

The April Demonstration with Melanie Cambridge Still Life in Oils

Melanie is an accomplished oil painter, known for her emotive seascapes with large expansive skies. This evening's subject was, to quote: "Something a bit different". The still life was based around an old artist's palette encrusted with the full spectrum of colours of dried paint. This was set on a blue cloth with other artists paraphernalia.



Fig 1 The start



Fig 2 The subject

Gesso & Mediums Mel worked on a gesso primed canvas 22" x 18". She explained that she mixes white shop bought gesso with a colour, in this instance Yellow Ochre (water based acrylic paint, oils can be used over acrylic but not the other way around). Yellow, Mel added was a warming base and she used the example of using pastels working on a coloured ground. She uses Sansodor as a paint thinner rather than linseed oil, her preference is 'sticky paint - not too slippery'. Her advice was "Don't use White Spirit (toxic)". Melanie uses a full palette of colours when working including 'Violet Grey' from Daler Rowney. Her oil paint brand of choice is "Vernissage" from Great Art Catalogue.

Composition Mel was happy with her still life arrangement which had strong angles and height. She drew her composition on to the canvas using thin watery paint, firstly in blue and then adding another dark colour to establish shapes. Where she wasn't happy she simply wiped off the paint and redrew. Mel also rejigged the subject commenting "You can move items once you've started painting" and "This is the time to move things around". Her final quote made me smile, "Slap some colour on and pray"!

Colour "Colour theory is all well in theory. It's based on light not pigments". Real life is different. After sketching the subject on to the canvas she began blocking in the objects starting with the background. Her initial blue colour was too bright, colour theory tells us to add orange but with the pigments Mel was using her English Light Red darkened the blue true to life.

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Melanie switched to an extra long filbert and blocked in all of the colours and main shapes (including negative spaces) at a fast pace. She was constantly looking and checking for shapes thinking “cooler/warmer” and “lighter/darker”. For the first half of this demonstration Melanie aimed to cover her canvas and block in all of the main shapes using light, shadow and colour. She shared where she was looking and making decisions, carefully shifting the edges of objects and the spaces between them. She pointed out shadows cast by objects within the still life; “mix shadow with a bit of hope”. By the end of the first half of this demonstration Melanie had a still life painting and was looking forward to adding some additional texture using Zest Cold Wax Medium. After refreshments and a brief appraisal of progress, Melanie went on with highlights to the glass and metal elements. For this she added white with a touch of Cerulean Blue. She also replaced the existing paint tube on the palette with a new distorted tube which was a better subject to paint.

Cold Wax Medium To Represent the the dried palette paint of the subject Mel introduced a ‘Cold Wax Medium’ It is a thick paste which is mixed with oil colours (up to 50/50 but usually 30/70) to make the paint stand out. The paste is applied with a palette knife.



Fig 3 Adding Cold Wax Medium

Glazes & Varnish The upright paint brushes cast a shadow across the subject palette, however the paint was wet and Mel did not want to disturb the under painting. Her suggestion was retouching varnish at a later point used as a carrier with a touch of colour. Mel only varnishes with retouching varnish because it allows the paint to breathe and importantly dry! Using this method acts as a glaze and can, for example, darken an area or add a golden glow without losing the lights and darks underneath. When your glazed area is dry the painting can be repainted with retouching varnish.

Framing Mel recommends working on 2 sizes of canvas for which you have a frame ready. If paintings don't sell you can interchange them. She uses (for 5 years plus and highly rates) an online company called; easyframe.co.uk they provide all the hanging accessories and free delivery over £50.

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Fig 4 The final Painting

The demonstration was as informative and entertaining as promised. Mel has her own line of paint brushes and she kindly gifted the society some watercolour brushes to try out. Mel has a website with links to her Art shop where you can purchase her various art supplies and tutorials. You can also sign up to her monthly newsletter the 'Oily Rag'.

Our thanks go to Melanie for an informative evening.
Melanie's website is:

<https://www.melaniecambridge-fine-art.co.uk>

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