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MAKING A MARK

A top art blog for artists and art lovers: news about major art competitions and exhibitions, interviews with artists, techniques and tips for art and business

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Monday, September 29, 2008

What are your reasons for working in a series?

I was very pleased to find out from a number of readers who responded to [A Making A Mark Project - Working in a series](#) that you're already 'working in a series' or are about too. Today I'd like to ask you a question!

I like to start all my art projects by thinking through a way of structuring an approach to what can be a big theme. That's just me - I like to try and see the big picture first in outline before beginning to work on the details. It's pretty much the same way I work when I create an artwork!

In this post I'm beginning to explore some of the reasons why artists work may work in a series as that might be one way to approach structure my exploration of working in a series.

On 1st October I've going to start a new poll about the reasons why people work in a series. This will hopefully provide some feedback for all of us about what you find are the greatest benefits to working in a series. Again I'm using this post today to think about some of the alternative options which could be offered in that poll.

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Your feedback is welcomed!

To kick off the poll I'm listing below some of the reasons I can think of for why artists work in a series - and I'm inviting you to comment about any important reasons that I've omitted or ways in which what I've said might be omissions or maybe a different slant or emphasis on the reasons listed.

I've come to the conclusion there are probably four main categories of reasons why artists work in a series. Within each category there are more specific reasons.

- investigate and explore - subject
- investigate and explore - technique
- emotional response
- business motive

Investigate and explore - subject

English Coast Paintings

copyright Tina Mammoser

[About the Coast project & the map](#)

Subject matter is probably where most people start if they're thinking about doing a series.

- **Explore an object as subject** - The subject is tangible and in front of you. Developing your knowledge of an object as subject might be about helping you to develop your artwork generally or it might be the reason behind the series you're developing. Knowing how something works is one step nearer to knowing how it can be represented in a more shorthand way if you work in a more abstracted way. Once you know your subject then it's possible to develop more imaginary treatments of the same subject. The range and size of your series is only limited by the limits of your subject. For example:
 - Tina Mammoser ([The Cycling Artist](#)) is working on a series of paintings about the coastline of the UK!
 - I've loved trees for a long time but, sad to say, I don't know as much about them as I would like. I then feel less

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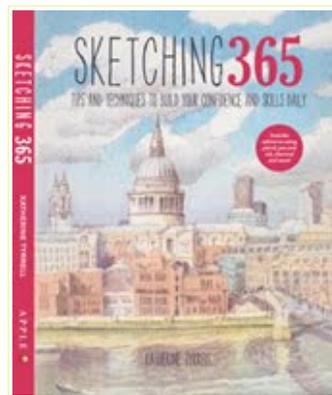
confident developing landscapes because I don't know how to represent their different characteristics in a shorthand way. My current aim is to find out more about trees and Sunday afternoon walks now involve us going out with my tree guidebook! I hope I may also get a series of developed works about trees out of this.



- **Explore an idea as concept** - The subject is in your head, it's an idea and it may be philosophical and/or conceptual. What the artist has to say may be represented in any number of different ways - detailed and realistic or abstract and metaphorical - but if the paintings are 'on message' then they all form part of a series. Having them all in the same style may help to convey the idea of a 'series'. Developing a series based on a concept is akin to 'working through a problem' - and outcomes from developing a conceptual series can range from very positive and very negative.
- **Explore a story** - The subject is known to you and may be tangible but can be an imaginary story or a story which has to be visually imagined. Well known ways of using a series of artworks to tell a story range from
 - history paintings associated with a particular place, event or person
 - portraits of an individual during their lifetime eg Velazquez's paintings of Philip II and his family
 - visual depictions of the stations of the cross
 - illustrations for a book or a comic

- Links to books are Amazon Affiliate links. If you buy using one the small sum I receive help to fund/maintain my 'resources for artists' sites. See Disclaimer notice at bottom.

"Sketching 365"



my new book about drawing and sketching (UK title & cover)

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The Top 75 Art Blogs

Making A Mark is in the TOP 10 of the world's top art blogs *Click this link to see the list*

#3 in Top 25 Art Blogs in UK

Investigate and explore - technique

I think this is a bit akin to a controlled scientific approach. In order to explore the impact of changes in one variable in an experiment you keep other variables the same throughout. Keeping the subject matter the same allows you to test changes in the variable which is being studied.

Series present a vast scope for exploring both design and colour. So, for example, in order for Monet to explore the colour of light at different times of say he painted the same subject over and over again - changing canvases as he worked through the day to the one appropriate for that time and that type of light. Using a series approach you can

- Explore the impact of change on design by
 - arranging different multiples of the same objects in different sizes and positions or
 - using different values for the same design of shapes and lines.
- Explore the impact on adjacent colour of combining colours in different ways. Josef Albers didn't paint squares - he painted different colours combinations which he always portrayed within squares.

The approach here is to work on developing an understanding about some aspect of technique - and to use one topic or motif to help you understand

- **Explore one motif** - In exploring a motif, identify all the different ways you can portray a single subject or type of subject. Repetition within an artwork and across a series of designs lends unity to the whole. Single motifs are often associated with particular artists - while others can crop up in the work of a number of artists
 - [Paisley](#) patterns are one example of a pattern repeated within a cloth and also repeated in cloths in many different colours.
 - Islamic patterns often take one or two motifs and then repeats them throughout
 - Architecture often has motifs associated with particular



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periods of building or particular types of building

- o This is a list of [visual motifs](#) often used in patterns.

a **motif** is a repeated idea, pattern, image, or theme.

- **Explore colour** - you can take one subject and explore its colour at then try different colour combinations (think Warhol and Marilyn) or you do as Monet did and explore light at different times of day and in different seasons. In my series on trees, I'm aiming to explore how their shape and colour changes through the seasons. I'm not expecting this series is going to be finished any time soon!
- **Explore design** - explore the impact of different arrangements of values relating to one subject to asses the best design for a painting. This can be a technique which is adopted prior to starting any painting rather than an end in itself. For example, developing several thumbnails of different value patterns for the arrangement of big shapes within the subject matter. See [Composition - why tonal values and contrast are important](#).

Emotional response

I think that to be able to get out of bed day after day and paint, one needs to have a feeling for a subject. It's really great if the subject continuously feeds your emotions and makes you feel good. Painting what you like best can then provide a jolly good reason for painting - period!

By way of contrast, some artists have to paint about the emotions which absorb them - and these can be obsessions. Whether they are good or bad obsessions rather depends on why they started in the first place.

- **Painting what you like best** - you never get bored with a subject if you always paint what you like best. There is only one difficulty - deciding what you like best!
- **Feed an obsession** - you're unable to paint anything else. You have to paint whatever is your obsession and that's the beginning and the end of it.

Business motive



time



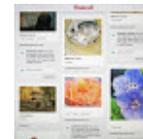
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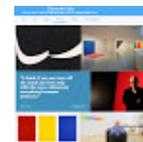
Call for Entries: Society of Botanical Artists' Annual Exhibition 2016



Robyn Sinclair: An Appreciation



How Pinterest removed all my pinned images in minutes (#1)



RIP - some of the artists who died in 2015



Cost effective ideas for artists - a series of articles for "The Artist" magazine

The new Europe Galleries 1600-1815 at the V&A

Business motive might be a crude way of characterising this category - any suggestions for a better way of describing it?

This one is essentially about achieving status, doing something which helps to make your work a more marketable commodity and creating a reason why people want to buy. These reasons might be subsidiary to the reason why you create the work - but they very definitely a legitimate part of the business life of any artist.

- **Achieve artistic credentials** - working on a series can enable some artists to achieve a status which has value to them as artists and in terms of marketing their work. For example, the RHS only awards Gold Medals to Botanical Artists who develop a series of paintings about a specific species or collection
- **Develop an artistic identity** - it's much easier to sell yourself to a gallery or a client if they know what you're about. It's just easier to describe and easier to market to clients who have a defined interest in your sort of work.

Exhibition of work by Tracy Hegelson (July 07)

her individual works are really great....
but the impact is multiplied when placed together
[Exhibitions by Tracy Helgeson](#)



- **Create an exhibition** - exhibitions which have a big impact are ones which have themes for the work displayed. Works which are linked often work extremely well together when displayed. Combining paintings from a series in one exhibition often creates a very powerful visual impact.
- **Create a collectible** - people like collecting art and a jolly good reason for creating a series is it makes it easier for people to collect your art. People like the subject and the way the artist treats it and may seek to



NEW: Art Business - For Artists



My NEW website offering advice and information about the art business - for artists (NEW content added regularly)

Art Business Info. for Artists - NEWS

- [How to share your Facebook Page in a Facebook Group](#)
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NEW - Botanical Art and Artists

make repeated purchases of anything they produce. There is a downside. Artists often cannot afford to stop producing such paintings - even if they now hate the subject matter - because of the financial benefits attached.

I was once given some very sound advice by a professional artist who was giving a marketing seminar to artists starting out. His biggest tip was *never ever* to start painting a series about a subject which did not absorb you. If it became popular and was linked to your name and became financially worthwhile you might have to paint it for a very long time to come!

Some questions for you

- Why do you work in a series?
- Are there any reasons which I've omitted or failed to explain properly?
- How much does your style and way of working contribute to what sort of series you choose?
- How much do series contribute to your style and identity as an artist?

Note: I've started my research to find hyperlinks to material about working in series. However, I can see that "working in series" is going to be a bit like "composition and design" - there simply isn't a lot of material out there on the Internet. Consequently, if anybody knows about good reference sites could you please flag them up by using the comments function - and thanks in advance if you do!

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Posted by Katherine Tyrrell on [Monday, September 29, 2008](#)



Categories [art](#), [art education](#), [art history](#), [Art Process](#), [art series](#)

17 comments:



Elizabeth St. Hilaire Nelson said...

Katherine, I am enjoying the working in a series investigation you are doing! I had originally set out with roosters to explore the collage technique and how it could work with colorful feathers. Once my roosters got some attention from



Resources about botanical art past and present for botanical artists and illustrators of today and tomorrow

Botanical Art & Artists - News

- [Anne-Marie Evans awarded M.B.E - for Botanical Art and Education](#)
- [Changes in Call for Entries for the Society of Botanical Artists Annual Exhibition 2016](#)
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