

# Part 6. Selected Painting Topics

## Select a subject that excites you:

This is a critical idea. All too often new artists believe that any subject, committed to paint, will look good as a painting. The thought is that painting automatically transforms any subject into something profound.

Unfortunately this is not the case. The experienced artist may turn an ugly subject into something beautiful. For example an inner city scene of urban ugliness sometimes looks great as a painting. Does not mean that any scene can be turned into something beautiful?

What the experienced sees is not the subjective scene where one could say "Gee that is an ugly sight of urban neglect!"

**Instead the artist may be excited by the abstract shapes, color and light.** The artist sees the composition and potential of the interplay between these elements. The result is a strong design with dramatic light.

We could see this even with the work of Turner in the 19th century painting early industrial scenes.

A pretty scene may not have strong design potential. That is a fact often difficult for the beginner to accept. Instead look for an **exciting abstract design made up of light and dark shapes. It may sound weird, but an artist must see this to even hope of getting excited about a painting.**

The subjective feelings of joy and other forms of pleasure are all enhanced when those basics exist.

## Painting by William Wray

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Illustrates the point of design, light and color adding the power to an otherwise mundane scene in real life.



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## Shapes not details

Another example of strong design of shapes, light and color.



## Use a Viewfinder and Plan the Scene

Remember to **crop** a scene.

Do the notan study

Do the Value study

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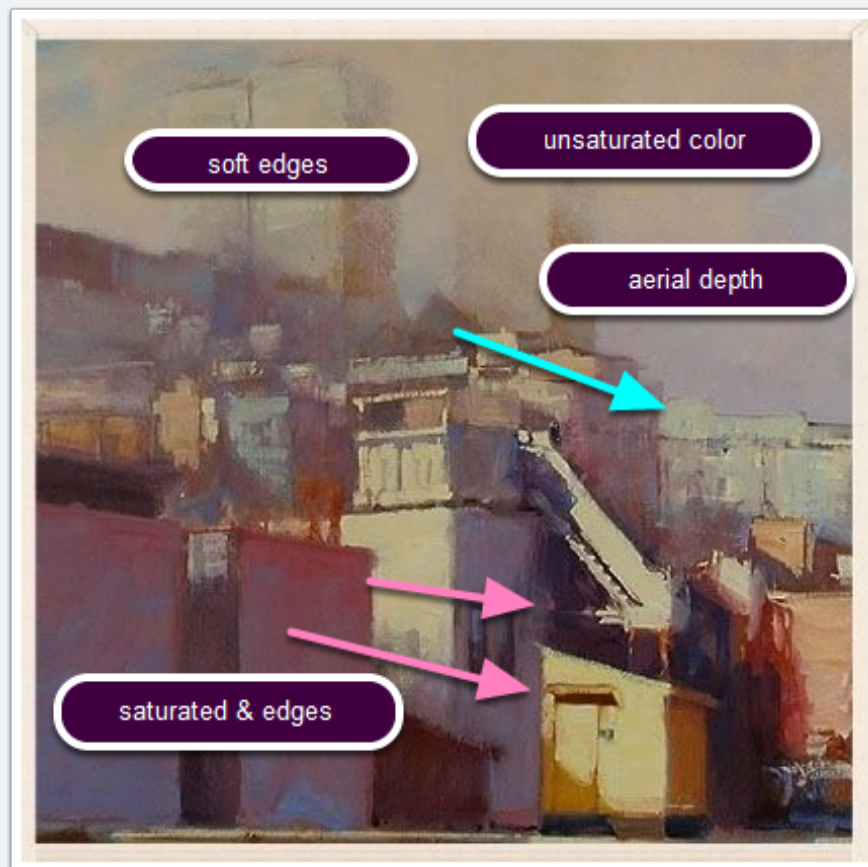
What can be left out to get to the strong elements? **Leave the unnecessary stuff out.**

## How Can You Add Depth?

Remember that you want to create the illusion of depth on a 2-d surface.

How can you use shapes, value and color to do this?

Overlapping shapes, emphasis of certain shapes, saturation, and color all must play a part in achieving this.



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## Low Light Subjects

Low light subjects **do not mean low impact subjects.**

It is important to remember that idea. The following elements still apply:

1. Light and dark values add strength and interest
2. Shapes still remain important
3. Color has warm and cool elements
4. Light and shade still apply
5. Design remains important

What does change is the **degree of light and dark contrast** since there is usually no direct sunshine. However the contrast between light and dark still remains strong in the foreground. The color may be cooler, but the contrast is still strong. **Do not confuse cool color temperature with weak color.**

**Another change is that edges will be softer overall.** However in the foreground you will still find strong edges in cool colors. Aerial perspective will come into play closer in the picture plane and cover the picture plane more evenly. Especially in misty or overcast conditions.

**Keep a strong foreground shape structure.** This will emphasise depth as the shapes in middle ground will appear softer and loose edged.

Brushwork will soften up too where the light is soft. Texture will reduce somewhat, but this is not a hard rule. **The most important thing to use is reduced value contrast, cooler color and softer edges.**



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## Conclusion

The same principles apply to all painting subjects. Strong design, shapes, value and color are the key issues.

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In low light conditions picking the correct subject becomes even more important. Strong design will hold a painting together where you may not have the luxury of strong color and light and dark sunny conditions. So look for design first in low light conditions.

Another option is to work against the light (contre jour). In this case the light removes all details but you still have to rely on design and shapes to make an interesting painting. Of course strong light and dark contrast will help, but color will usually be washed out by the strong light behind the subject. You will find yourself painting instinctively using values and shape arrangement to carry off the painting. Very challenging and rewarding too.

These value paintings are excellent for building your painting skills since you cannot get away with simply using bright colors. Once again your experience with simplifying shapes and values will help you with this type of painting.

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