

A Word of Warning: Do Not Fall in Love with your Workshop Painting!

Every year when LWS sponsors workshops, we get a great response from our members and sometimes from others who aren't members but just want to take our classes. Inevitably, the question pops up from workshop participants concerning the paintings that were started or completed in the workshop: "Can this painting be presented in one of our shows?"

The answer is always a resounding NO!

Workshop paintings are like textbooks. You can use them in the class and even at home, but you wouldn't want to read them for pleasure! There is a whole host of reasons why we are not to use workshop paintings for display in the Louisiana Watercolor Society shows, some of which I will outline:

1. Displaying a painting in an LWS show that was in a workshop is simply not allowed. It is assumed that participants in a workshop are there to learn tips, technique, composition, paint application and other subjects that the teacher has on his or her agenda. They have a tacit agreement with the teacher or workshop leader that they will not competitively display in a watercolor show whatever they are painting in the workshop. It's simply classwork.

2. We do not want to be accused of plagiarism in any way, shape or form, when we display our work. Using classwork created and painted under the supervision of a teacher can become derivative very fast and pave the way for copying.

3. The workshop teachers are hired by art groups to impart knowledge and perhaps demo how they put paint to paper. They look out at the class and see all those faces eager to learn, waiting for instruction and anxious to start their own paintings. The teachers become very reluctant to tell the participants 'no' when they ask questions about entering work in shows. After all, they are there to teach their lessons. They are not there to arbitrate rules of ethics for displaying work. Therefore if a workshop teacher states that you cannot enter your workshop painting in a show, but suggests you go back to your own studio and try to reproduce it, he or she may not want to hurt feelings or sound scolding.

4. However, our teachers are all not familiar with every society's rules and regulations and LWS has strict standards regarding work done in a workshop. You cannot go back to the studio and re-do your workshop painting. You cannot reproduce the image that the teacher has brought for you. You cannot display a painting done in a workshop that a teacher has even laid eyes upon because she has probably given you advice on what to do, even if he or she did not specifically address your painting.

5. Participants in the workshops walk around and see what everyone else is doing. It's just part of the fun of the class to do this. If you think that you can enter something painted or copied from a workshop discreetly, think again! Everyone who is in the workshop with you will know your painting and if they see it hanging as your entry for an LWS show, they will know with certainty that you accomplished it under supervision in that particular workshop. These paintings always get 'found out' and are inevitably eliminated from the competition by the guidelines committee.

6. Speaking of that, LWS has set up guidelines for our members to follow when entering competitions. (Our three shows: Spring Member Show, Fall Juried Member Show and the Annual International Exhibition.) The guidelines are the same for all three of our shows. They will be listed in our regular newsletters that you receive with your membership. Please read them. They are important!

7. Finally, we tend to take the workshops of our watercolor 'idols'. We love certain artists' works and finding out that they are coming to teach brings great joy and anticipation knowing that we will see them demo and show us their stuff. Although you have fallen in love with a particular teacher's style, please do not be tempted to paint like the teacher. Your work will always be a poor reproduction of your idol's work! I use this analogy: I love the way Marilyn Monroe looked. Her beautiful face was framed with perfect blonde hair and set off with ruby-red lips. If I stood in front of my mirror and tried to recreate Marilyn on my own face, I would look like a clown.

So be mindful of your idols' paintings. Observe them. Learn from them. And when you sit down to do your own composition, use your own 'hand'. Create your own style. You will be so happy when people recognize your work as your own.

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