

Notes on Veil Painting from the books of Liane Collot d'Herbois

From *Colour, Part I* by Liane Collot d'Herbois:

The concepts are molded into ideas, the pictures arising are finished; to paint an already finished picture, that is in one's head in this way, was done until roughly the end of the last century. One began a picture with an already completed concept, a form was 'thought out' and the form was then colored. This was done at a time when the accepted path to the worlds of spirit was through feeling, as expressed in the mystics and in the monastic orders of the medieval centuries...

Today the process is reversed, through the step which is taking place – and has already taken place – in our inner theatre. This same path can be pursued in the full light of our consciousness based on our *thinking*, whereby through recognition of the laws of light, darkness and color, these laws lend themselves as instruments to the hands of the human being to be used again, through him, in the process of creation.

With this knowledge arises the longing to paint not the finished pictures from the formed concepts, carried from the head into the hand, but to take part in the creative element of color by using instead the laws of light, color and darkness...

Therefore today painting can take part in a process of becoming through the building up, veil by veil, in accordance with the all pervading enlightening laws of light and the impulse of darkness: a spiritual experience, and of moving color: a soul-experience.

One observes a cosmic threefoldness, with color revealing itself in the sense world as a moving interval between the unseen creative activities of light and of darkness.

Through the techniques of painting, slowly, allowing red, for example, to move as red always will – a phenomenon observable in nature -, ... painting veil after veil..., entails a slow process of gradual coming into being, a process which can be likened to the growth of a plant born out of ponderable darkness and dying into ponderable light.

To take part in this creative activity as a being of inner light, inner color and inner darkness, is one reason for attempting to paint in veils....

It becomes no longer merely a question of naturalism or abstraction, which is after all an end-product, but a question of living in one or more moods of color and an immersion in the essential nature of color itself. This is not only a subjective experience for one has the possibility of going beyond subjectivity by using these laws of light, color and darkness, into a world of greater objective significance.

From *Light, Darkness and Colour in Painting Therapy* by Liane Collot d'Herbois:

And in the daily painting-exercise it all comes together: the concentration of the waking consciousness of the head, the thinking of colour that is in the heart and the act of will that is in the actual activity of painting. Painting in veils is then a very useful technique: one works at a picture from day to day and so one is able to take it with one into the night where the colours work deeper into one's being. And so painting becomes more and more an activity in which the ego (spirit) is involved.

One can for instance paint with a wide-awake consciousness and with great concentration. Painting in veils can bring about such an attitude of soul when one carefully, consciously puts on veil after veil of colour. One is then in a state of mind that is similar to the one in meditation: the ego stays in its own realm and does not play on the blood. One is fully incarnated, fully awake, but one is absorbed in an activity that stays in the sphere of the ego and therefore the destructive forces of the consciousness-pole do not bear down on the blood and the life-forces in the organism have a chance to build themselves up.

The consciousness and concentration that this technique calls for rouse the activity of the ego. The ego draws towards itself the consciousness-pole of the astral, so that the astral rises to a slightly higher plane. The nerves are then not touching the blood in quite the same way. The etheric is left free. Spasms and cramps are released. The ego can then incarnate fully into the organism.

From *Meeting with Therapists* – 20 January 1983, by Liane Collot d’Herbois
regarding painting in veils

Watercolour is difficult because it calls for more consciousness... Aquarelle is a difficult medium because you have to think in colour. It takes time to practice to put into your hands what you see inwardly. In oil you can put paint on top of paint. Here it is just the reverse process. In the colour you leave a part open. In indigo you leave a part open where the blue will come.

One makes first of all a “skeleton” of the picture. You know where the light comes from; you know what movements the darkness makes, where the light will be broken. It is a kind of light-and-darkness you do in your head before you start. You put all the colours in; don’t work too far with one colour. When you have that skeleton you can start spreading out and get things moving. Then you can do anything: a part that started in green can end in red. You can bring the colours in front of the light over part of the picture. I often end up with quite other colours than the ones I started with. For me to paint a picture it takes two weeks, painting each day.

You never stop the light and darkness. In one case you use charcoal, in the other case you use colour. And when there is a certain movement in your painting it changes its colour. You bring in a sort of ground plan of light and darkness... Then you are free to move the washes of colour about as you like according to light and darkness. You never come to an indication of form or content till you are about three quarters finished, because all the time you are still moving colour about. Never have the feeling when you put a colour on: now that is that and that is finished.

Remember one thing from the beginning, you must give yourself air to breathe, space to move in. When you put on a flat wash never let it be too heavy. Let it have in the beginning the appearance of air.

Never think you have to know everything about the picture when you start: see three washes ahead and you can manage... Never worry when there is a part that you don’t know what to do with. The colours will tell you later. You can always let a corner of your painting be nothing, just let it go. You can breathe out there... So get in to the habit of having a part where the colour just flows out. When darkness encloses it all then movement is not possible anymore...

As soon as you get into the habit of seeing it like this you will develop your own way of doing it. You must have your own style. You use the same laws, but you must find your own style.

First one has the idea of light and darkness, where the light is coming from, the direction of the light, the strength of the light. After that: the colours. Now all the colours are accompanied by other colours... The third step is the practicing of light and darkness... You cannot have two brilliant colours... One must be toned down. When both are brilliant it becomes nothing... So the last step is the calling up of light and darkness.

When you look at the picture you can see the colours there that you did not yet paint, complementary colours coming from them. It means they belong there and you paint them in later.

Compiled by Pamela Whitman, 2019