

# PAINTINGS IN OILS FOR BEGINNERS

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**T**HE habit of close and accurate observation of things, their features and movements, is one of the rarest of possessions, but it is absolutely necessary to one who would win any degree of success as an artist. Most persons' observations are vague and wanting in fullness of detail and precision. The unpractised eye fails to observe that the color of everything varies with the quality of light falling upon it; that in the dark all things lose their local color, and a leaf or blade of grass which we call green may vary from the deepest possible tone through all the shades of brown and green and yellow, even to white, according to the quantity and quality of light in which it is seen. Turner was one day painting a landscape with the richness of color that was his specialty, when a young girl who was painting near by, left her easel and came to look over his shoulder. "Why, Mr. Turner," said she, "I don't see any of those colors in the grass or the trees." "No!" said Turner, "Don't you wish you could?" Certain it is that the power even of perceiving color may be developed in no slight degree by exercise.

**H**APPY are they who have an intuitive perception of color; but those less fortunate should not be discouraged, for the faculty can be acquired by patient application. If you have not already done so, try first to become intimately acquainted with the colors in your color box, and to recognize them wherever they occur, whether in a picture or in nature. If you are painting from a colored model, after mixing your tint take it up on your brush and hold it beside the color you wish to match. If it is too dark you know you must add more white, or if it is less blue you will need the addition of that color. Practice combining tints in this way until you detect easily what is wanting. But above all train your eye to the careful observation of the harmony of tints so bountifully displayed in nature. If you are looking at a sky or flower try to detect by your eye the colors that are in it. Aim to develop a habit of so doing, and before you are aware of it you will find yourself thinking: "There is a great deal of yellow ochre in that sky" or "madder lake in the half-tints of that leaf."

**A** SIMPLE spray of ivy makes an excellent study for a beginner in painting from nature. First sketch the design in outline with charcoal. For the background mix lightly on the palette, with a good-sized bristle brush, the following colors: white, yellow ochre, raw umber and ivory black. Always mix colors as little as possible, as too much mixing muddies them, destroying their purity and brilliancy. The brush is better in this respect than the palette knife. Begin at the upper left-hand corner. If an old board is used for a background, you can practice on the palette strokes to imitate the grain of the wood. A knot or two may be effective, but be sure to keep the backgrounds quite simple, avoiding detail, which would only detract from the leaves. Remember you are painting leaves, and everything else must be made subordinate to them. Close one eye and study the first leaf. Note carefully where the light strikes most directly. We always speak of this part as the light; then notice the part where the least light strikes, making a shadow. Between the lights and shadows you will find a part very little affected by light and shade, and the color of any object uninfluenced by light and shade is called the local color. It is this color solely that the unpractised eye sees. The beginner is slow to recognize the power of light and shade in a painting. Local color seems more real, and there is a disposition to let it hold its own even into the lightest light and the deepest shadow. A most important point is to guard against the excessive use of local color. Lay in first the general tone or local color of the leaves while the background is still wet, so that the edges of the leaves may be softened into it. For the local color use Antwerp blue and Indian yellow and into this paint the shadows, using more blue, and lastly paint the high lights, adding chrome yellow.

**I**F your design is large, begin only what you can finish at one sitting, as it is essential to have all parts wet at once, so there will be no harsh edges. Leaves that are behind others should have their edges softened into the background more, and by working a little of the background color into them they can be thrown still farther back, so that the leaves will appear in the painting just as they are on the branch—different distances from the eye. When you succeed in doing this, we say you have produced a good atmospheric effect, for it is the effect of the atmosphere that makes the remote object less distinct.