

MESSAGE FROM ERIC

– October –

A LETTER OF INSPIRATION

My new Zoom classes have been a very fulfilling experience. Yet I need to remind my students that periods of creativity are often followed by what appear to be plateaus. From 1983 to the end of 1985, I had the pleasure of studying under the watercolor master, Irving Shapiro, at the American Academy of Art in Chicago. His teaching was such an influential part of my development that it still informs my art today. He taught me how to think in terms of design rather than subject matter. At one time early in my career I felt tired of painting and expressed that concern to him. Here is his reply:



I think that the matter of the artist who spends days upon days in the studio not coming up for air and finally coming out unshaven to declare that his ART demands all of his energy and devotion is right out of the pages of some fictional and romantic novel. A poor one at that. Everyone that I have ever discussed the matter with will have had the same experiences as me--days when I can't wait to get behind a brush, days when it's the last thing that I want to do (but will do anyhow, if the schedule is pressing enough), and days when I just take off for a shopping trip with my wife, a visit to a museum, a movie, or maybe just nothing at all. I think that a certain amount of time has to be devoted to emptying the brain. However, our concentration and dedication to painting will, I think, have us see the world differently than others, so that even when we might be doing what seems totally unrelated to painting we're still soaking up what will affect our painting. In my own experience, I've found that at those times when I've had to be away from the studio for a stretch of a few days or even longer, or even when I've chosen to not paint for a while, that when I come back to the drawing board I am refreshed, I am more responsive, and more often than not my work shows the benefit of a bit of renewed excitement.

It just isn't possible--or even desirable, maybe--to have a totally even attitude of sustained interest in painting. That invites burnout, if we should demand this attitude of ourselves. It might very well be that the results of this self-imposed pressure provides us with OK paintings, but the spirit has to be bruised by this kind of excess.

If you don't feel like painting now and then, don't sweat it. I understand that Rembrandt bowled a few lines with the boys once a week, and that Rubens toiled around on his motorcycle. We, like anyone else, are human.

Best Wishes, Irv Shapiro

Keep your brush wet,

Eric