

MESSAGE FROM ERIC

- APRIL -

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Earlier this year I had the pleasure of traveling to Houston and picking out the award winners for an international show: WASH (Watercolor Art Society of Houston). I selected the show online several months previously and in conjunction with the final awards judging I conducted a week long workshop.

The workshop attendees were a delight and the new friendships made it very special. Southern hospitality and grace were displayed freely.

One afternoon I took the workshop attendees to the show and shared my award selection process. I think some of the students were surprised that some of the more realistic paintings, while getting into the show, were not award winners; and that some of what may appear to be less refined were selected instead.

Painting is never meant to be a replication. It is an interpretation of life before the artist. An understanding of design is paramount, and unfortunately, many realistic paintings lack this time honored discipline. Also, subject matter and a refined technique can hide a lack of design discipline to an uneducated eye. A superficial technique can easily be accepted through the influence of commercialism and the media.

The unknowing public can easily be fooled that a painting copied from a photograph represents reality.

So as I select award winners, I am looking for those artists who have the courage to paint with an appreciation of design concepts, even though their work may appear somewhat less refined than others. I am looking for artists willing to take risks to more deeply express themselves, over a slavish replication.

Paintings that hint of copying a photo— by hand, by a projection process, or a computerized digital interpretation—will have points taken away in my judging process. I want to see the artist's interpretation, not a camera's or a computer's.

I want to honor those who are using their own sense of design, but I also want to even the playing field between those who draw freehand and those whose refined paintings are a projection of an image on the watercolor paper, traced and filled in. (This is the Elephant in the Room few competing artists want to talk about. Many influential artists come from a commercial background where projection is widely accepted — time is money!)

Some may interpret this to mean I don't appreciate realism and detail in painting. On the contrary I do, but I want to see it well done with an appreciation for design and with freehand drawing.

I think it is possibly time to have an international show where no mechanical devices are allowed in the painting process. It may be time to even the playing field. I believe the great watercolorist Milford Zornes felt the same way. However, it would have to be on the honor system, and that could be problematic.

Keep your brush wet! - ERIC

AWS Gold Medal of Honor

