The importance of light in achieving intensity and sharpness in detail

Light Effects

Using Natural Light by Ross Franzi

All of these paintings are in acrylic and gouache. The reason for the different scenes is to show the different environments and lighting for each subject,

Early Morning Sunrise, Beach Curlew, 560 x 360mm
This painting shows back-lighting and silhouette, using pale warm colours with dark cool colours to produce the strong light.

I love painting wildlife, as I am very passionate about the environment. Each piece I paint has a different story, not only about the wildlife, but its habitat also.

Every painting has four vital parts: size and shape; light and dark; texture; and composition. In my demonstration, I used soft light with a very dark background and strong highlights.

Note that the time of the day or night is very important, as it gives you not only the light intensity, but also the correct colours to use. In this case, I used Raw Umber with Carbon Black. The reason I chose these colours rather than Paynes Grey, was due to the light source, the colour of the wall and the browns in the floor.

When you do highlights, don't just use white - try others like Unbleached White or Naples Yellow as this makes it warm and soft, and not flat. Then add your white.

For intensity and sharpness in detail, use black versus white - the stronger the intensity, the sharper the detail. An example is - the stronger the light coming from the sun, the darker the shadow of the object. As I tell my students, it takes time and a lot of practice to know and understand light, so don't rush it and you will find it starts getting easier.

I tend to use acrylic and gouache, but firstly I concentrate on the composition at the conceptual stage, and my image is drawn in with watercolour. I begin with the background and then follow with the subject. I use paint in a traditional manner with attention to detail, which I consider is very important when working in this genre.

Through my art I hope to teach people the importance of looking after what we have on this planet - the habitat of animals and plants. I want my art to make a difference to how people see and think about the environment. □

Solitude, Reef Heron, 360 x 560mm
This painting shows shadow on shadow, with strong light behind - if you have strong light, you have strong shadows.

Watch Out, White-bellied Sea Eagle, 760 x 580mm
This one shows back-lighting where the light is coming through the trees, hitting the back of the eagle and going onto the water. This great effect shows up both light and dark!

My Favourite, Green-backed Heron, 560 x 360mm
This painting is about open space and distance, and showcases the different sizes of the subjects.

> **"**I begin with the background and then follow with the subject.**"**

Stage 1 Preparation
The painting is prepared by painting gesso primer on the surface you use. I use 600g paper as I find it very good for detail. Next, draw up the image and transfer it onto the paper using a watercolour pencil.

TIP: By transferring the image, you can place it anywhere on the surface. This way, you get the image in the right position. If you are painting, use a watercolour pencil as it does not leave marks.

Stage 2 Background
Start painting the background, making sure that you paint up to the image with an even coverage. I normally put the darker shades down first, as you can see. Here, I used Raw Umber with Carbon Black. Don't use black only, as it makes the painting flat.


Stage 3 Subdued light effect
Next, add the background colour - you will notice the dark colour adsorbs the lighter colour. This is the effect I want, as I require a subdued light effect.


Stage 4 Texture
At this stage, start adding light to the back wall and texture to the floor area.

TIP: To create the timber effect, put down the darkest colour first, and as you are putting down the colour, use the brush to get a light/dark combination. Then use lighter tones as a wash over the top. To finish off, place shadows and your light effect.
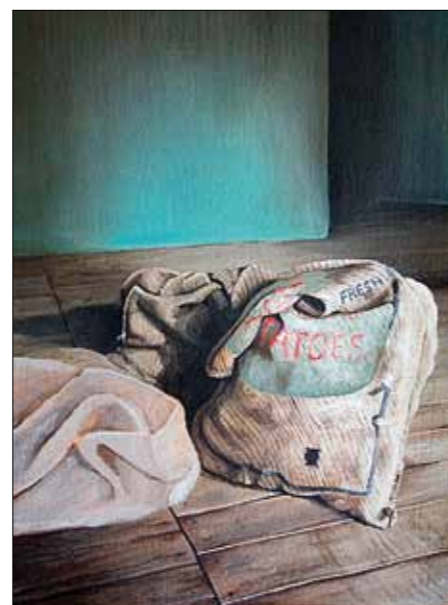
Stage 5 Shadow and light
As you can see, the background is coming together with shadow and light - very important. The light intensity is governed by how many layers are applied. Note that the light is not all over the wall, but blends into the shadow and dark tones.
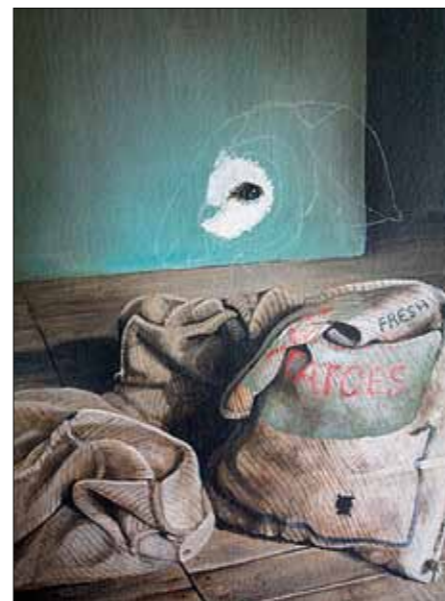
Stage 6 Feathers
Start the feather effect using acrylics, then gouache, over the top for detail.

TIP: Do not rush this stage, as this is very important!

DETAIL
Here is a close up of the eye - notice the light effect in the eye.

Stage 7 Details
Finish off the detail on the owl and mouse, ready for the final highlights and shadows. This painting is about light coming through a window on a moonlit night, so being delicate is important.

Stage 8 The Finished Painting

Home Sweet Home, Willie Wagtail, 260 x 360mm
This came about through the love I have for textures and light. I used strong light coming through the window, which allowed me to get the strong texture effect on each item, and that is why I also used the Wille Wagtail, being a black bird which stands out in the light. As you can see, I used all different textures - metal tins, glass lamp, timber brush and so on, which showed the rough and smooth surfaces, using different colours and light.
By having subjects arranged this way you have balance also.

These paintings are about the harsh Australian conditions in drought and what my grandfather told me about using chemicals and baits around the farm. In these paintings, I looked at the rustic textures, the light and the colours around farming areas in the dry. They take me back to my childhood, looking through old farm sheds and watching the wildlife.

Tapping on the Window, Peewee, 290 x 390mm
This is one of my favourites - in this painting I wanted to show depth. To do this, I started with a large window and by having it dark inside the window, it makes the room appear to go forever. I placed a door opening down on the bottom panel to show the other side of the building, which gives the room its size, and this is why I put the Peewee in also. To finish off, I placed a wash over the top part of the window, to give the effect of strong light outside of the building. By placing the reflection on the bottom panels, this also helps achieving this effect. Depth is obtained from strong light and dark, which also gives us the 3D effect - so remember, strong light, strong shadows!!!

Grand-dad's Favourite, Magpie, 260 x 360mm
Grand-dad's Favourite is about old machinery and how to get that old rustic look. To get the effect I used Burnt Umber for the primary colour, with a little Paynes Grey in places. Then I applied Burnt Sienna with a round brush, dabbing the paint on. For the highlights, I used unbleached white with Gold Oxide, and to finish off I dotted purple and blue over all the rust area. This effect can be used on any metal subject such as wire, car bodies, tin roofs and so on.

Morning Break, Blue Wren, 290 x 390mm
This painting is about making the subject come out by the use of strong colour, with a neutral background. Due to the handle of the garden tool being rustic, I decided to use the Blue Wren, which is opposite in colour on the colour wheel, and hence this makes the bird stand out.

TIP: look at opposite colours to make your subject stand out: i.e. red and blue (the red centre) or purple and pink (sunrise/sunset).

about the artist

Ross Franzi is an artist from Bloomfield in Far North Queensland. He was born in Melbourne in 1963 and from an early age enjoyed drawing and had a keen interest in animals. His father was a professional photographer who taught him about light and texture, and Ross believes his enthusiasm for art and animals stems from early influences from both his father and grandfather.

With his passion for the environment, Ross is known for his depictions of animals, birds and marine life. Upon leaving school, Ross joined the Royal Australian Air Force as an aircraft engineer. Being unable to continue in this career due to a serious injury in 1993, Ross turned to art and nature to aid his recovery.

In 1994 Ross commenced studying traditional art, figure drawing and perspective. Ross exhibits in his own gallery, Black Cockatoo Gallery, located on 25 acres on the Bloomfield Track, between Cape Tribulation and Cooktown.

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Who Pulled the Plug Out, Teal, 260 x 360mm
This painting shows how to set up perspective. To do this, you move the subject, in this case the boat, down from the horizon line, until you position it to the point where it is balanced and the subject doesn't look like it is going to fall over. I put the duck in to give some reference point for how big the boat is and where the water mark is.