

# Is my painting finished? How do you know when you are finished and can sign your painting?

## Start by asking yourself, 'Have I said all I need to say?'

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Occasionally, a painting might turn out well by accident, or luck, or sheer effort, but don't count on it. If you wish to make certain your painting will succeed, a minimum of three things must come from you – and only you.

1. You need to know why you wanted to paint this subject, what caught your interest and attracted you, what makes it special to you to paint this scene, abstract, still life, portrait or whatever you have chosen to paint? What was the WOW Factor? Was it a shape, a colour, an interesting variety or arrangement of elements, the expression on the face, sunlight, or a mood or feeling? What was the energy? You must be able to identify it and express it in words and then write it down. You won't know if you have arrived if you don't know where you are going.

WHEN YOU START A NEW PAINTING TAKE THE TIME TO WRITE DOWN SOME THOUGHTS. These thoughts can change along the way but something gave you the desire or passion to paint this particular picture. The message is the most important thing, the technical supports the message. Even in an abstract painting, somewhere along the way there was an AHAAA moment when your painting came to life in your mind. Be prepared to identify that moment and articulate it on paper.

2. You need to have an analytical grasp of what you see.
3. You need the skill to control the process of the painting.

Don't bother about whether or not you have talent. Just assume you do and then forget about it. Profit from your failed efforts, find out what went wrong and try not to do it again. All easier said than done. Mistakes are part of learning but it is never an excuse to claim lack of talent. That's the easy way out of the effort of learning.

So before you run off and ask a friend to critique YOUR UNIQUE PAINTING, sit back with a coffee or a glass of wine and try to view your painting as a patron who is seeing it for the first time would, and then ask yourself the following questions:

1. Have you captured what you set out to paint? Review your original notes. Use the language that you had in your original conversation with yourself. Be honest and do not be vague.

2. Is the focus of your painting clear? If not, how can it be reinforced?
3. Does anything need additional work to convey the message? Not just because it is there and you have not painted it in, e.g., all the trees, etc.
4. Is there a general sense of harmony in the painting? That is, do the technique and colour work together as part of the same world?
5. What finishing touches could you add to give the painting more zing?
6. Does the initial abstract value pattern still read clearly?
7. Is there enough detail or is there too much detail?
8. Does the painting convey the mood that you intended to express?
9. Does this painting really represent you?
10. As successful as the painting might be, would the next one be even better? WHY? What have you learned?
11. ARE YOU HAPPY WITH THE PAINTING? Then sign it and move on to your next unique painting challenge.

***Some additional suggestions if you are still having difficulty:***

***'Ways to Unstick a Painting' by Tony Urquhart:***

1. Shock spot - Stick in a bright colour then paint around it. After a couple of hours take it out.
2. View the painting upside down.
3. Look at the painting in a mirror - reverse the composition.
4. Use fresh eyes. Ask for your friends and fellow artists' critiques.
5. Look for equal things to correct – things that are equal make the painting less interesting.
6. Undercutting creates a jump; it is the dark line or shape next to it that brings an object forward in space.
7. Triangulation is a good compositional device, e.g., three red spots of different sizes in a triangle position in the painting.

***Belia's often-used ideas:***

8. Cover up the part of the painting that is bothering you with your hand or a sheet of paper (or if unsure what is, start from the top of the painting and work down) and gradually pull the paper down across the painting until you see what is bothering you. Could be the wrong colour, perspective, value, too hard/soft an edge, too many highlights, shadows the wrong colour, lighting /shadows direction, or the inconsistent or overuse of white or black. Have you developed relationships – thick/thin paint, soft/hard edges, warm/cool colours?
9. Make sure you note what you like about your painting before you start making adjustments so as not to lose sight of this area and begin to paint into it at the risk of losing it.
10. Is the composition flawed, and if so how can you make it stronger? Does it read well from a distance? Why am you responding or not responding to it emotionally? Could something be added or removed to make it a stronger piece? Does the eye travel around the painting and not out of the painting?
11. If you are still not satisfied, set the painting aside for a week or a month to let it breathe, or conversely, put on an easel where you can look at it from time to time throughout the day. Sometimes a quick glance can reveal a problem. But be cautious about jumping in and making a major change. Let it percolate.

***Additional thoughts to consider from the TIFAA discussion***

1. Use photographs, colour and black and white to check composition and values.
2. Preparation is important - thumbnail sketches, value is more important than colour.
3. Use Photoshop to try different things before painting the next layer.

As frustrating as it is to us today, there was a poignant and inspiring aspect to Leonardo's unwillingness to declare a painting done and relinquish it: he knew that there was always more he might learn, new techniques he might master, and further inspirations that might strike him. And he was right.

*Presentation to the TIFAA Meeting of 27 February 2018 by Belia Brandow*