

Abstract Painting: A Practical Approach

Hennie Reimer

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For many readers, and even some of the painters among them, abstract art prompts often-heard complaints like, “my kid could do that!” To these skeptics, abstract art is the ultimate in impractical ventures, making a title like *Abstract Painting: A Practical Approach*, Hennie Reimer’s guide, sound like the lead-in to an art joke. But Reimer’s book is true to its title, offering clear how-to tips on everything from mixing colors and stretching canvases, to experimenting with new methods and finding inspiration.

Abstract Painting: A Practical Approach is written with painters of every ilk in mind: oils, acrylics, and watercolors are all addressed in simple descriptions, making it perfect for beginners, and veteran painters looking to challenge themselves will be inspired to branch out from more realistic works. The key element of the book is the impressive array of colorful visuals—instructive photographs of paintings in progress and scans of finished artwork by the author, illustrating the style, technique, or concept Reimer is trying to teach.

Hennie Reimer is perhaps the ideal author of a book like this; she has taught painting at the college level for many years, from introductory classes to graduate-level offerings, and has developed a fluid, step-by-step style of instruction. Reimer describes her book as a volume for serious artists who do not have the opportunity to obtain a formal fine arts education, and it seems that she has taken all of the elements of an abstract painting course and included them in her text.

Yet the book’s strength is not just in the how-to; it is also in the why. Reimer waxes eloquent about the philosophy of abstract art, making a key distinction between random splattering and that done with purpose: “real art cannot be produced in a totally automatic way—that is, without vision and judgment by the artist ... art has an underlying organization, also called a hidden order, that can be perceived and thus recognized.” Reimer also addresses problems faced by more seasoned artists, such as how to find a new style, or how to determine when a painting is truly “finished.”

Abstract Painting: A Practical Approach is an excellent guide to abstract painting, providing valuable insights for beginners and experienced painters alike. It is the sort of book artists would do well to keep for reference, coming back for ideas and refreshers even long after their exploration into abstract art has begun.

PETER DABBENE (June 18, 2012)

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