

I think I overworked it, again – by Sterling Edwards

Sound familiar? We all do it from time to time; some more than others. We seem to have this irresistible urge to make our paintings look perfect. I guess that the main question is "Look perfect for whom?". Why do we so often feel the need to keep picking and prodding a painting that would probably look quite nice to most viewers if we just left it alone. I can honestly say that I could probably take a year off and just relax if I had twenty dollars for every painting that I have ruined by overworking. I see it all of the time in my watercolor workshops. When making my rounds through the room I will come across a student that has really nice painting. I will almost always suggest to them that the painting just needs a signature and nothing more. Then I will come by a few minutes later and see that they have pushed it too far. They have usually either detailed it to death or reworked areas of the painting that a few minutes ago were clean applications of color and now appear scrubbed with smudges. Painting with watercolor takes a great deal of discipline. It truly is a thinking process and one of the most important things to consider is when to leave it alone. Why do we ALWAYS feel like it needs just a little more of this or that? Maybe it's because we're just having too much fun and don't want to stop, or maybe, it's because we fall into that self defeating trap of always wanting everything in the painting to be perfect. Why does it need to be perfect? It's a one of a kind piece of art, not something that was created as an example of total perfection. When I am looking for a nice piece of hand blown glass to add to my collection, I want to see a few bubbles in the glass which reassures me that it is indeed hand blown. The same is true with paintings. I like to see the brushstrokes and little accidental color variances. Maybe some of the wet paint ran slightly over into another shape. That's what makes it look like a watercolor!

Let's face it, we are our own worst critics. We know every brushstroke, color, flaw, and abnormality in our painting. Things that others may never even notice are screaming at us. Others see the painting as a whole. They see shapes, colors, values, and textures

that have been carefully choreographed by an artist. They will either like the painting or they won't. We cannot please everyone no matter how well you paint, there will ALWAYS be the occasional critic. This is not to imply that you should not make every effort to apply all of the skills that you have and strive to be the best you can be, but merely to give yourself a little breathing room and enjoy the painting process rather than getting too caught up in the mindset of total perfection. In my "**Newsletter Archives**" link on my website; www.sterlingedwards.com, you will find a much thought out editorial that I wrote in the **January, 2015** newsletter titled, "**Vision vs. Results**". I hope that you will read this editorial because I did a lot of soul searching when I wrote that piece. Just like most of you, I was never totally satisfied with my paintings and would often push them beyond their brink in an effort to make them perfect. I still do sometimes, but not as often as I used to. Nowadays, I approach each of my paintings with a sense of purpose that leans more towards making a visual artistic statement rather than trying to make everything perfect. I've learned to be more accepting of the little nuances that didn't quite play out as well as I had envisioned. On the other hand, sometimes they played out great and actually enhanced the painting. Watercolors really do have a mind of their own.

I now approach my paintings with a little more of a loose and somewhat interpretive style of painting. I want to give the viewer enough information for them to make a decision or form an opinion while at the same time leaving a little room for their imagination. I make it a conscious decision to minimize scrubbing and pay particular attention to the amount of detail that is necessary only to make my statement without overdoing it. It REALLY is OK to put down the brush.

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