SWS November 2026 Challenge: Eyes; The Window to Your Soul

November's challenge: paint eyes—human, animal, bird, or whatever you please!

Lifelike eyes connect viewers to your subject. Eye position, lid openness, and alertness convey a wealth of information. Below is a summary of "Why Eyes Are the Most Important Part of a Portrait Painting," an article I found thought-provoking.

The science behind eyes.

Ever felt a portrait looking back at you? This connection is biological. Your brain uses a shortcut called **"face schema"** to locate key features: eyes, nose, and mouth. Eyes convey the most information about gaze and thought, making them an anchor in portraiture.

Tips for painting eyes that capture attention:

1. **Shape:** Suggest the eye's rounded form with the lid's curve and shadows beneath it.
2. **Moisture:** Add highlights from your light source to give the eye a wet appearance.
3. **Sclera:** Use washes of gray, blue, and pink—not pure white—for a lifelike appearance.
4. **Iris:** Create depth with radial strokes and color gradients extending from the pupil.
5. **Pupil:** Paint a circle for a straight-ahead gaze and a slight ellipse when looking elsewhere.

Gaze. You get to choose!

1. **Direct eye contact** creates intimacy and confrontation.
2. **Gazing away** creates a sense of contemplation or distraction. Placing catchlight in the direction of their gaze balances the scene.
3. **Lids.** Heavy lids suggest fatigue, sadness, or seduction. Wide lids suggest alertness, surprise, or fear.
4. **Eyebrows.** Furrowed brows add tension; raised brows add openness and surprise. Make sure your brows are congruent with your lids and gaze to fully convey your subject's expression.

[Why Eyes Are the Most Important Part of a Portrait Painting]

[How To Paint a Super Realistic Watercolor Eye to Give Life to Portraits]

[How to Draw & Paint Animal Eyes in Watercolor | Denise Soden | Skill share]






