

Blurring the Lines

Applying the lessons of an illustration career to personal work

By Jay Bauer

Very few artists will pass up the chance to discuss their processes and, heaven help us, their philosophies. I'd like to thank the good folks at Strathmore® for this opportunity to gather my scattered thoughts into a semi-coherent form. Analyzing your own work is like playing a familiar piece of music very slowly and deliberately, thinking about each note before moving on. I learned a lot, and I hope that you, dear reader, can derive some benefit from my efforts.

I have been lucky enough to support myself through most of my adult life by designing, drawing and building things. While clearly not thrilled about my prospects as an artist, my parents were very supportive (in an Indiana Dutch sort of way). Dad spent a lot of time teaching me useful things like auto mechanics, carpentry and household wiring so that I could feed myself when times got tough. Mom kept me



Jon Quixote, collection of Jon Michael Siau
Strathmore 500 Series Illustration Board



Rites of Spring, available
Strathmore 500 Series Illustration Board

supplied with art materials and helped develop my interest in nature by encouraging me to work as a volunteer for the Parks Department. I signed up for every art elective available in high school, but also took vocational classes in welding and printing. Oddly enough, all these seemingly unrelated activities contributed enormously to the work I produce today. I make my living as an illustrator and graphic designer, but I also sculpt in steel and build furniture. Being interested in the way things work and in the structure of objects has a strong effect on the way I draw and paint.

If you are one of those artists who fill book after book with drawings, doodles, cartoons, sketches, scribbles, musings, meditations, etc., then our processes are very different. And that's FINE. More power to you. When I set out to produce a painting, I usually "see" the complete picture in my head before I begin drawing and refining it. There are some very prejudicial attitudes in the art world against one sort of process or another, but I don't believe that there are any right or wrong ways to approach your personal work.

For a long time, I had the idea that personal work was fundamentally different than "commercial" work, but the similarities far outweigh the differences. When I do a piece on my own, I am trying to convey an idea to the viewer, just as I do with illustration assignments at the office. The nature of the message may be different, but effective communication is still the goal.



1. This is a quick little sketch done on a layout pad to test the imagined composition. This is comparable to what I might show a client in the very early stages of an illustration project.



2. One of the reference shots I took for this piece. Initially, I had my buddy pose with an electric resonator guitar, but later I thought that would be out of character for an old blues duck, so I replaced it with a battered acoustic. Note the vintage shoes from my personal collection (I may have been a duck in a former life).

Space and light: For me, the most important factors in any representational image are the ways in which space and light are described. If you are depicting a situation that does not occur in real life, your connection with the viewer depends on your ability to control these two factors. Effective manipulation of space and light make the scene accessible, no matter how bizarre and unlikely it may be.

Detail: I love detail, and would happily fill every one of my pieces with labor-intensive, edge-to-edge, triple-zero brush-work but for one painful truth: too much detail flattens the composition. When you are developing an image, you are making decisions for the viewer about what is very important and what is less so. Try to imagine what your image would look like as a photo taken with a small depth of field. Items very close to the viewer or very distant would carry less detail, and may even be blurry, but the essential elements of the image will be in sharp focus.

Inspiration is where you find it: In a good year, I might produce a dozen pieces of personal work (paintings, sculpture, furniture, whatever). I simply don't have time for much more than that. I was thinking about what sort of piece to do for this article when I heard about a new restaurant in our little town with an intriguing name: One Blue Duck. I have had very good luck displaying my paintings in restaurants. Many of my pieces feature humorous subjects, which are better received in a more casual viewing environment. It seemed to me that I could do an interesting piece based on the name of the restaurant that might stand a good chance of being displayed there.

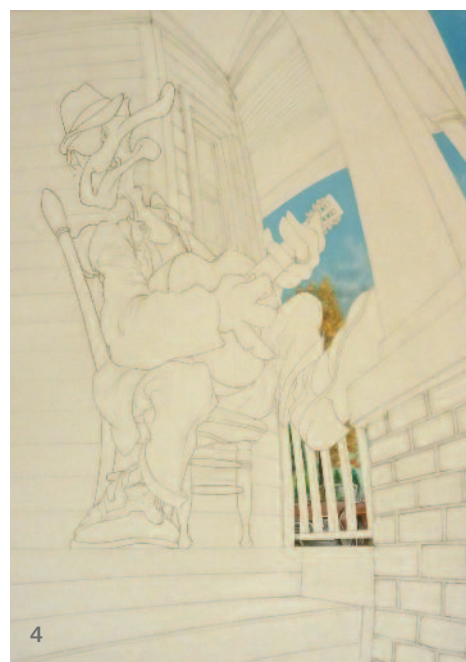
At this point, there are doubtless some who are thinking: "That's a horrible, mercenary approach to your work! It's not an honest expression of your innermost feelings and inspiration, it's a shameless quest for validation and commercial success!"

Yeah, well, bunk. There is plenty of inspiration in a thoughtful, well-executed piece, no matter what the motivations behind it. Any painting on view where people can see and appreciate it beats one languishing at home in the studio.

Reference: I cannot overemphasize the importance of good reference. This, too, is a lesson learned in illustration. I have a sizable collection of photos torn from magazines, sheaves of old polaroids taken of friends and colleagues and whole shelves of books devoted to source images. A quick internet search will yield photos of nearly anything, but the best, most helpful reference relates directly to the subject as you are painting it. If you're going to draw a certain type of tree, go look at one. Take a photo from the correct angle. Have friends pose in the right type of clothing, and light them the way the characters in your composition will be lit. It's fine and good to draw from your imagination, but give your imagination a little help, for Pete's sake!

Technique: I use Strathmore® 500 Series illustration board (heavyweight, vellum surface) pretty much exclusively in my work as an illustrator. In my personal work, I use all kinds of different materials: wood, metal, canvas, enamel, plexiglass, cloth, foam rubber - you name it, but I also make use of illustration materials and techniques to produce 2-D images, so I use Strathmore a heck of a lot in my home studio, too.

When I do personal images, most of my development work happens right on the board. I erase and redraw a lot. I move back and forth between wet and dry media. The 500 Series board does not mind in the least. It stays flat when you use wet media (sometimes I get the board really wet, and I can't



3. The completed pencil drawing. This is a fairly large piece that will be framed without a mat, so eliminating borders on the board helps it fit on my studio table. Working from my reference photos, I tightened up the setting before moving on to the character work. You can see the distorted perspective that I sometimes use in my humorous pieces. The character development was done on layout (marker) paper to keep the board tidy, and applied to the base drawing with transfer paper.

4. An airbrush was used to achieve a smooth gradation for the sky, and I left the frisket in place while painting in some background objects - this saves a lot of tedious "cutting in" later. This compartmentalized approach helps me to keep from overworking the background. The softened autumn foliage and the rusty old T-Bird (what else would a blues duck drive?) were pulled from my photo reference file.

5. Here, the color has been blocked in on the house, and most of the architectural details are in place. I have made the bricks much larger than they were in the pencil drawing to help emphasize the distorted view.

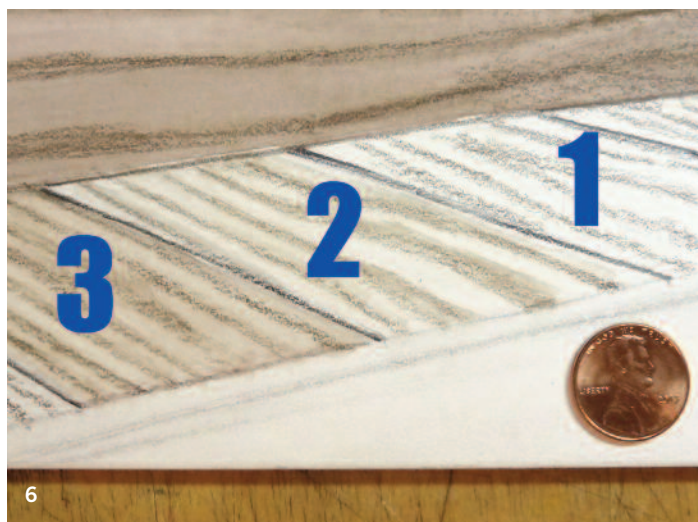
stand it bellying up or separating). The surface paper has adequate tooth for pencil, but isn't so highly textured that it causes pigment to collect in the pores of the paper. If and when I find something that works better, I'll use it, but I have been using the 500 Series board for a long time, and I like it. A lot.

The basis of my approach is to keep the board surface receptive to color for as long as possible. I use Prismacolor pencils to establish value, hue and texture in the drawing, then apply thin glazes of acrylic paint over the pencil to build up and solidify color. I use Daler Rowney FW acrylic ink for everything except white, where I substitute Golden Fluid Acrylic. There is nothing very unusual about this approach, a lot of artists use it, but here's where things get a little weird: I discovered several years ago that you can break down Prismacolors with plain water (sort of like a watercolor pencil, but the dissolving effect is not as pronounced). By using water to break the boundaries between the two mediums, it's possible to blend dry and wet media in a much more effective way. This approach allows you to apply multiple layers of Prismacolor without building up a thick waxy coating, so there's no need to refresh the surface with fixative to continue working. If you keep your acrylic applications thin enough, you can switch back and forth between dry and wet media several times without exhausting the surface.

I also occasionally use...an airbrush. There, I said it. Even as far back as art school (the late Mesozoic, in my case) people were railing against airbrushes. I understand the objections; airbrushes smack of heavily retouched models in photo

6. This is a staged demonstration of the Prismacolor method I use. 1—dry Prisma, 2—wet brush used to soften the pencil marks and describe the wood grain, 3—very thin wash of sepia acrylic over the top to establish the overall tone. This area is still completely receptive to additional color applications.

7. Here you can see the same method used to describe the duck's trousers. To avoid having to maintain a large wet area, I work one small segment of the fabric area at a time. The foreground detail areas are really starting to pop.



layouts, painfully slick advertising illustrations and other morally questionable practices. But even taking into account the tedious chore of cutting frisket, there are some effects that simply can't be done as well or as quickly by hand as they can with an airbrush. Surely in this age of completely digital illustration and CG visual effects, we can let the humble airbrush up off the mat. They do, after all, require

a fair amount of skill to use, and for things like sky gradients, clouds, shadows and soft highlights, they're very hard to beat. The trick is to use them only when you can integrate them seamlessly into the rest of your work.

As hard as it was to start this writing process, it's even tougher to end it. I tried to stitch together a cogent account of my methods, without writing a "how-to" article, and I wound up somewhere in the middle. As to the rest of the technical stuff, it's all pretty basic. I try to work from background to foreground, from light to dark, and from loose to tight. The photos tell the tale. I hope that you glean a useful idea or two from this rambling account - the whole idea is to produce finished work that looks just as fresh as your initial drawing. Best of luck in your work!



8. The final stages, blocking in the last of the color areas. Soon I get to indulge my love of excessive detail – but ONLY on the character!

9. I may noodle around with a couple of shadows and highlights, but this is pretty much the finished product. Once the signature goes on, all the adjustments stop. At that point, it'll be time to build a frame with curved interior edges to accentuate the distortions in the image.





About the Artist

Written by Jay Bauer

Jay Bauer's paintings and furniture have been described as amusing, angular, anthropomorphic, architectural, austere, bold, cartoony, colorful, creative, dramatic, exotic, fanciful, geometric, handcrafted, humorous, ingenious, one of a kind, outlandish, playful, tongue-in-cheek, unique and whimsical. Hardly any of these terms apply to the artist.

A man of varied interests and questionable judgment, Jay has found gainful employment as a welder, sign painter, auto mechanic, commercial announcer, electrician, teacher, jewelry designer, copywriter and bouncer. After earning a BFA from the Art Academy of Cincinnati in 1989 he relocated to Seattle, where he hand-painted very detailed pictures of very large airplanes for an American mega corporation.

He was replaced by a computer.

Jay is now a designer and illustrator for a major university in one of our southern states. He divides his time between drawing bulldogs and avoiding meetings. After hours, he works in his home studio in a little grey house across the road from an alpaca farm. He lives with two dogs, a fat black cat and a beautiful and tolerant woman.

To see more of Jay's work, please visit his website at www.grumpyhoosier.com, or his Facebook studio page: www.facebook.com/JayBauerArt



How To Be A Cat, collection of Jennifer Hope Gustafson, DVM
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Joan Aardvark, collection of Elizabeth and Anthony Demarco
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Après la Danse, collection of Jeffrey Schultz
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Strathmore® 2014 ONLINE WORKSHOP SERIES

Workshops are FREE! Registration is open! Series starts March 10, 2014.

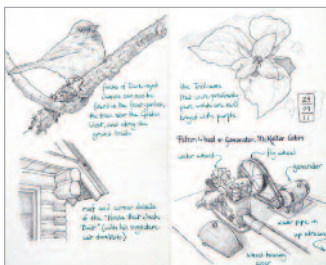
Learn techniques from experienced artists through online videos and downloadable instructions.

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Our online workshops are free and self-paced. Workshops are held in our virtual classroom website. Each workshop consists of four video lessons and supporting downloadable instructions. Students can participate in conversations in our discussion boards or share work in the classroom photo gallery.

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Workshop Schedule



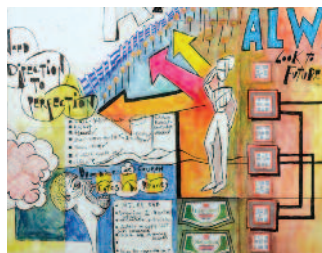
Workshop 1. Back to Basics

Instructor: Earnest Ward

Start date: March 10, 2014

Whether you are just getting started or you are a seasoned artist with years of experience, all good artwork, regardless

of style, is built upon a strong foundation of basic skills. During this four-week workshop, veteran artist Earnest Ward will lead participants through a hands-on exploration of those basics. He will help you sharpen your drawing and observational skills while exploring a range of dry media, papers, and techniques.



Workshop 2. Visual Journal Fodder

Instructors: The Journal Fodder Junkies – David R. Modler and Eric Scott

Start date: May 5, 2014



This workshop focuses on the use of simple materials and techniques to develop richly layered journal pages. You will explore a variety of mixed-media approaches that use different combinations of art materials and techniques

that lead to unique and visually complex pages. A wide range of layering techniques using watercolor, watercolor pencil, text, page transitions, collage, and image transfers will be explored to create texture, depth and meaning.



Workshop 3. Watercolor Sketching and Journaling

Instructors: Christina Lopp and Gay Kraeger

Start date: Sept. 1, 2014

In their friendly and conversational workshop, Gay and Christina will guide you through learning watercolor one step at a time. They will start by showing you the basics, then move into using quick sketches, page design, lettering and more watercolor



techniques to give you all the tools you need to learn how to keep a special illustrated journal of your surroundings.

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Questions From Our Website

Your pad covers all have a “Series” number on them. What do they mean? What is the difference between the different Series?

Our Series numbers are our way of classifying our fine art papers with the intent of helping you determine what paper or Series best suits your needs as an artist. The Series also helps clarify which level each of our papers fit into.

Selecting the right paper for your artwork is one of the most important decisions you make as an artist. We also understand that each artist has different needs, which is why we developed our Series classification system to help you decide what works best for you. Our Series numbers include:

- 100 Series – Youth
- 200 Series – Skills
- 200 Series – Good
- 300 Series – Better
- 400 Series – Best
- 400 Series Recycled – Best
- Windpower® Series – Best
- 500 Series – Premium

We have papers in a very broad range of grades, weights, formats, and finishes and our Series numbers help indicate which level each paper type falls into. Many times you’ll find the same grade of paper, but in a different Series. For example, you could find Strathmore Mixed Media® papers in 200 Series Skills, 300 Series, 400 Series and 500 Series, so what is the difference? First, let’s take a look at how the different Series are defined:



100 Series – Youth

Designed for ages 5 and up with the right paper types and product features that enhance the creative process. We believe providing artist quality materials to kids is the best way to nurture talent and ignite a lifelong love of art.



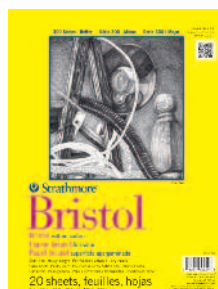
200 Series – Skills

Paper for Practice – Paper weights and convenient pad formats designed for frequent use and lots of practice. Features include pads with higher sheet counts, a heavy-duty chip board backing, larger wire to accommodate pad expansion as it’s used, and 30% post-consumer fiber in every pad.



200 Series – Good

Good quality paper at a great price that’s economical enough for daily use. The broad range of papers is a great starting point for beginning artists.



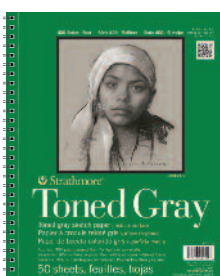
300 Series – Better

Better quality paper designed for quick studies and practice of techniques with any media, as well as for final artwork by beginning or student artist.



400 Series – Best

Best quality with superior sheet formation, harder surfaces and a variety of textures that work with a wider range of media and styles. Perfect for advanced artists.



400 Series Recycled – Best

Best quality recycled paper contains post-consumer fiber that is rated Grade A for cleanliness. Strathmore® supports environmental solutions that don't compromise paper performance, appearance, or price. Perfect for

advanced artists.



Windpower® Series – Best

Windpower® paper products converted by Strathmore are certified through the Green-e® Marketplace Program administered by the non-profit Center for Resource Solutions based in San Francisco, CA. The Green-e logo is an assurance that we purchase Certified

Renewable Energy. In addition, these papers are manufactured at a paper mill that purchases 100% Wind Renewable Energy Certificate Products towards the production of these papers.



500 Series – Premium

Premium quality, professional grade fine art papers. All papers are archival quality, acid free and manufactured with cotton fiber for enhanced surface durability and exceptional results. Perfect for professional artists.

So back to the example with our different Series of Strathmore Mixed Media® paper. What is the difference between them?

The 200 Series Skills Mixed Media pads have high sheet counts, a heavy chip-board backing for durability, a larger wire that allows the pad to expand as it is used, and it is a medium weight, 75 lb. Mixed Media paper in a sketchbook format. The paper contains 30% post-consumer fiber, and it is intended for practice, studies and developing techniques.

The 300 Series Mixed Media also comes in a wire bound sketchbook format, but the paper is a bit heavier at 90 lb. and will accept more wet media than the 200 Series Skills Mixed Media. It is good for studies or finished pieces.

The 400 Series Mixed Media comes in a glue bound pad format, allowing clean and easy removal of the sheets. This is a heavyweight, 140 lb. paper that is great for finished artwork.

The 500 Series Mixed Media is made from 100% cotton fibers, and it is excellent for finished artwork. It is archival and lignin free. It would be considered our very highest quality mixed media paper.

Hopefully this helps give you a good understanding of the difference between our Series and will help guide you as you choose the right paper for your artwork.