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A Study on the Phsycological Effects of Oil and Watercolor Painting on the Artist

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A STUDY ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF
OIL AND WATERCOLOR PAINTING
ON THE ARTIST

Honors thesis
Carol Westerman
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This study was conducted to better analyze the communication an artist has with the painting processes of watercolor and oil painting. It was done to help myself discover if one medium has a stronger effect on my working style and is one more constructive, does one better fill the needs of the painter as an emotion filled, communicative being. Would one communicate better the ideas and feelings which were intended by the artist(myself).

Approaching this work I had experience with watercolor and oil painting. I did not prefer one over the other but having different feelings about each. I have always considered watercolor to be simple and oil painting to be more difficult but, much of that judgement was based on the fact that I had to build the canvas before the oil painting could be started but, only having to buy a sheet of watercolor paper and start painting other wise.

It would be difficult to completely separate myself from the reluctancy which I have toward the carpentry required in preparing a ground for an oil painting so, I attribute much of my painting "style" to the planning which I had done in each process. The watercolor painting came to be much less structured or more freely composed and spontaneous than the oil paintings. Much time was spent in planning out the subject matter and composition even before the canvas for the oil painting was stretched. As the oil canvases were generally much larger than the watercolor paintings, the watercolor paintings were produced much more quickly than the oil paintings. Twenty-five small watercolor paintings could be done in the time used to build and paint an oil painting on canvas.

The style of the paintings is much attributed to this. The figure studies which were done in watercolor placed emphasis on the single stroke and water/wash response to the technique used to accomplish a finished figure. The oils were not as conducive to this 'free' type of painting. The oil paintings were more studies on architecture and linear composition, not as organic or natural feeling as the washes of watercolor.

Although I will probably continue working in oil paint as a central study it is already possible to see the influences of the watercolor style in my oil paintings. I am beginning to paint much more consistently thin and transparent such as watercolor is. This study has also helped me to see how the paint itself can be manipulated on a canvas so that the light of the canvas is used to its' fullest potential.

Through this study it is also seen that watercolor painting can very easily be used as a quick study tool and preparation for later more involved paintings. The watercolor stands very well on its' own but there is a seductive personality to the feel of oil paint which excites one to paint.

A conclusion to this thought on painting is actually only a beginning to a life long study of paint and painting. Because of the basic chemical buildup of the two paints they have different qualities and disadvantages but the two can be combined to accomplish a feeling of emotion and thought.