Tony Paul - May 11ᵗʰ 2015 -   Watercolour

Tones First, Colour Second

This was a most unusual evening. Promised a demonstration of watercolour painting, Tony spent all the first half working in black and white.
"A lot of watercolour painting is so 'wishy washy' he said. "It just looks 'limp'. The end result is so often mono-tonal - there are no real light and dark contrasts. Look, there are three stages to producing a finished painting - first the drawing, second the tones, and thirdly the colour."

Tony trained at the Bournemouth Art College, has shown at the Royal Academy, written four books, and has been writing for 'The Leisure Painter' since 1992. So we thought we'd better listen fairly carefully.

"So first, the drawing. This should be firm not faint. Any pencil lines will be covered by the paint. I use a 2B pencil - this one here is a Papermate – buy them in packets of 10 for about £4. You don't have to keep sharpening it, and it's got a rubber on the other end which is handy."
Tony had already done a drawing of a house and some cottages by a foreground river.

Drawing

"I'm using a fairly substantial 200lb paper, and since I'm working vertically, I must be careful not to use too much paint, otherwise it'll run down the paper. I'm only going to use one brush - a number 12 pointed sable by Escoda - yes it's expensive but it is the best."

"Now for the tones - there are only four, and here they are –

white --------half light----------half dark-----------dark.

The paint I'm using for the tones is a blend of Daler Rowney's ultramarine with their transparent red brown. This makes a neutral dark, not black, and certainly not the lifeless Payne's Grey.
My three tones are all pre-mixed in three separate dishes, so I have them available all the time, and they are different dilutions of the same mixture."
Tony put a square of each of the tones at the edge of his drawing.

The 4 tones

"I'm going to put in all the tones, before any colour so I'm painting a monochrome picture, starting with the darks first."
Working from a photograph, Tony went on, "Notice how the darks further away are lighter than the close darks. The darkest darks are the reeds by the river - and I mustn't forget their dark reflections in the water - then it's also dark under the trees over by the row of cottages, and the gap in the hedge where the gate is."

Darks

"Now the half darks - using the same pointed sable brush, I'm going to do the windows, the chimney and the river bank. For the edge of the trees I'll use the *side* of the brush to leave just a suggestion of dark. If it's too strong I can dab it out with a piece of tissue."

Darks with half darks added

"Now the half lights. The side of the house and the roofs of the cottages, some of the grasses and the hedge. Also other reflections in the water - these, by the way, are bigger as they come towards you – the ones further away are smaller and closer together."
"I've left parts of it white so that when I put the colour on it'll be nice and bright. If you want to tone it down, now's the time to put a little of the tonal mixture on."

At this stage we had a nicely painted monochrome picture – no colour but all the tonal variation of the original photo.

Finished tonal picture

"Now for some colour. Manganese blue for the sky, with some patches of white paper for the clouds. If I wanted a complicated tree with branches, I'd do it now on top of the sky, but here it's easy to go round the houses and trees. Blue greens for the background trees - duller there and brighter as they come forward. So, I'll put a blue green at the back on top of the darks but a sunny yellow green on the half darks. A bit of ultramarine on the cottage roofs and on the front - I don't have to go round the windows because I've already made them different with their tone. The roof line is orange, with a touch of lemon yellow."

"I don't use any cadmium colours in watercolours - they're too opaque. OK for acrylic and oils. Burnt siena on the chimney of the house at the front, I can paint the same colour over everything because the tones are already there. The wall is obviously old so I'll paint it 'blobby' to give it a rough surface. The hedge is a fresher lighter green, leaving the top white. A bit of manganese blue in the water to reflect the sky, and a touch of burnt umber too. What colour would you like the door ? Red ? If it's too bright it might take the eye out of the picture, so we'll tone it down a bit with some manganese blue."

Finished colour picture

"There ! The colouring was so quick because all the tonal work was already done. This is how I teach my students. Give your pictures much more depth and contrast by concentrating on the tonal light and shade first. It makes all the difference."   And it certainly did. Thanks Tony.

Robert McLeish