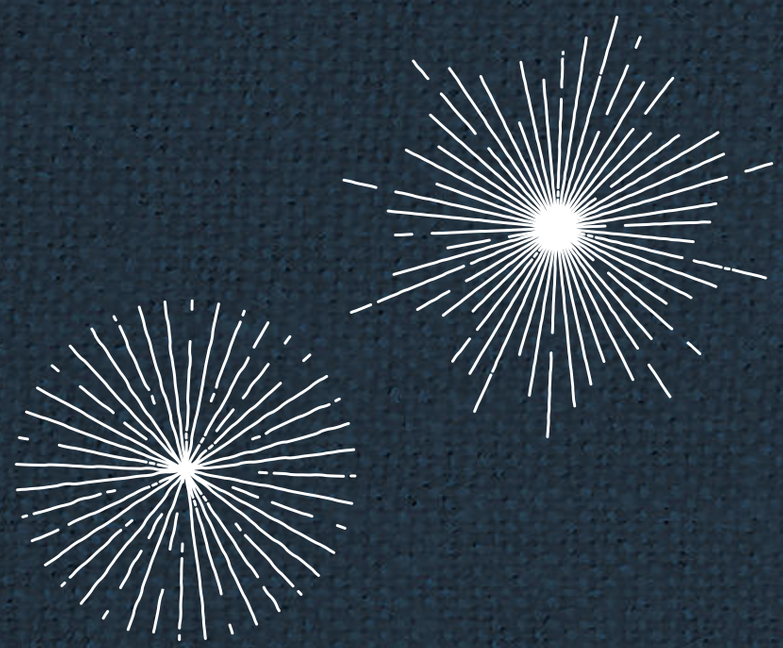
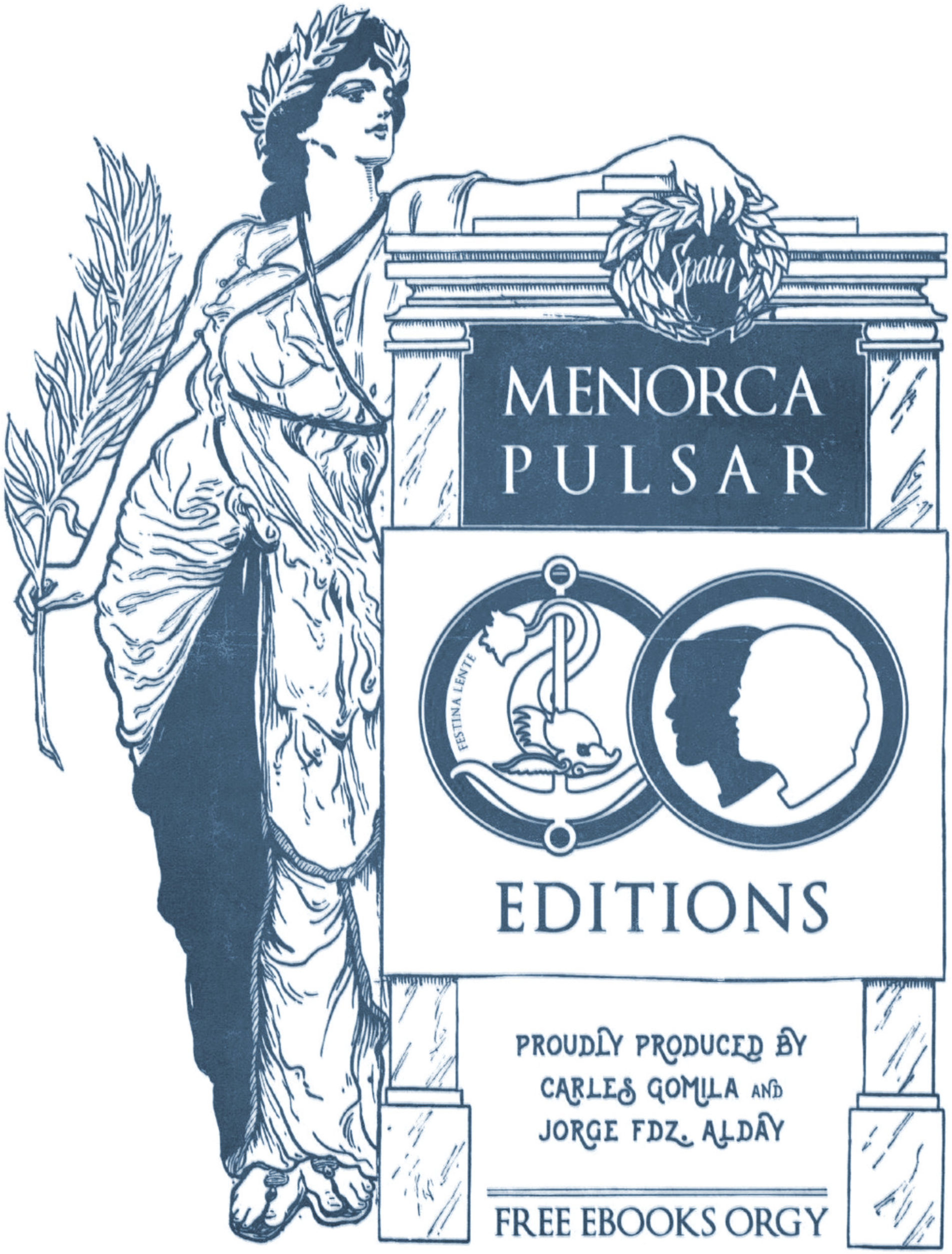
COSTA DVOREZKY

BY CARLES GOMILA



MENORCA PULSAR


Spain
MENORCA
PULSAR
FESTINA LENTE
EDITIONS
PROUDLY PRODUCED BY
CARLES GOMILA AND
JORGE FDZ. ALDAY
FREE EBOOKS ORGY

INDEX

Menorca Pulsar, Art Oasis 1

Why have I written this book? 2

Introduction

Dvorezky Planet 5

Who is Costa Dvorezky? 7

Training 10

Interview 14

Philosophy

You know too much 16

True knowledge 19

Do not think as a student 21

The art of being lazy and disorganized 27

Perfect is the enemy of good 32

Perfection is a poison for the soul 35

Creative process

Make it happen 39

The risk of not taking risks 53

Focal point 59

Correct with discipline 61

Demos

Material list 65

Palette 67

Julieta 69

Marta 86

Workshop's program 109

Participants 110

Who we are? 111

Our partners 113

MENORCA PULSAR,
ART OASIS



RARA AVIS WORKSHOPS

If a workshop does not transform you, it's not a good workshop.

Menorca Pulsar is an artistic boot camp where not improving is not an option. **Our mansion** is at the perfect retreat to get inspired: **Menorca**, a small island in the heart of the Mediterranean sea.

During Spring and Fall —two magical seasons at the island where everything is in perfect calm— a teacher and a tribe of art lovers come together in order to share work and free time.

MENORCA PULSAR

Art Oasis

www.menorcapulsar.com

WHY HAVE I WRITTEN THIS BOOK?



My name is **Carles Gomila**, and I am an artist and co-founder of **Menorca Pulsar**.

Within this book I will explain everything I learned at Costa Dvorezky's workshop, giving some order to all the notes and photographs I took.

When you meet someone you admire a lot, you almost always imagined him taller than he really is. As if the scale of veneration and physical height were linked. That's why getting to know a star in person can be a disappointment.

Well, I can say that this did not happen to me with Costa Dvorezky because the guy is quite impressive. He is a vigorous man, strong and with a powerful gaze, even with jet lag.

Costa spoke with moderation as if it fatigues him to waste words, and everything about him suggested that he was a fighter. Shortly after our first handshake, he showed that he also knew how to have fun with the same vividness with which he paints.

What a great guy!

You see, in the workshops, the good vibes are not started by the participants, as could be expected. Well, sometimes it does, but it's unusual that it happens that way. The one who lights the fuse is the teacher. It's as if he is giving a starting shot, something that simply happens because it has to happen. And without being a romantic guy, I would say it's a magical moment.

…Sometimes it's a gesture of complicity during a demo or a few extra glasses of wine after dinner. But there is always a spark that makes everyone realize that the adventure has started and that time flies.

At that moment everyone feels at home and surrounded by friends they didn't know they had.

Magical, as I told you.

And now, knowing Costa a little better, I'll tell you why I wrote this book: because I want you to know this brilliant mind a bit better. I want to









leave a testimony of his philosophy of life, in addition to his peculiar way of destroying rules and stirring freedom.

I will also talk about his method, of course, but do not take it too seriously. I'm sure he would not want it that way. Because more important than his technique is the way his head works, the way he makes decisions and lives painting. How he takes risks. And I will try, as far as possible, to reveal all his wisdom in this little book.

All these good vibes are thanks to you, Costa. Thank you for making it possible.

Carles Gomila

Menorca, December 2018

INTRODUCTION

DVOREZKY PLANET



«I do not teach or indoctrinate, I relate».

'**Essays**' quote. Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592).

The universe of art is not monolithic. It's an infinite space full of stars, planets, and phenomena. And each planet has its own physical laws and civilizations.

Unfetter your mind, because everything fits in this universe.

In my previous books —and especially **Mark Tennant's**— I talked about the need to plan paintings and the importance of discipline.

One can come to think that planning and discipline are indispensable rules for good painting in this universe. But no, that only works on some planets.

In the Galaxy of Figuration, there are countless stars around which planets with unique light, gravity and horizons orbit. And there we find Planet Dvorezky, a small and bright sphere marbled with Burnt Sienna and Indigo. It does not look like any other and you'd say it's going its own way.

On Planet Dvorezky there are few laws, but well set. A free and prosperous place where the past is respected without renouncing the present. Where the error is not dismissed but retained because it's the best construction material. A place where nobody aspires to be perfect, just good enough. There is only one non-negotiable thing: bureaucracy and boredom are reasons for expulsion here.

One just does not come to this planet for organizing subtlety discussion committees.

Costa Dvorezky smashes right in front of you a handful of physical rules that seemed unalterable on your planet. And you know what? On his planet, this works perfectly and smoothly.

But Planet Dvorezky is not your planet, and its ambassador made it very

clear to us: **«I will not teach you anything, I only share my experience»**.

And it's a relief, for once, finding someone respectful and without the dark intention of colonizing you. Its ambassador just wants you to learn everything about his planet in order to enrich yours, but in no way does he want you to lose your identity.

This is because your planet, believe me, is unique and precious. It will be good to learn how they manage in other places, but home is home. And in your home, it's your rules.

Never forget that, because not all planets come in peace.



WHO IS COSTA DVOREZKY?





Costa Dvorezky was born in Russia in 1968 and obtained his superpowers at the Art College and the Academy of Arts in Moscow, paying for his studies by illustrating books for children.

He confesses that sometimes he feels as if he lived eternally in school, in the sense of not having responsibilities and that his only duty is to paint and have fun. He wants to take advantage of that feeling, extend it throughout his whole life. Not in vain does he claim to have the best job in the world because he does what he wants to do all the time.

No cherubs nor shepherd romances. Nothing to do with looking for beautiful subjects; only good painting. Solid as a rock, radiant, vigorous, and powerful. **Costa Dvorezky loves painting over any subject: he paints without fear, without seeking applause, without the need for arguments and without the pretense of showing anything to anyone**.

His thing is a vital need, and it's absolutely sacred.

For him painting is the celebration of a lifestyle emancipated from the tyranny of ego and market whims, it's an unconditional commitment to individual expression and strength.

A teacher is a travel companion.

Art teachers' teachings tend to be like iron objects: perfectly solid, with a single specific function and an unalterable form. That piece of iron may be very useful for the teacher, but it's probably a piece of junk for his students. Costa's teachings, on the other hand, are like a molten iron casting capable of filling any mold and solidifying in its rightful place and shape. The principles he teaches can aid any person because they are flexible and universal.

His lessons do not try to make you fit into a method but suggest a way of thinking about painting that opens up an infinite number of possibilities as for personal expression. This saves you time so you can find your own path, your own way, and learn things by yourself... as it should be!

The only purpose that Costa Dvorezky has is to get you to think pictorially. And, not less important, think for yourself, and find that doorway to your mind so that you may unlock the channels of expressive freedom. How many teachers do you know who do this?

I'M NOT GOING TO TEACH YOU ANYTHING, I JUST SHARE MY EXPERIENCE

TRAINING

The balance between discipline and expression.

Costa states that the best time he spent in his life was watching, fascinated, as his great grandfather painted horses. It was that grand old man who lit the flame by putting a pen in his hand for the first time. Blessed instrument. So the first creature Costa immortalized in his life was a horse. Costa Dvorezky today is who he is —he says— thanks to this.

His training at the Art College and the Moscow Academy of Arts was very demanding. He studied a lot and very intensely. Tons of anatomy and structure! However, he knew how to use this discipline in his favor, adding power to his expressive nerve.

He studied in a very different Moscow from the one nowadays, highly competitive and with severe filters of academic permanence which tested him hard every two months. The classes were very conservative and focused on the deep understanding of structure, and Costa admits that this has given him incredible agility, to such an extent that he states that **learning to observe and express structure is the smartest thing you can teach to an artist**.

In no way does he reject the learning method he received; In fact, he praises it and he's deeply grateful for the excellent training received. But when finishing his studies, his restless mind needed to paint different subjects from a less rigid and academic perspective. Over time he has reached a delicious balance where academic rigor builds his figures without numbing them, preserving their spirit. It's as if they were wearing academic perfume in its proper amount, without getting soaked.

Because, let's be honest, we're all tired of always seeing the same thing.

Tired of seeing how academicism is the kryptonite of individual expression as if excellence were a curse that cuts the wings of those artists most able to fly. But it doesn't have to be like that! That's why it's so refreshing to discover an artist who loves academic discipline without compromising his freedom.

Costa Dvorezky is living proof that freedom of expression does not have to be at odds with discipline. Moreover, Costa convinces you that discipline is the key that opens the doors of personal expression. His painting is precise as well as immediate. Freshness is not at odds with precision and correctness. The balance is possible, that is the Costa brand.

Everything you have been told about the Russian Academy is not true.

Costa says that the Russian school is not as strict as everyone believes. It's training is traditional, of course, but in no way strict. Let's see why.

There is a generalized prejudice that all artists trained in a Russian Academy paint in the same way, because they are inculcated with very strict standards on how they should do it and end up confined. **But that's flatly false. In fact, there was total freedom of execution and the only requirement was that the construction was solid. In other words, «do it however you want, but do it well.»**

It's true that some voices claim that academic education is too intellectual and tight and that there is a risk of castrating expressive capacity. A view that academia should perhaps renew the pedagogical agenda so as not to generate automata without artistic ambition. However, despite the fact that the discipline was very real, Costa reveals that the Russian school promotes versatility and technical freedom which is light years away from that currently taught in many ateliers.

Costa Dvorezky graduated in the '90s, that decade when the whole world took a turn because of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with a great impact for culture. There was a lot of constructive drawing in its classes, something he now likes —but, he admits, did not enjoy when he was studying—. However, that discipline helped him to understand human shapes. They did not learn too much about drawing and painting in terms of technical execution, but at a philosophical level, in the way they observed the construction of great artworks.

His technical training was a means to an end, and not a goal itself. In fact, in the Russian Academy, the students were not taught painting technique. Instead, they painted *their own way*. **The training was based on how to observe and build something as observed, but nobody told you how you should do it**. They guided you towards a concept and the teachers did not stop to give you instructions on how to solve all those ideas technically; that path was explored by each student.

Knowing the principles of cooking is more powerful than memorizing a handful of recipes. For this reason, Costa gives a lot of importance to the concept: how you approach things, how you do it, why you do it, and what you're going to be satisfied with. And that's a strictly intellectual aspect of painting that is beyond the reach of any recipe, palette or procedure.

Costa feels lucky he had great teachers, a stroke of luck he found again at the Academy of Art. He didn't fully understand the advice he was given during the time he was studying, but rather later, when he realized how important what he was taught was.

Influences.

When he was a kid Costa was blown away by the great masters. In school, by the impressionists. In the academy, he opted for conceptual artists, perhaps as a reaction to his academic training «At that time I needed a breath of fresh air!» —he says.

He's now back to his beginnings and his admiration for the great masters. Usually, he travels to Europe a couple of times every year for visiting museums and getting intoxicated with their paintings. An artist must study painting at museums and, the more mature he gets, the clearer it is to him what the paintings can teach him .

Although his points of reference might change over time to the extent that maturity molds his interests, there is a constant: Francis Bacon, an artist for whom he expresses a deep admiration.

He feels in Bacon's painting something very intense and is of the opinion that Bacon is one of the best artists there has ever been. «Bacon is great» —he declares with unequivocal conviction, lowering his eyes with humble reverence. Without a doubt, Bacon is the artist who has



Francis Bacon (1909–1992).

most influenced Costa in the last decade and will always be there exerting his influence.

He says he does not know what it is: maybe it's the feeling of flesh... there's *something*! there's *something* about Bacon that invades his senses and thrills him. He can't explain it with words, and yet that emotion is there working at full throttle, inexplicably trapped in his painting. Costa only knows that Bacon does *something* to him, but he can't explain it. He can't analyze it. He just experiences it as an enigma beyond reason and arguments, like all *true* art, which encapsulates in its Nature the same tragic sense of life.

INTERVIEW



100% NOIR Pulsar Podcast INTERVIEWS

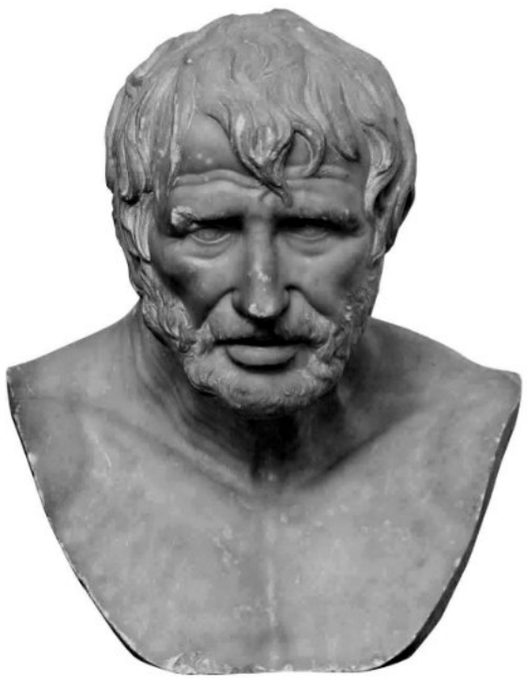
Do you want to know more about Costa Dvorezky?

Jorge Fernández Alday did an in-depth interview for **Pulsar Podcast**.

Take a look at the video.

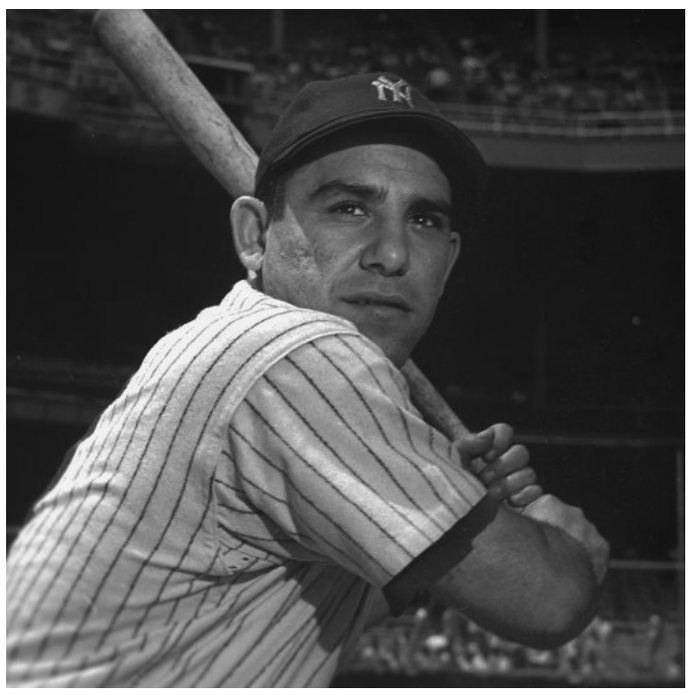
PHILOSOPHY

YOU KNOW TOO MUCH



«There's nothing that a busy man takes less care about than living; nothing is harder to learn».

Lucio Anneo Séneca (4 B.C.–65 A.C.)



«In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice; but in practice there is».

Yogi Berra (1925–2015)

When learning, many of us miss the training that goes beyond method. We seek those teachings outside of painting, with greater or lesser success, and we always stumble over the same obstacle: **learning is not the same as knowing**.

In other words: living is not the same as talking about life. Nobody learns to love by studying love, and the telling of the experience pales in comparison to living the experience yourself. I guess that, at this point, this is nothing new to you.

Don't get me wrong: studying is very good, especially when it comes to technical skills. As long as it does not become the perfect excuse not to take action. A laudable excuse with a very good reputation, but an excuse after all. Because, believe me, **students take shelter in the comfort of their studies to avoid the panic that they feel before an unknown experience, in the real world arena**.

Added to the fear of gaining that experience, there's the great ocean of available information. In the Galaxy of Figuration, there is such congestion of schools, methods, and books that artists are overwhelmed and confused. Today, more than ever, we have a hard time focusing on painting. So we settle for what we know about it.

Thinking the map is the real world is the most common mistake. Because it may be somehow easy to understand the ideas behind an artwork, but it's extremely difficult to *make them ours*, live them, and make them work in our day to day. **You must turn them into an experience. Live those ideas. Be those ideas**.

And do you know what the real problem is? Costa Dvorezky has a possible answer:

«You know too much».



«…But knowing how to choose books is not enough, you also have to be correct as for their number, be properly settled, make the most of your time, create the most favorable disposition, alternately restrain and accelerate thinking, adopt an active role or a passive one, that is, to know how to get by without books».

Hérault de Séchelles (1759–1794).

'**Théorie de l'ambition**' quote.



«The most useful books are those of which readers themselves compose half; they extend the thoughts of which the germ is presented to them; they correct what seems defective to them, and they fortify by their reflections what seems to them weak».

François-Marie Arouet, better known as *Voltaire* (1694–1778).

'**Philosophical Dictionary**' quote.

Super problem no. 1: inviting everyone.

If we know too much, maybe it's because **we do not have good criteria for discerning vital information**. We must be able to distinguish the true signal from the noise, and most importantly, not consume so much information that we become dull.

It could be said like this: «do not invite all your friends to the party». You only invite the best ones, and you have your own reasons. Why not do the same with ideas, teachers, methods and books? More information does not mean more knowledge, but less clarity. If the information you consume does not give you clarity, it's confusing you.

Information occupies a huge area of activity in our brain, in addition to consuming energy and diluting attention. That's why **the excess of information is the main reason why many artists get blocked**.

Super problem no. 2: treat the new ones as intruders.

The ideas that inhabit our mind think they have the right to live forever in our attic, even if they don't pay the rent. There was that day in which we invited them to spend the weekend and they settled there, feeling no shame and abusing our confidence. They resist leaving and have changed the lock in order to protect themselves from fresh ideas. Entrenched in our brain, they insult the guests, spoiling our hospitality.

If we don't kick them out, they will prevent us from learning more and better. **These old ideas only worry about their permanence, not about being useful**. That's for sure, so you decide what you're going to do with this rabble.

An old idea is entrenched and never gives up. For this reason, many times, **what we think we know is what prevents us from learning new things**. The same thing happens with skills: the old skills will not easily pave a way to new ones. So the challenge is not really to incorporate new ideas but to **detach ourselves from old ideas**. Simply, make room. Clean the floor. Take out the trash.

Having an open-minded attitude places us in a better position for growing. Of course, being willing to change is the smartest thing we can do... But it is so difficult to banish our prejudices!



«Only men of deep intelligence and the most obtuse fools remain invariable».

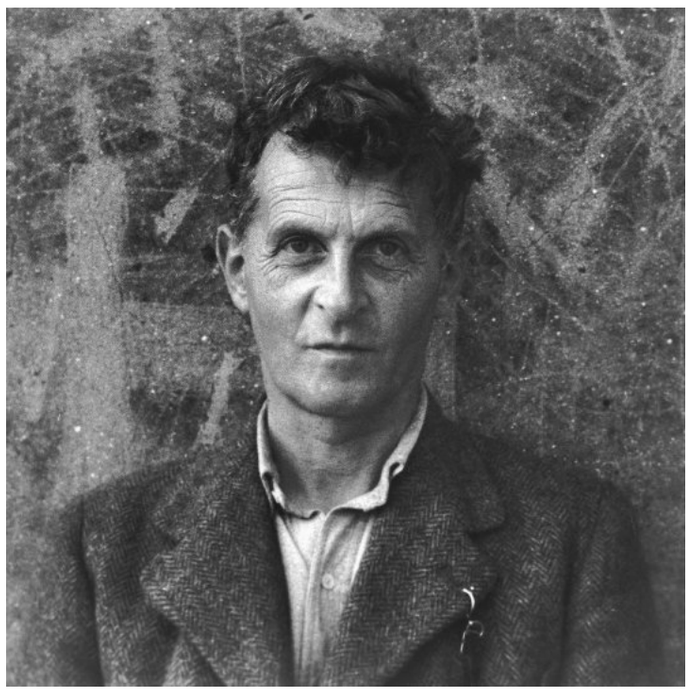
Confucius (55 B.C.–479 B.C.).

We own ideas to such an extent, and they're so embedded in our personality that, when we get rid of them, a terrible sense of loss invades us. We feel that by getting rid of old ideas and habits we also lose a bit of identity. And it really sucks. It's especially painful for artists because **learning something new requires suspending the ego and cultivating humility**.

Every new idea goes through a real ordeal until it's settled on a privileged balcony within our brain. As in a videogame, the new idea struggles to go through screens until facing the final monster that guards the castle.

And, guess what: the monster is just ourselves.

TRUE KNOWLEDGE



«There are observations which sow and observations which harvest».

Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein (1889–1951).

'Observations' quote, 1949.



«The ability to perceive or think differently is more important than the knowledge acquired».

David Joseph Bohm (1917–1992).

Maybe we have the ability to understand words, but not to immediately internalize what we learned. Internalizing takes time and dedication. It requires patience, practice, repetition, belief in it and, above all, a welcoming approach in our minds.

When we enter that flow, **methods stop being mere recipes and we turn to focus on the process, not on the result**.

A method places our expectation in the future, and that frustrates the execution because we still do not see any results. That exasperates us. Everything we see in the present is light years away from our fabulous expectation, so we become disappointed and accelerate execution, impatient to reach the goal, neglecting many important things. **By projecting our illusions on the future result, we neglect execution in the present, ignoring that this is where the brush is handled**.

You have to subscribe to the idea that the result will come. Do not think about it but focus instead on execution, the here and now. **Painting with the end result in mind is painting for the wrong reasons**. The goal of painting is to paint, not getting a painting, in the same way, that when having sex we do not just think about *getting a climax*. Relax —or not— and just have fun, do you get it?

In order to obtain true knowledge, you must focus on the act of painting, stay open-minded and do not repeat second-hand formulas with the intention of obtaining a result you already know. In order to truly learn, you must lose your fear of trying unknown solutions. Or rather: you should want to try new solutions.

So all this is about constructing new buildings in our brain. But real buildings, it's not enough to rub our hands in front of the blueprints, as a speculator would do. Markets can create value with promises, but an artist needs to forge real experiences beyond plain talking. We need to



«If you can talk about it, why paint it?»

Francis Bacon.

build mental buildings that we can inhabit, and get to know them so well that we can walk through them in the dark and without stumbling.

That's true knowledge, born out of experience, curiosity, and tenacity.

So do not take the methods I will show you later in this book too seriously. At the end of the day, as Costa says, he will not teach you how to paint, he can only share his experience. **You learn to paint by painting, there is no other way**. Live the painting moment by moment, keeping your mind open and without dulling it with methods that are fighting each other. Learn from the experience of those who paint better than you, but don't attempt to appropriate it.

You can only learn from your own experience, and for this trip, you need a dash of common sense, good traveling companions and perseverance.

DO NOT THINK AS A STUDENT



In this video you can find on YouTube, Jeffrey Watts —director of the **Watts Atelier**, California— gives a masterful lesson on why small *ateliers* are so efficient in training artists.

It is a generous, honest video with great common sense advice based on experience and professional ethics. Highly recommended.

https://youtu.be/KX0MrnzBJ8M

We have a harder time managing abundance than scarcity. However, simplicity has been difficult to implement in art schools. Perhaps because it goes against the spirit of some misguided teachers, who just want to show off with contrived ideas in order to justify their position and feed students up with theories that sound good but work badly.

Fortunately, in opposition to this pedagogical perversion, small workshops have emerged, those whose banner is clarity. These ateliers have been able to transmit technical knowledge with an effectiveness that Fine Arts Schools lost more than half a century ago. Good for them!

Ateliers are effective because they teach progressively an orderly and rational method. They don't confuse their students by urging them to reinvent the wheel each time they pick up a brush.

They are specialized in transmitting technical knowledge and transforming it into results. Their way of doing things, based on the progression and repetition of a single method, simply works. It's almost impossible that someone does not *improve* that way.

However, the moment comes when an artist needs to complement his training with a purpose that gives the training some meaning. In that sense, there are great voices that criticize this pedagogy, like **Vincent Desiderio**, who dismisses it as an intellectual prison.

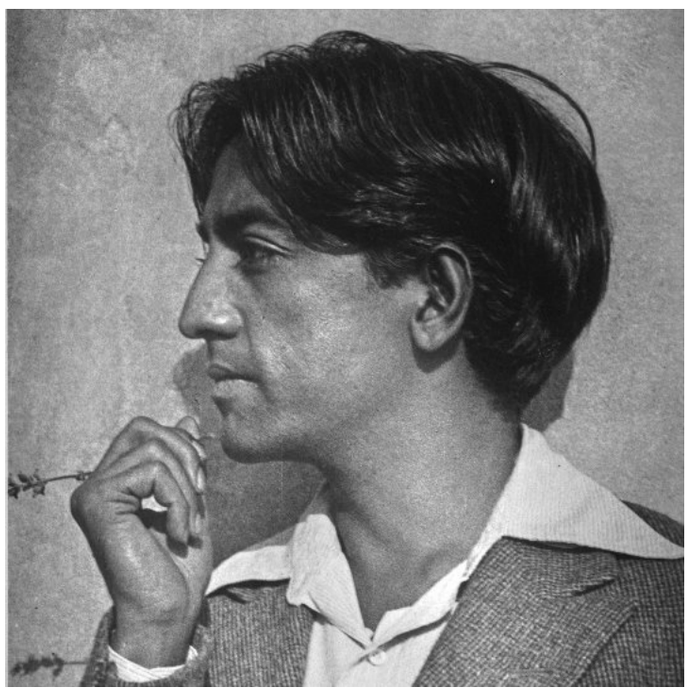
Other artists, such as **Jeremy Mann** and **Nadezda**, defend a strict and disciplined training provided it is combined with large doses of personal experimentation. Identity conflict —they say— emerges when artists see themselves making decisions that come from their teachers, and not from themselves.

And they're not misguided since students should, in the first place know what the hell they are training for. **Because the important thing is**



«It's not enough to have good qualities; we must also know how to handle them».

La Rochefoucauld (1613–1680).



«Have you noticed that inspiration comes when you are not looking for it? It arrives when all expectation stops, when the mind and the heart calm down».

«Fear corrupts intelligence and it's one of the causes of egomania».

«No one can put you in a psychological prison, you're already in it».

«Intelligence is the questioning of the method».

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986).

not what you do, but what you do with what you know.

And now comes the million dollar question:

—*What will you do when properly trained?*

Many artists perpetuate their studies because of their fear of facing this terrible existential question. They depend so much on the need to *do things correctly* that they end up forgetting what they wanted correctness for in the first place. That's a sensation that creates terrible confusion and restlessness.

—*So... What will you do?*

If the answer to this question is that you want to be a teacher, that's great. Transmitting knowledge is perhaps one of the noblest and most difficult tasks in the world. Go ahead, good teachers are needed!

But if your goal is to be an artist —that is, to transmit your unique vision through a universal language— you will need something else. You will need to know how far you're going to allow methods to possess you and schools to speak for you. **Being an artist involves the audacity to think for yourself, establishing the rules of your own universe**. Only then is it possible to paint with your own identity and do something authentic and with real meaning. Otherwise, you will not transmit your vision, but your teacher's.

All these matters are extremely important and will bring you many headaches. So, stop it! because this will not be cleared up just by thinking. It's solved by making art. A lot of art.

We are all better artists when we paint than when we think about how to paint. And in the same way that teaching film making is not the same as making films, Costa Dvorezky teaches painting, not how to paint paintings. Aware of the eternal conflict between training and freedom, he proposed something very difficult in his workshop: **encouraging students to think like artists, not like art students**.

TAKE IT EASY



Wayfarer, the only way
Is your footprints and no other.
Wayfarer, there is no way.
Make your way by going farther.

By going farther, make your way
Till looking back at where you've wandered,
You look back on that path you may
Not set foot on from now onward.

Wayfarer, there is no way;
Only trails of wake on water.

'**Wayfarer, there is no path**'. Poem by Antonio Machado (1875–1939).

The most important thing that Costa has learned lately is not to take things too seriously. The idea of perfection is a heavy burden that requires a sense of perspective in order to maintain good mental hygiene. Do not make life bitter, relax and simply enjoy the act of painting.

It sounds great... but how difficult it is to take it easy!

Costa proposes that you avoid big commitments and do not take yourself so seriously. There is no need to torture yourself by trying to paint great art; it's better to slow down and start with something less pretentious: play with paint. After all, everything should be approached as a game with an open ending.

Take note of this advice from Costa:

«Play with paint and do not take everything so seriously. Have a good time, challenge authority. If someone tells you there are rules, break them. There are no rules, only toys that you can play with.»

«We're gonna be cool».

Do you want to reduce stress? Well, then stop doing breathing exercises and go straight to the point: you suffer stress because you take everything too seriously.

First, remove the ego from the equation. **The ego will make you feel eternally dissatisfied. Simply enjoy what you do without thinking too much about others or the final result**. Ego needs the result and the photo for f***ing Instagram. But an artist needs, first of all, to enjoy the process in order to obtain a decent result as a consequence.

Having high expectations is the worst thing to do, so it's best not to have



— Nobody’s gonna hurt anybody. We’re gonna be like three Fonzies. And what‘s Fonzie like? (...) C’mon Yolanda, what’s Fonzie like?
— He’s cool?
— Correct-amundo! And that’s what we’re gonna be, we’re gonna be cool.

‘Pulp Fiction', by Quentin Tarantino, final scene dialogue.

any. Preconceptions are frustration engines which take you away from the enjoyment and make you anxious to reach a goal. F**k the goal! When you expect a certain result, the pleasure focuses on the possession and gratification of the goal accomplished, not the process to achieve it. And that's a bad thing for an artist.

Remember the verses by Machado —«wayfarer, there is no path: is your footprints and no other»— and do keep in mind that **the result is the byproduct of an authentic process, never the culmination of an expectation**.

Without the ego distorting everything, the desire to paint something incredible becomes less important. The only important thing is what you live without planning, from experience, from the action without prejudice. It's a path you have to travel so that you may discover as you learn from it. It's the kind of freedom only possible when external pressure no longer distorts the enjoyment of the act of painting.

Thus, manias and worries do not distract you and you can enjoy at full throttle what you do at the very moment you do it.

So... are we cool?

What do you like most, painting or applause?

Sometimes you will like what you paint, and sometimes not. **But the act of painting should be what makes you feel alive, not the result**. Never allow gratification to condition your art: your painting should be the celebration of your decisions, not the decisions you make to please others. Do not sell your soul to the devil!

There is nothing so terribly destructive as the will to please others at any cost, something exacerbated in the present day with social media, to the extent that it can reach pathological levels. **You are an artist, not a fair monkey. Paint with dignity and courage, without the expectation of being given peanuts, *likes* or money**.

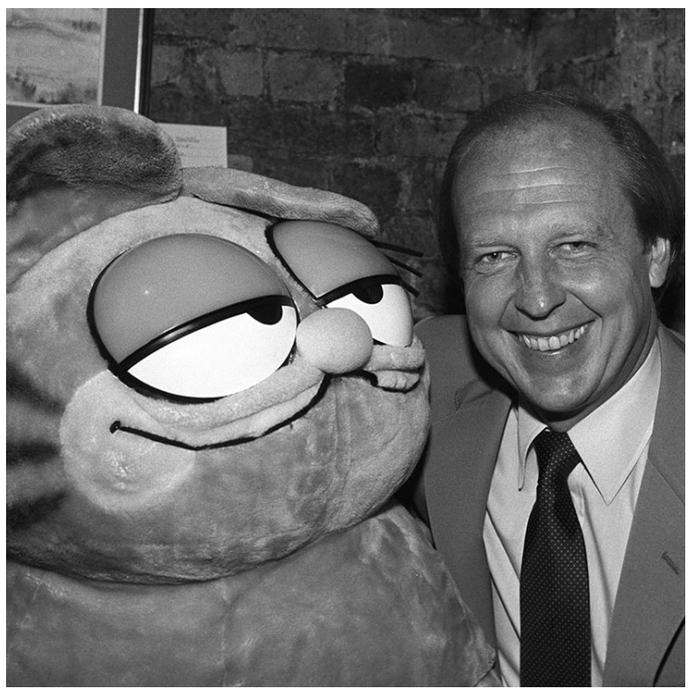
You do not have to prove anything to anyone. You do not have to show off what you know or get frustrated by what you don’t. You do not need any of that. Just relax and enjoy. When you truly love what you do, you love it independently of other people's opinions and the need for self-gratification. **If you paint for showing off or for the act of showing something to someone, you are painting for the wrong reasons**

and what you love is the award, not the painting.

Ask yourself, with brutal honesty: «Do I like to paint or to be liked by others?» Both things can't coexist within the same person. You choose!

PLAY WITH PAINT, DON'T TAKE IT THAT SERIOUSLY

THE ART OF BEING LAZY AND DISORGANIZED



«I'm not messy. I'm organizationally challenged!».

Garfield, a cartoon character created by Jim Davis (1945).

Some artists —like our beloved **Mark Tennant**— find it great to be methodical, so it does not involve any personal conflict. But Costa recognizes that being organized has never been part of his process of personal and artistic growth. And this is a juicy matter.

Costa openly recognizes that he is lazy and disorganized, he knows it and has no problem with it. He's like that, period. Not being methodical presents a challenge because there is always an inner voice, a Jiminy Cricket, which suggests that he should be more organized, but he does not find a way to do it because it goes against his Nature. So when he is forced to be methodical, it's painful for him.

When you know yourself well, you get the superpower to turn your defects into virtues. And Costa Dvorezky, a wise and humble man, knows his defects very well, he accepts them and takes a lot out of them.

This apparent disorganization allows him to be free and flexible in his works. He does not do “what he has to do” to get the result he has planned, but he does “what he wants to do” without shutting any door or blocking any road. **It's all about playing and nothing is about *working***. Stay with this idea, because it's absolutely great.

The fact of being lazy and disorganized has modeled his decisions in a miraculous way, taking advantage of the economy and the simplification that someone diligent and organized would have hardly thought about. **The technique is nothing other than the way to save time and work for your brain, creating “shortcuts”**.

Let's see what these “shortcuts” are:

Process simplification.

There is nothing more comforting in this life than kicking the hateful lists of tasks. So Costa, **in order to avoid undue stress, does not complicate himself with sophisticated procedures. This allows him to be much more concerned with the *what* than the *how***.

After all, when a process hinders your work, it ceases to be a process and instead becomes an obstacle.

Limited Palette.

Many artists have a limited palette and love to explain “the reasons” that lead them to paint with a minimum of colors. However, Costa's palette is not limited as a result of a thoughtful reflection about chromatic frugality, that would be wasting time; he works mostly with primaries because of laziness.

He admits that, when he was a student, he saw all that color range wasted on the palette and did not know exactly what color to use. There were too many options. **So he limited colors on his palette so as not to mess his head and dedicate all his attention to the act of painting**. «Keep it simple!»

On the other hand, when he was a student it was also difficult to buy colors in Russia and he didn't have access to the variety he would have liked. So he limited his palette to primaries also because of his money limitations, and then he realized that, with those ones, it was more than enough to paint anything.

And if it works well, why change it?

Economy.

- **He doesn't spend more time than necessary to solve a problem** and, consequently, does not favor the chance to ruin freshness by overworking a painting.
- **He does not seek «the perfect thing», but «the good enough»**, releasing an enormous potential of resources (I will talk about this within the next chapter).
- **He uses large brushes** because they are faster, favoring the shapes

synthesis and not worrying too much about details.

- **He does not use glazes, grisailles or anything that is not directly painting his work**. He does not like intermediate steps, obstacles or procedures that involve intermittent waiting.
  I guess that he equates indirect painting with a bureaucratic procedure, and he does not want that adult world garbage to seep into his pictorial world in any way.

- **He does not do multitasking**. He focuses on painting one work and not several at the same time, concentrating all his energy on it.

Do not plan.

By not being methodical, he does not plan his paintings either and simply «makes things happen» (I'll tell you a lot about this later). He stands in front of the canvas and starts to work directly, beginning with large brushes and gradually moving towards higher definition. **Costa does not make plans, he puts his skin in the game**.

The peculiarity of working like this is that, depending on the state of mind you are in, you can approach each session in a completely different way. So there is a certain randomness in the approach to his painting, and it's this unpredictability that opens his painting to opportunities and solutions which would be impossible to undertake through structured planning.

That said, when he works on large pieces (2-3 meters), he is sometimes forced to plan his works with previous drawings and admits that this is the least interesting part of his work because there is no physical contact with paint and canvas. He only worries about the piece's coherence and the position of the elements so he can know where he's going, and his impatience leads him to jump as soon as possible into carrying out the piece.

Costa doesn't deal very well with everything that means thinking without acting and needs to jump to the arena as soon as possible to fight physically with the painting. He admits that the more he cares about shape and color, previous studies and methods, the more easily he forgets about the piece. And that is something that can not be allowed.

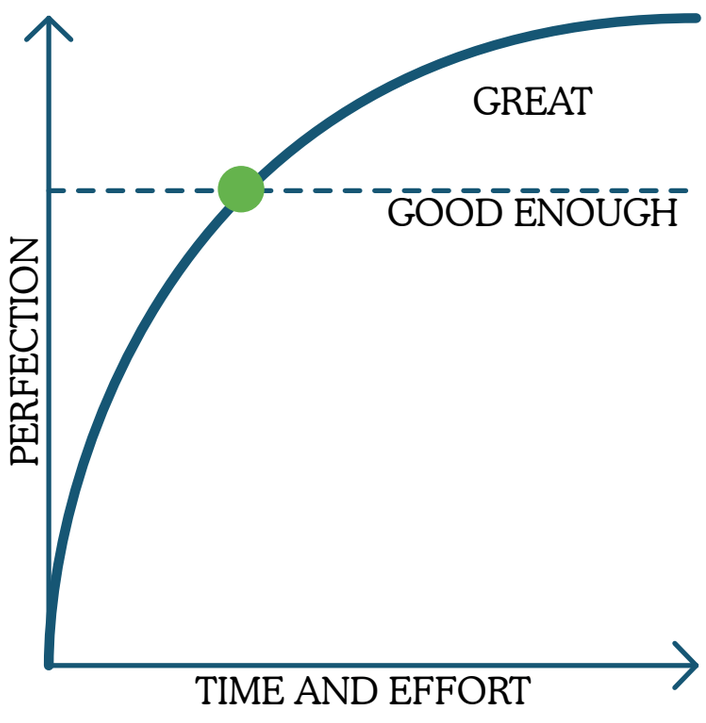
Well, my friend, if you thought that being a mess was a bad thing for

your art, here you have a good example of it being just the opposite.

The point is knowing yourself, both your defects and your virtues, and be consistent with yourself when you make decisions in your painting. Be humble and recognize what you are not good at, accept it and do not ask for miracles; instead, favor everything that is naturally good for you.

THERE ARE NO RULES, JUST TOYS YOU CAN PLAY WITH

PERFECT IS THE ENEMY OF GOOD



Perfectionism curve: the degree of perfection necessary to achieve «the great thing» is inversely proportional to the time and effort invested to achieve the «good enough».



«Do not be afraid of perfection, you will never reach it».

Salvador Dalí (1904–1989).

Perfection, time and effort.

Costa says that it's good to seek «the great thing», but you have to settle for arriving at «good enough». Perfection is an idealistic criterion that can guide you in your decisions and help to maintain a fixed course, but you must keep in mind that it points towards an unattainable destination, like the horizon that moves away as we approach it.

In this chart, you can see the relationship between time and effort represented by the difference between *the great* and *the good enough*. With the resources and efforts you need to achieve *the great*, you could double your production of *pretty good things*. The difference is that you will never be able to reach the first one and you have the chance to reach the second one.

This philosophy has several advantages:

1. **You notice more progress and you get less frustrated.** You focus on affirming the positive instead of regretting the negative.
2. **You learn more in less time.**
3. **You get better results with less effort** (ha, again the virtue of being lazy!)

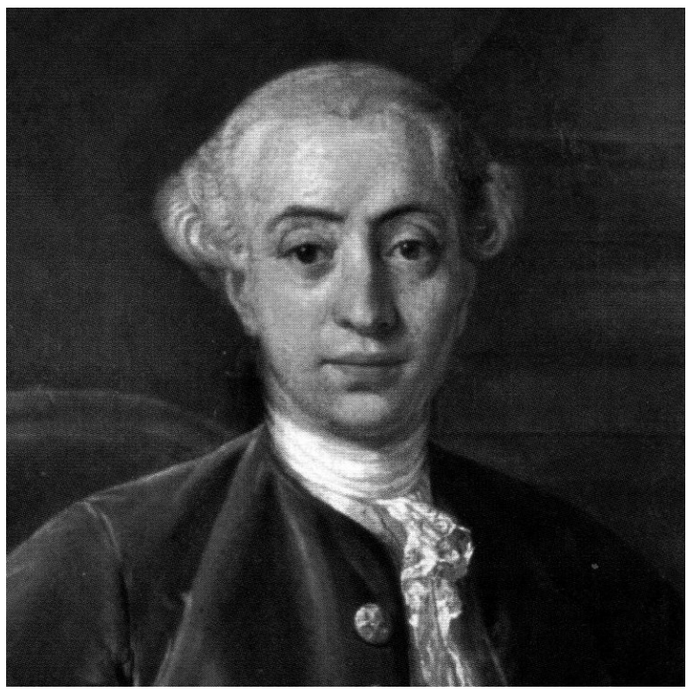
Self-esteem, error, and growth.

Artwork is the harmonic movement of a miniature universe, not a cocktail of well-resolved things pushing each other to make themselves room. That's why virtuosity rarely conveys an idea in a satisfactory way. It happens very often that in brilliantly executed paintings the figures seem to inhabit parallel worlds, segregated in shape and spirit because there is no general idea to illuminate them. It lacks a fundamental,



«If you do not make mistakes, it means that the problems you are dealing with are not difficult enough. And that's a big mistake».

Frank Wilczek. Physics Nobel Prize 2004.



«Man is free but stops being free if he does not believe in his freedom».

Giacomo Casanova (1725–1708). '**The Memoirs of Casanova**'.

unique idea that binds them and gives them an internal coherence and consistency.

When you're a student you worry too much about *painting correctly*, too well maybe, disproportionately paying attention to details and forgetting about the unity. And there is no magic when we lose sight of the final purpose.

On the other hand, painting everything *very well* creates a conflict of focus and hierarchy in the whole. Sometimes you have to paint something *badly* because the work demands it from you; It hurts, but you have to do it. You have to be strong and not allow the work to be an excuse for self-indulgence.

We are addicted to «being right», but that does not necessarily lead us to «be right». In the same way, you must know how to differentiate between *painting correctly* and *doing the right thing* in your painting.

Costa believes that the first challenge of art education should be to encourage artists to believe in themselves. Then they will rectify if they are not right, but they must be able to act freely without being coerced by the fear of error, capable of overcoming technical hypochondria and focusing on displaying their expressive potential. They must gamble and *do the right thing*, instead of taking shelter in the comfort of *painting correctly*.

«Believing in what you do —says Costa— even if you're wrong, is sometimes enough to make leaps and bounds. Accept full responsibility of yourself».

Do have the confidence and flexibility to adapt to what the artwork demands, even if you sacrifice the virtuosity that you are so eager to show off. As in any good movie, the climax is reserved for a very specific moment. **The climax, the detail, the virtuous and the orgasm should not be wasted, but celebrated as something extraordinary and brief that gives meaning to the whole work**.

VIRTUOSITY IS
NOT ART. IT'S
VIRTUOSITY

PERFECTION IS A POISON FOR THE SOUL



«The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man».

Malcolm Gladwell. '**David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants**'.

A painting is like a living person: of all the peculiarities that it may have, the most important one is that it is alive, and everything else is subordinated to that primary fact. The detail only makes sense when it's part of a visual strategy that reinforces the vitality of the idea you want to express.

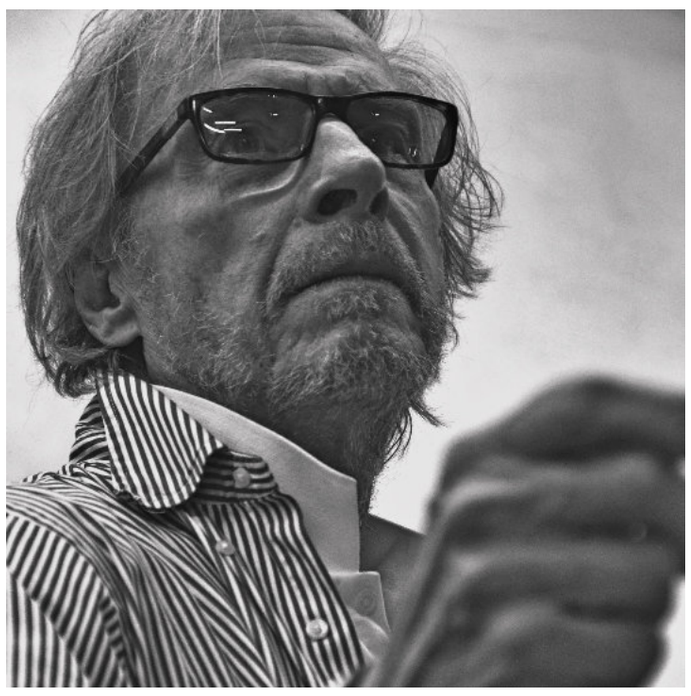
But if it's not like that... Do you do it just to show off? Focus on the important thing without trying to impress anyone with your skills. The most impressive thing you can achieve as an artist is to convey your vision in the cleanest and most direct way possible.

Because if everything is uniformly interesting in your painting ... how are you going to lead the viewer's gaze towards the important stuff? If you solve everything with the same dedication ... how will you indicate what is truly transcendental?

You do not have to overwork the finishing just to show off that you can do it, there should be a more mature reason behind your decisions. Working too much in a painting, without other criteria than to show off your skills, is to demean the purpose of the artwork and deny your own personal expression. You have to know when to stop, and why.

Let me insist: having a great technical ability for painting details and doing it all the time is like being a Karate black belt and kicking asses in the street just for the record. **You must know with what spirit you use your skills in the first place: do you do it to enhance your art or to impress others?**

Think deeply about this last question, it's much more important than you might imagine.



«Wrong is right».

Mark Tennant.



«It is as certain as it is strange that truth and error come from one and the same source. Thus it is that we are often not at liberty to do violence to error, because at the same time we do violence to truth».

«Error is related to truth as sleep to waking. I have observed that on awakening from error a man turns again to truth as with new vigour».

Johann W. Goethe. '**Maxims and reflections**' (nº149 & nº331).

How much imperfection does perfection require?

Costa feels comfortable with imperfection because he thinks it is the most charming thing in the world. **There is vitality in everything that happens and we can't foresee, in the opportunity provided by the defect that escapes the immobility of a plan**. There is something organic that celebrates life in a chance given by imperfection.

Any imperfection is an opportunity to communicate life, and taking advantage of it is a technique perhaps more difficult than taking a painting to its maximum exponent of perfection. Imperfection is a part of your paintingwhich is as necessary as values are, and it serves as a contrasting element to define the nature of the focal point. In an artwork, **you have to define where the perfection lies and surround it with imperfection so that it shines with its own light**. If everything is uniformly correct, there will be no focal point. And without it, there is no life.

And it is imperfection —and only imperfection— that allows us to appreciate perfection in all its glory. **In the same way that darkness defines light, imperfection defines perfection**.

Later on, when I tell you about Costa's creative process, I will go deeper into the constructive facet of imperfection and how mistakes are rectified in a disciplined way, with a well-defined purpose.

Perfect is not interesting.

There are problems that are more interesting when we show the testimony of our struggle to solve them, instead of showing the testimony of their resolution. The poetics that the pictorial narrative shows of an unsolved problem is always more interesting than the obviousness of a problem solved in a perfect way. Maybe that's why the best paintings are imperfect in some way.

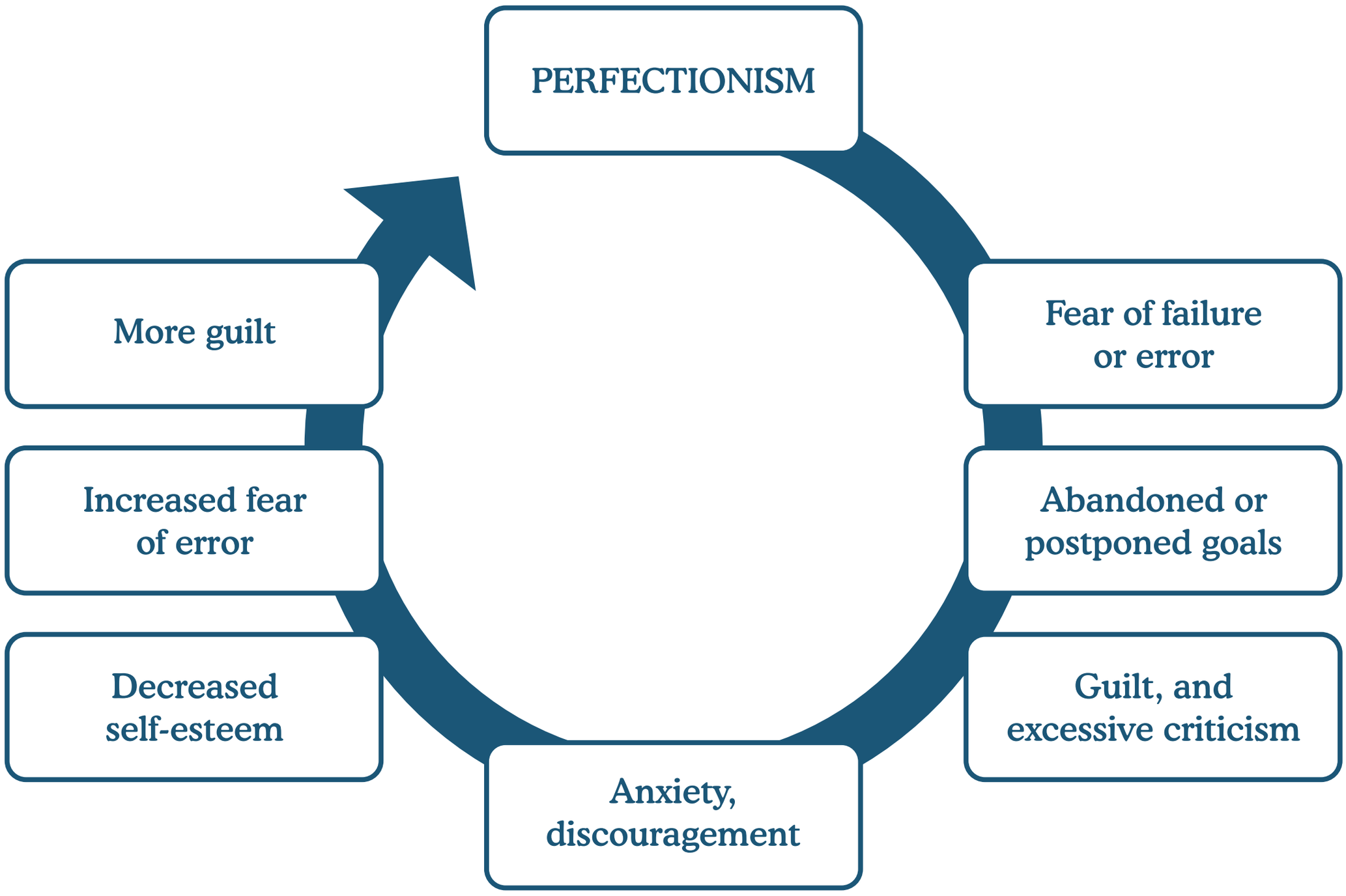
Perfection in reproducing detail means the same problem: everything is too obvious and boring, almost as an insult to the viewer's intelligence. Notice that in poetry, when you compare two things that are identical, you create a very close analogy which does not work. For example, it doesn't have the same poetic effect saying "blades like daggers" than saying "lips like daggers." It's the asymmetry of the analogy that gives it

value and captures our interest. Well, it works exactly the same with details: **the interest does not lie in faithful reproduction, but in doing the opposite**.

You need some friction in order to create interest and challenge the viewer with something imperfect that captures his attention. **You will need to use the imperfection as a seasoning in meals, where little is upsetting and too much is offending**. «You have to be precisely imprecise» —says Costa.

Perfect is not interesting, and neither is too-finished. When a piece in the puzzle is missing and our painting is incomplete, it necessarily becomes more stimulating. A finished puzzle has no interest; however, things change a lot when a piece is missing. **The fascination of imperfection lies in transferring responsibility to the viewer and in not insulting their intelligence**.

The vicious cycle of perfectionism:



CREATIVE PROCESS

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Don’t think. Be aware.

When you fall in love you do not do it by medical prescription or because *you have to do it*; you simply feel the desire and you sense its effect. There is an intelligence within your sensibility that is not within your plans. You know what you have to do and you do it, just because.

There is no way to plan love. Nor a good painting. It’s clear that in both cases a good outcome does not depend so much on the organization as on the experience and sensitivity that we have.

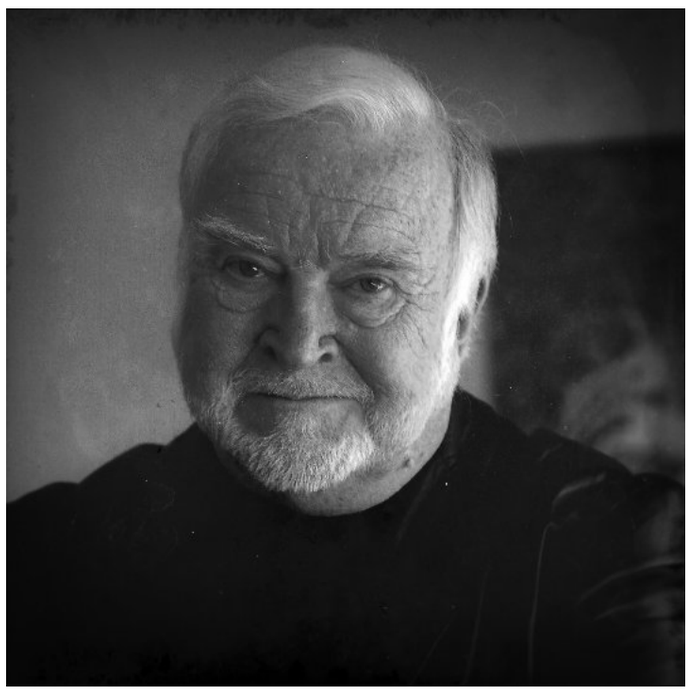
Because love is as blind as a bat: it does not see very well, but it flies with superb accuracy. You know what I'm talking about, right?

The expression of feelings, and not the repetition of a formula, is the true scope of an artist's intelligence. **Trust your feelings. Be assured that when you feel something, you’re quite close to the truth**.

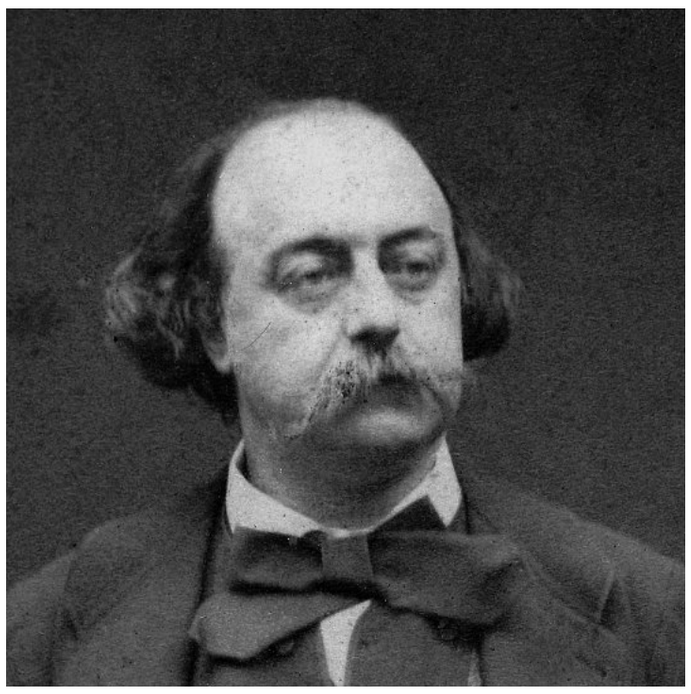
You think too much and you know too much, so be careful because what you know can dilute the impulse of your idea. Let the feelings guide your decisions: your good visual taste is superior to your ideas and beliefs about what you *should do*, directed by the ego, the anxiety to feel safe and the need for approval.

Costa Dvorezky says that **there is no such thing as an artist who has no resources, but emotions that have no resources**. Within every student, there is a huge potential that waits to be unlocked. Because in art there are no limits, there are only limitations to efficient self-expression.

When the creative channel of the artist is unlocked and the decisions flow intuitively in a continuous flow, we feel like masters of our destiny. Owners of our work. In the words of the unpronounceable Mihály



Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, author of the book '**Flow**'. Recommended!



«Mediocrity wants the rule; I hate it. I feel against it and against every restriction, corporation, caste, hierarchy, level, flock, execration that fills my soul».

Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880).

According to Flaubert, every rule is prejudice and contains the seed of stupidity. Flaubert writes about prejudice, outraged:

«Shit gets up to my mouth ...I would like to make a paste with it with which I would smear the19th century».

In Flaubert's writings, from a very early age, there is a violent hostility towards that attitude that seeks the norm and whose main attribute is stupidity.

Csíkszentmihályi, this state of mind is «what a painter feels when the colors in painting begin to show a magnetic tension with each other, a new thing, a living form, is drawn before the amazed creator».

In fact, when we paint something that works we do not consciously know how we got there. It seems that we were only passing by when the miracle happened... But we were there!

Does it sound familiar to you?

Do not seek rules.

«Take liberties, not licenses.» —Costa Dvorezky.

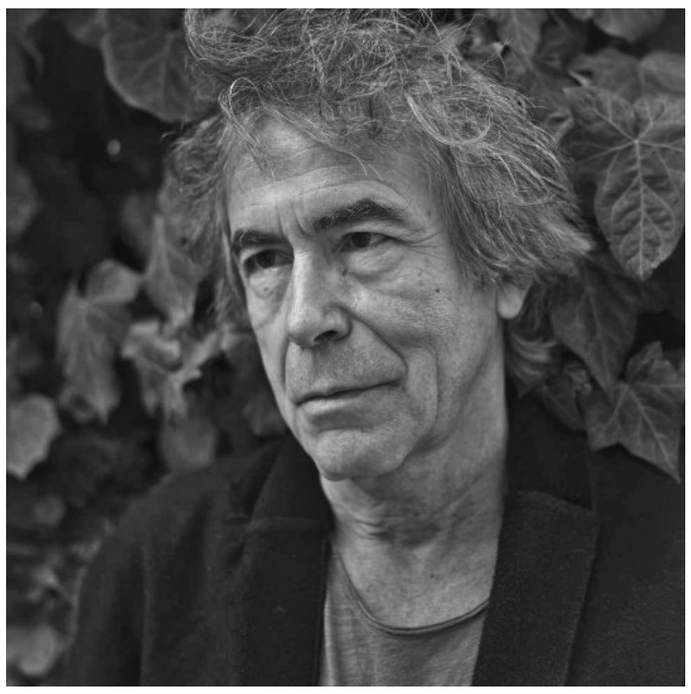
Costa Dvorezky does not teach painting. He shows a philosophy of life that proposes to paint from feeling, not from thought. His mission is to teach simplicity —unlike the complexity taught in art schools— and the most important thing for him is that students, in their learning, **do not end up confusing visual thinking with intellectual thinking**.

Unlike many teachers, Costa does not worry too much about teaching technical procedures. Instead, he wants the painting to have a deep connection with and fascination for human existence. **The core of his teachings is motivation, interest in the *what* before the *how***.

Like love, ideas comes to you when you are consciously open and receptive. It reveals to you and speaks directly to you, but you can't *possess* it. **When you *truly* fall in love with the model, you do it selflessly. You can't plan to fall in love with what you paint**. Love for the model has its own intelligence and does not reveal itself to someone who does not have the sensitivity to receive it. If you fall in love it's because you can do it, and you should paint in the same way that you have a crush: letting yourself go.

Sure, you can always do certain things to pave the way and make things happen. But... the really incredible and exciting thing is to see how everything emerges on the canvas, instant by instant, without anchoring any decision in the past. Everything happens on the canvas at the moment and without the coercion of a prejudice, with an open mind, making it happen without effort, without imposition, without authority, without any desire for control or possession of the work. In other words: without freaking out for the outcome.

You make it happen when everything flows at the same time in the



«The difference lies between keeping something or abiding by something. Abide, but do not stick to».

François Jullien. '**Unsage est sans ideé ou l'autre de la philosopie**' quote.

present moment. Without the past distorting with its own plans, nor the future distorting with its own illusions. Simply, paint for the pleasure of doing it. When you enter this state of mind you can only do things in the manner of painting, *not in your own way*. We put ourselves at its service and do things according to its law, making fluid, accurate and intuitive decisions, but never planned. **Painting is not about following any instruction manual, but about the following life**.

So now you know: **do not ask yourself *what* you are going to do with the idea; ask yourself what it is going to do with you**. Conflict and frustration come when we look for something within the image, whilst instead it sould be the image looking for something within us.

Costa Dvorezky teaches us not to fear to be dramatic and to free ourselves from the influence of the methods taught in art academies. He thinks that methods, beyond their obvious usefulness, can become a prison for the creative impulse when we forget that they are only a medium. «**There are no rules, only tools»** —says Dvorezky.

The limits of breaking the rules.

The rules are similar to poisons because, in reality, there are no lethal poisons, only lethal doses. So we can break the rules as long as we do not overdo the dose.

The problem is knowing the limits of this dose, which can only be obtained in the light experience. You have to try and try since hunches only appear after long experimentation.

Painting teachers are used to giving a good example to their students respecting the basic rules of painting so that they don't develop bad habits. However, **Costa Dvorezky does not respect the rules themselves, rather the intelligence of those who play with them**.

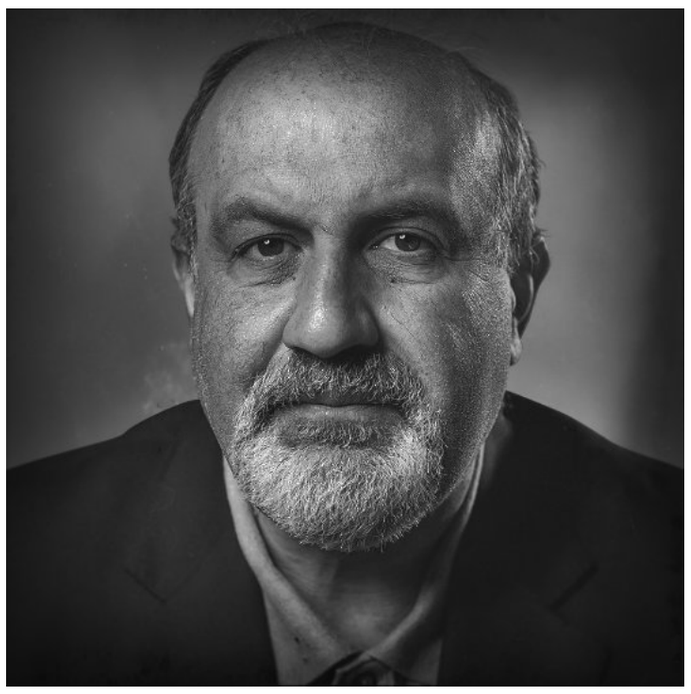
Costa turns the need for breaking the rules into a rule. Not in vain he says that, in art, **«breaking the rules does not go against the rules»**.



«Rules not to be always observed in their literal sense: sufficient to preserve the spirit of the law».

Sir Joshua Reynolds . Discourse VIII, from his book '**Discourses**'.

Download the eBook for free.



«We have to invent a cause. We have a very poor ability to observe sequences of events without weaving an explanation, a narrative or pattern that gives them a reason to be. But there is not always a reason».

«We want to understand everything to such an extent that we prefer an invented map to no map».

Nassim Nicholas Taleb, Lebanese essayist, researcher, and financier. Fragments of his book '**The Black Swan**'.

Are there any rules?

At this point, we must ask ourselves if the rules are really nothing more than narratives that work well, but that we could ignore if there are reasons to do so.

Let's see an example: a universally accepted rule is to apply the maximum possible economy in the use of accents. However, Costa destroys that rule with wonderful freshness and turns the passion for the accents into a rule that has more authority than any other.

The accents being frugal and executed in the end is a recommendation that is well thought out, and has an internal logic that works. Not in vain all the painting manuals set it as a golden rule... But it is not a rule! So if that passion for the accents has an expressive contribution of a higher order, go ahead with it, **make it work your way**.

The best thing is to take the rules as *recommendations*. If they were *real* rules, they would just work, in a non-negotiable way. But we can see that it's not exactly like that. There are principles, of course, but we should not confuse them with strict rules.

Sometimes Costa breaks the rules in order to experience what may happen, like painting a background thicker than a figure. Just because. Because he can do it and nobody will send him to prison for it and because it's an additional challenge that fulfills him more than taking something for granted; following that beaten path, boring and without emotion or risk.

«It's like breaking the rules without breaking the rules» —he says. Like imperfection, so necessary to express the idea of perfection through the contrast effect. **No rule trumps the fact that you can do whatever you want with the rules**. The only thing that should be important is that the painting works your way, not fitting the expectations of academic bureaucracy which might force it to work in the way of another way.

WE DO NOT MAKE GOOD ART, WE JUST MAKE IT HAPPEN



«No! Try not! Do or do not. There is no try».

Yoda (896 ABY–4 DBY).

Think visually.

Ideas are like butterflies fluttering in your brain, flashes of intelligence that are presented to your consciousness for their expression. No matter how receptive you are, these are capricious and elusive, they are transmitted in their own way and in no way will they follow your ego's game.

The first big step you must take is to stop confusing painting with ideas. A painting is not something you can plan, manipulate or build, as you do with a project focused on the result. **The purpose of painting is not making paintings that illustrate your ideas!** Painting is thinking visually, not a way to illustrate your intellectual thinking. In fact, **the source of ideas should be your own painting**.

Your ego is anxious to express that great idea, show it off, take it out for a walk, possess it some way, puffing up your chest and being phony by using the painting as a vehicle of expression. But that is not how things work. **The point is not how you are going to express an idea, but how you want that idea to be expressed through you**.

A pictorial idea can't coexist with your ego and with your desire to be applauded for what you do. It can't coexist with the idea of possession or with the need for approval, because it is humility and dedication that guide the way to pictorial expression. Do not try to lead the painting. It is not *yours*. It is you who is at its service.

The pictorial concept suggests a destination.

The pictorial idea has nothing to do with the production of details but deals with the character, strength, and spirit of the image in essence. This idea has a graphic nature made of lines, masses, color and spatial division that appeals to a unique way of seeing things.

Your idea must be a visual event, not an intellectual one, and the weight of your art will depend on the weight of your visual idea. So do not mess up your head asking yourself questions about your work. What is actually expected of you as a painter is that you empty your mind of arguments and fill it with pure images. The arguments are to art what bureaucracy is to action... the eye does not attend to reasons!

Be darn obvious. An idea, just one. Solid, forceful, dramatic. Every good idea is a brutal conviction, a devilish affirmation,



These are the two principles of Fernando Pessoa's «system» of writing:

1. Say what you feel exactly how you feel it -clearly, if it is clear; darkly, if it is dark; confusingly, if it is confusing.
2. Do understand that grammar is a tool, not a law.

Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935). Extracted from his '**The Book of Disquiet**'.

resounding, without a trace of doubt or vagueness.

In your painting, there's no room for words, reasoning, premises, and good intentions. The virtue of visual language —as opposed to verbal— is that justification, detour, and subterfuge are useless. Intellectual cheap-talking may allow someone who is not intelligent to appear is if he is, for a while, but it's impossible to look like a good painter without actually being a good painter.

Do not plan your artwork. Play with it.

Every good painting has an abstract pattern, a visual affirmation, which arranges light and shadow in a dynamic exchange of forces that reinforces the character of the image. This pictorial concept governs everything, and every small detail must serve the sole purpose of transmitting that primary idea.

A plan is a map. But no map is worth anything if we do not have a compass.

The road to the expression of our pictorial concept is always full of obstacles, technical difficulties, frustrations, fears, doubts, etc., and things rarely go as planned. That's why it's better to know where the North is than to trust a map. **And your sensitivity is the North**, do not have any doubt about it.

Stay committed until the end with your pictorial concept, your abstract idea, but at the same time be flexible in your strategies. The idea is what keeps you alive and prevents you from faltering when things get ugly and you have to change plans. No matter how many corrections you make in your painting, if you stay consistent with your pictorial concept, sooner or later you will achieve it. So you can change the map when you need it as long as you never lose sight of your North, your criteria for making decisions during the creative process.

It is important to be receptive to the new proposals that the work presents and to accept that we are at their service, that we must adapt to their demands with total commitment. Flexibility, tenacity, and humility are the qualities that define artists of the highest caliber. You should know too that greater effort will not necessarily lead you to a better result; the important thing is to never lose sight of your goal.

Costa Dvorezky is not as concerned about technique as about his ability



«Good things, when short, are twice as good».

Baltasar Gracián (1601–1658).

Popular aphorism written by Baltasar Gracián from his '**The Art of Worldly Wisdom**', who added:

«And even bad things, if brief, are not so bad».

to connect with an emotion and communicate the idea it symbolizes. At the moment you worry more about adding technical details to the painting than its basic concept, the painting is lost in a magma of erratic brushstrokes with no other purpose than to show off. And that's where we spoil everything... does it sound familiar?

So when you make a decision and you have your doubts about its coherence, ask yourself: "Does it help to move my idea toward its conclusion?" If not, eliminate it. **Everything that is not essential is superfluous**.

Everything that is not indispensable is unnecessary.

As Baltasar Gracián said, «Good things, when short, are twice as good». Miguel de Cervantes came to the same conclusion when he said that «a proverb is a short phrase, the result of long experience.» And, of course, Leonardo Da Vinci bested them all with his famous sentence «simplicity is the supreme sophistication».

Harvey Dunn said that the world will never see our best works because we personally take care of spoiling them by overworking them. Not in vain Costa Dvorezky recommends doing only those things that we must do, but not one single thing more.

Every brilliant mind throughout history has seen greatness in brevity and simplicity. We can say that simplicity is the resource of intelligent people, of those who know how to appreciate the essential stuff.

Paint as if you were writing telegrams: little things that mean a lot can be much more important than big things that mean little. **Express yourself without the need to describe. Nature is not described but used to express your idea**.

Your work must have a design so well interconnected that it would collapse just by removing one single thing. Do not move forward just because, do not believe that you have to paint another piece of drapery just to have everything covered, if it is for no good reason.

Do not be that generous or waste your potential in small things, you'd better reduce everything to the minimum necessary. You do not need *all of that* in order to tell your story. The pictorial technique is the tool you use to communicate your idea in the shortest, brightest and most energetic way possible. So, when in doubt, leave it out.

DO NOT PLAN,
MAKE IT HAPPEN

Shut that little voice up.

Never paint anything so it does not *bother* you. When you are painting and you hear that little inner voice saying nonsense like “make it lighter” or “paint it red”, kick it out. It’s your ego’s little voice wanting a more beautiful and pleasing result, forcing you to distort your painting in order to satisfy others.

Be as free as you want. It's your work! Do not think that something *should be* or *sould not be*, just do what is best for the painting. Build a powerful visual thought and shut up all those voices with all their ‘do that’ and ‘try this’ that will poison your work to make it more flattering. That try to make it *less yours*.

Think about it and remember those times you have ruined your painting by playing that little voice’s game. Pay no attention to it. **Your thinking should be strictly visual and focused on the present process, with no expectation of a future outcome**. Just flow and have fun with the paint. The purpose of your work is not to fit Instagram.

Enhance whatever you’re good at.

Call a man a thief and he will steal your watch. Treat him as an honest man and he will be an honest man. So you better find the good things in your work before you put all your energies into finding the bad ones.

We always look for what is wrong. Instead of looking for what is good and knowing how to enhance it. That drives us crazy. While correcting you must avoid bad vibes and move forward in a positive way, concentrating on what you’re good at.

Of course, we must correct, but we should not put all our energy into it. **Enhancing what we’re good at is more important than correcting our mistakes**.

Your relationship with your work is very similar to a human relationship, where hardness spurns friendship, yet love leads to fidelity. You can’t expect to maintain a good relationship with your work if you spend the whole day criticizing. Just treat your painting as you treat your friends. Be polite and warm, and if you have to criticize something, do it with respect and tolerance.

Do not expect your painting to respect you if you treat it like garbage,

focus on what is good, recognize the good in it and kindly point out what should be corrected to improve. **Criticize your painting for its benefit, not for its destruction.**

A good teacher is one who not only corrects what you do wrong but says what you do well so that you understand which decisions have been correct. He says: “Yes, that's the way”, and then you can move forward being certain that you know exactly how to continue, as opposed to knowing exactly how not to continue, which for some people can be paralyzing.

In that sense, the proximity of a friendly guy like Costa Dvorezky is super important. We just can’t separate both! A good teacher is always a good guy.

Never decide anything out of fear.

In no way will we be able to transmit a solid idea if it is built from a fear of error whereby we concentrate our efforts on what we do not know how to do properly.

Never say “as soon as I know more, I will try to do that”. Do it now. If you want to do it, work hard and do it without excuses or fears. **Never decide to do or not do something out of fear, but out of freedom**.

Do not take the figure so seriously.

Remember that we see things because they obstruct, reflect and absorb light. Light hits a head, but does not pass through it as if it were an object different from any other. A head is nothing more nor less than an egg-shaped object.

Why do not we draw a head with the same naturalness with which we draw a teapot? The more we know about the human figure, the more we fear to represent it. This happens because **knowledge coerces perception**.

Do you like to paint heads? Maybe your personal tastes give you away and turn you into a bad painter because you give priority to things that should not have it. You attach importance to objects with a symbolic entity of their own, when in reality the identity belongs to the whole of the work. All the parties are at the service of the work, even if you may

prefer some of them separately.

Do not take the figure so seriously, do emphasize the relevant stuff, do a caricature.

Enjoy equally painting a head as much as anything else. Don't take the figure too seriously as if it were something personal. Painting is a more impersonal act than you suspect: anyways, you are painting light!

It's true that we have the capacity to paint more freely when we know the subject. Knowing that it's very important to become visually familiar with the subject. But the trap is to become intellectually familiar, and that is what happens very often with the human figure and anatomical knowledge.

When you paint a door, you do it with ease and naturalness. But if I tell you that you have to paint a door and that a carpenter must give you his ok, you'd begin to complicate the process with the design. The door ceases to be an illuminated object and becomes instead a design in search of approval. Well, that's exactly what happens when you paint the human figure.

When you paint a tree you do not have to become a botanist to hit the bar. You just have to be convincing and be sure of what you do. In fact, you can be as careless as you want while you know what kind of tree you are painting, and how it looks. Painting a convincing tree, as it is observed, is much more important than knowing its characteristics.

Everything is light.

The form is what the light reveals when it bounces off it. Let the light be the subject of your work, not the figures that are in it. Build your works with images that speak to you, make you think about them for some reason, but do it, as if they were winks of light.

When you paint a head, your impatience to state everything you know about heads produces an anxiety that ends up diluting its beauty. And you must not forget that every head needs a body: they are visually connected, even if symbolically they are not.

Love never loses sight of beauty or neglects it. Can you paint a garbage can and express the same beauty that you would express when painting that young girl?

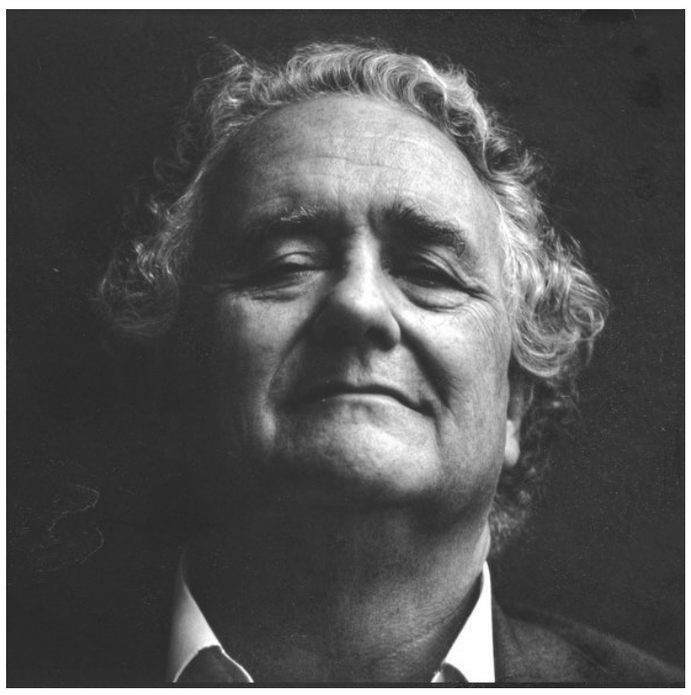
You can if you understand that what gives off beauty is not the form of the object, but its glorious light.

When something fails, ask yourself:

- Am I describing the form or the light that reveals the form?
- Am I painting things or the relationship that exists between them? am I painting colors or their relationships?
- Am I separating background and figure forgetting that both are light?
- Am I interpreting the air as if it were a low-density object?

LET'S KEEP IT SIMPLE

THE RISK OF NOT TAKING RISKS



After talking about «the art of being lazy and disorganized», it seems a contradiction to recommend now the need to take risks. But do not be mistaken: it is one thing to avoid confusion, but quite another to look for the easy way out.

The artist's work is very hard because he must perform this engineering task without the formulas available to an engineer. Perhaps, for this reason, **all artists are tempted to look for formulas that soothe them**. But to learn something new in this life, Costa says that you need to feel discomfort in your bones as a non-negotiable requirement.

«The bad can be an accident, the mediocre is an attitude».

Jorge Wagensberg (1948–2018). Aphorism 248 from '**Más árboles que ramas**'.

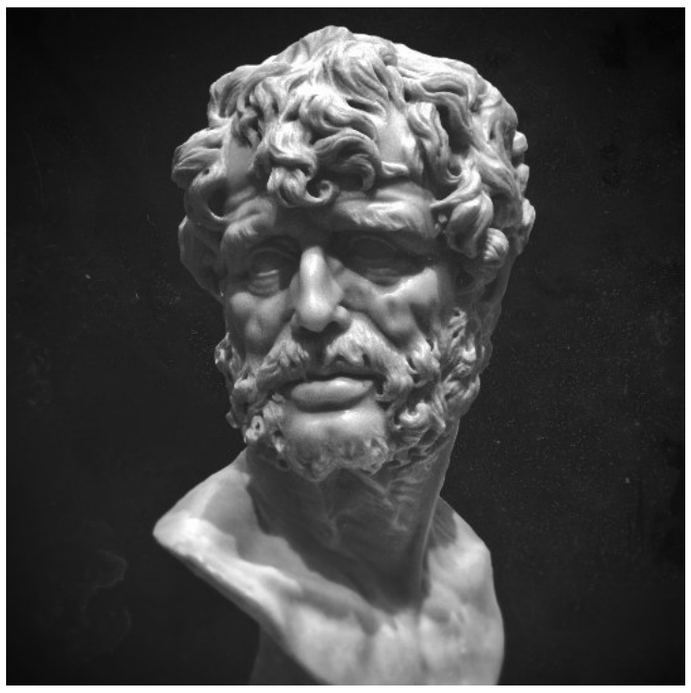
Learn for life, not for school.

There are teachers who are the main obstacle to the students' improvement since they eliminate the trial and error of their student's mental processes. They turn them into automatons who act according to preexisting maps of reality, **students who know the lesson but who have no idea where the knowledge comes from**.

And where does knowledge come from? This is easy: trial and error.

Imagine a child who has been warned not to touch the fire and another who has experienced in his flesh the inconvenience of touching a flame. For practical purposes both obtain the same result: avoid a burn in the future. However, the child who got burned has real knowledge about the nature of fire, while the warned child has only one more rule. The first one knows very well why he does what he does, while the second only does what he has been told without really knowing why.

It is as if these teachers' missions, with their structured learning and their step by step examples, was to eliminate from the student's life every little bit of variability and randomness —with an ironic result. Thus, **artistic**



Lucio Anneo Séneca, about two thousand years ago, expressed this problem:

Non vitae, sed scolae discimus, «we do not learn for life, but for the school».



«Those who do not take risks should not make decisions».

«Much of what others know is not worth knowing. **What we need to know for a profession is necessarily what is outside the corpus**, as far as possible from the center.»

Nassim Nicholas Taleb. Fragments of his books '**Antifragile**' and '**Skin in the Game**', respectively.

learning runs the risk of becoming a mere tourist route through the busiest and safest common places, forgetting that learning is nothing other than solving problems for oneself.

In addition, students do not receive any training to deal with ambiguity, **but simply look for those problems that fit better with the solutions they already have. They do not have the learning needed to solve new problems that arise**.

Costa Dvorezky is definitely not this type of teacher and shies away from giving shortcuts to students, protecting them from themselves. He is always honest with them and invites them to find their own solutions, to take risks and to become aware that comfort is synonymous with mediocrity. Costa wants them to fight with the paint and, if it does not go well, they try harder so that it works out the next time. Exactly the same as in real life.

Costa's proposal is that of not circumscribing the students in a specific program so that they are empowered to change the process according to the observation of the model.

The inconvenience of a convenient set.

What is life painting? Does it have anything to do with painting in the happiest conditions for the painter? To what extent does a "professional set" hinder the student's progress?

Costa is clear: he does not trust even a bit of the "professional" models and lighting. *Studio* lighting is not very *natural*, and its purpose is simply to facilitate the artist's analysis work, discouraging any departure from the learned method. **A professional set-up allows the student not to think too much or stray too far from their comfort zone.** The consequence is a low value learning process.

Costa recognizes that perhaps it is okay to become familiar with the problems of lighting. However, it does not seem very ambitious to be a painter and, instead of venturing into new and exciting challenges, seeking shelter in already known solutions for problems with which we are already familiar.

When we know the solution to a certain problem, we tend to recreate that problem in order to give us the pleasure of applying the recipe of success. It is as if a martial arts fighter, instead of competing with those at his level, is satisfied with beating beginners.

There is not much glory in it, only junk food for the ego.

So an excellent exercise is not to *professionally* light the figure, leave it as it is, without looking for the effect of light or fireworks. That forces us to get rid of shortcuts, prejudices, and formulas, and to analyze the pose without any precedent that conditions the method to follow. And that's what Costa calls *real* life painting.

So when you're going to prepare the set for painting, think about whether you are doing it to adapt the problems of the model to the solutions you already know, or if you do it to achieve a higher order of purpose.

Do not seek subjects.

Costa's ideas never depend on finding a good subject. In fact, the effect of looking for "a good subject", or a "nice" subject, is not different from looking for a convenient set. The important thing is the way in which the subject is painted, not the subject itself.

Costa looks for beauty, not a beautiful painting. Something beautiful is the product of ingenuity, but beauty is the consequence of understanding art and life in a certain way and having the ability to transmit it in the most efficient way possible.

You can take as a model anything that can express beauty through you, and thanks to you. But it is useless to look for "beautiful" subjects to disguise the fact that you do not know how to convey the beauty of any subject. **You do not need a "pretty" model to paint better, but to know how to observe better**.

Quite simply, there is beauty in everything. Both in a *beautiful* subject and in an *ugly* one, because **beauty is in our gaze, not in the object**.

Beautiful subjects are a trap, and we fall into it because we are human. In addition, when the subject is *too beautiful* it is dangerous since it can eclipse everything else. And it may even block our ability to observe the pictorial beauty of the subject.

On the other hand, this tic also manifests itself in drawing and brushstrokes. **If you change things all the time so that it looks "prettier" you will only make it look different, not better**. And if you want to do things in a different way, it is best to stop touching everything and start another canvas by building it in a different way from the beginning.



«A man goes to knowledge as he goes to war: wide-awake, with fear, with respect, and with absolute assurance. Going to knowledge or going to war in any other manner is a mistake, and whoever makes it might never live to regret it».

Carlos Castaneda (1925–1998). '**The teachings of Don Juan**'.

Three great tips:

1. **Paint what you love, not what you want to sell**. Never paint in a forced manner, because you must do it or because of a sense of duty.
2. **Do not paint *beautiful* things. Paint things *well***. Beauty should not be confused with beautiful things.
3. **When you have a solid plan, stay faithful until the end**. Be true to your decisions, whether they are good or bad. Next time, you will take another path.

Feel the discomfort.

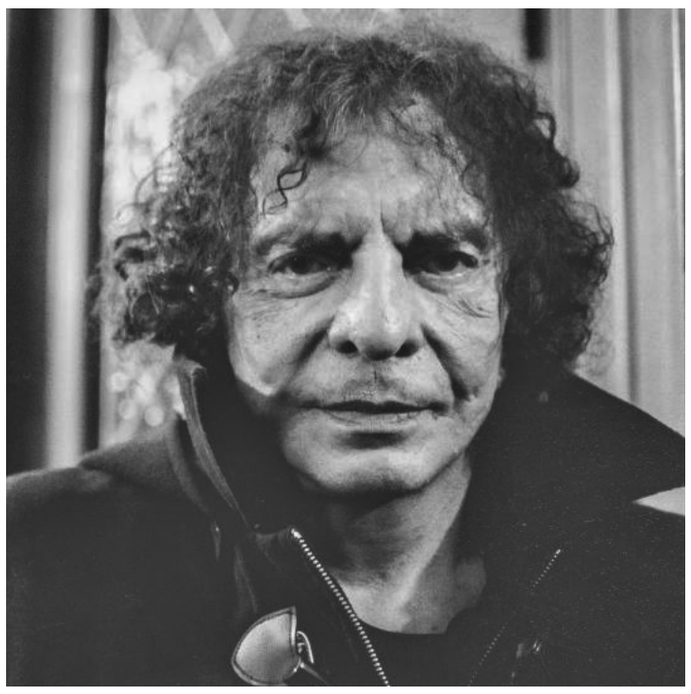
There are artists who suffer because they do not know how to deal with risk; they suffer because they do not want to suffer. However, Costa already warns us, loud and clear: **«It is a great risk not to take risks»**.

Without risk, there is no art. There is always a risk. This is something that every good teacher will tell you: **leave your comfort zone because everything you want to be and do is outside of it**. Taste the discomfort as the prelude to growth.

If you create your works happily, it is very likely that you are already stuck and repeating routines in automatic mode. In that state, you will not gain experience over time, but you will only accumulate years of routine.

According to Nicholas Nassim Taleb, the modern problem is the incomprehension of the effect of comfort: it lengthens life as well as illness. So it is **virtually impossible to know if we are being consumed by the ease of our decisions**. Carl G. Jung formulated this problem as a riddle when he said: **«How can you find a lion that has devoured you?»**

So do not try to find where the comfort of your day to day lives, it is better to wait until your stomach gives you the signal. When you feel fear in your flesh, congratulate yourself: you are on the way. **Fear indicates that you are facing risks**. Maybe you are wrong or the result is not the best in the world but you must trust that, if you feel fear, the path is the right one. A student cannot be anything other than a warrior.



The great Alejandro Dolina is an Argentine broadcaster, who also achieved fame as a musician, writer, radio host and television actor.

If you still do not know his radio programs, this is a good opportunity to do so.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTCVukcaUkM

A wet artist is not afraid of the rain.

Alejandro Dolina says that «we do not like to read, but to have read». We like to communicate that we have read this or that and to show that we remember something about it, but we do not like reading it so much.

Dolina states that if we could swallow a book as a pill —as the summaries try to do— we would get some memories similar to those who have really read it.

But what reading gives us is not that. **What reading gives us is to become someone able to read books**. The true value of the book is the effort we make to read it, understand it, enjoy it.

Therefore, any creative process focused on the outcome, anchored in the scope of the result and not in experiencing the adventurous discomfort of getting to it, only produces inconsistency and mediocrity. The process is the path, and the consequence of walking it is the work. **The path does not lead us to the painting: the path IS the painting**.

We can take shortcuts to build an image, for example by merging stolen photographs or projecting images on the canvas. Shortcuts —like the book summaries— save us a lot of effort, but at the same time, they also deny us the chance to be better artists. **Shortcuts weaken us**.

A good artist is not the one who has the best resources to achieve an effect, but one who lives permanently in discomfort and non-conformity. **Every shortcut dodges the necessary experience to not need it**. Taking the shortest route is the definitive symptom of not wanting to be better, instead for pretending it.

The creation of muscle mass and resistance to fatigue are achieved only through physical exercise. There is no other way. And if at the gym we find the trick to lighten the load of the weights without the coach noticing, we will not achieve anything but waste time. Such is the fraud and uselessness of shortcuts at gyms and in works of art too.

Not taking the shortest route is the surest way to invite crisis and; if it were not for these, we would still be bacteria. Adversities are absolutely necessary to spur progress, and the best way to take advantage of them is to voluntarily encourage crisis.

So in this painting world —and maybe also in life— you'd better take your time to walk all the way and accept its adversities.


THERE IS NO
LACK OF
INSPIRATION,
JUST LACK OF
COFFEE

FOCAL POINT

This is, without a doubt, the most important part of the book. That's why I've intentionally reserved it for the end. **Costa Dvorezky's focal point concept destroys many of the concepts that the academic world takes for granted**, so it's possible that what comes next will not be easy for you to accept. Now you will understand why it was necessary to previously develop all his philosophy in order to get to this point.

The concept is not really new and, nevertheless, when Costa explained it, I came to realize its true potential. According to him, the focal point is the big deal. And he explained it so easily that I felt silly for not having understood it well until then. For me, it was a revelation.

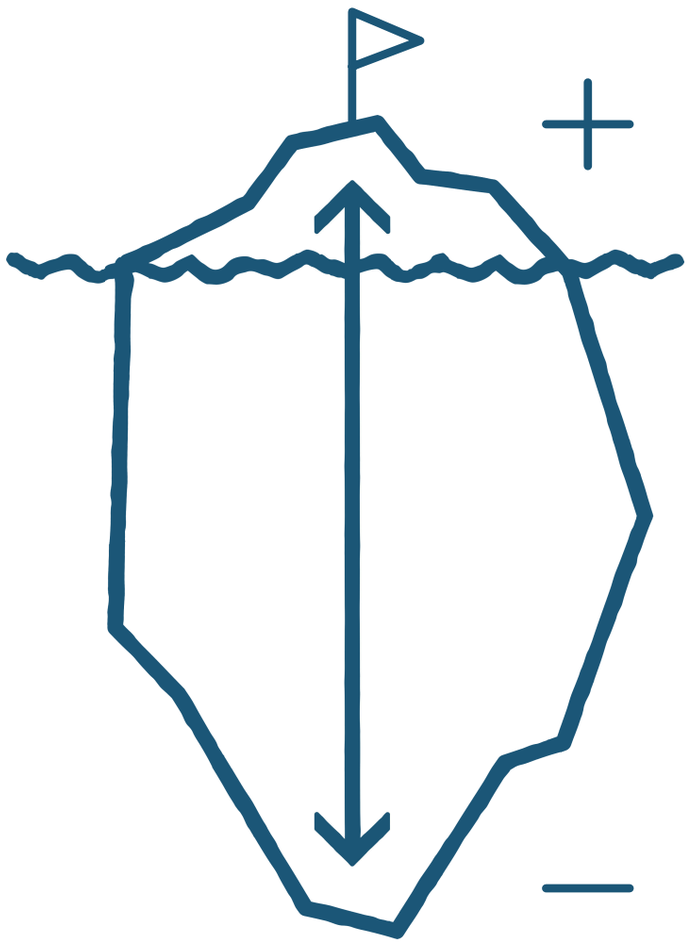
Let's get into this bit by bit…

The basics: set a focal point and a hierarchy.

Fundamental.

Do not let your interest be lost around the merely incidental: your composition must have a clearly defined and dominant center of interest. The most convenient thing is not to have more than one main point of interest in the same composition, although of course there's a ton of exceptions.

In any case, **your center of interest should be a short, high impact headline. One with large letters on the cover**. Your focal point always responds to this one question: how are you going to attract the viewer's attention and where will you take it when you have it?



Imagine that correction is the tip of an iceberg, which crowns the massive amount of impropriety and lack of detail beneath the surface.

The closer we get to the top —the focal point— the more detail, correction and perfection we will need.

The core: anything can be the focal point.

All students got this more or less clear: we must subordinate the elements under the same law. There should be a sense of order. However, manuals and art schools have convinced us that the focal point is limited to the interaction of elementary visual elements: gesture, structure, value, and color.

However, Costa told us about the focal points of all kinds. Literally. And that's when my head was blown away...

Because I had never heard before about how ideas as complex as disorder, correction or emptiness can be nested. Yes, my friend, there is life beyond hierarchizing visual elements: anything can be the focal point.

Do you realize the potential of this idea?

Incorrectness as a contrasting element.

We've been taught to avoid error, to flee from it, to despise it. The schools have turned us into hypochondriacs of imperfection and thereby incapacitated us from using its tremendous potential. Because **perfection needs imperfection, as light needs shadow**.

If we accept the idea that we can turn anything into a focal point, we are ready to understand that **incorrectness can be used as a constructive element**. Incorrectness as a source of additional contrast to express life in our painting.

Costa Dvorezky introduces inaccuracies in order to dramatize the correction at the center of attention. Thus, the eye discovers success as if it were a powerful light shining in the darkness. Try to ask yourself this question: what stands out more, a success surrounded by successes, or a success surrounded by incorrectness?

If everything is uniformly correct, we are wasting a source of contrast as powerful as complementary colors. So Costa, progressively, ***nails it* more and more as he approaches the focal point. Or corrects more, depending on how you look at it**.

CORRECT WITH DISCIPLINE

There is one more treasure Costa gave us that I had never heard of, or read anything similar before: we must correct with discipline, not indiscriminately. In other words, you have to have a criterion in order to correct the errors. **Correcting without criteria is not useful**.

The irrational, hysterical, fearful and purposeless correction serves no other purpose other than to get the painting drunk with an excess of decisions that do not add any value. **These are reactive decisions based on fear, not on your artistic vision**.

In the same way that no artist would despair over adding a “too dark” value in his painting, we should not react in the same way when adding something “too wrong”. Have you ever wondered why you try to correct everything blindly, instead of putting order only when this action brings value?

Again we discover that the schools blocked us from this point of view. Because from an early age we were instilled with the dangerous idea that it is our moral duty to correct all errors, without making any difference. Without criteria. **We eradicate error without considering its constructive potential; we eliminate it from the root, thoughtlessly and without considering anything other than its extermination**.

However, Costa Dvorezky questions this dogma and shows that it is just another narrative. «Corrections must have a reason for being» —he says. You should not correct everything that is not equal to what you see in the model. **You only have to correct what you do not see well in your painting with respect to your focal point, because corrections do not have an absolute value, but are relative to the focal point**.



Have you ever considered if absence can be an expressive material? Would it be possible to use a void as the center of attention?

In this wonderful work by Arnold Bocklin, ‘The Isle of the Dead’, the focal point is, literally, the void. A tremendous dark ridge with ascending vocation constructed from the cypresses.

This is how Bocklin manages to connect with the idea of death: using a center of attention whose power is the same non-existence.

So if your focal point is, for example, the head, you should fine-tune your corrections as you get closer to it, and tolerate more error as you move away from it.

Sounds simple, huh? But soon you will see that it is much more difficult to do well only what needs to be right, rather than to try to do absolutely everything right.

How are you going to do it?

Costa Dvorezky questions the way we use focal points, emphasizing that anything can be a focus of attention. That said, ask yourself: Can chaos be a center of attention? And sadness? And a sense of humor? And stridency?

Now it’s your turn.

Now that you know that any idea can create a focus and a hierarchy in your work, the time has come to rethink a lot of convictions and venture into new ways: what ideas obsess you, what do you want to explore?

Forget about looking for subjects as soon as possible and focus on establishing a focal point based on the ideas that ignite the subject.

Two thoughts before launching:

1. Every rule is an opportunity to get rid of it.
2. Every rule is an invented narrative.

Good luck!



DEMOS

MATERIAL LIST



Brushes:

Bring a good assortment of good quality brushes. Costa does not recommend any brush in particular, just bring those that work best for you.

Maybe you do not use it in your day-to-day, but you will surely need a wide and flat brush of nylon hair or bristle to cover large areas.



Paints:

Any good quality paint such as M. Graham, Michael Harding, Rembrandt or Gamblin will be fine.

Avoid student paints and bring large tubes. Costa recommends that you bring these colors:

- Titanium White.
- Cadmium Yellow Medium.
- Cadmium Red Medium.
- Magenta (*Rose Permanent*).
- French Ultramarine Blue (it's got a warm hue).
- Phthalocyanine Blue (it's got a greenish hue).
- Indigo (if you do not have Indigo, you can use Prussian Blue or Phtalo Blue mixed with Ivory Black).
- Yellow Ochre.
- Burnt Sienna (transparent, Winsor & Newton is good) .



Support:

Costa recommended linen or cotton canvases between 16”x20’’ (40x50cm) and 20”x24” (50x60cm) maximum.

Extras:

- Bring your best palette
- Cotton rags (old t-shirts work fine, and leave no fuzz)
- *Gamsol*, by Gamblin Colors (odorless solvent).



Supplementary colors:

These colors are not required, they were not within the list of recommended materials for the workshop.

However, I’m including them within the list because they were occasionally used by Costa during his demonstrations:

- Cobalt Blue.
- Prussian Blue.
- Payne’s Gray.
- Transparent Red (*Terre Rossa* transparent).
- Raw Umber (green shade).
- Sap Green.



PALETTE

Left half:

Area reserved for mixing opaque colors with white, meant for lights.

1. Titanium White.
2. Cadmium Yellow Medium.
3. Yellow Ochre.
4. Burnt Sienna.*
5. Cadmium Red Medium.
6. Ultramarine Blue.

Right half:

Area reserved for mixing transparent colors, meant for shadows.

7. Magenta.
8. Raw Umber.
9. Prussian Blue.
10. Payne's Gray.
11. Indigo.

* It's the exception: W&N's Burnt Sienna is placed on the left half, but it is not opaque. It is very transparent.



«It doesn't matter how colors look like on the palette because they change into others when they are placed on the canvas».

«Do not worry too much about colors, they will change in an hour. The important thing is value and relationships».

Costa recommends not mixing more than three colors into each mix, including white. That's why it is advisable to use primary colors since many brands use mixtures in their colors and hinder the mixtures on the palette.

The palette is divided into opaque and transparent colors. The first ones for the lights and the second ones for the shadows. For example, he uses Cadmium Red in the lights, and Magenta in the shadows because it is more transparent.

Although he uses all the colors of this list in the demonstration, he does not recommend all of them for the workshop so as not to confuse students.

4 hour demo. 1 hour for underpainting, and 3 for color.

Before starting.

«The beginnings are the hardest part» —he says. This is the list of Costa's recommendations for starting out on the right foot:

- If you are right-handed, he recommends placing the model to the left of the canvas.
- **Your composition must be adapted to the support, not the other way around**. Your composition is always subsidiary to the chosen format and orientation, so it's important to choose them wisely.
- You have to leave enough space on the canvas so you don't squeeze the figure in it. **You should feel the air running in the canvas**.
- **Do not compose cropping areas that behave as nodes or connectors, like the joints**. Unless you look for that effect, it will always look bad to crop parts that do not suggest continuity.
- The most important thing in the composition is the focal point because all the elements will be subordinated to this choice and you will have to be consistent with it until the end. **Decide wisely what your focal point in space will be, and what its nature will be**.
- Load the brush properly, it's always better too much than too little. **Place enough paint on the palette**, so you will not be psychologically "saving paint".
- **Do not stress about your models' time limitation, keep calm and concentrate**.

THE FIRST THING IS TO FALL IN LOVE WITH THE MODEL





He starts by simplifying as much as possible with Burnt Sienna, transparent and warm, with a little *Gamsol* and a cotton rag made of an old t-shirt.

He works on the underpainting as if it were a charcoal drawing: adding paint to darken and removes it to open light areas, using a rag moistened with *Gamsol*.

We only see light, not shadow, because the shadow does not emit light; so shadows are indicators to understand light.

Costa chisels the light using the shape of the shadow and then softens it with the rag.

Reduce information.

Where to start? This is a huge debate in the figurative arts, and each school has its own solution. Costa recommends not putting too much information in at the beginning, so he uses the old tip of squinting, in order to reduce the number of discernible values.

He says that **proportion is not the priority at the beginning**, and begins with the keys of light and shadow, establishing from the beginning the highlights key, and the darkest shadows key.

Costa says that the logical order to develop a painting, according to his experience, is the following:

1. Composition
2. Value
3. Color

Underpainting: values.

According to Costa, painting is thinking with the brush. The underpainting is a game of shapes and lights that paves the way for when we start painting with the whole palette. It's the way we prepare ourselves for painting.

«A painting is nothing more than a composition of values enriched with color. If the values are wrong, everything is wrong».

This preliminary process is one of learning in order to explore the beauty of the model. The process is for you, and for no one else. It is your game, your way of thinking, relating and proceeding. Have fun in this phase: your world, your rules.

«The shadows are observed freely, and lights rigorously».

In its genesis, the painting resembles sculpture: you start with a large block, and you shape it by cutting it into small pieces. This means you do not have to obsess about details at the beginning. In fact, you should not care about details until the end. Only then should you decide if they are necessary or not.

«Fall in love with the model and with how light behaves. Fall in love with relationships, not with the subject».

At first, everything is a pure composition of value: before becoming interested in proportions of form, Costa worries about proportions of light and shadow, their rhythms and their balance. Nothing of proportions, details or anatomy. Then the form develops over this abstract approach of light and shadows.

«Do have your own criteria and do not fall into “painting by numbers”».

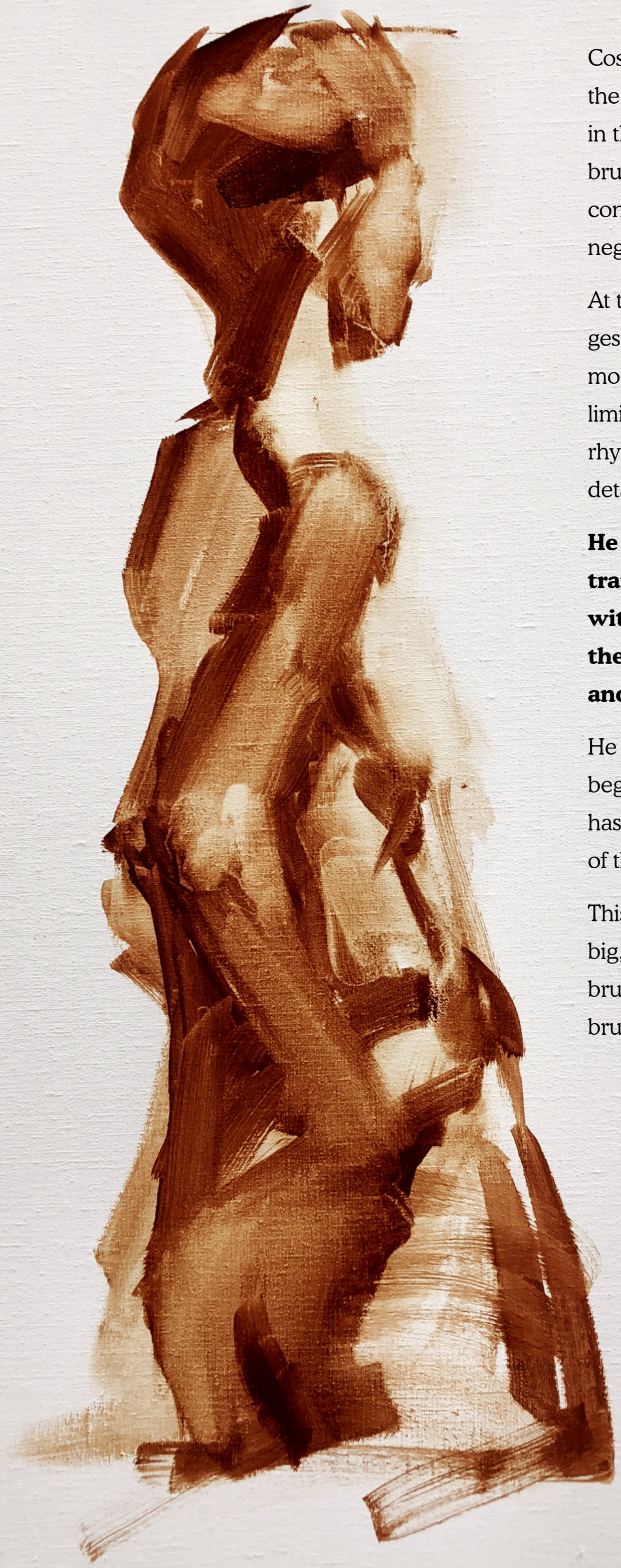
So it is best to **start with a general abstract perception, a**

composition in terms of relationships between large areas of light. There is always a balance between light and shadow, we must take advantage of it from the start and create drama before anxiety compels us to put details in.

Because those anxieties always come.

Principles must be clearly understood:

- The core shadow is always the darkest one.
- Cast shadows are darker than form shadows and have hard edges.
- Form shadows have soft edges and are lighter than cast shadows.
- A change in value always indicates a plane change.
- A dark value indicates heaviness, and clear value, lightness. You should darken everything you want to physically make heavier.



Costa place and removes paint all the time, drags and uses the rag in the same way you use the brush, simultaneously constructing the positive and negative shapes.

At this moment the texture and gesture of the brushstroke are more important than the shape, limiting himself to defining the rhythm without worrying about details.

He keeps the shadows very transparent and drags them with a rag in order to give them direction, movement, and character.

He uses large flat brushes at the beginning. The size of the brushes has everything to do with the size of the canvas.

This demonstration is not very big, so he uses medium size brushes. «For large canvases, big brushes» —he says.





Set the dark key with a large brush, and the light key with a smaller brush. Once the value limits have been established, the paint will fit within this spectrum.

This way of proceeding is called *bracketing*. Its purpose is to **frame the limits of the medium values in order to have more control, setting boundaries we should not step out of**.

It is exactly the same concept of blocking in that we use in drawing, where we put limits on the form, except in this case we put limits on values.



For now, he focuses on value and volume. At this stage he could still completely rethink the value composition, something he can not do when he introduces the notions of proportion and anatomy, renouncing all flexibility.

He mixes a greenish gray with white for the background, using Payne's Gray, Cadmium Yellow, and Titanium White.

Then he begins to paint the areas of light and gradually gets into shadows.

For flesh tones, he uses a mixture of Yellow Ocher, Titanium White and a bit of Cadmium Red.

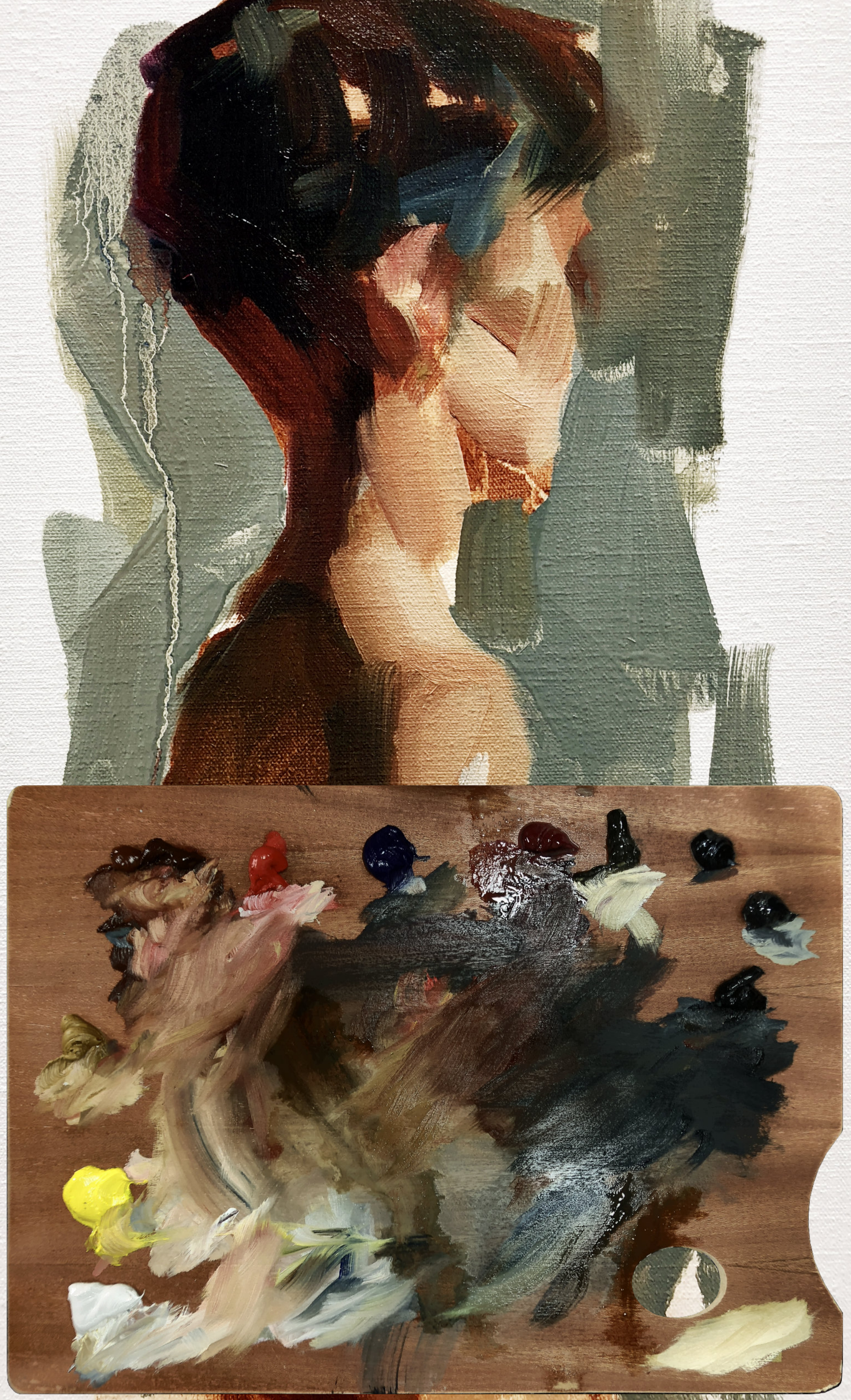
Recommendations:

- Having the canvas too wet is dangerous. It is best to use *Gamsol* moderately so as not to soak it. Use it to moisten your work and your brushes, but nothing more. Costa does not use mediums in his process.
- Burnt Sienna must be transparent, not opaque. Some brands are very opaque. They work well, but the transparent ones work better. Winsor & Newton's is good for our purpose.
- For starting, you will need a brush that is not too hard, or else you will sweep the paint instead of manipulating it.
- Costa's highlights are never white: the cast shadows are obtained by washing the shadows with the rag, keeping the opacity of the core shadow.
- When you start, don’t worry if you forget the background: «you'll take care of it later, this is just a study» —he says.
- Costa recommends keeping the brush clean so as not to contaminate lights and shadows. You can have a different brush for each, or clean them constantly in the solvent.
- The underpainting should be dry to allow the painting on top to be continued.



He uses both palette mixing, and surface mixing; that is, the mixing of colors over the canvas.

He mantains a habit of cleaning the palette very often, which ensures that the mixtures do not get dirty and do not negatively influence subsequent mixtures.





At this point, it is time to create more contrast by retouching some shadows. When the canvas is dry it is more difficult to touch up, so it is convenient to do it now, wet on wet. This restores and adjusts value relationships.

It is not about placing the colors “well”, but to transmit the idea of surface and relation of values, incorporating at the same time movement and direction.

The direction of the brushstroke is very important since it indicates spatial information: the horizontal ones approach, and the vertical ones move away.

Knowing this visual effect is especially useful in plein-air painting.



Now he begins to play with the rhythm and the temperature of the color, creating loops of cool and warm brushstrokes. He also alternates fast and slow strokes, hard and soft, creating corresponding relationships between thick brushstrokes in the light and transparent in the shadows.

He creates complementary contrasts all the time: slow and fast, vertical and horizontal, light and dark, warm and cool, etc.

This game of complementary in different planes enhances the liveliness of the painting.



He reinforces the drama of the medium shadow, using contrasts of value and color. This illuminates reflected light without resorting to white, which would make it chalky, breaking the contrast effect between opaque lights and transparent shadows.

Sometimes he resorts to washing the cast shadows with a rag when he steps too far, so he keeps them transparent.

The consistency of the pictorial idea is more important than the accuracy of the color. Once we establish the criterion that the shadows will be transparent and the lights opaque, we must be consistent with it until the end. So there can never be too much paint in the lights. **«Never be afraid to put too much paint on the lights»** —he says.



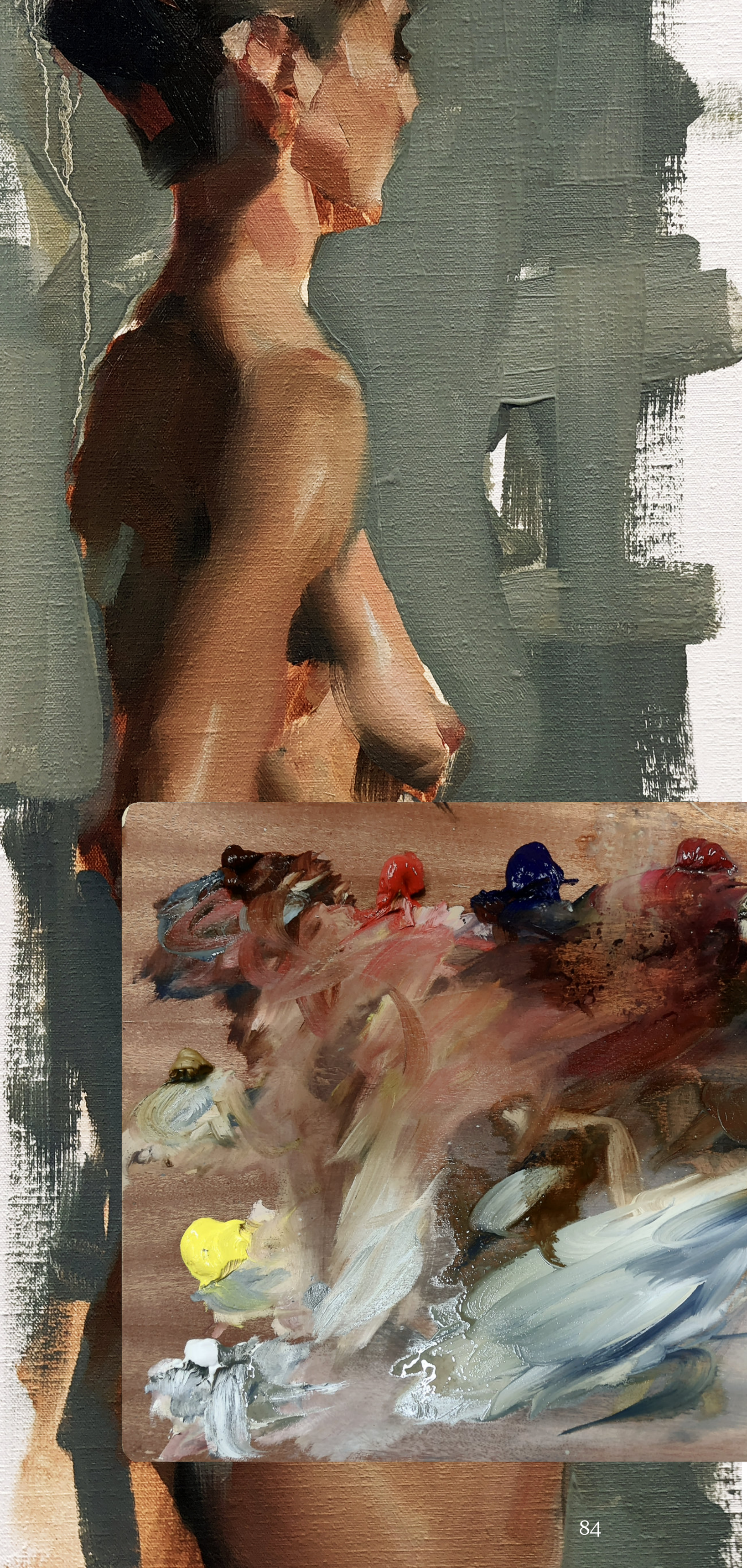
As he progresses through the lights, he progressively introduces Raw Umber. Then he reinforces the edges of the shadows with a smaller brush, creating more intense color contrasts.

The touch-ups and accents of color are added more by *surface mixing* than by mixing on the palette.

The most intense accents of color are applied with smaller brushes and always close to the core shadow since the average values are the ones with the most chroma.

He goes back to the background: large brushes and energetic gestures, combining verticals and horizontals in order to create dynamism. He plays all the time with binary elements, so for representing freshness, he resorts to contrasting it with more “dirty” colors.

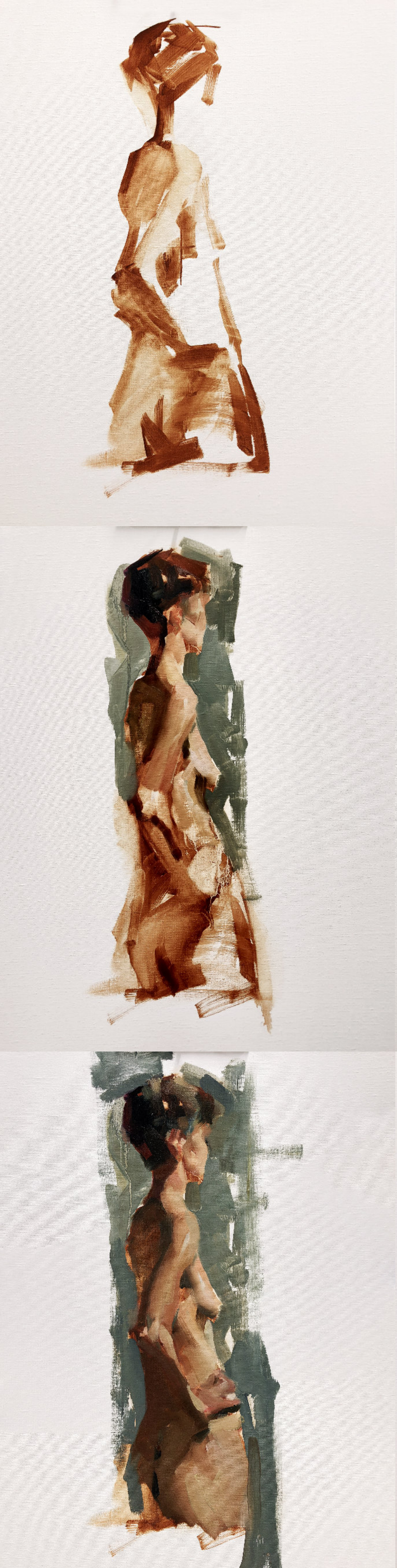
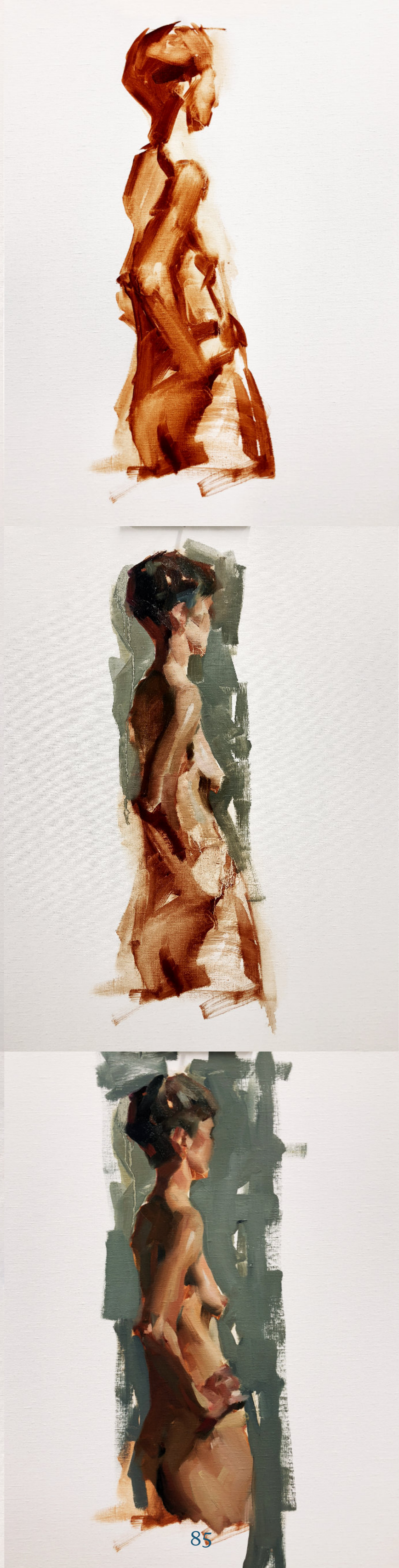
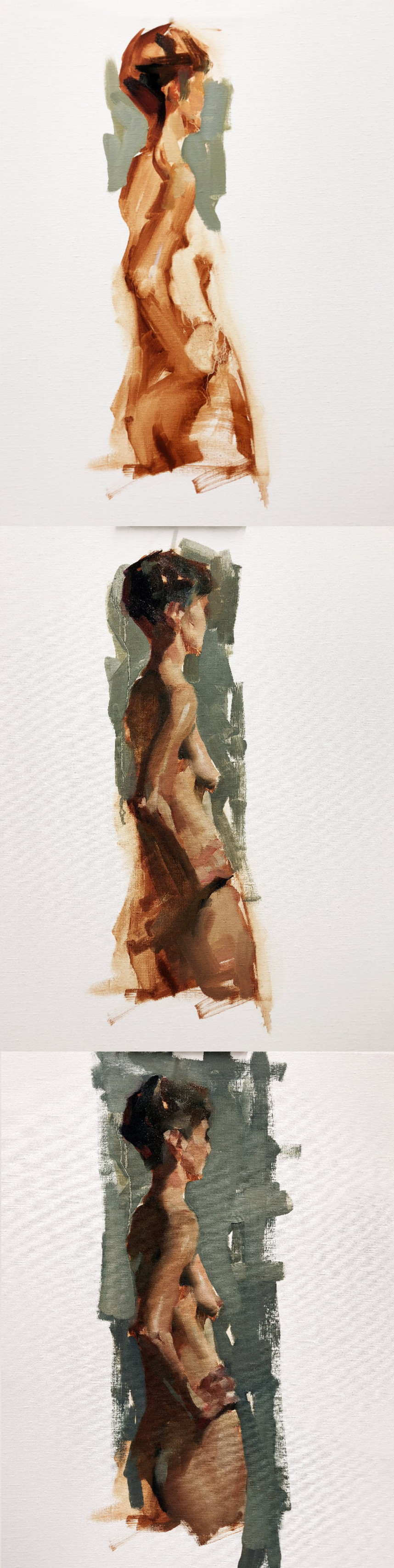
In the final section of the work, everything is built from the light spots. So he makes sure he does not overstep the mark and maintains control of the lights by *bracketing* between mid-tones and highlights.



Costa applies colors by *bracketing* all the time in order to have maximum control, combining his actions with simultaneous contrasts between binary concepts.

Towards the end he defines contours with the background color, reinforcing the gesture and the rhythms of the figure.

And finally, it's time to put the accents in, the part Costa finds the most fun. As well as being fun to do, his “false accents” are resources to emphasize form.



MARTA

8 hour demo. 1 hour for underpainting, and 7 for color.

Underpainting.

The composition is set as a concept, not as a “postcard”. In other words, elements such as sofa and fabrics are only resources that are used to give emphasis to the figure, and not to “beautify”. **An artist does not embellish the scene with external elements, but with internal ones, in the way we observe it**.

Art is an illusion. It’s not quite true, it’s a visual narrative that the artist creates in order to convey something. It’s not *real*, nor does it have much to do with reality. Fortunately.

We must do whatever it takes to make the painting work so that it becomes an artwork. We do not look for resemblance, but for our decisions to count.

SESSION I







He sets the upper and lower limits of the pose and the center.

Then you can play a bit more with the horizontal limits, but you have to set them anyways.

He starts an underpainting but changes it completely after the first attempt.

He says there were too many elements in the game, which would create confusion and would complicate decision-making a lot.

When starting a work, you'd better be too dramatic than too correct. It's always better to start with high chroma and progressively dull the color than the opposite.

First, the relationships are set, and then the structure.

Finally, if necessary, you can think about working on anatomy and details.









He sets the dark key with a mixture of Burnt Sienna and Payne's Gray, and then the highest light spots with a mixture of Titanium White, Yellow Ocher and a little Cadmium Red.

Gradually he begins to add "dirty" colors with white, from the point of light to the mid-value. Little by little, he incorporates primary colors.

First, he mixes the colors on the palette and then mixes them back on the canvas. He manipulates the paint constantly, modeling the shape using wrist turns, different speeds, and different lengths and directions in the stroke.

He looks for variety and contrast in each of his strokes.

The brushstroke that shapes the exterior shape of the figure also enriches it with rhythms and movement.

The brush strokes follow the direction of the long axis of the shape, modeling the shape with firm strokes and a clear direction.





The sequence that Costa uses to combine the mixtures on the palette and the manipulations on the canvas is more or less the following:

1. Obtaining the value #1 on the palette and application on the canvas.
2. Obtaining value #2 on the palette and application on the canvas.
3. Obtaining the transition between the values #1 and #2 by means of manipulation wet on wet on the canvas.
4. Accents and modeling, by direct manipulation, wet on wet.

For this, he uses a soft nylon brush, but not too soft (semi-rigid).



SESSION II



He starts introducing Raw Umber in the lights in order to dull them with a neutral and warm color.

These lights with less chroma are placed above the mid-values which have more chroma, defining the shape and playing with the variety of temperatures.

Progressively he introduces cooler lights, adding Ultramarine Blue to the mixes on the palette. For example, the planes that move away contain more Ultramarine Blue in the mixtures, and those that approach, contain more warm colors.

To accentuate the depth, in addition to cooling the distant planes, he softens them gradually by blending their edges.

He combines and contrasts cool and warm brush strokes all the time, long and short, vertical and horizontal.

The closer the simultaneous contrasts are, the more vibrant, vivid and volumetric the form results.

He does not put much color in the lights but in the mid and dark values.

This is supposed to be “against the rules”, but Costa says that it works well for him and that the rules can go to hell.



Modeling light with negative shape.

Costa shapes the form with large brushes, and when he has to paint a small shape, he chisels it using surrounding brushstrokes. This technique of using the negative shape is observed especially in the brushstrokes that define the form, especially in points of light and accents.

So to get an accent of light, Costa does not usually use a small brush but **prefers to get a big brush and start chiseling its shape using the surrounding colors**.

The point of light looks more intense and defined when it is conceived as a negative form, instead of a normal brushstroke. **It's like "sharpening" the point of light, but without using small brushes**.

In addition, to achieve a more vibrant effect, he trims these light accents with temperature changes.

Thus, the lights "breathe" and emerge from below the mid-values, as if the mid-values formed a grid through which the light from below seeps in as if we saw a crack against the light. The accent is, in reality, a window through which the lower paint layer peeks out.

The lights should not be retouched.

On the other hand, Costa says that when he places white he must be very sure that he puts it in the correct place. And if he doesn't nail it, he does not correct it; he deletes it with the rag.

When light is retouched, it must always be because it's enrichened with emphasis, rhythm, and direction, but if we retouch it to correct its position, everything gets dirty and the volumetric effect is diluted. **«Light is built, it is not retouched»** —he says.

The light areas are modeled and constructed all the time. All the time, again and again. But they are not corrected.



First brushstroke.

The first stroke has a lot of white, has little chroma and its temperature is cool.

The brush stroke follows the direction of the long axis of the shape and emphasizes the volume.

Clipping brush strokes.

They carry less white, have more chroma and their temperature is warm.

The strokes are straight and long, with a clear direction. They form a grid of brushstrokes with variations of value and chroma.

Resulting light accent.

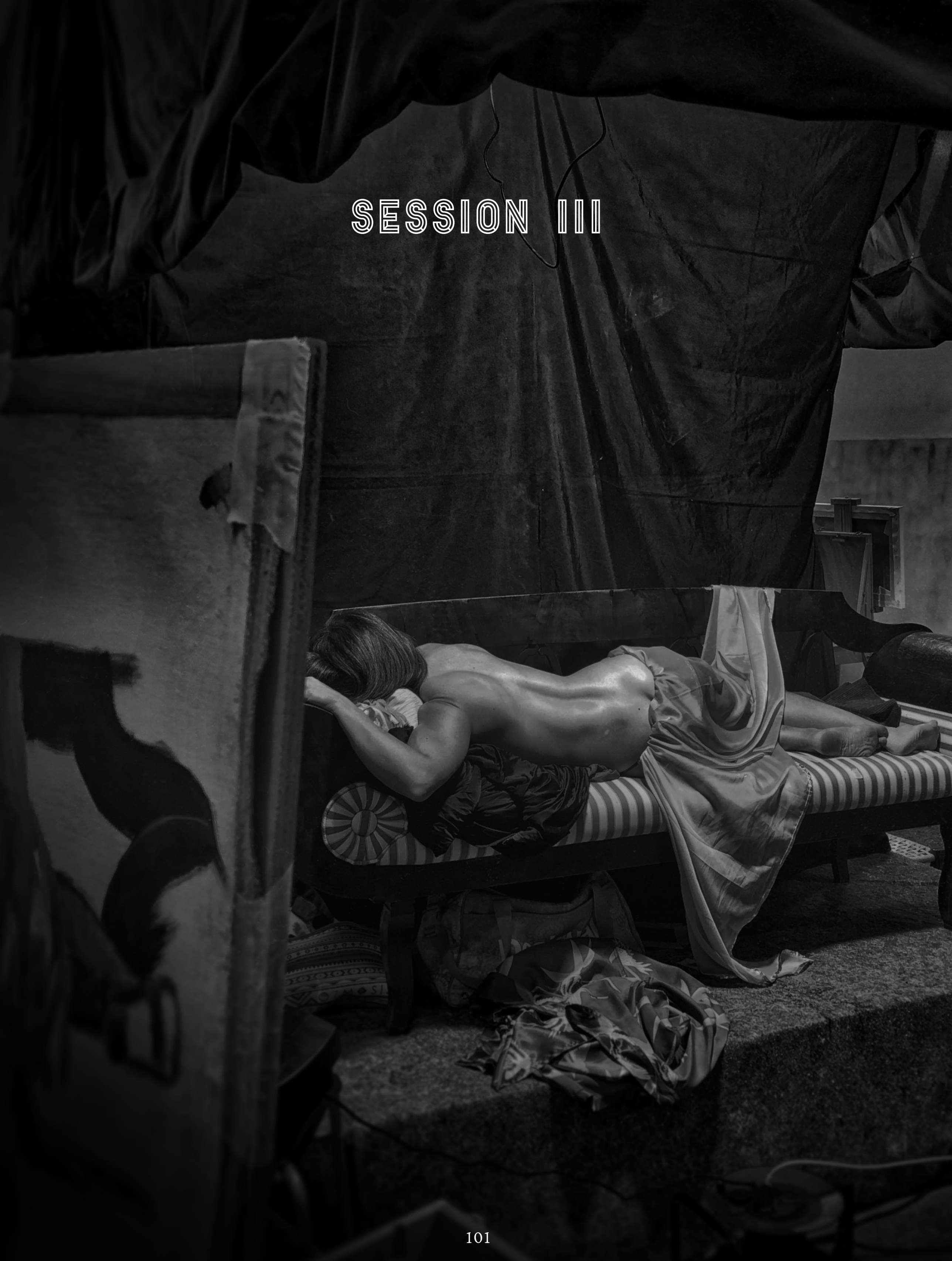
The resulting negative shape is well defined and its edges are hard.

The definition of its shape would be difficult to execute with a small brush and without correcting.





SESSION III







Hacking details.

The management of details should be like an illusionist trick, whose purpose is to control and direct attention. The details are not intended to depict the model, but to direct the viewer's interest.

In this phase there are already areas with "too many details", and Costa explains that it is time to alternate them with other more simplified areas. It's not strange if this sounds weird, because it's like *hacking* art books.

This strategy goes against what we all know; that the hierarchy of detail must be set progressively. That is to say: from less to more, in a linear way. Costa questions this rule and shows once again that everything is possible on the canvas.

Costa reinterprets the function of detail, comparing its use to that of color, where cool and warm colors alternate, thus:

Warm → cool → warm → cool.

So **he alternates very detailed passages with very simplified passages, creating a simultaneous contrast based on the detail**, like this:

Detail → simplification → detail → simplification.

Don't you think it's a stounding?





«True magic happens when several layers of paint are handled, and one sits on the other. So the last layer is the logical conclusion of the previous ones, which tell us about the path walked to reach the conclusion».

«At the end of the day, everything is composition and focal point».





WORKSHOP'S PROGRAM





Below you will find all the details about Costa Dvorezky's workshop '**Painting precise but loose**'.

You can watch the video that we prepared **HERE**.

And you can download the program **HERE**.

PARTICIPANTS



Carlos Ochando (Spain)
Christine Urquhart (UK)
Cristina Cerdán (Spain)
Fernando Vicente (Spain)
Gaya Kairos (Russia)
Jeff Curtis (UK)
Jessica Perlstein (US)
Jody Waterson (South Africa)
M. Carme Bufí (Spain)
Michelle Puchalski (US)
Safoora Terani (Iran)
Stephen Enríquez (Philippines)
Uxua Vides (Spain)
Wendy Achuang (China)

Models:

Geliah Peralta
Julieta Oriola
Marta Asensio

Organization:

Carles Gomila
Jorge Fernández Alday
Itziar Lecea & Virginia Torrego

April 7 to 13, 2025 → Lazaretto Quarantine Island, Menorca (Spain)

