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PRESENTS

American Artist
Beginner Painting Tips:

Learn Acrylic Painting in 7 Steps

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ARTIST DAILY STEP-BY-STEP

American Artist Beginner Painting Tips:

Learn acrylic painting in 7 steps. | by M. Stephen Doherty

The rooms inside private homes, historical museums, and public buildings make excellent subjects because they give artists the chance to create interesting relationships between adjoining rooms, reflective windows and mirrors, contrasting natural and artificial light, and organized furnishings. The cool light from a table lamp in a living room can be shown close to the warm sunlight of a nearby kitchen. A heavy Victorian sofa can be balanced by a delicate spindle-backed chair. And a six-foot hall mirror can reflect the images of people sitting in an adjacent room. All of these possibilities can be explored in paintings derived from photographs, drawings, or on-site studies of interiors.

Ronald Lewis became interested in painting interiors when he began to grow bored with the oil landscapes he had been producing for a number of years. "I was getting burned out," he explains. "And even though I loved the smell of oils, I felt I could really take advantage of the fact that acrylics dry so much faster. I decided to focus on acrylic paintings of interiors, a subject I had explored on occasion but never really focused on. I quickly discovered a whole range of possibilities with the subject and the medium."

Lewis is one of many artists who have added acrylics to their repertoire of painting mediums. While oil paints and varnishes have qualities that can't be matched by other paints, they dry slowly and require the use of mineral spirits, turpentine, or other potentially hazardous solvents and mediums. **Acrylic paints are mixed with water and can be altered with water-based acrylic mediums and additives**

**Game Room,
Sims House,**
1996, acrylic,
14 x 10. Private
collection.



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LEARN ACRYLIC PAINTING IN 7 STEPS

**Guest Room,
Sims House**

1996, acrylic, 14 x 10.
Private collection.

photographs and sketches of actual rooms, Lewis changes things so radically that the paintings seldom end up looking like the actual locations. “One of the advantages of acrylics is that as long as I keep the paint relatively thin during the initial stages, I can make whatever changes I want,” the artist explains. “I can add and subtract furniture, re-create the framed pictures on the walls, and change the colors and patterns in the room with no problems. I once turned a canvas on its side and converted a horizontal picture into a vertical one.”

to increase their thickness, extend their drying time, and modify their finish. Furthermore, acrylics dry quickly and permanently, making it possible to paint additional layers of color over them within a matter of minutes.

Lewis came up with the idea of painting interiors while visiting the homes of friends in Birmingham, Alabama, where he lives. He asked to **take photographs and make sketches of the rooms and later used that material in his paintings.** Once he decided to create more such works, the artist made a trip to the historical town of Eufaula, Alabama, which, because of its position on the Chattahoochee River, once prospered from the riverboats that passed on the way to the Gulf of Mexico. Wealthy families built large, ornately appointed homes there that Lewis now finds to be excellent subject matter. The paintings shown in this article depict rooms in one of the artist’s favorite homes in Eufaula, the Sims house.

Even though he begins his paintings by referring to

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Guest Room, Sims House (Second Impression)

1996, acrylic, 14 x 10.

This painting and the one on page 3 show the same interior, and show the diversity of Lewis' approach to acrylic painting. He sometimes prefers a loose, gestural style rather than a tight, detailed presentation.

Sometimes Lewis paints on watercolor paper, watercolor board, or Masonite, but about half his acrylic paintings are done on Fredrix acrylic-primed canvas. The acrylic paints are versatile enough to also be applied to wood, paper, or certain plastic panels.

Beginning with thin applications of paint and later switching to thicker, more opaque brushstrokes, Lewis takes advantage of the fact that most manufacturers of acrylic paints sell both a fluid and a thick formulation. The fluid colors are usually sold in jars or squeeze bottles, making it convenient to work with thin paint. The thicker formulations are usually available in standard paint tubes or in jars. Lewis' palette normally includes the following colors: titanium white, burnt umber, burnt sienna, yellow oxide, raw sienna, cadmium orange, cadmium yellow, Hooker's green, dioxazine purple, Grumbacher's alizarin crimson, cadmium red, and Mars black.

During some phases of a painting's development, the

artist may add Golden's acrylic retarder to thin the paints and slow the drying process. This step is particularly important when he is trying to establish a subtle blend of colors or a soft transition between adjacent tones and needs to keep the paint from drying too quickly. But once a painting has been completed, he applies a coat of acrylic gloss medium, which brings out some of the underlying colors and gives the picture the glossy surface of an oil painting.

The artist sells most of his paintings through commercial galleries, but he also exhibits in a few national and regional outdoor festivals. "Most of my sales occur in the spring and fall, so I try to get my work out as much as possible during those times of the year," he explains. "The best outdoor shows are usually the ones that are juried, and it's a good idea to exhibit in the same show for several years in a row so collectors can become familiar with your work."

Lewis graduated from Alabama College (now the University of Montevallo) in 1967. He has received nearly 100 awards for his oil, watercolor, and acrylic paintings in juried shows organized by the American Watercolor Society, Watercolor U.S.A., the Southern Watercolor Society, Arts for the Parks, and other national organizations. He has illustrated two books, *My Country Roads* and *Papa's Old Trunk* (both Buck Publishing Company, Birmingham, Alabama). Lewis' paintings have been featured in *Southern Accents* and are in many private and corporate collections as well as in those of the Birmingham Museum of Art and the Fine Arts Museum of the South in Mobile, both in Alabama, and the Columbus Museum, in Georgia.

M. Stephen Doherty is the editor-at-large for American Artist.



Demonstration: Reading Chair, Sims House

Step 1 (right)

After making a rough graphite drawing on acrylic-primed canvas, Lewis applied a thin underpainting of burnt sienna and burnt umber.



Step 2 (far right)

He then blocked in the walls with cadmium orange, yellow oxide, and titanium white.



Step 3 (right)

The fireplace and hanging pictures were then painted with Hooker's green and yellow oxide. He toned the picture down with dioxazine purple and titanium white.



Step 4 (far right)

Next, Lewis painted the chair. He added some Golden's acrylic retarder to increase the drying time of the paint so he could blend details before the paint dried.



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Step 5 (far left)

This detail shows how Lewis used a white charcoal pencil to draw the table and books more carefully before painting them.

Step 6 (left)

Finally, he blocked in the bed and rug using blue, red, purple, and burnt umber with titanium white.



THE COMPLETED PAINTING

Reading Chair, Sims House

1996, acrylic, 18 x 14.
Courtesy Bryant Galleries,
Jackson, Mississippi, and
New Orleans, Louisiana.

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