



The Painting Cave

Art Space Solutions #010

Learning to See

Like an Artist



by **Jacqui Simpson** 2019

It sounds ridiculous to tell someone that they need to learn how to see. I mean seriously. Unless we are afflicted with poor eyesight, we should all be able to see perfectly well. Right?

Sadly, no. As wine-taster will tell you, they had to hone their tasting skills. As did a perfumer, need to hone their ability in order to develop their fine sense to smell.

Believe it or not, ALL these skills can be taught and learned. You needn't be born with a special ability (although it would certainly help)

I find it surprising that artists are mortified at the idea that they cannot see as they think they should. Learning to see like an artist can be self-learned or you can learn from a teacher. Obviously, in order to acquire this skill it also takes patience and practice. There are no shortcuts or quick methods of learning to see. However, we have remarkable brains. When we hear or read, and comprehend something, it's like a door that opens and cannot be shut.

The first mistake new artists make when they begin to draw, is that they attempt to draw the exact subject immediately. This is really difficult to do if you are unpractised.

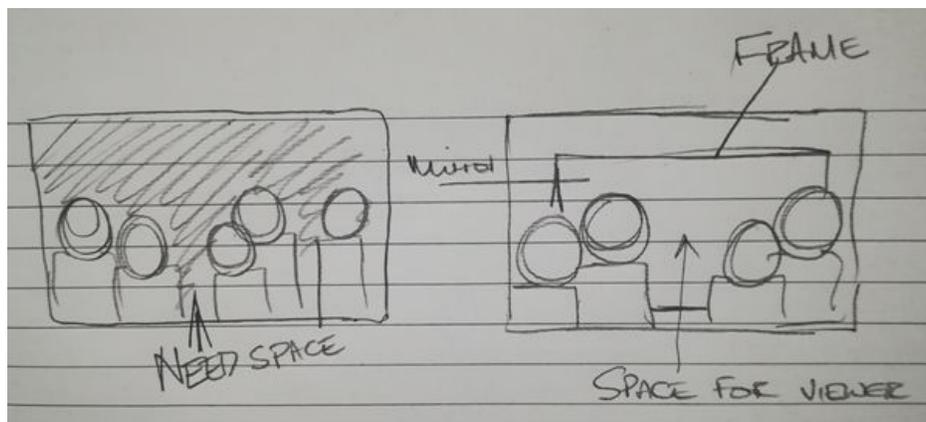
One of the elements of art is SHAPE. Shape is used in many ways including learning to see. Shape is a very important element to use when you are drawing. It is a way of simplifying the subject or subjects in a way that allows you to position your subject on your page. Correct your composition (a principle of SPACE) and assist you with proportion, scale and perspective. (more principles)

In my class I always tell students to start with thumbnails. There is a specific reason for this which I have already mentioned above. A thumbnail is not a detailed or completed drawing. It is a plan. Especially when you are dealing with angles that are confusing.

Your thumbnail can be on a scrap of paper or even a white board. This allows you to play with the shapes of your subjects before you begin your drawing.

Here is an example for you.

I began planning this painting with a few thumbnails. Using simple shapes to determine what I want to go where.



Originally I wanted 5 figures in the painting but then realised that I needed enough space between them for the viewer to see themselves in the painting. I was also thinking of covering the entire background with the mirror vinyl, but I decided to turn the mirror into an old fashioned one with an ornate frame instead. The point is, these are not figures. They are

a bunch of circles with squares as bodies. A very simplified SHAPE that allows me to loosely plan my painting.

When I had settled on the layout in my second thumbnail, I did a third one which had just a little more detail. The angle of the faces, which once again are just a few curved lines.



From here, I began to sketch on my canvas, and began to focus a little more on the actual shape of the characters in the painting.



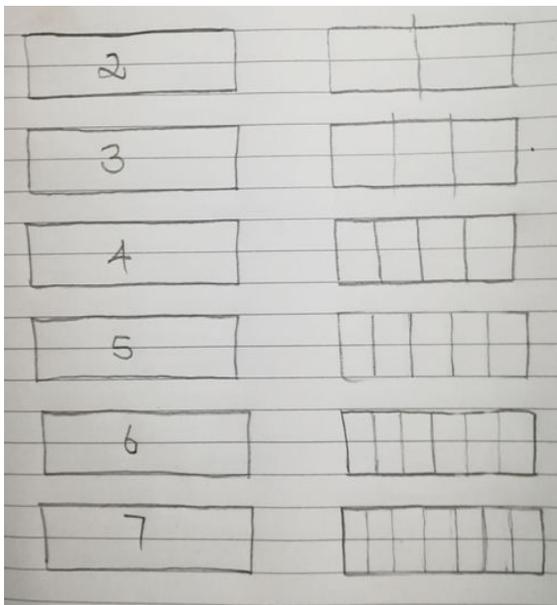
This was my final result. The painting is called The Watchers. You can read more about it here - [THE WATCHERS](#)

If you are trying to determine the angle of something - let's say the chair below



It is easier to determine the angle of the chair when you start off with a block and then look for the shapes that are formed. Drawing the triangles is easier to draw and determine than the angle. Especially when you are looking for them inside a specific area, like the block - the crude shape of what will become the chair.

This leads to another exercise that will assist you if you practice it. It looks a lot easier than it is, so I challenge you to try this at home.



Draw 6 rectangles on a piece of paper.

Then by just ESTIMATING (no ruler) divide the rectangles as I have here.

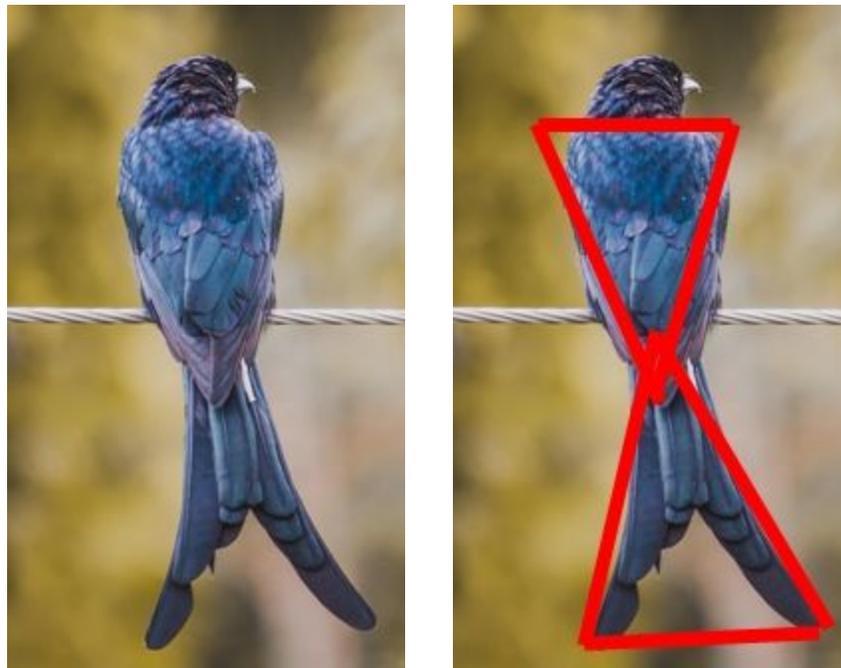
The first one in half, then thirds, quarters etc.

Do this with squares too. And even circles. Learning to accurately measure, will help you when you are drawing the chair, for example.

Once you have your initial square, you can estimate how far from the edge of the square, the angle for the chair's back begins, and lower down, where it ends. Drawing the angle then is easy

Looking for shapes and estimating sizes begins first with a lot of drawing. Your thumbnails may look like a crazy mass of lines - and that's ok. Because once you have the shapes laid out, and then the angles that you need, you will be able to accurately draw your subject.

Studying your subject for some time, I mean really just looking - looking for shapes, angles and lines. Just look. Estimate where your subject will be on your surface (your thumbnails should be approximately the same shape as the surface you want to work on) Make a mark on your thumbnail to show the top and bottom of your subject. Determine what shape you will need as a crude outline. It could be a geometric shape or even an organic shape. Organic shapes like flowers, could start as circles. Here is another example below.



Chances are that if you just tried to draw this bird, you would have made the tail shorter than it actually is. But when you determine the crude shape, you realize that the two triangles are almost the same size. Once you have your triangles, you can start to curve the corners and gently add the detail as it is required.

So much easier, don't you think? I really hope this helps.

Please let me know if this helps you. I love making these Art Space tips, but I am not sure if it is actually benefiting you unless I get some feedback.

Have a wonderful week

Love Jax



Who am I?

My name is Jacqui (Jax) Simpson. I am an artist and teacher and have taught many students over 30 years.

I am passionate about Art and about those who want to learn how to create art.

I will be sending out tips, tricks, and advice to you on a weekly basis.

I am here to help you and I would love to hear from you.

Stay in touch with us!



info@thepaintingcave.co.za

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The Painting Cave Art Studio
4 Typhoon Road, Centurion
South Africa 0152