# Simplify Trees

A sculptor student asked about how one does images of trees and further how to simplify them as the complexity of painting a million leaves can make an artist batty. Some painters and sculptors want to paint every leaf...bless them...for the rest of us this mini-lesson is about

A. Making realistic trees
B. Simplifying those trees in our images (paintings, drawings, sculpture)

First there are countless kinds of trees and then millions of variations within those -- two shown here, they couldn't be more different

(above left: photo of wide tree.....above right bare trees from my painting "Snow Gardens" below:)

We could go on and on with many other tree shapes, sizes and variations, but let's focus on one tree, analyze it in the following steps:

I. Let's figure out how to make the tree real

II. Let's explore how to simplify the real tree we create in various degrees of simplicity

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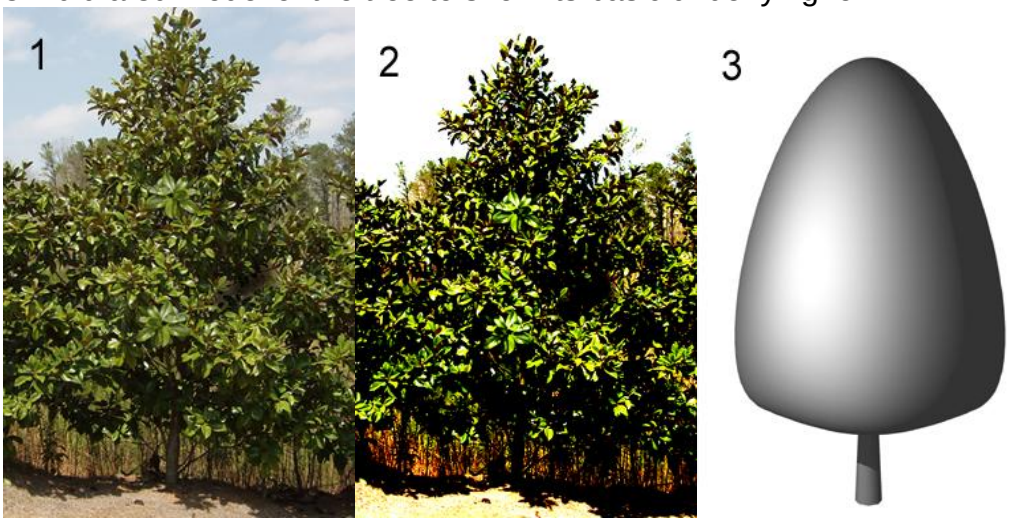
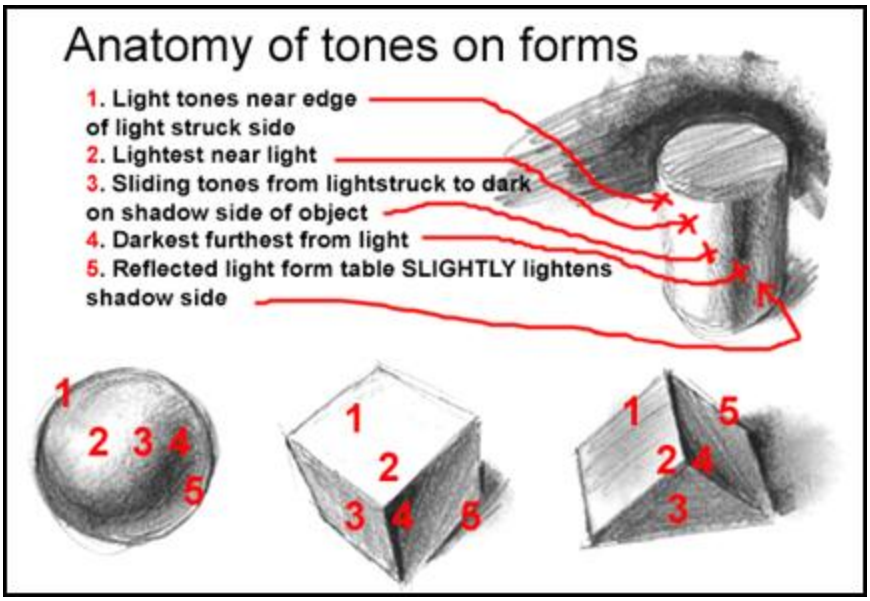
On the left below is a  photo of a row of Magnolia trees... confusing, right?
As a reference for a painting...lets analyze one tree:
1. The original photo
2. That photo made more contrasty to start to
see the form better revealed (this is done here with photo manipulation
in sketching in nature you would squint your eyes to achieve this effect)
3. I did a 3d model of the tree to show its basic underlying form




A tree - like everything we see, has a basic form or a series of basic forms as its understructure. Students often get lost, particularly with trees, in painting each leaf ...while to make it real its underlying structure needs to be communicated.

To make an object seem solid, one needs to understand the following:




Study the above and also the mini-Lessons on Form (click on the blue links below):

Lesson 2 Basic Form and

Lesson 3 Advanced Form

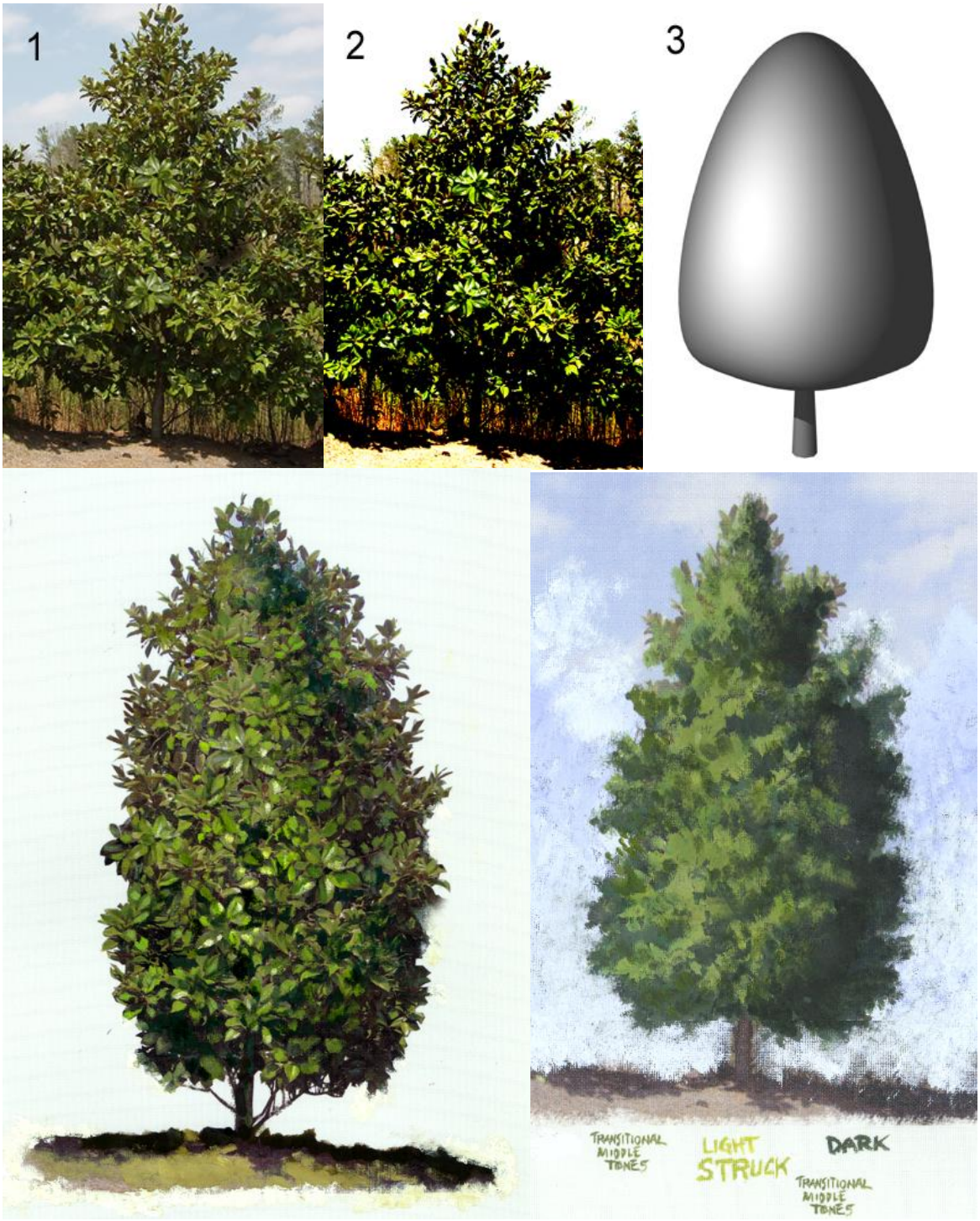
One needs to mass the tones in groups based on the above
-- the darkest tones on the shadow sides of objects, middle tones in the transitions from light to dark and the lighted tones in the most light stuck areas of an object.

Just below is a painting of a group of leaves from the tree photographed above (you can paint the rest of the tree in this level of detail - I'm just not going to do it

...it would take almost forever)

Now lets explore how to paint the tree simpler, then still simpler:
on the left is the original photo, then a simpler painted version,
then an even simpler version on the extreme right:

Left is a reprise of the source photo from above.....then, the tree painted to be round in lots of colors and values.... then the another interpretation SIMPLIFIED---into three tonal masses

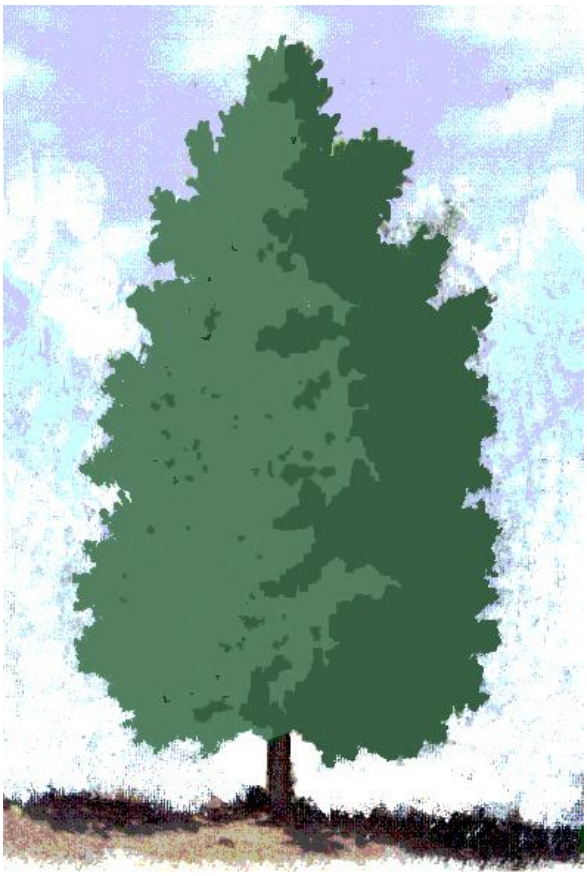



In my paintings above, I eliminated the sky and simplified the outer shape of the tree to better demonstrate the principals of form and the simplification.

In the right hand most simplified tree, I used only THREE color mixtures to paint the tree
On the left hand side is the transitional middles tone
Up through the middle is the light struck tone...then some middle tones again to step

down from the high tones of the light struck leaf masses.... and...on the right side I have massed the darks...the resulting tree is simple but solid...no details, not painted leaf by leaf

**POSTERIZED:** Simpler still-- areas are divided into a few colors - tree leaf area into just light stuck side and shadow side



"Posterized" . . . simplified
to light struck side and shadow side

**(See Wikipedia definition of "POSTERIZATION" at:**

**http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Posterization**

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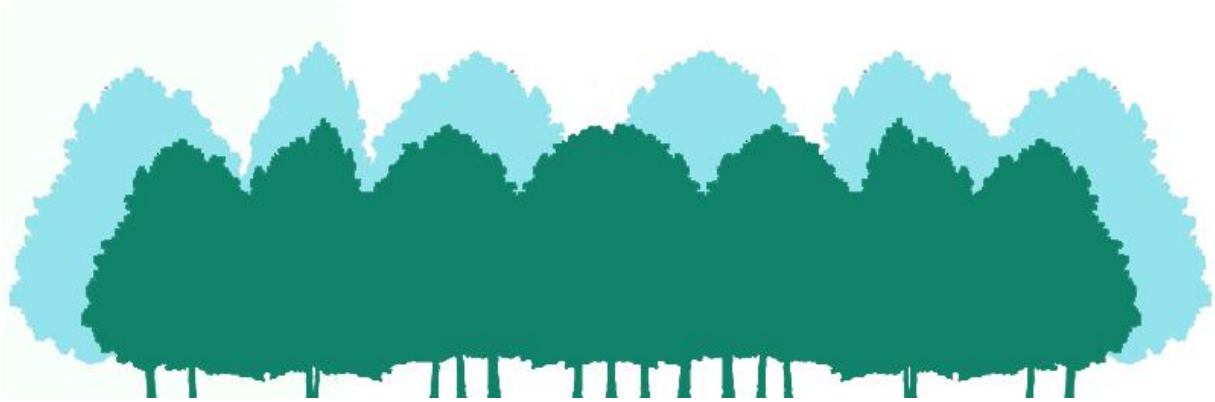
**The ultimate simplification- silhouette...First in black and white...**

Then - silhouetted "forest" in color:



The trees in the foreground are darker and more vibrant (more intense color green... while the taller "forest" behind is a lighter and bluer, less intense color blue-green--- this is a reflection of the concept of "atmospheric perspective"...as things get further from the viewer's eye... they get light in tone, less chromatic (color intensive) and have less contrast (see mini Online Lesson 4) for a fuller exploration of atmospheric perspective.