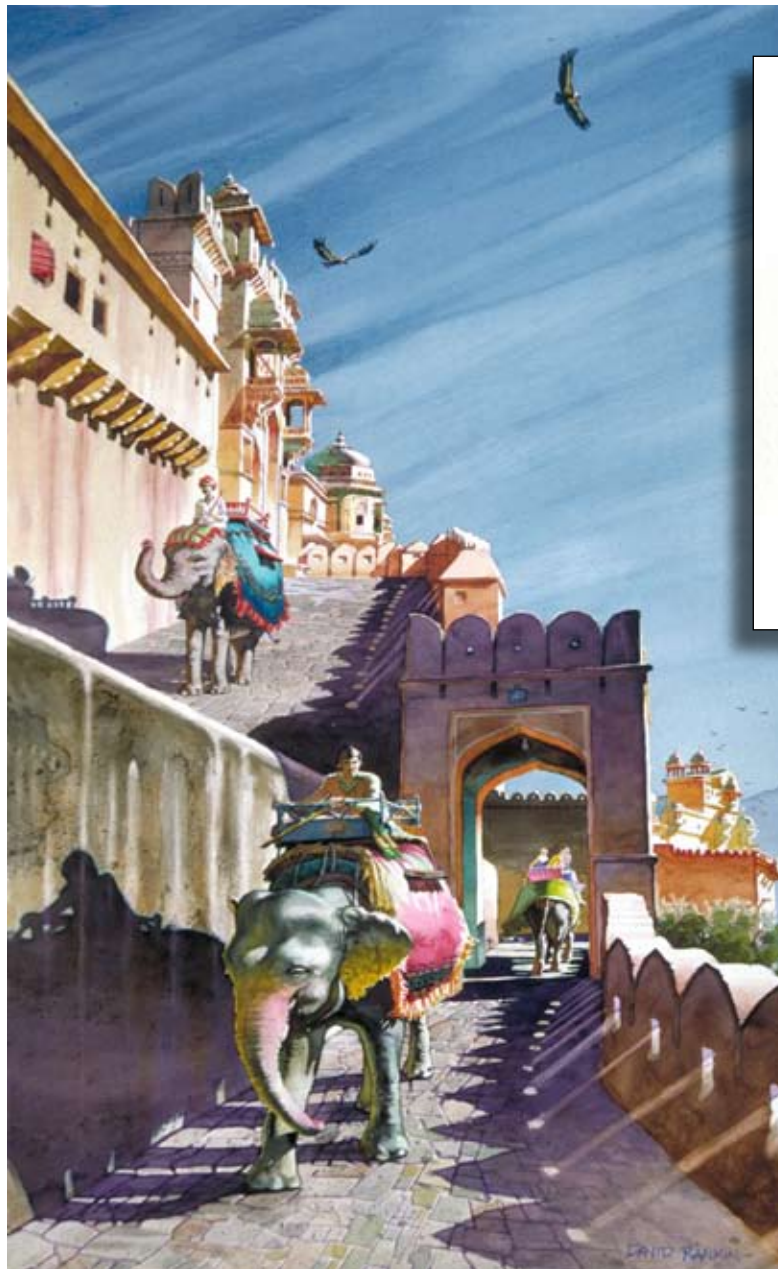


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David Sketching in India, 1985



From the late 1980's

Here 2 additional Gray Studies I did while working on a number of paintings of the Amber Fort, in India's desert region of Rajasthan.

Back then I was just developing my ability to see, evaluate, and paint values more accurately. And it was this ability to create Gray Studies which has helped me throughout the years.