

MESSAGE FROM ERIC

– September –

SHIFTING VALUES

The mantra for outdoor painters—those who paint from life and are trying to capture a sense of reality—is to squint and see the value relationships. Squint, squint, squint is what we are told.

But are the values really a constant? Or do they shift according to the viewer's line of sight and therefore there are no true values?



Even though I do find it very helpful to squint while painting on location to see large value relationships, I would still propose to you that there really is no true value of any object. Sound funny? Let me give you an example:

Look at the grey-weathered telephone pole that has a dark mass of bushes behind its base. Squint at the base. Notice how the pole appears lighter than the bushes. I would probably paint it with a light mid-tone in such a scene.

Now look up at the top of the pole and squint. The pole appears dark against the sky, and in such a scene I would paint it a dark value. But keep in mind this is the same pole with logically the same value throughout its length and yet it is perceived as two different values at two different spots. The reason: Our irises open and close according to the amount of light, much like the aperture of a camera, and values are perceived variably. So value is really a matter of perception and not of reality.

The conclusion I draw out of this: Stop worrying about getting the “right value” of an object, it really can't be done. It is better to focus on an overall pleasing interpretation of values.

Keep your brush wet,

Eric