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Mastering Through the Block

Breaking Artistic Barriers by Sherie Sloane



Romancing the Harbor

Watercolor on Strathmore® 300 Series.

Painters are like writers, telling stories not with pens but with our brushes. Our prose is rendered through myriads of colors, instead of words. And just like writers, we occasionally face the inevitable “block” – in our case, the “artist’s block.” No matter how hard we try, we find it difficult to pick up the brush and start painting. The inspiration just seems to abandon us. Some even go for days and even months unable to continue with their artistic pursuits.

So, how does one triumph over this artistic obstruction?

Take a Breather

Take time out from life’s hustle and bustle and observe the things that are happening around you. Oftentimes, we miss a lot of opportunities due to how busy we are and our attempts to accomplish several tasks all at once. We juggle multiple roles with the aim of being the best in everything.



Butterfly Kisses

Watercolor on Strathmore® 300 Series.

Take a breather. It doesn’t have to be a long and expensive vacation. Even five minutes of complete silence in your own space can do wonders. Doing nothing but just relaxing in that moment of silence is a great stress reliever. I don’t mean to lay around and waste time. Find a comfortable place to wind down and shut off all distractions like cell phones, computers and televisions.

Open Your Eyes and Mind

As an artist and mentor, I am posed with the question of where I get the ideas for my paintings. Many are surprised when I tell them, "I oftentimes don't look for it. It finds me." From the everyday mundane things and scenes, to the most revering experiences, my subjects have made themselves known. All I have to do is recognize their existence.

Focusing on details I would not normally spend time on reveals astounding characters in my subjects. Flowers, for example, are no longer just buds with petals and leaves but a contemporary composition of light and shadow by itself.



Squeezing In

Oil on Strathmore® 300 Series Bristol.

Revisit Memories

When your creativity crumbles and the well of artistic drive has dried up, it's time to go back to the basics. One proven exercise I use to jumpstart my creativity is to look back and remember the stories that shaped my life. At times, just the thought of a cheerful summer stroll with my sisters is enough to liven up my urge to create again. Or remembering how I became an artist.

Although my parents said I was born to be an artist, it was only after my father's sudden demise in my early twenties



Band of Sisters

Watercolor on Canvas.

that I officially became one. "Officially," since I strongly believe I was created as one. I found solace from grief in arts. The process was slow but expressing myself with brushes and paints helped to heal the wounds of loss. Emotions derived from this humbling memoir emancipate me from my occasional loss of inspiration.



Chicago Spring

Watercolor on Strathmore® 400 Series.



Coconuts

Oil on canvas. Artist's first painting.



Music Maker

Watercolor on Bristol Board.

Try Something New

Another way to break the block is to explore other mediums than what you're used to. I began as an oil painter and after two years, I developed the courage to reverse the methods and I learned to become a watercolorist. The aqueous medium has since brought me towards new levels of artistic exploration and confidence.

If you're a realistic painter, experiment in impressionistic style or vice versa. Dare yourself to delve into abstraction if you haven't tried it before. Or learn something new that is totally unrelated to the arts. Deviating from your norms and routines will give you a fresh perspective and view on things.



Easter Bunny

Watercolor on Strathmore® 300 Series.

Become A Child Again

Give a child some crayons and almost instantaneously, he will start to draw. He is doing it purely for fun. In that very moment, it doesn't matter to him whether it will look good or if his parents will hang it on the wall. He simply does not care about anything except what he can do with the paper and colors in front of him. Nor does he have a specific plan or method. Yet he'll call it "art"



Flower Vendor

Watercolor on Canvas.



Painting the Apple

Watercolor on Strathmore® 300 Series.

when he's done. Adopt that child-like spirit and take artistic liberties. I recall seeing a child paint a mango in purple. When I asked him why he did so, he said because he liked it that way. It was a life lesson for me to keep in mind. Nothing shuns creativity more than the daunting expectation of our own perfection.



Birches

Watercolor on Strathmore® 400 Series. From the Artist's Journal.



Downtown Portland

Watercolor on Strathmore® 400 Series. From the Artist's Journal.

Start an Art Journal

Chronicling one's thoughts and experiences on paper has a relaxing and calming effect. Since your journal will be the repository of your art journey, choose one that is portable and beautiful enough to inspire you. Perhaps you would want to create one yourself and embellish it with your own style. No matter what you choose, keep in mind



Resting

Pen and Ink on Strathmore® 400 Series. From the Artist's Journal.

that your journal is for exploration rather than for achievement. That it is solely for discovery rather than accomplishing a certain body of work. Mine is composed mainly of pencil drawings and watercolor sketches. Some are recognizable subjects and some are not. In its pages, I allow myself to take risks and record things, words, people and places that interest me.



Heavy Sleeper

Watercolor on Strathmore® 300 Series. Back portrait of the Artist's husband.

Find Support

If self motivation doesn't work, obtain encouragement from others. Join an art group or start one. Meeting individuals with the same interests will help you get back on track with your goals. Find an

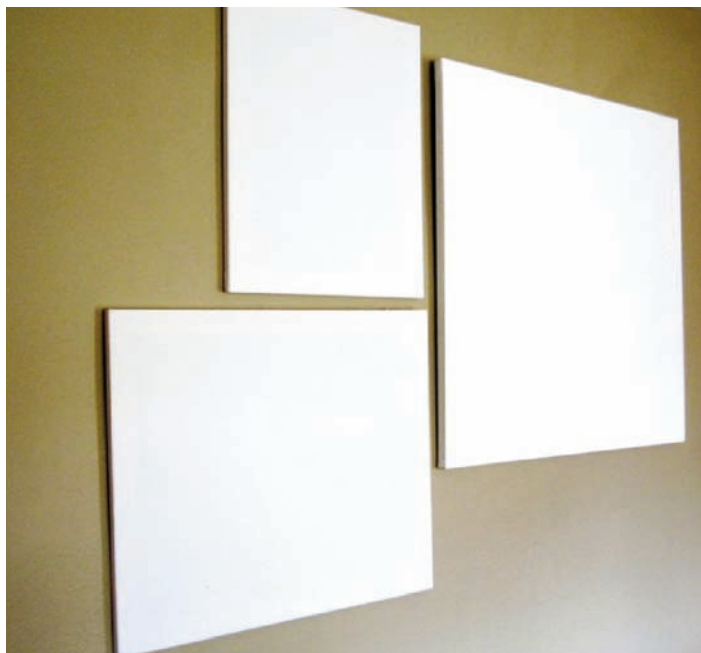
"accountability partner," one to whom you can ask to remind you to either paint once a day, a week or even once a month.

As a new mom, finding time to paint has become more difficult. Although my husband is not an artist, he is my biggest motivator. He understands and appreciates the

innate value of dedicated creative time. If weeks have passed and I have not created a single piece of art, he'll use all means to convince me to paint. This includes driving me to painting locations and taking care of the baby by himself.

Be The Subject

In my studio, three blank canvases hang on a wall. Anyone who visits my creative space is totally in awe to see those rather than a set of my finished paintings. I lost count as to how many times I have to explain the reason behind this. I do it cheerfully anyways. The canvases remind me that whatever circumstances I'm in, inspired or not, I have a gift to create something beautiful from scratch. This is a special gift given to me that is unique from others. It represents a chance for me to start anew. More than appreciating your skills, you have to appreciate yourself. Forgive your flaws and highlight your individuality. Only then will you be able to embark on a more meaningful artistic journey.



Wall Art

Blank canvases in Artist's Studio.

About the Artist

Sherie Sloane



Recognized as the master's medium, Sherie has come to love the spontaneity of painting in watercolors. Retaining the freshness of the paints and winning over the fear of losing transparency, are challenges she has come to embrace.

She employs thoughtful planning and wistful creative instinct in all her works. Although she still paints in oils and acrylics occasionally, watercolor has become her medium of choice. She paints a variety of subjects from landscapes and still lifes, to portraits in an impressionistic and contemporary manner.

She has won several prestigious awards over the past years and has been inducted into the Asian-American Hall of Fame for her outstanding contribution in the field of arts and charitable work for children.

Sherie has conducted workshops at the Chicago Children's Museum and in other parts of the Midwest. She also founded the Kids Art for Peace movement to reach and mobilize children to create inspirational artworks across the globe.

Her works can be seen in private collections and have been exhibited in various galleries in North America and Asia. Art World Chicago and the renowned Saatchi Online Gallery in London currently display some of Sherie's works.

Sherie lives with her husband and son in Illinois. Aside from painting, she also writes weekly in her creative blog "The Morning Artist" and posts some of her paintings in the Daily Painters Marketplace online gallery. She is also a graphic and indie fashion designer.

Sherie can be reached at (708) 441-7575.
Other samples of her work can be found at
www.sheriesloane.com

The Great Holiday Swap for Artist Trading Cards

Strathmore Artist Papers™ hosted a successful artist trading card swap this holiday season! Artists submitted their holiday or winter-themed original artist trading cards and in exchange, they received an original piece of art from another artist. Return swap cards were mailed on December 15, just in time for the holidays.

In case you haven't heard, artist trading cards are miniature pieces of art that are traded around the world. Artists create, trade and collect art at organized swap events, either in person, online or by mail. The only official rule is that the trading card measures 2.5" x 3.5."

"We received over 1,000 entries," says Jeanette Gile, Strathmore's swap organizer. "The talent and creativity exhibited by participating artists was amazing! And, judging from the comments we received, artists truly enjoyed participating in the swap."

Following are a few of the comments we received:

"Thanks for a fun inspirational promotion!"

- Collette Pitcher

"Thanks for the opportunity; it was a fun size to paint."

- Catherine Bottelman

"I have been using your art papers since I got my first sketch pad at 10 for Christmas. I was so excited about this project – my friends at work wanted to play too! Aren't they (ATCs) wonderful!!!" - Deborah

"I've been involved with making ATCs for about 5 years now and I think it's great that you're offering a holiday swap. I hope it is successful!" - Leela

The Great Holiday Swap is a follow up to the introduction of Artist Trading Card surfaces launched earlier this year. For more information about Strathmore's Artist Trading Card line, visit: strathmoreartist.com/atc.



First Snow
Angela Brereton, WI



Untitled
Amy Mebberson, OR



The Night Before
Delilah Fiechter, CO



Christmas in the Caribbean
Erin Marie Elman, NY



Candy Cane Swan
Cathy Clark, WA



Winter at Sunlight Basin
Rhonda Green, AZ

Featured Product



Creates soft, stretchable images

Inkjet Iron-On Transfer Sheets

Create brilliant, opaque images on dark-colored fabric.



Draw directly on transfer sheets



Combine inkjet images with your drawings



Stretches without cracking or peeling

Now artists and crafters can express themselves on fabric without the limitations of traditional transfer sheets.

Image stretches with fabric and feels soft

- Softer look and feel to image, not stiff or shiny
- Won't crack or separate from fabric

Draw directly on transfer sheets with markers.

Use with many fabric types including cotton, synthetics, poly/cotton blends, linen, canvas and denim. The transfer withstands multiple washing cycles and there are no special wash instructions.

The possibilities are endless

- Design one-of-a-kind fashion accessories
- Use on t-shirts, totes, aprons and more
- Combine transfers, artwork and fabrics to make personalized purses, pillows and quilts
- Use for creative kids' projects



Look for this product at fine art and craft retailers!

Questions From Our Artists

What are the differences between handmade and machine made fine art papers?



Most fine art papers that are used today are machine made. The reason for this is not only economic but because machine made papers provide an extremely consistent surface for fine art purposes.

Both handmade and machine made papers use the same basic raw material ingredients, providing artists with archival quality sheets. But, unlike handmade papers where each sheet is unique, machine made papers result in sheets that are virtually the same. This provides a consistent basis for artistic techniques since each paper varies little from sheet to sheet.

I'm a vegan. What is paper "sizing?" I've heard that some companies use animal products as part of their sizing process? Do you use animal products in your paper sizing?

Sizing is applied to paper in the papermaking process to make sheets less porous. Without sizing, paper would react to moisture like a blotter. The type and amount of sizing applied to paper varies with each type based on the desired working properties.

Drawing paper is sized for surface strength, helping protect the surface for erasing. Watercolor paper is sized to help produce a consistent wash as well as help the scrubbing and layering of colors.

We do NOT use any animal products as part of our sizing process. We use plant-based and synthetic sizing.

What is the difference between the smooth surface of your 400 series Bristol and the plate surface of your 500 series Bristol?

While both smooth and plate surfaces offer a finish suitable for smooth, fine line details, our plate surface is considered an "ultra-smooth" finish which is ideal for the professional illustrator. The surface is excellent for detailed work with pen and ink, technical pen, airbrush and markers.

The term "plate" comes from a process that is exclusive to the Strathmore® brand. The finish is created by hand – layering sheets of paper between special metal plates to create a "book." The book is sent to a specialized piece of equipment that compresses it creating a very consistent, ultra smooth surface like no other.

What is meant by "rag" paper?

Rag is a term used today to describe papers that contain cotton rags and linters. Rags come from the clippings used in the making of textiles and from the reprocessing of cotton garments. Linters are the by-product of the cotton gin process. They are shorter fibers that cling to the cotton seed after it is extracted by the cotton gin. This makes cotton rag a more environmentally-friendly option compared to tree-based papers.

There are also a number of other advantages to papers that are constructed of 100% cotton. First, cotton cellulose is up to 10 times stronger than wood cellulose. Cotton is also lignin free. Lignin that is left in tree-based papers will naturally turn yellow or brown over time.

Cotton paper has become the preference of many professional artists because of its purity, durability and permanence.