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MARCH 2006

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Tough It Out  
with Oils and  
**SUCCEED!**



COVER:  
Japanese Teapot  
With Lady Apples (detail)  
by Mary Kathryn Massey

\$3.95 U.S./\$5.95 CAN.



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Japanese Teapot With  
Lady Apples (detail)  
by Mary Kathryn Massey, 2004,  
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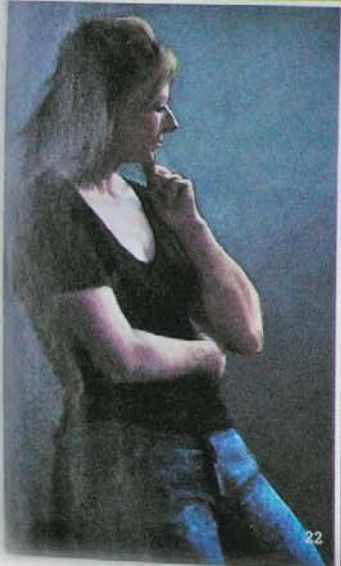
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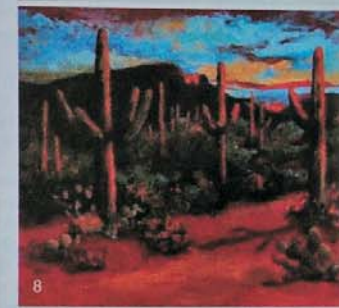
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- View an Online Exclusive gallery of artwork by Henry Stinson.
- See a gallery of pastel paintings by Diane De Santis in our Online Exclusive section.

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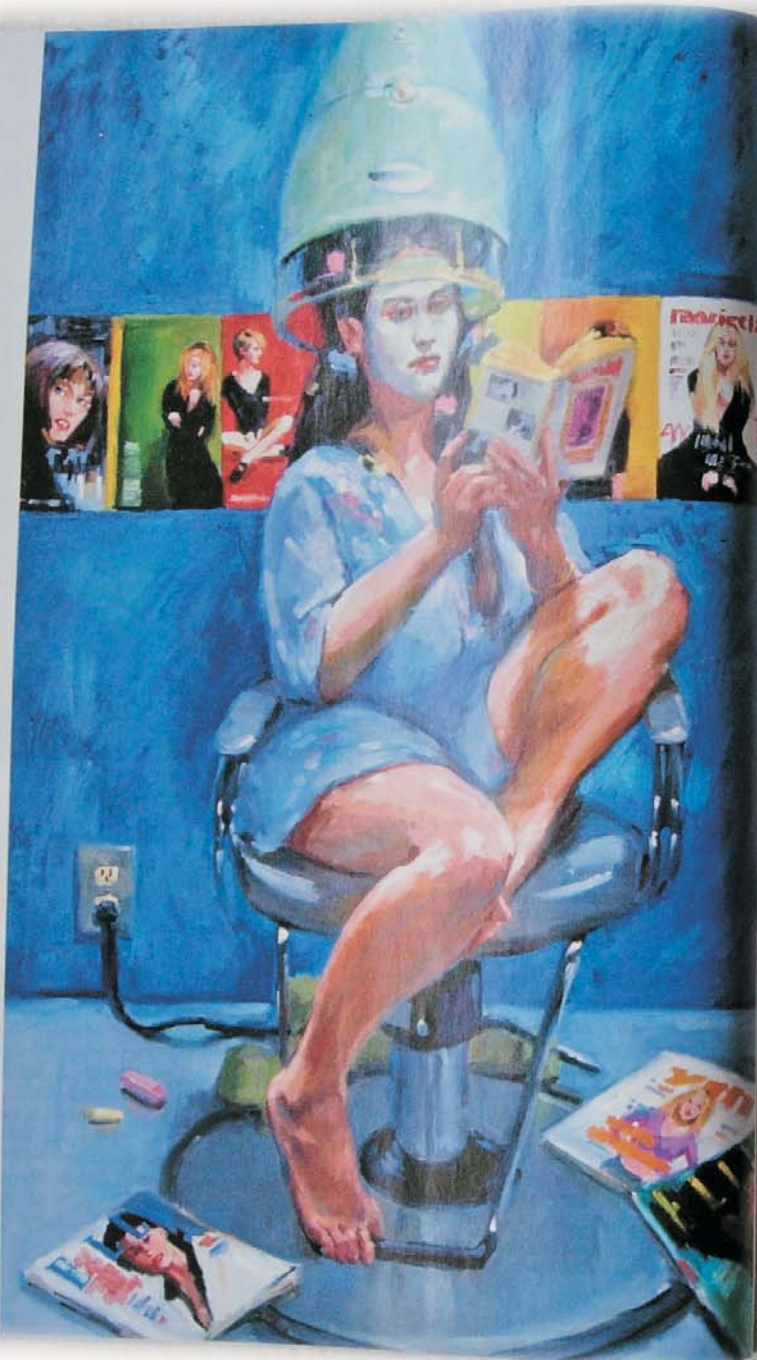
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**Beauty School Dropout**  
1997, oil, 70 x 40. All artwork in this article collection the artist unless otherwise indicated.

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## Tackle the Big Painting Issues Right Away

Instead of having his students undertake a series of limited exercises, **Henry Stinson** asks them to make a leap of faith and “jump into the deep end of the pool,” painting with a full palette of colors. He wants them to immediately judge the relationships of shapes, values, color temperatures, and edges. | **by M. Stephen Doherty**

**S**ome instructors require students to spend the first days and weeks of a class preparing color charts, drawing with dry or wet media, working with a limited palette of pigments, or representing simple boxes and cylinders. Students progress through these limited exercises as they are gradually introduced to the fundamental concepts of oil painting. But Northwest artist Henry Stinson prefers to have his students immerse themselves, jumping right in with a full palette of 15 colors to develop a complete painting. “I start them with a simple still life and ask them to lock in the middle values before they punch in the strong darks and lights, but in all other respects I have them immediately attack the key aspects of painting,” he explains.

During his initial demonstration to students, Stinson makes it clear why he wants them to cover their canvases with full color as quickly as possible. He believes in the old adage “Finish the start before you start the finish.” He approaches his own work with concentration and efficiency, finishing large paintings in a

fraction of the time others might devote to the process. “When I’m in my studio, I can complete a 6’-x-5’ painting in 12 hours,” he explains. “My approach is similar to the Russian Impressionists, who were after an immediate, bold, and painterly response to nature, not an academic study of details. I prefer to use bright, clean colors and a wet-in-wet technique to capture the essential life of a subject. I can achieve that quickly by concentrating on the fundamental aspects of painting and remaining completely focused during the process.”

Stinson does offer his students a methodology and a rationale that help keep them afloat when they “jump into the deep end of the pool,” as he describes the process. “They will learn to paint confidently and make bold decisions while concentrating on harmonious relationships. All aspects of painting relate to one another and to life itself. Mastering difficult concepts earlier rather than later has a dramatic impact on the quality of the paintings students are able to create. They learn to achieve harmony from the chaos involved in

BELOW  
**The Three Graces**  
2004, oil, each panel  
18 x 18, Private  
collection.

OPPOSITE PAGE  
**Beyond the Pale**  
2004, oil, 72 x 48.



looking at everything together and all at once.

"There are seven distinct stages to follow [see sidebar], and I explain the reasoning behind the recommended set of procedures," he continues. "I have them develop the painting within the middle range of values, for example, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is the lightest value and 10 is the darkest. I ask them to limit themselves to values 3 through 7 until the image is well established. Once the midrange is anchored, students can punch in the darkest darks and use thick paint to lay in the brightest highlights.

"After toning the surface of the canvas with a light wash of cerulean blue, students use a No. 4 or 6 brush and a mixture of ultramarine and cerulean blue to make a linear drawing of the basic shapes in the painting," Stinson continues. "Next, students prepare a mixture of paint with dark values around 5 through 7 and block in the shadows. The goal in painting the shadows first is to block in the simple masses that link the compositional elements together. Charles Hawthorne talked about having no more than seven key shapes in a painting, and I think there is wisdom in simplifying a subject and defining it with those basic, connected forms. Once those are identified, the next step is

## THE SEVEN-STEP PROCESS

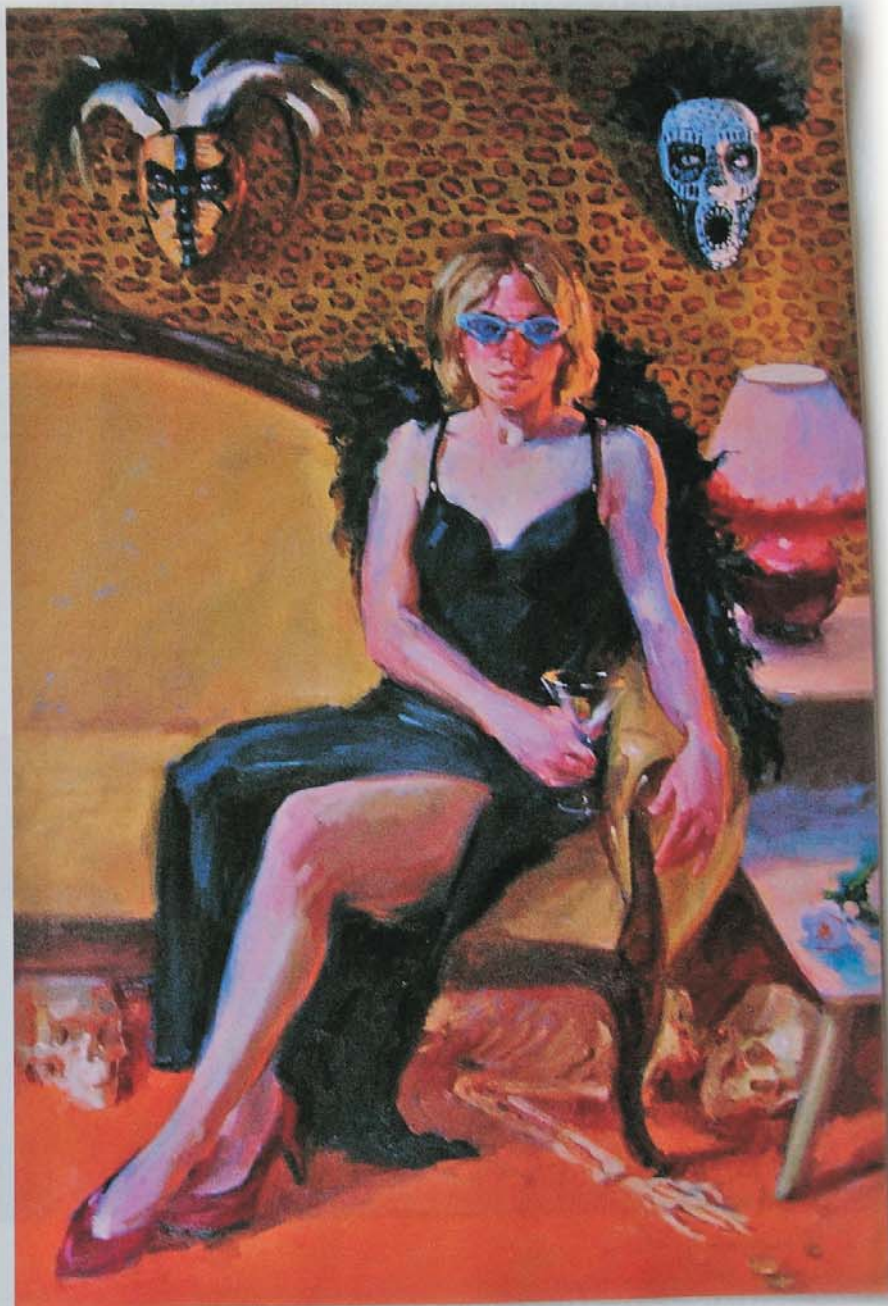
- Step 1:** Tone the canvas
- Step 2:** Create the linear drawing with a brush
- Step 3:** Block in the shadow areas (tonal values 5-7)
- Step 4:** Block in the area struck by light (tonal values 3-5)
- Step 5:** Corrections (colors, color relationships, perspective, and composition)
- Step 6:** Add the core accents (tonal values 8-10)
- Step 7:** Add the highlights (tonal values 1-2)

to block in the areas struck by light using a value 3 mixture that is the opposite color temperature from the shadow. For example, if the shadow is warm, then the light should be cool, and vice versa. From that point on, the artist identifies the spots of color that gradually break up the large masses, always judging the new brushstrokes of paint against the relative value and temperature of those already on the canvas. Some artists refer to these additional strokes of oil color as 'patches' or 'tiles,' terms meant to suggest that paint is laid on the surface and not scrubbed so much that it loses its vibrancy and freshness.

"It's my preference to push the colors and make them stronger," Stinson explains. "Artists tell a story by recognizing the strong color relationships.

To emphasize that point, I demon-

strate by painting small studies similar to those reproduced in this article. *The Three Graces*, for example, shows how intense colors bring clear separations in forms and enliven the depiction of boring household appliances. Those demonstrations also illustrate how the color of an object is affected by what surrounds it. That's easy to see when painting metal and glass objects that either reflect the surrounding colors or allow them to become visible through





**FAR LEFT**  
**Take Me to Your Leader**  
 2004, oil, 18 x 18.  
 Private collection.

**LEFT**  
**Our Lady of Kirby**  
 2005, oil, 84 x 24.

**BELOW**  
**Riddle of the Sphinx**  
 2004, oil, 36 x 66.

**OPPOSITE PAGE**  
**Beauty Secrets**  
 2003, oil, 40 x 20.  
 Private collection.



the transparent facets of the glass.

"Those simple household objects also illustrate the importance of finding beauty in the mundane," Stinson adds. "Living is a wonderful mixture of unpredictable events playing out in an unpredictable manner. Though not wholly predictable, life leaves clues. There are patterns. Harmony and chaos are present together in every tiny particle of living. Therefore, it is helpful for students to learn, understand, see, and use all aspects of learning to paint at once, in the limited space of one canvas and one nonmoving setup. When students can learn to paint in a manner that mirrors life and nature, suddenly they have a system that makes sense. They begin to experience the 'aha!' moments and see basic live patterns and connections vital to translating life directly onto the canvas.

"While discussing color, I advise my students to buy high-quality paints, not cheap student grades that are diluted with fillers," Stinson adds. "I also encourage them to work as if they were using someone else's paints they didn't pay for and not the pigments they stretched their budgets to be able to purchase. There is a false sense of economy in using cheap paint or in being stingy with the amount of oil color on the brush. It's always better to work with highly pigmented oil paints and apply them generously to the canvas."

Stinson advises his students to adjust the consistency and speed up the drying time of their paints by thinning them with a homemade medium prepared by combining

## STINSON'S PALETTE

Stinson exclusively buys artist-grade paint (from Gamblin Artist's Oil Colors) and divides his oil-painting palette so the cool and warm colors are separated. With the exception of Mars black and titanium white, he keeps the cool colors on the left and the warm colors on the right.

### The six colors on the left include:

- Mars black
- ultramarine blue
- cerulean blue hue
- cobalt blue
- phthalo blue
- phthalo green yellow shade

### The 11 colors on the right include:

- titanium white
- cadmium yellow light
- cadmium yellow deep
- yellow ochre
- cadmium orange
- cadmium red medium
- naphthol red
- alizarin permanent
- quinacridone red
- burnt umber
- diazine purple





RIGHT  
**Summer**  
 2004, oil, 84 x 24,  
 FAR RIGHT  
**Winter**  
 2005, oil, 84 x 24.



**"All aspects of painting relate to one another and to life itself. Mastering difficult concepts earlier rather than later has a dramatic impact on the quality of the paintings students are able to create."**



### About the Artist

**Henry Stinson** received his B.A. degree at Washington State University, in Pullman, Washington, and an Associate of Applied Arts degree at The Art Institute of Seattle. He later studied oil painting in the Russian Impressionist technique for four years with Ron Lukas. Stinson maintains a studio in Moscow, Idaho, and paints on location throughout the United States. He has exhibited his oils in Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Florida, Washington, Oregon, and the U.S. Embassy in Geneva, Switzerland. He is represented by The Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture, in Spokane, Washington; Bonner/David Galleries, in Scottsdale, Arizona; and The Ars Longa Gallery, in Folsom, California. For more information or workshop schedules, send e-mail to [dstinson@idaho.net](mailto:dstinson@idaho.net).

▶ [www.myamericanartist.com](http://www.myamericanartist.com)  
 To view additional artwork by Henry Stinson, visit the Online Exclusive section of the American Artist website.

LEFT  
**Head Study**  
 (20-minute class demo)  
 2005, oil, 8 x 6.

3 parts linseed oil with 1 part varnish and a cap full of cobalt dryer. "That improves the flow of the paint while keeping it thick, and it speeds up the drying time," he explains. "I prefer to work wet-in-wet without stopping, but if it becomes necessary to let the oil colors dry, I want them to be thoroughly dry in 24 to 48 hours so I can apply fresh paint on a surface that isn't tacky."

Stinson stresses the importance of constantly judging relative values, color temperatures, and edges during the painting process. "One has to constantly remind oneself about the nature, direction, and intensity of the light source and its impact on the surfaces being revealed," he explains. "For example, in my studio the light is usually cool, the shadows are warm, and the transition of values is subtle. Outdoors the light tends to be warm and intense, the shadows cool and hard edged, and the transitions are distinct."

In addition to demonstrating with oil colors, Stinson

shows his students how gouache (or opaque watercolor) can be useful either for sketching potential painting subjects or testing compositional ideas for larger works on canvas. "Gouache is similar to oil in that it is opaque and can be built up from either light to dark or vice versa; but it is more portable, safer, and quicker to use. That means it is perfect for making simple notations about people in coffee shops, landscapes viewed while traveling, or compositions being evaluated for possible studio paintings."

The validity of Stinson's "deep-end-of-the-pool" approach to painting instruction is evident by the quality of the work created by his students. By the end of a five-day workshop, most are creating strong, accurate paintings of their subjects even while they continue to refine their understanding of the basic principles. ■

M. Stephen Doherty is the editor-in-chief of American Artist.