



ODIHAM ART GROUP DEMONSTRATION REPORT

Paul Weaver; Figures in a Landscape, September 2016

Paul introduced his subject by telling us a little of the background to his chosen scene. He has done a lot of Plein Air painting in the south of France (lucky chap) and the scene he painted was taken from his sketches, photographs and (most important of all) his memories of a hot summer afternoon. Interestingly the original photo and sketches did not have any figures in, he added these later. Paul stressed that the planning stage was vital; you should decide why you are painting a subject – is it the light, subject, shade, colour or a combination of those reasons, as well as deciding what you are going to concentrate on and, almost as important, what you are going to leave out. He recommended using a viewfinder when sketching to crop and select a subject or scene. This design stage is critical to the success of the final version.

Paul started by doing a rough tonal sketch on cheap paper in order to plan the composition and mark out the lights and darks of the subject. He tends to see the abstract shapes in a composition first, then the tonal values. Paul used charcoal for the tonal sketch at the demonstration but explained he would normally use either a 2b or 4b pencil when sketching outside. He advised us to consider the edges of your subject carefully. Are they brittle, broken, lost, found, jagged or soft – this dictates how to use watercolour when we decide on wet on wet, or wet on dry, dry brush etc. Be free when doing the tonal sketch and don't be afraid of making mistakes, it is just for planning purposes. He also recommended we draw the scene first as it connects us with the subject in a way a photograph cannot do, capturing the memory, (although by all means take reference photos afterwards).



Paul roughly blocked in the tones, noting that shadows are useful for describing the contours at ground level as well as giving depth to buildings etc. He said it was important to leave the lightest part of the subject white in the sketch so you know that everything else has a tonal value against the white reference. Shadows at the front of a painting add interest to the foreground. In order to place figures into the scene Paul tore up scrap paper, drew a couple of rough figures on them then placed them against the tonal sketch to decide where they should be and what size to make them. He advised it best to remember that, as a general rule, a torso is approximately 2 x heads deep and legs are 4 x heads deep.



Before embarking on the watercolour painting Paul told us he uses Ken Bromley watercolour paints and either Bockingford paper, which allows washes to dry quickly on the surface and are easier to lift out, or Saunders Waterford that stays wetter for longer as it is a cotton rag paper and holds moisture on the surface, extending the time it can be worked and moved around. He draws the layout, once finalized, lightly onto the paper with a 4b pencil – he never uses anything harder as it will 'tattoo' the line onto the paper and affect the finish painting. He uses a size 30 brush with a sharp point that holds lots of water, made to his specification by Rosemary & Co, and always works on an easel, not flat on a table. Another interesting tip was to always use a large pot of water filled to the top, so you could



see how far your brush dips into the water, allowing you the maximum control over the amount of water on the brush.

Paul started the painting by putting a soft Raw Sienna wash across the whole scene. He then flummoxed all of us by putting a subtle rose pink wash on the top left side of the sky before adding a cerulean blue on top – this stopped the blue mixing with the raw sienna and turning the sky green. Brilliant, who knew! At this stage it is important to remember to keep any hard edges dry, and only wet those you want to have soft edges. He said ‘slightly damp is dangerous’ – avoid painting on areas that are nearly dry unless you want to have a specific textured effect, for example as texture on masonry.



Paul continued to work from background to foreground, a recognized technique in watercolour. He re-wet the tree line, using a mix of Ultramarine, Windsor Yellow and Raw Sienna which was darker on one side to give depth and shadow, with additional darks mixed from Ultramarine and Burnt Sienna. Leaving the space for the front figure very pale, Paul painted the right hand building in a thicker mix of Cobalt Blue and Alizarin Crimson, using a cooler blue shade at the top of the building then shading down to a rich warmer colour at the base to reflect the warm sun on the road. An even thicker mix was used to delineate the windows and doors as well as the outline of the two figures in the background.



Moving to the left hand building Paul used Ultramarine Blue and Light Red for the side of the barn, commenting that it is important to go for larger areas like this in one hit, not lots of strokes, as it keeps the painting fresh. Shadows added under the eaves and in the windows gave the subject depth. For the pantile roof he used Burnt Sienna and Ultramarine Blue washes that ran into each other, giving a ripple effect, then painted in negative shapes at the base of the barn wall to indicate grass.



Using a dry brush he created a deep textured shadow to indicate the doorway, as a solid black shape would look too heavy and incongruous. He also added texture with dry brush strokes on the road. The final painting glowed with the heat of a summer afternoon in rural France and Paul received a warm ovation for his excellent demonstration. There is talk of a workshop at some point in the future so watch this space!

