



**DECORATIVE PAINTERS  
WHO THINK  
THEY ARE ARTISTS**

**THE ULTIMATE INSULT**

**BY JAN BERGHUIS**

# Decorative Painters who think they are artists

## Introduction

It's a question asked a million times, attempted to be answered by many: *what is art?* Essays have started less presumptuous. Art is a *study* at universities, explored by thousands of scholars. But you know what's funny? Most of them probably never held a brush in their own hands. Now, please, don't be offended. If you are that brilliant scholar *and* artist, good for you! My point is: why don't we let the artists exclusively have the stage for a bit? Here I am, a Dutch decorative painter by day, artist by night, trying to form my own opinion. Over the past years I've gathered quotes from artists, writers, and philosophers to figure out the meaning of art. This essay is the result. I'm well aware I can't pin down the definition of art, not for the present, not for the past. Universities full of professors and specialized companies are busy with this. People make loads of money philosophizing the subject in courses and gatherings. So, I am only picking up some quotes that came on my path through the years.

Before we launch the quote rocket, let me entertain you with a view on how the function of art has changed. Before photography came around, art had a replica function of reality. It simply served to tell stories. I'm talking about Christian icons, made because the plebs couldn't read the Bible. Thank God (literally) those times have changed. Still, also in today's world we find similar ways of storytelling. Think about comic books, Japanese anime and, regrettably, Instagram and Facebook. Here text is inferior to picture. The images are highly decorative, shallow, and easy to swallow. When there are indications of decorative values, the core value of art may get lost. How to fix it? Well, a plan or composition can help the image to become stronger. One may add borders, lines, and symbols and voilà, the image becomes agreeable. But is this art?

Let's talk more about this frightful, distant era: the time before Photoshop and Instagram. You can probably barely imagine it anymore, but painters made their own filters. What?! Yes. There are painters who apply the same filter over every painting they'll ever create. Think about the impressionists, for instance. If it's successful and sells, it's very tempting to work this way. People will say it's the painters' 'style', serving recognition. Every painting becomes a plan. Is *that* art?

## “If it's planned, it's boring.” – Freddy Mercury

Of course, boring art is an expression too. I'll give you Andy Warhol, the emperor of boring. The more detailed and outspoken paintings are, the less you need to experience the concept of it. They all turn into illustrative comic book pictures. It's *decorative*. Not to say decorative illustrations are useless – I wouldn't dare. Hell, I'm a decorative painter myself. But what exactly is the relationship between art and decorative painting? It seems an impossible question to answer. Let me tell you a little secret: the real difficulty lies in the *difference* between the answers. Don't forget these universities filled with scholars, determined to 'nail down the problem'. All have their own experiences; all have their own opinions of 'art'. And like these scholars, the quotes on art are just as many.

Growing up as a decorative painter, I have been studying and practicing all sorts of period styles, laws, and orders among imitations of structures. Books after books I've read. This is the one answer I can give you, without ever having attended an art study: there is almost not one, real professional *decorative* painter who really has a style of his own. Without a style of your own, you can't make art. You see, we're like actors. Adapting roles to play. We must stay true to both tradition and our clients. Could we ever be artists?



Let me tell you how I got to asking myself all these fuzzy questions in the first place. Back in 1999 I attended the Salon meeting in Sweden, a gathering of dedicated decorative painters from around the world coming together to exhibit their work and discuss old and new techniques, products, and information in the field. I presented a slide show lecture, which was way too long to look at. One day at this Salon meeting, my dear, dear friend Robert Woodland (a painter from Essex, near London) was installing his panels for the Grand Exhibition. He hung his oak imitation panel on a display and said to me: "This is art, Jan!" I respect this man to the highest degree, but before I knew it, I looked into his eyes and replied bluntly: "No, it isn't!" I created a little friction there. It triggered me to do another lecture, twenty years later during the Salon meeting in Chamonix, France. The host, Pascal Amblard, who had given me the opportunity to present a lecture, asked me to deliver choices of topics. He went with 'Decorative painters who think they are artists. I promised a quick one, upmost forty slides. It ended up being seventy, as usual, but at least the pictures were of good quality. And now we're here: 'Decorative painters who think they are artists, part 2'. I won't promise to make it short.

Before we really start off, I want to make something clear. In no way do I aim to insult decorative painters or artists. I just want to put decorative painting to the test and show you *my* view on whether decorative painting can be called art.

When I write about an artist, I mean contemporary modern artists. Those who paint on canvas or board. Those who exhibit in galleries in the latest fashion of art. With the newest visions on society. Their value does not depend on an hour-rate but how "hot" they are in the market. Some artists are true popstars. Their influence stretches further than their produced works. Let's just say artists have the antenna for things to come. The Avant-Garde.

“Are you ready for some quotes?” – Jan Berghuis



Seb Lester

## Imitations

Whether or not imitations of structures are art, is to me no difficult question. Imitations have a function; art should be an explosion in your brain. The composition of an oak dapple formation may charm you. It might even divert your eyes, like abstract art does. The difference between imitations and art lies however in nature's laws, which decorative painters are forced to follow. The only thing imitations and art might have in common could be *action*: the initial birth of a composition. Both art and imitation could begin with a drive from the heart; a sparkle to start. Throw your pencil against the canvas when making art, for all I care. Not with imitation. Imitation requires the *right* appearance and movement. It's all a physical act. Only that.

"Art is not what you see, but what you are about to see." Edgard Degas

"Art must change what you expect from it." Paul Marius

Very strong quotes, if not the best. When applying these on decorative painting (imitations), it is clear that decorative painting will not rock your world. It will make you feel good, at most.

"An artist is not paid for his labor, but for his vision." James Whistler

A decorative painter is paid for his labor and craft. Take an artist like Mark Rothko: he expresses his deepest emotions on a simple surface. He must unclick his mind, experiences and upbringing. He must have had an empty mind'. Such as to unlearn your history in order to feel again. Nowhere in decorative painting is this a must. It's a totally different philosophy.

**"Art is cluttered philosophy."**

The only branch of decorative painting that *might* come close to the meaning of the quote above, are mural ornaments (Italian Renaissance-style). The stories depicted in these displays of arabesques might represent a philosophy. Mostly they illustrate a language or story, following a set of rules. Here the Italians are the real hipsters: reading comic books before it was cool.



Mark Rothko

Unfortunately, you simply can't stay cool forever. Somewhere at the start of the twentieth century a group of revolutionary artists broke with academic traditions and changed the view of art completely. I'm talking about Dadaism, an art movement of the European avant-garde (although it is said it originates from New York). Dada is in fact nothing: everything goes, every expression is art. Dirt is art. Photo collages are art. Industry is art. Whatever floats your boat. Or doesn't.



*Dadaism was highly influenced by philosophers. People like Marcel Duchamp, Andre Breton and Philippe Soupault. Their written pamphlets were a threat to the 'art bourgeois': an act of breaking with the old values. It's a common pattern throughout history: one revolutionary group gives an older group the finger. Anyway, Dada showed the way to concept art: the expression of an idea. And it doesn't matter how that idea is presented. Letters and sentences on a wall are enough.*

Cluttered philosophy: when you study the Zero-movement (abstract expressionism), you must be ready to digest numerous books explaining this 'art'. It is very easy and safe to say: "If I like it, then it is art to me." Well, being a punk myself all I can say to that:

If *you* don't like it, then it is more likely to be art

### **Reality is not art**

Furthermore: art is personal, decorative painting is *not*. Decorative painting is mostly *trompe l'oeil*, to trick the eye. Whether it be a marble, grisaille, sign writing or even clouded ceiling: it's an imitation of reality. When done properly, *trompe l'oeil* presents painted objects in *real* dimensions. With the use of extreme or clever shadowing these displays are a joy and a big trick. The painter needs highly trained eyes and hands to make it successful. One must imitate *life*. With this I mean: not only should the objects be hyper realistic, but also what happens with its placement. Picture coins and keys thrown on a table. When done in real life, the composition is 'random'.

When the painter starts to make a composition, he or she must keep in mind that the randomness is an indispensable factor. Even when successfully performed, *trompe l'oeil* is a frolic that will not last for more than a couple of minutes.



Loredano Rizzotti

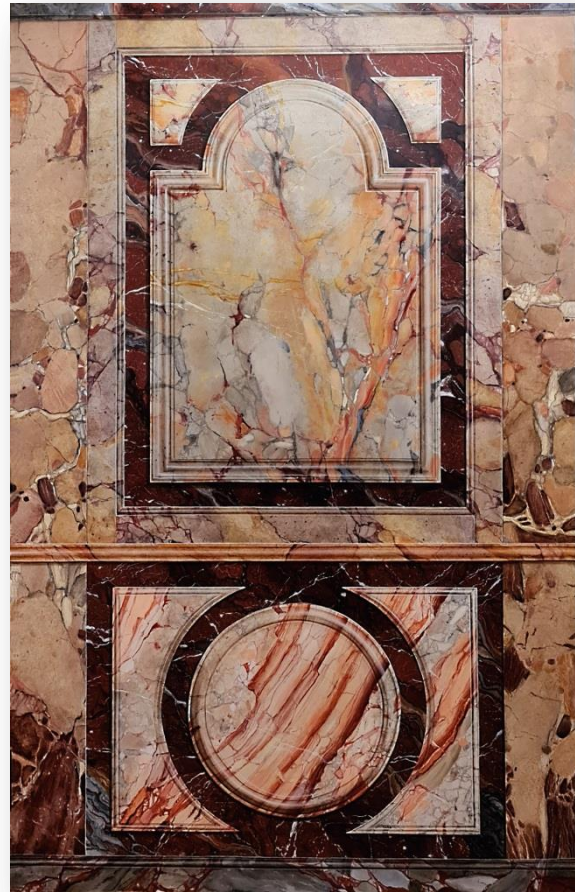
Decorative painters are making use of reality to the highest level. That means a lot of discipline and practice. Deep knowledge about each subject, technique and materials, in the field is a first. And the more 'realistic' one paints, the more laws and rules one must respect. But is the result art? Take for example the famous *trompe l'oeil* painter Loredano Rizzotti. It's absolutely astonishing how real his objects are painted. I saw his bookcase and was flabbergasted. Or be amazed by the grisailles of Jacob de Wit: so immensely 3D holographic, if you don't pay attention, you

will absolutely be fooled. But still: reality is no art. Right..." I hear you say, "So Bouguereau and Alma-Tadema are no artists, even though you can enjoy them forever? How about all these fantastic altars in churches?" Here's my point: the illustrative value makes it *less* art. The outworked composition and clever arrangements, coloring, and detailing leaves almost no imagination for the public/consumer. Trompe l'oeil is not art.

"If it brings a question or an emotion, then it's art."

So, let's put this view to the test. For the sake of this essay, let's imagine you say to me: "I am moved by this piece of marble imitation, so it must be art." I ask you: will you be moved by that marble imitation in the length of time? There really is a time limit to the excitement of decorative paintings. A real fine-art painting: *that* might move you until the end of times. You simply cannot argue with an imitation; you can't ask questions about it. It simply is what it is: an atmospheric value. They're painted imitations of structures and forms that are to be repeated. Craft related, technical and functional. This is not art.

When painting and craftsmanship rule, the essence of art disappears. Because decorative painting occurs mostly on walls and ceilings, one could say that these decorations and enlightments have the same purpose as wallpaper. This doesn't mean however that decorative painting done on canvas is suddenly (more likely to be) art, regardless of how often people may think everything with a frame around it is. One thing art and decorative painting have in common though, is the law, order and craftsmanship required. Masters, teachers, and famous painters will always put discipline at #1. To practice again and again is an absolute must.



"In life and art, one has to start over again each day."

However disciplined you might be, solely hard work won't make it art. To make art, you need something more: freedom. Freedom to express, freedom of mind, freedom to be independent. To make it more complicated: in abstract and concept art, the craftsmanship is not even an important issue. To make art means finding a balance between discipline and freedom. It appears aleatoric: the action and randomness are important. I for one like throwing dice. Improvisation and compositional luck are key. However, when you are not familiar how paint and brushes work and react, you truly will find yourself, even in the abstract world, in a desert without water supply.

"How great is thou art!" Shakespeare

To what extend are you prepared to open up your mind and beliefs? Your upbringing and environment determine a great deal your ability to create. I believe you must rethink and evaluate your present goals

and future goals. Doubts and self-reflections (as well as questions) with every stroke of color. While you are painting, is in fact a new development.

## **Between thought and expression**

Lou Reed has the perfect quote about the initial sparkle one must have before any production:

“Between thought and expression”

How can I transmit a certain mood, thought or concept? This quote is about the choice of channeling. And while we are at this point of starting a painting, another thing is very important:

- Will it be relevant to others?
- So what? (Austin Kleon)
- Will this change anything?

“Because art, in these modern times, has to change what one expects from it.” Paul Maens

So, between thought and expression is the vacuum moment to decide. The center of a whirlwind.

When it raises a question or emotion, it is art. This implies that realism is not art. Earlier on I tried to explain why Trompe l’oeil is not art. Trompe l’oeil is in fact a frolic form of hyper-realism. As where art has a long span of ‘entertainment’ value, trompe l’oeil is a short frolic. A little surprising shock it offers the spectator. People might walk through a corridor, without paying attention. But when they are told that the doors and walls are wood and marble imitations, it will bring astonishment. But it will not *change* anything.

There, where technique and craftsmanship rule, the essence of art disappears. Anybody, artist or craftsman, who works on displays for interiors or on isolated canvases, should not have any lack of ideas. A provocative quote, I admit. But waiting for inspiration is like waiting for swimming while the sea is in front of you. Having said that: after a long period of producing works (years, even decades), there will be a moment of: “Now what?”

Inspiration and creativity are for amateurs. Any artist or craftsman will have notebooks with ideas and unfulfilled projects. So do have writers. And now, even with your notebooks and sketches, a writer’s block will suddenly stop you. *Overthinking* every next step becomes a burden and here is your ‘painters block’. Seen it, done it, got the t-shirt.

You might even think: “Am I an amateur?” In this case a momentum of peace and relaxation is part of the game. Reboot! Go clean your garbage pile of references (Austin Kleon). There you will find your answers. Stroll through a bookstore or walk alone in the forest. Being alone is where your own spirit will appear. “In your skin” (Patrick Kirwin).

All those doubts are useful too. Consider them as mood boards. They are just facts to throw away or use. These painters’ blocks are horrendous if you don’t take action. Your little mind (you own self’s thinking) and your big mind (outer world attacks) are at war.

“Don’t believe everything you think.” Joseph Nguyen



I have always proclaimed that a decorative painter is sort of an actor, adapting styles and structures. A decorative painter studies a certain marble or architectural document or whatever within their possibility. And so 'becomes' the desired, painted decor display. He/she must *feel the subject* and *execute the rules* all the time. The rules and laws of a structure, as if it is a personality on its 'own. You'll be an actor and copying the behavior of a personality and character.

Some decorative painters do paint on canvases calling it 'modern art'. But never will they abandon the decorative aspects. Using the style or stealing someone else's ideas or concepts. And obviously it is very difficult to come up with an original, never seen before style. For instance: works of Schoonhoven, Mondriaan and quite a few others. It's not something every artist will come to that point. Many are called, a few are chosen.

Consequently one has to realize that real art, wild shocking, new and daring, is a concept of a life that might have been frustrated and troubled. Real modern art is as much an evolution as real life, and there is in no need for unnecessary elements in order to have a pleasant result for the spectator.

"Steal like an artist." – Austin Kleon

Kleon advertises collecting and gathering of images, ideas, and concepts, which is absolutely a good advice. Especially if that supports your *own* style, then it is certainly necessary. Someone like David Bowie had an enormous vault of books and references.

Regarding the likes of Jeff Koons and Andy Warhol you'll find that they are almost kings of the 'ready mades'. Ready -mades has been around all along. But now used in a different context and display. Yes, it is eclectic! Yes, it is stolen! But transformed into something else.

I don't think it is original what some painters do, but it will *evolve* into something original. That is important. So: put the old images out of context or change it into something new or something different.

"Act as if you are something (which you are not) and then become that." – Austin Kleon

This is typically what my point is: decorative painters who think they are artists. Which they are not. So stealing is nowadays a normal standard. And yes, they all did that in the past. Steal from each other and the art evolves. All past time artists had references and prints from other painters. When a display is successful, use it again. For your own profit.

But it is something totally different when photos from the internet, Facebook and Instagram in multiple ways are the sketch for your painting. That's just copy/paste: that's being your own Photoshop. Another problem that comes from doing so is the mixing of images and atmospheres from different sources: this results in strange perspectives and awkward combinations. If you don't make the necessary adjustments.



**"Jan, Jan, Jan, what a sick mind you have!"  
(Peter van Straaten)**

Take your own photographs if you use photographs. For sure, I also projected and used reference pictures. But it is not sensible, I tell you. So, using photographs is a great source. This is your personal well to drink from. It's there, so we're going to use it. Guys like Rubens gathered etches, sketches and replicas from others and reused that. Copy, copy, copy and in the end it transforms into your own style. We must find a personal style for the topic we master.

But always keep in mind that you must draw *from* a picture as an example. Never *over* draw it. Change it at least slightly. Take a different background or colors of hair. Make it different and make it your own. Blur it: give the chosen subject another atmosphere. If that is possible towards the picture. Oh... and be careful. Never become your own personal Photoshop. With that I mean: a woman in one photo and a cool guy in another photo. Don't think you can mix them together without adjustments. The perspectives will never be right.

To give you a real downer: in the Renaissance up to the 20th century 'artists' were trained to sketch literally *everything* by *memory* in the right perspectives. Anatomy and lighting. Without references. Happy birthday to you, contemporary 'artists'! Obviously they had references too, sketches or etchings, books from other artists to learn from.

See stealing from others as using and adapting. I only get disappointed when a decorative painter bluntly imitates something exactly. A decorative painter that paints straight the same image from the internet or reference book is just a mere CD player. And what is the use at all? As a rehearsal or practice maybe. I have witnessed Stefano Luca using ornaments on his displays. But they are always original and/or at least rearranged and changed. Well executed but with a new twist.

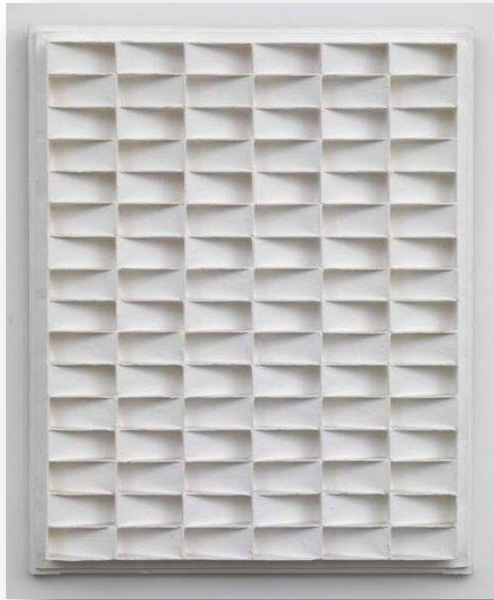
## **The one trick pony**

If you are not so much interested in the world around you and 'new' developments, there is a great chance you will produce the same kind of thing over and over. Very safe! During education you might develop your style and technique, but that's all. It's a form, a style - it's recognizable. As for an all-round decorative painter you just must be informed about interior fashions and changes in general. Let's just say: be in the middle of life and have good communicative abilities. Being locked up in a studio and coming up with great new paintings is not likely to happen. At least not for me.

All different angles in decorative painting need practice and study. Can we expect from a decorative painter to be outstanding in sign writing *and* trompe l'oeil? Or even a muralist to create a very good oak painting? Yes. The decorative painting craft is divided in many disciplines and as a professional these are all a must. And preferably to the highest standard.

Obviously, you can only reach that level at a higher age. But there are talents in this world already bloody good at twelve years of age. A genius, then? No sir or Madame - dedication and determination! If one wants to succeed in the field of decorative painting, studying is a lifelong must. Not only in the technical, chemical painting department, but also the numerous historical styles. And practical studies of actually working with your brushes and colors are essential. So: no time for the toilet or sleeping.

But if it is your desire to be merely a *very good sign writer*, then is sure to go into the depth of things. And then you'll have what I call the *one trick pony*. It's a dangerous position to be in economically: when you run out of work, you're practically lost. No safety net for you. So be wise and take up other disciplines. Be an all-round decorative painter being able to do the preparations of surfaces and some splendid general house painting. And let me tell you this: it's far more difficult to paint a flat door with a lacquer by hand and a brush in a uniform color than decorating that flat door with graining or any other trompe l'oeil!



**Jan Schoonhoven**

only sold one painting in his life. But he was disciplined to strive on. Now we have museums full of Van Gogh lovers, drooling over his paintings. And now *his* paintings sell for millions. So, the talent of the public is also a time related object.

You don't need talent or in-depth wisdom to like a decorative painting. The development of 20th century art needs some investigation and foremost understandings. So is not the case with decorative painting. Decorative painting is like illustrative art. It's enhancing and exhilarating a story or environment. Easy to understand.

Trompe l'oeil is for consuming, a brief functional pleasing. As a quick frolic we will gasp at the surprise of decorative painting. As difficult it is to paint a trompe l'oeil, it remains a neutral display with no message, like marbling and graining or signwriting.

Art is personal. Decorative painting is universal. And therefore, decorative painting is a *service* to its surroundings. Which is a great thing. It surely can change a mood. When an environment is well decorated, you feel special and enriched. Enhancing and exhilarating a space by conceptual (a theme used in a room with everything that is connected to it) decorative painting is totally a mood changer! In that sense decorative painting can function as ambient music. Wallpaper for your ears.

The one trick pony is also present in the art world. Nothing new here. For instance: Alma Tadema, Mancini, Warhol and more have their own peculiar style developed. They are happy with it and stick to it. The subject they expressed might have changed. But their painting signature was evident. As opposed to a Picasso or Max Ernst who investigated and developed new styles. I think it is very important to evolve. Keep searching for different information.

In real art, the artist *and* public have talent.

With a talentless public it would become impossible to sell art. Maybe in the length of time something odd will be understood. But not now. It is like Van Gogh (whom I don't like as a painter, but that's for another time): he probably



Art is experiencing a soul. This makes art *personal* and decorative painting *universal*. So, it is quite a difference to have a wall-to-wall mural painting compared to a framed canvas painting. The latter being more of a message from someone's heart.

It all comes down to this:

Decorative painters – coloring in between the lines (following the rules)

Artists – coloring outside the lines (no rules at all)

Decorative painting immediately makes you feel the boundaries that come with it. So now what? Art hasn't got any boundaries? I guess the answer depends on the historical context. There were times when *anything* produced by hand, a pencil or brush was called art. For example cave paintings or biblical displays. If it was an expression to show quickly what someone else meant or wanted to show or tell without written word. People were not language educated.

Creativity and inspiration are for amateurs.

Stop the world! Is he mad? Well, to some extent. But when you're a painter, you're a painter all the way. From your first brush to your last dying day. Meaning: it's not a hobby, it's a lifestyle. Anytime in your life, all seconds of the day. You don't *need* creativity and inspiration. It's everywhere! It's hard to be original but coming up with a different combination of atmospheres and painting styles is not such a difficult task when you use your wits and eyes. Therefore, decorative painters are *not* artists as well.

They adapt styles, structures and forms like an actor does. That is *work* – more transpiration than inspiration. To become inspired means to become enthusiastic. You suddenly are aware of a 'new' usable input. New input is your vault of references that you gather each day. And yes: from other painters too. Or, as Austin Kleon puts it: "Steal like an artist"! Art is experiencing a soul. Inspiration is an animation of the soul.



**William Turner**

existing laws. For *real* art, there are no laws. An artist doesn't need creativity or inspiration. Surely, it has also to do with your personality and upbringing. When you grow up in an environment that was secure and safe it will be difficult to jump out of your mind.

The artist is *always* animated, and so is the professional decorative painter. The difference, though, lies in the target of display.

William Turner once said:

"I just want to express and show you what a particular scene looks like."

In the word 'creative' is the word 'create'. Turner:

"It is only when we are no longer fearful that we begin to create."

But a decorative painter creates as well, you think. Except *that* is within

However, creativity and inspiration are something to spend a lifetime waiting in vain. Better start and making shit. Good shit and bad shit. The bad is even better. It is like throwing dice: aleatoric. The faults are interesting too. Take Mesdag (a painter in The Hague, around 1900), who collected tons and tons of sketches from fellow painters like Antonio Mancini. Being interested in the development of painting, he was interested in the flaws too.

Suppose you take up a sketchbook and you want to go “plein air”. Do something outside your studio. You will find yourself constantly doubting whether the sight is interesting enough to sketch. Ballony!

“The game is called: do it!” Patrick Kirwin

You don’t need inspiration. You don’t need creativity. You *are* both. All the time. But what about a ‘writer’s cramp’? These things exist, also for painters, when you just don’t know what to produce anymore. And even if you persist and try: there’s no satisfaction in your

results. This doesn’t mean the inspiration wasn’t there before. A tip from someone who’s been in the business for 40+ years: write down your ideas when you’re going through an inspirational phase. This will give you starting points during uninspirational phases.

Unfortunately, not all ideas keep their brilliance over time. They were written down in the past, in another mindset, another context. As time passes, our view on the world outside changes. And in addition to that, the world around us changes as well.

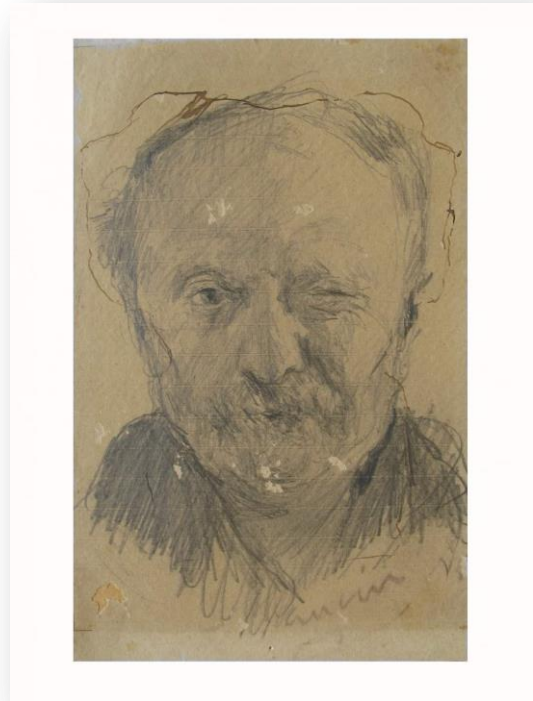
### **Art is a search.**

Decorative painting *always* moves in a certain direction. There’s a significant and specific goal to paint. In that goal is the search. Obstructive thoughts will come to surface, rest assured: “Why should I? It’s been done earlier anyways. I’m bored of it already.” Maybe, indeed, put the ideas and concepts aside. And just do the unexpected. Something you even would surprise yourself with. Because it’s *not* typically you. Take a risk. Worst that can happen is failure in *your own* eyes. And then throw it away. Or save the mistakes, whatever. But: do it! Paint.

“However... I paint.” – Patrick Kirwin

So, ‘persistence’ is the keyword, along with ‘discipline’. In both decorative painting and art. It’s a lonely existence. Well, decorative painters ‘work’ in groups sometimes. It’s also here you’ll find a difference towards artists. Artists are individualists. Of course, they do organize in groups and paint according to a certain ‘style’. Think of all the ‘isms’ that appeared after 1890 or so. Meaningful groups of artists that all followed a ‘sign of the time’. A consensus.

Both decorative painters and artists work in groups, but their goals are different. Decorative artists form professional groups as tradesmen, like a union, and share techniques and learning methods. Artists clutter to share common feelings. Most often, artists operate within one style. But at least they are busy creating with their eyes, brains, hands, tools and paint. Obviously not everybody is chosen to become a painter. But artists need other people to exhibit, publish or manage them.



**Sketch Antonio Mancini**

That's when we come to a point where loads of philosophers, university professors and the like form an industry discussing art and the value of it in society. There are libraries full of art wisdom, talking about conceptual art etc. - but really: nothing comes from it. It's like walking backwards...

To me it is like what Warhol said:

“Make more art, and while people are discussing *that*, make even more.”

## Function of Art

Andy Warhol had many great to-the-point quotes. One that really divides decorative painting from art is:

“An artist produces something people don't need.”

Here you are: a decorative painter produces what people *do* need. Decorative painting has a function. It is a form of writing in pictures, even in structures, to make the environment comfortable, to enrich it.

**“Art is not comfortable – never a trustful, safe environment”**

Austin Kleon writes about the So What-question: what is the function of this art piece I made? Is it useful or entertaining? That is an important question because when it is useful, I dare say it is not art at all. When a display is mood changing or has psychological effect, it is most certainly art. When it affects emotion or a change, it is art. But Jan, photographic painting can have a mood changing effect by someone too!



Istvan Sandorfi

Let me make an example. The Crying Boy series by Giovanni Bragolin show highly realistic young, teary-eyed children. The modern art dealer will neglect it, but someone on the streets might define it as art. In the UK alone, over 50.000 copies were sold. We nowadays call it kitsch, but let's not forget how kitsch became trendy again by Jeff Koons. Here I must admit that art is a personal subject as well.

“Is it art or can I throw it away?”

This quote is a commercial joke. However useful and entertaining: most stuff is temporary and can be seen as an object. It wears out and you throw it away. Like comic books and magazines: you read it... you know it... and stash it away. But we keep art.

“When it's useless, it's art.” –Andy Warhol

Saying art is useless is a modern approach. Before the industrial revolution the meaning of art was different. There *was* a use. Art's function was foremost storytelling. It was William Turner that painted “because it was plain beautiful what he saw.” Then came Dada, and the meaning of art collapsed.

## Comic books

Paintings that tell stories are like comic books. But art is transporting emotions.

Let's talk about illustrative pictures. You know, those for book covers, magazines or in comic books. They enlighten the text, are a visualization of the story. I see it as a form of decorative painting. Great artists illustrated books, posters, and movies as well in the past. But like decorative painting, illustrative painting has a purpose towards an object. It is *not* free opposed to an object on its own.

Alike a decorative work, illustrations are not the original thoughts or imagination of its creator. You see: illustrations represent the story of someone else's imagination. We can easily regard The Fourteen Stations of Jesus as a comic book. Now, what happens if the illustrator makes up his own script? Do we call it art?

Take a genius like Winsor MacCay, creator of Little Nemo, who was able to create a fantastic script *and* illustrations. Illustrations, in all their forms, are most often very exact paintings. Things that the public



Winsor MacCay

immediately recognizes and relates to.

Illustrations, like decorative painting, have a “use” and are “serving” to the story or environment. So no, however wonderful and inspiring MacCay's work was, I will not call it art.

“When there's a suggested movement in a painting or display, then art is drifting away in benefit of illustration.”

Suggestive movement can be found in abundance in comic books. Cartoonists truly are well gifted. Especially when they can sketch by hand – not by a computer or using photographs – they surely have the same skills as painting artists. Cartoonists must be able to paint and draw *everything*. By memory too. So, nothing bad about cartoonists – they have my admiration.

One of the things I admire most is a cartoonist that sketch by memory. They remind me of the way biblical paintings were made, or how Rembrandt used to work. Both comics and the works of Rembrandt have strong links to a story and characters. The Nightwatch even has a lot of movement, like comics often do too. Movement, however, will never be the center of attention in art. Movement in Art is only supporting the concept. Sure, modern artists use movement in their art, but this I consider to be an effect, a filter, supporting the concept.

Illustrations are stories in frames. To temporary change your mood or emotion in order to sustain the story. In that sense it is art. In real independent art (on canvas), any change is not temporary but a steady factor. Because there is only one picture instead of many that creates animation.

Illustrations, however, share more similarities to decorative painting. They have a frolic, startling quality. It is amazement. Also, public in general use the word ‘art’ for just about anything that is a production of pencil, brush and colors. Or even any display that is a frozen movement, like a photograph.

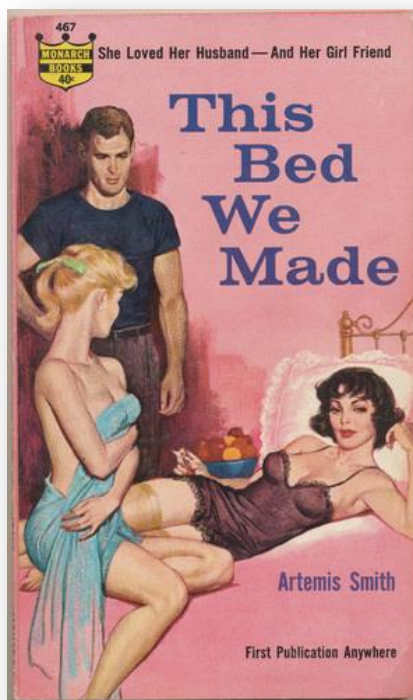
When the public doesn't know the real meaning of a display or painting, they just throw a general remark, as if it was a blanket over a bed: calling it ‘illustrative art’ or ‘decorative art’. The word ‘art’ actually doesn't even belong there.

## Art is for a certain kind of people with talent to understand it.

As for decorative painting, like murals or imitations of materials, no one needs to understand what is painted. As for illustrations, one needs the story to accompany the display. In some cases, it's so clear, a story would be obsolete. Any isolated frame of a Batman comic is already telling what's going on. In some ornamental works like arabesques and grotesques you'll even find text, like "winter" or "love" and sometimes poems.

Decorative painting is like a pre-chewed meal for the public. Is that a problem, sir or madam? Absolutely not. *Somebody* must make a beautiful display that even real modern artists like. Because you will not find a decorative painter using the "ugliest" cobra-painting as a mural or as a structure to imitate.

It's very simple, really: art is not here to be decorative. When Impressionism started, it began to break with the Salon Academic painters, to *change the arts*. It was a rebellion. Nowadays the public tend to have a romantic feel about Impressionism. Impressionism is totally accepted and even considered decorative.



60's book cover

But that was not the original intention. Modern Impressionists are more or less standing still. Like the decorative painter Simon Pasini, using the technique and swiftness of Impressionism as a filter. That also counts for other painters who use an 'ism' as their 'style'. But their intention is not decorative. Or commercial. Why paint like Antonio Mancini when we've already got one? He was a better Mancini from the start anyway!

Illustrative art is obviously a craft of its own. And one definitely needs a different talent and imagination for it. Decorative painters must have a talent for seeing through structures and imitate anything that is not alive (except panoramic sceneries). The illustrative craft is way more about bringing over a story or message, making a picture attractive.

### Illustrations and stories

One of the most famous illustrations that convey a story are the ones from the Bible, made by monks, though prehistoric cave paintings told stories way before. As what da Vinci already said: a writer will need many sentences that a painter can tell with one painting to tell a story.

With the industrial revolution came also better ways to print books. Around 1880 illustrative works became an industry of their own. Newspapers used drawings for their articles and comics became very popular. Creative studios had artists work on advertisements and comics. Especially Mucha is well known for painting posters. He added frames and decorative borders around the central figure functioning as a decorative value.

When one is using a frame or enlisting around a painting, one determines a mood for the spectator. It also exaggerates the intended message one wants to convey, it serves as an extra atmosphere to enhance the central focus point.

Illustrations are not art, because they dictate the interpretation and freedom is limited.



When there is movement in a painting or display, then Art is moving away in benefit for the illustration. Like paintings where snow or rain is falling, or children are playing. Then art is moving away again.

## Photography

“When you are sure about your art, you’ll paint as a photo. A real artist is never sure.” – Bernard de Wolff

Using photographs for art is a poor solution. I’m aware even the biggest names, like Vermeer, used optical lenses and tricks like the Lucinda apparatus. For illustrative and decorative works, photographs are absolutely a big help. Using a projector to enlarge a photograph is fantastic in the commercial field. And if you cannot draw yourself from life, then photographs are a solution. And nowadays with search engines, smartphones and editing programs, photographs become very tempting to use.

Why paint a photograph, when the photograph exists already.

Well, I can understand the use of photographs for practicing painting *technically* – using it for the coloring and structures. Commercially it’s an inevitable tool. But projecting a photograph onto a wall 40 meters high in a busy street, to paint a mural? Muralists have modern solutions for that too (although I *have* seen muralists with charcoal and photograph on scaffolds). But coming back to canvas painting and real art:

There is no use to paint using someone else’s style or flat-out copying a photograph. Unless you change it. I know that copying artists is a learning method at academies. This way one can understand the logics of art. But for creating your *own* masterpiece – avoid copying at all times. Change the composition or add new stuff to it. You might think it will turn more into you... the opposite is true.

It will never be art because you are just a human using Photoshop as a technique to enhance a picture. But your own, essential idea should be exquisite. With that special sparkle.

“I begin with something and then I change it” – Pablo Picasso

Basically, we’re talking about the foundation of self-development. Like doodling, scratching mindlessly during a daydream or telephone conversation. One might have a vision for a painting. You might even have a load of inspirational or simple pictures for a painting. But whilst painting on the fly, it takes a different turn. It changes direction. That is the ‘art-risk’. The painting might end up as rubbish, or a mistake. That is just exactly what it is. A mistake.

The risk could easily also become a success. So, ‘change’ is a keyword for art. Change the possible outcome. Change the mood or your expectation. Make it different and surprise yourself. Make it ambient. Change the colors, remove the face, and destroy the plan. You can’t grow by sticking to your plans all the time. Don’t become a One Trick Pony. That’s safety and safety is not art.



Yago Hortal

**Decorative painting is safe – art is unsafe and dangerous.**

So shock yourself and shock your audience. Abandon your plans!

Exaggerate at all times the feeling you want to express.

It's like in an orchestra with many violins, or an extensive brass section. With the intention to 'double' the tone and harmonies. Although they are similarly tuned, there is always a small difference. This boosts the expression. Exaggerate your expression. Double the colors, layer for layer.

When doodling and scratching mindlessly, it is said that our subconsciousness comes to surface. It's an interesting theory. Very

valuable too, because in fact our real inner personality is the essential sparkle of art.

A very meaningful practice this doodling is. Salvador Dali was a well-known doodler. When you see Brittany Baker and Stephon Senegal you know instantly how doodling becomes art. And now that I mention Dali: surrealism (expression of subconsciousness and dreams) might be exactly what personal art is all about. The inner world. Psychological art. *It's the real deal.*

Painting your dreams, stories or problems is obviously very personal. Which means you really need fans in the audience to buy that kind of work for their collection.

So how to react when you are looking at a Mark Rothko? Or about any abstract art in general? Most common reply to this kind of art: "I don't understand, it's not beautiful." The point is that if you keep within a certain context, you will never develop new visions. It is very secure to stay in a past dream world, but the art world is complex. If you want to keep up with developments, well congratulations, you've found yourself a new fulltime job. And keep up with developments all you want; the public should have at least the *talent* to recognize something different. Your public is aware of your place in the art world. You don't have to convince them; they are not even public anymore, but clients almost. That is gratifying and very welcome. They share your talent.

As for decorative painters: they have only clients, and a client doesn't need to have talent to understand a decorative display. The display is as obvious as an illustrated book or comic. Talent means "to have a feel for it". Have a receptive open mind for new, other stuff has to do with an eager personality. Free from established doctrines. It's a good thing that not everybody likes the same art.

Diversity is always important. Diversity is the key to life. Embracing new art is a necessary talent. People accept Dadaism easier nowadays than when it just arrived. Also because of the repetitive confrontations in books and magazines about the subject through the years.

Consider it as an advertisement in magazines and television. The more it is repeated the more it is accepted. A new wave in the art world needs time to find its own foundation. The word needs to be spread around, so to say.

**“Only detached souls, without limitations of laws and rules, are the real artists.”**

Real artists are considered a bit ‘wacko’. Unable to make normal conversation, or a strange conversation at the bare minimum. It’s a generic opinion: artists live in their own private world with a fantastic universe around them.

Decorative painters fit in their environment much better. They must *understand* the private world of their clients. Unique artists with a detached soul can make spontaneous irrational changes in their plan. Using faults as part of a plan. They play aleatoric, something like dice throwing. On good luck. ‘Anything goes’, and if it’s wrong then it is part of the plan. Coincidences are very welcome. Too often I made a plan or vision for a new painting for days. Then, when the paint and the canvas are ready and the first try is done I just abandon the whole idea and in the end I am more satisfied.

I’ve painted it in my head: how it should look and how it should actually be done. So, I was already bored with the idea beforehand.

Destroying your painting is a spontaneous reaction to your own expectation. Irrationality and change of behavior (out of frustration sometimes) sheds a new light on your own abilities. A Dutch painter stated the following explanation on artists and painting:

“Painting is personal and has little to do with just technique. It is an accumulation of experience, of how you look at the world what you think is interesting might just make the work you do relevant. No guarantees, no certainty... just one big unknown.” – Hans Jan der Leeuw

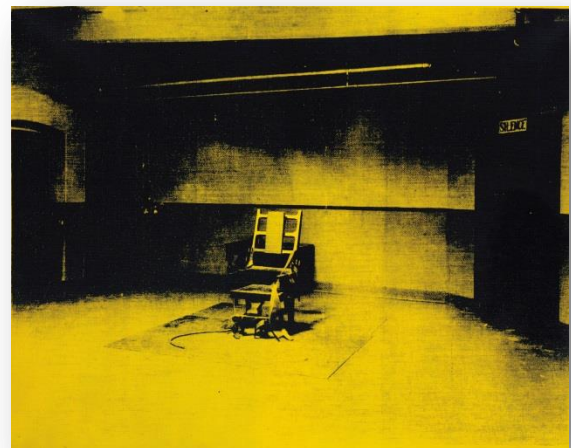
No guarantees, no certainty, just one big unknown. Relate that to decorative painting and it is very clear decorative painting is not art. Decorative painting is totally the opposite. You don’t start with a decorative panel or work without knowing what to do, how to do it. It’s all about guarantees and certainty.

“Pure and bold expressions of human emotions are significant for art”

Shocking images of revolt, sex, punk, aggression, jealousy, and frustrations are expressions of negativity, but none the less needed for art. Without taking caution, one could end up at the extreme end of negative expressions. For example:

“The highest form of art is murder”

That’s a shocking and obviously very destructive statement. It’s a quote from a movie, I believe *The Exorcist*. Also, Bowie had an album about this subject: “*Outside*”. This is where I definitely draw the line – as an obsessed painter one wants to live the fullest and longest in joy. Murder has no place in this.



Andy Warhol

Still, if we observe art over time, we find that death plays a very big role, as it’s a very big part of life. Interestingly, there’s a mix of erotica and death to be found in Art Nouveau style, a decorative style for sure. Take Félicien Rops, Schiele but also Klimt for instance: all exponents of dark erotica. They balance on the borders of fantasy land. It’s what illustrations are well known for. Dark erotica is a nice topic to express a daring subject. And it’s far easier to find inspiration in the negative than in the positive.



Felicien Rops



Von Stuck

## Abstract expressionism

“Abstract expressionism is the only real art”

As art develops in all kinds of directions, it also elevates and sets itself free from boundaries. Decorative painters just *love* boundaries, laws, rules, and techniques.

“Where technique and craftsmanship rules, the core of art disappears.”

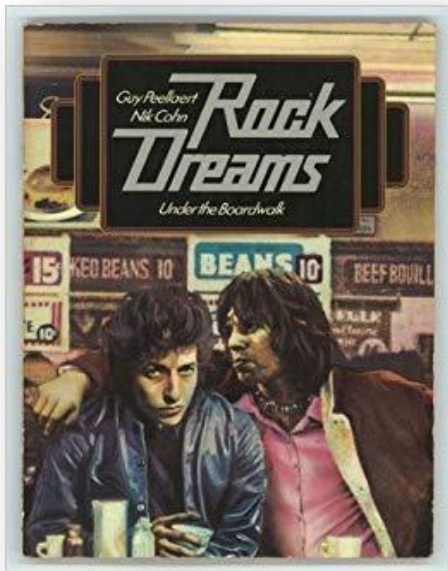
Abstract expressionism is not about rules, but solely about expressing oneself. Your inner world will *have* to come out at some point. The event is the art. And the event changes all the time.

You can clearly see the big difference here between abstract expressionism and decorative painting. For decorative painting, the event is definite and not a show. No expression of inner thoughts. Decorative painting also shows a repetitive quality of form and structure. Art is free from that.

But what about Zero-style, which creates very repetitive, automatic displays? Zero Art is what it says: nothing – zero. No color, no emotion, no individual expression. One of the biggest Zero-artists is the Dutch artist Jan Schoonhoven.

Indeed, some of these repetitive structures are very well usable for walls! But alas, *decorating* with zero-structures is obviously and totally *not* where Zero-artists want to see their work end up. But do you want to know something funny? In fact, it’s the other way around: these repetitive structures you see in Zero-art are *inspired* by stencils and wallpaper. There is no emotion in those stencils except that it offers a certain feel, comforting ambience when put together in a certain way. For just a moment, there’s an emotion. With all this I want to proof that a decorative painter will use anything – any form or structure.

The decorative painter will just use existing structures as they are, the artist will find new ways to change the structure. An artist is finding something new. For the decorative artist anything goes, for instance



Guy Peellaert

references from books, magazines, catalogues, tv and nowadays foremost the internet and social media – it’s a form of stealing.

Take this guy from the 1980’s, Guy Peellaert. He totally used new media to create something sensational. Taking photographs of famous people and rock stars, cutting them up and pasting them together to create something new, and then spraying them in with colors. His biggest hits were the covers for David Bowie’s “Diamond Dogs” and The Rolling Stones’ “It’s only Rock and Roll”. He made a massive book called “Rock Dreams”. Basically: ready made’s turned over and reworked. Is this art?

For me, reusing references and turning them into a new point of view is basically how art develops and evolves into the next thing.

“A real artist steals.” – Picasso

Like the ready-mades of Duchamp: it’s there already anyway, so let’s reuse it in a different way. This is about living in the outer world and being influenced by different types of media. Also very typical for decorative painters: to adapt concepts, structures and forms to use for walls, ceilings, furniture and doors. But not creating something new.

## Less is more

Diving into our inner world, one can expect a more personal and ‘original’ display. The famous line:

“Less is more”

Or, in decorative painters’ terms: to paint more is to achieve less. I came to that conclusion in 2000, when there was a hype in interior decorating. Greys and browns and raw materials were a key factor. I picked up plastics and metals and raw old wood to decorate with. But bloody hell, some of those materials (like snake and leather) were a real pain in the ass to find out how to paint them and also time consuming to reproduce.

Painting snakeskin or crocodile skin is like imitating an intricate burl: very intense and busy. But looking from a distance it becomes a unity. This is highly technical painting. And in case you’ve got the clients for new sensational decorative concepts you might find yourself “one step beyond”.

A decorative concept must be like a blanket around you after a shower. For example entering a Catholic church. You will find yourself in a fairy tale from the Baroque-era. The sculptures have so much movement, they almost turned into a show. The walls and ceilings become one big backdrop showing stories. And what about when a king or queen reigned a country or even the world. That had an influence on interior decorating as well as a concept. For instance: Napoleon was big on military. And thus, old Roman, military signs were the foundation for that empire-style seen in so many early 1800’s homes.



## Doodling and making mistakes

So decorative painting can also be seen as an influence to the existing environment using political issues. An outgoing message of the inner, mental state. Again here: decorative painting in a concept has a

strong function. And it's the opposite of total freedom.



Stephon Senegal

“Total freedom in art is the expression of a personal struggle and beliefs”

Doodling away with a pen or charcoal is probably the purest form of expression. Scratch art probably – and understandably – doesn't *look* like it, but it is one of the purest subconscious expressions. Talking about *that* shit: Surrealism (*and* doodling / scratch art) was a real turnover in art. Expressing your dreams on a painting is high-end inner world. I saw doodle works of Stephon Senegal and Brittany Baker that blew me away. This is not just scratching on paper one does during boring class lessons.

No sir/madame, it lifts 'technique' up to a high level. From there on its art. I hope you don't mind, but I'm not going to explain

Surrealism. It came forth from Dadaism, a style

picking up in the early 1900's and the start of 'art' as we know it now. A total revolution. Actually, a punk war against mediocracy and bourgeoisie. And so, yes, war to the decorative painter who just served clients with a repetitive technique.

Point is, to decorative painters I say: stay where you are, and you'll be safe. Practice more and you'll be safer. To artists: make mistakes, more, more and more. And do it in 30 seconds, or 5 minutes upmost. A decorative painter wants to spend as much time as possible on a 'project' – the more the better. They will be applauded, and the money is more.

Not so for the artist! The artist is *not* interested in time at all. A common ground both decorative painting and art have is focus and attention. Something that's applicable to probably all actions. So you might have talent, a feel for decorative painting: you sure need focus and attention and discipline. The practice is very important, the failures are treasures. Again, again, again and again. Did I mention again?

## Value of art

“All art ends up on a museum wall, losing its origin.” – Patrick Kirwin

“If you look long enough at a painting, it loses all of its meaning.” – Andy Warhol

Well, la-di-da... Art is temporary. With these quotes on art you find yourself doubting the *Mona Lisa* or *The Girl with the Pearl Earring*. Have they become a mere wrap cover picture for a chocolate bar, coffee

mug or post card to be bought in a museum store? Items used by an individual to express their character?

What is this 'art is temporary'-bullshit? People have got paintings on their walls for decades and still enjoy it. They become members of the family, to pass on even. The fact that a painting loses its original purpose is a strong point.

After years on a wall, the 'message' of the painting is changed for the public or owner. It becomes an object of a new personal meaning or remembrance to it. Becoming 'part of the family' means a different function. Like a piece of furniture. An object to fill in the space. And that happens also with decorative painting.

So, the art value of 'real' art floats away with years of passing by. The value of 'temporary' changes. The value of 'concept' or 'ism' changes too. Becoming a mere memory. As where decorative painting lasts forever because its presence is meant to be supportive and serving in the background.

Decorative painting will not change its service goal. Fine art is made with a mindset and in a period by an artist expressing himself. Feelings using a display as a vehicle to express.

"Art is excitement. Art is something created that shocks, stuns, delights and overpowers the emotion in such a way that one's reactions and perceptions are altered by it – possibly forever." – Andy Warhol

This represents exactly the temporary value again. In no way will decorative painting change your perceptions. As much original your panoramic landscape may look, as much fantastic your Renaissance ornaments of grotesques are done, how impressively you painted and clouded ceilings... they are not art.

They don't change you. They make you feel better, that's all. Which is also an accomplishment. Now then: if a modern artist wants to paint or produce something on a wall but it is technically out of their possibility, they can call for a decorative painter. This happens sometimes with conceptual artists or poets and writers.

But then *still* the decorative painter is not creating art. He/she copies the art of others. Like an orchestra who plays the symphony of the composer.



All right, hold it there... What if a decorative painter has luminous ideas and concepts to express? Well, here we arrive at the outer limits and cross-borders. My point here is the personality of this person. It comes to originality. Must all fine art be original or represent an original style or concept? It would be easy to say no, it will be challenging to say yes.

The challenge must bring the originality to another stage. And if you are a decorative painter wanting to be an artist you just must renew yourself and bring decorative painting to a higher level instead of using old techniques or patterns over and over again. So maybe go with the present times you're living in. And with that in hand, new perspectives in decorative painting can also uplift the decorative craft in general.

## Evolve or repeat

Baby, make that choice. Using decorative painting to evolve can be very refreshing. I have tried it with success. If a movie seems popular for instance and influences the current fashion and styles, then painting a room in that fashion would be commercial *and* temporary. How about using modern materials instead of an oak imitation? At least that counts as original in the decorative world. And by God, how much *that* is needed. Still, any new ideas for decorative works will eventually be repeated and lose its originality.

Strictly put: the artist evolves, the decorative painter repeats. Overlaps are possible, and an original decorative painter can surprise a client within the acceptable limit of the commission. Again, the client should have talent for such, and understanding. But pushing the limits and going beyond is *not* what a decorative painter will do because it will scare off the client. And therefore, the decorative painter is not an artist. Surely the decorative painter themselves will evolve too.... right? In technique, yes. In the meaning of their work? No.

“Decorative painters are adjusted and mixed with public and customers. Artists are unadjusted and stand outside the community and society.”

Decorative painters are concerned about clients and the bill - it's a *trade* to win. They are outward. They can mingle easily and are social. Artists on the other hand are concerned about themselves. They are inward. They *create* to win. Decorative painters should have great social abilities, their outer world is big. Artists are less interested in others. Their inside world is big.

If a decorative painter wants to be a real artist, here's my advice: open your heart and your perspective, and after reaching that: go further into the high clouds and the deep earth. Because:

“Decorative painters have boundaries, and art doesn't.”

The boundaries are clear, namely the laws and orders of ornamental styles, material imitation, perspectives, the use and technique of paint. Practice and self-discipline go hand in hand. It looks like a circus act, a trick - a 'one trick pony'. That cannot be art.



Christina Parese



But there are real artists that do the same trick over and over too, you must think. Indeed, people like Van Gogh, Bouguereau and Rothko all made their paintings in the same manner. They call that their signature. Their typical hand of painting. Take Picasso, Rembrandt, or Paul Klee: they evolved and were always searching and finding. And radical switches don't make a trustful artist. But evolution and transforming a life story makes an artist. From baby to child to adolescence and elder. When you make a series of paintings there will come a time to break it up and leave that situation. An artist moves on to the next thing. Again, experimenting and time investing, being flexible in life.

**“Being an artist is *not* a job.”**

Being a decorative painter is a job. Working on a scaffold and ladder doing repetitive work is what any regular house painter does. The financial reward is set and the earlier you're finished, the more you earn. That doesn't mean an artist is not working. Focusing on the end goal is a form of working. Except time cannot be an issue with art. An artist must be commercially aware. Starving because of lack of money is a bad idea and well known among artists. Van Gogh and Mancini are famous for it. Therefore, it must be essential to have knowledge of commercial success. Nowadays even special platforms and courses are available to update yourself. *Show your work and work on your relations!*

So: Art is not a job, but a real artist *must* work hard to create. And 'working' is a significant word for a job. Repeating your own style day in day out could easily become a trick and thus a job. It will become production. As Warhol said:

“While others talk about your art, make more.”

It sure is very welcoming to have commercial success. And more tempting to repeat your style. But an artist can fail at that. If you don't surprise your audience with a new development, then the sponge gets too much of the same water. When you're just making a new edition of Donald Duck, people will get to know the storylines. So, beware of becoming that one-trick pony.

Getting and gathering new inputs and interests must elevate one's expressions in their 'art'. Talking about working: it is no surprise that the most successful artists are sort of ADHD characters. To name a few: Da Vinci, Picasso, Max Klee, Dali, Winsor MacKay, Norman Lindsay, Warhol, Mann, Mucha, Mancini, Van Gogh – all were highly productive. Even over productive. And to give a wise advice: work in series and concepts.

Stay focused on a theme. These periods have clear borders, and you can really put out all your brainwaves and possibilities within a frame of works. You can focus like looking through binoculars. The raging enthusiasm will show them. This way the artist will express their vision on a theme.



Andy Warhol

**“An artist is not paid for their labor, but for their vision.”**

As where a decorative painter is paid by the hour. This does not mean that a decorative painter has no vision. It’s only a different vision serving his client and object. To value a canvas painting or art depends strongly on popularity of the painter or fashion.

“Art is whatever you can get away with.” - Warhol

I suppose decorative painting doesn’t work that way. Although I have met and worked with painters that indeed threw numbers at clients that were accepted. Mainly because the general public is completely oblivious. Mixing colors is already art to them, or if it has a big price tag. So, paying for a decorative painting equals paying for any serving job, like a plumber, electrician or carpenter. In fact, the value of decorative painting is rather stable. Fluctuations in value depend on the history and contemporary fashion. In the art world value varies immense.

“Is it art or can we throw it away?” - Unknown

Obviously, this is a quote coming from art lovers. According to this quote, only art is useful and has value. It has a good sense of humor in it, too, as opposed to:

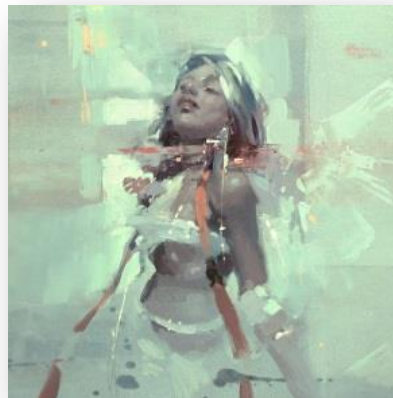
“When it’s useless, it is art.” - Andy Warhol

This quote totally summarizes the debate to me – the split between art and decorative painting. There is a function and use for decorative painting. It is a wrapped decor of an object. Decorative painting is dolling up objects or an environment. Either incidental or conceptual. But what about an Orthodox trompe l’oeil on panel or canvas? Well, whatever you think of it... it is still a frolic, only for a moment. And yes, when there are objects painted in relation to relatives it sure is emotional, but only to a few. It becomes ‘a use’, a momentum. It contains a history. Not the future, neither a change.

With this insight you can understand that isolated decorative painting on a panel or

Decorative painting will usually be done on walls, doors, windows, ceilings, and furniture. On objects of use. You can absolutely find art on useless objects as well – but that was not created to serve the needs of a client, but the painter or artist himself to express a thought, mood or emotion.

Emotions are popular Art topics:



**Jeremy Mann**



**Gustav Klimt**



**Alessandro Papetti**



**Nick Alm**

canvas is not art.

Erotica/love    Horror/ death    Hate    Boredom    Enlightenment    Jealousy    Frustrations  
Action



**Jatnien de Boer**

## **Destroy the painting**

Here comes a difficult one. So, you're a decorative painter and studied all kinds of different techniques for years. And must keep studying and practicing. You have a business and successful commissions. Now don't tell me you would destroy a complete room painted in a fantastic concept. Even if it were only partly. Unimaginable. Saying "destroy the painting" is a typical Art School (or university) practice. It dares you to leave your concept. To step out of your comfort zone. In fact, to step out of your own personality and take a big leap into the unknown. A lot of modern painters use it even as a trick.

After finishing a work, they wipe out of a certain part of the paint. An act of aggression. An action coming forth from the Cobra Style. A decorative painter will never do that. Mostly because the client will probably not be pleased at all. Let alone willing to pay you afterwards. Any decorative painter treasures time spent on the painting. The artist is not aware of time and values it completely different.

"Kill your darlings" – S. King

Break it up and abandon your art. An artist is attached to their work like it's a baby. There is a true relationship. Although technically we're speaking about a mere canvas or board with paint, there's a soul in the painting. It's alive and will always reflect that initial feeling the artist had whilst creating it. Decorative painters leave their work behind, and with ease for that matter. A bit slow perhaps, for all that money in their pockets.

The artist is involved with transporting a thin translucent mind, which is difficult to get a detached from. It will always be their baby. I dare say even, and I know it's not nice, that decorative painting resembles the dead, in terms of inflicting a human soul. Too often decorative painting depends on models and examples or works from others and the past. Making it repetitive and reproducible. Surely the decorative painter is also 'one' with what they paint, but that occurs only during the production phase. They will absolutely put their soul in it, especially into the technique, laws, and orders. But will the decorative painter kill or damage its work? No, they treasure all time spent. It's worth money. In contrary to the artist whose mind is totally free. The artist can reject their earlier works. Even destroy it because their mindset or soul changed.

I feel this is a crucial point in life and on vision: destroy and radically change what your previous road was. Immediately change direction. Don't even trust what is the 'normal' or what is told to us. A new vision on all traditional visions. More or less: "Punk it all!"

"Art is a game"

This quote clashes with the decorative painter, who must have a solid plan before execution. An artist is open to anything. Their work can change to a different outcome. Making a portrait is probably a good example. The artist has only one option to make the likeness work, namely capturing the soul of the portrayed. Portraits too are planned out beforehand as well. They must make several sketches beforehand. Their career is based on a lot of knowledge and exercise. Portrait painters in that are quite similar to decorative painters. In the sense of an old craft. Since portrait painters had a function of a photographer. As where the artists have new perspectives that can create revolutionize portrait painting styles.

To start any painting without a plan, means not fearing to fail. The painting can change anytime for the better purpose and outcome. The pure joy of painting. The action. Similar to what the Cobra group wanted. Failure is welcome, without corrections. This is a way of thinking and behaving. It's called 'aleatoric'. Like throwing dice and see what happens next. Taking the big risk, seeing art as a game. Having fun with paint. No direction or end goal at all.

This is what some people would call 'degenerate art'. I find it very dangerous to use these words. Degenerate art means in general that it doesn't fit in and I feel that everything must be accepted in some way and has to be looked at. It's important to have a totally open mind. Brutality, murder, pain, extreme porn: it might make you want to avoid contact and seeing it. Keep in mind that it is an expression of someone's soul, none the less.

"Between thought and expression" – Lou Reed

What happens when a thought or idea or concept comes to mind? Can we call that inspiration?

"Inspiration is for amateurs" – (JB)

When you must wait for inspiration to come by, I guess you are blocked your whole life long. Great ideas are everywhere: just pick one and work on it. Any blocking for execution is just a stupid excuse to 'not fail'. Failing a painting is superb! Make some more failures. Make mistakes: more, more, more! Surely painters are thinkers. But when the result is not what you had planned... even better.

Between thought and expression! What happens there? I guess you are figuring out how to give birth to your new baby. What form or texture or color? It is a translation of the non-visible into the visible. Art in that view has the role of a medium to make clear what you want to express.

## **Choose significant or satisfying**

In case a painter wants to be in the art-scene he or she will try to impress with new stuff that throws the spectator off totally. By shock or supreme beauty. Otherwise, an artist is working to satisfy. To satisfy their self or, like a decorative painter would, an audience. To create something significant can obviously also be very satisfying for others. But I mean, satisfying is too safe. Significant paintings should be groundbreaking like a volcano. Basically, one can see decorative painting as satisfying, art as significant.

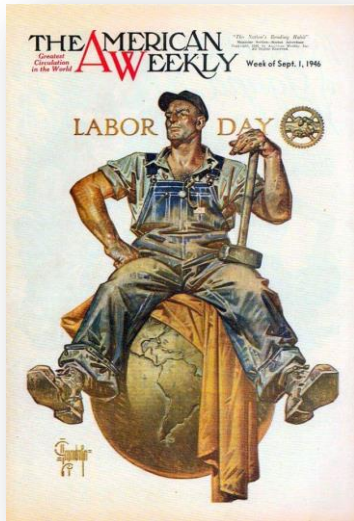


**Karel Appel**

## No title

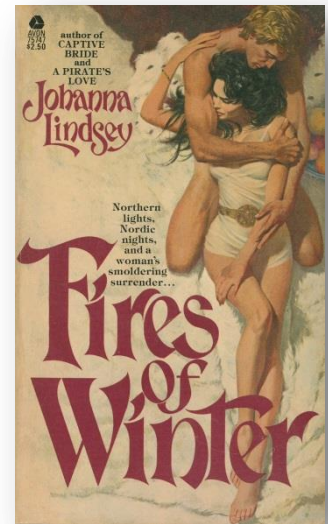
How come that significant, modern paintings have no title as name? When you are looking at a far-fetched abstract display it sometimes merely says 'No title'. I consider paintings as children – they come from your personality. Children have names, personality, and a history of their own. The name is the translation of a painting in words. Even part of the painting and can help the spectator understand.

So this 'No title'-business is not quite helping a difficult painting. It might add something if the painting is part of the Zero movement, because it's so minimalistic it only deserves 'no title'. Decorative works don't need a title, because materials, like wood or marble, come from a specific 'family' and all carry that name and that name only. A landscape mural is normally named after its origin. A blue Sky on a ceiling is exactly that: a blue sky. The same applies to paintings of a legend, historical event and portraits: the titles will be obvious because that helps the storytelling. Like a header in the newspaper. The same counts for ornamental works. Names used for decorative works mostly are not there to clarify or boost the picture. A title in terms of decoration is always supporting, and sometimes even gives away a hidden message in the picture.



Joseph Leyendecker

But the decorative painter cannot do a wood graining or clouded ceiling without the proper equipment. In art anything goes. Everything is accepted, basically. Tools and techniques are irrelevant. Surely any skilled artist must endure and respect basic education. Think of Picasso, who started out as an extraordinary well-trained painter and drawer who evolved. Which is the number one rule for artists: to change. Because your life and mind changes. To remain at one level would be autistic. Are decorative painters autistic and not changing? No, absolutely not. But they do stay in their lane. With tools and all. Tools are always important for the decorative painter. The more the better. Sure, there are artists also who rely on their tools. Many and a lot. But real and modern contemporary art goes out of the window when you stick to your tools. Use your mind and imagination instead of tools when plunging into the big freedom of big art.



Robert McGinnis

Book covers from the 1950s/1960s (like from Robert McGuire / Robert McGinnis or Gil Elvren ) combine illustration and title very well. Obviously, the purpose is commercial. For most of all the works of Norman Rockwell and Leyendecker are great names that really managed to combine titles and painted display. In my opinion, if you *really* want it to give a decorative work like a wood imitation a title, it can help to add some humor. Like "Oak in trouble". By that you raise the question to the display and create a meaning. The work also obtains a history because the client will always remember this story, hopefully remembers you by that. Although in general: decorative painting is not in need of a title.

“When tools get important, it becomes less art.”

Of course, technique and materials are helpful and useful. Obviously, no painter can do without. Quite often I have wondered what I am or to do without. Well: in the end I can always draw with my hands in the sand or scratch on surface.

“A decorative painter paints what somebody wants. The artist paints what he or she wants.” –

“Could you do this painting in red?” A typical question from a client. The decorative painter will answer: “I can do whatever”. An artist will reply: “Never, this is it!”

If we conform to someone else’s desires, our own goal of perception is put aside. Again, the serving character like an actor comes into mind. A bill is the end of the relation or commission.

The execution of an oak imitation is about mixing different tubes of paint. Whether the client wants it purple or petrol blue. The working scheme, or recipe, stays the same. I once had to do a petrol blue oak imitation on kitchen cabinets, doors and drawers. A patina in petrol blue would have done the same trick probably. But I could convince the client that the structure of oak could be better related to the original cabinet material. Now I was able to keep the decorative structure more compelling and closer to the craft of imitating. And it is far more interesting to paint. Better paid as well.

When a painting is made as a commission, can it still be art? Tricky. The artist will in this case just use their signature technique. It could be a portrait or landscape or still life. The only thing that can make it art is *that extra one sparkle*. That one thing that will amaze not only the client, but the public too. Achieving that can be done by adding emotions.

“Emotions are art topics”

Emotions also occur in illustrative paintings. But alas, that doesn’t mean its art. Emotions always take place within the author’s context. They have a function. Illustrations serve to, well, illustrate. And remember my concerns about art and function?

Decorative painters have clients; artists have a public.

Here is another difference: the one between client and public. There is almost no improvisation in decorative painting. I hear you literally think now: “Oh... right! So doing 30 square meters of Breche Violet (or any wood or marble) doesn't require improvisation?” Well, I wouldn't call it improvisation to ignore a recipe or a work scheme. That's 'wandering off'. The outcome must always be a recognizable imitation. The decorative painter stays within the laws of the plan and desired outcome for the client. An artist is actually painting for themselves initially.

**“Money has sex with art and a meaningful long relationship with decorative painting.”**

This is a tricky one. Too many artists are poor. Van Gogh sold only one painting in his lifetime! Antonio Mancini would have kissed the floor for any selling show. Although he had patrons like Singer Sargent and Mesdag, but too often painted on plates in a restaurant to pay for his dinner. Money and art. Money is in fact the start of fraud. Unless you, as an artist, are assured you can paint anything you want for your patrons or allowances.

Wait a minute here: there has even been a time from 1950 to 1990 that some governments had a social allowance for artists. You just had to have at least an academic education and be active at galleries and to do shows. That’s where we’re crossing a line to ‘work’ in my opinion. Artists *do* have to work by their own style. As where a decorative painters work on security of their skills. Next to that you have to work on your social relations as well. And working for your money is healthy. And that work isn't done between 9 AM and 5 PM. So: money has sex with art. It's a short, occasional relation. And the satisfaction is also short to the artist because in fact they lose a piece of their heart, a piece of their child. It's a sad, empty story afterwards. On the other hand: an artist will be proud that somebody else has the same appreciation and vision as they do. A form of admiration. Yes, there are many wealthy collectors of one, two or three artists.



Stefano Luca

A decorative painter quite often has long relationships with their clients, or architects or contractors. Still there is an hourly rate involved. There is no hourly rate for the artist. In both cases plays money a key role here.

“Decorative painters sell custom-made dreams and luxury. A tailor-made fantasy island.”

When you do a panoramic view 360 degrees in a room on the walls, you more or less throw a blanket over the room and your client. It will be *their* dreamland. Not yours. It's *their* emotion. Not yours. It's always an

imitation of something. The word ‘Trompe l'oeil’ basically means ‘fake’ for a reason. You can see this as a language for creating an atmosphere or transmitting a certain mood. Always somebody else’s atmosphere. Nothing wrong with that of course. The painter serves the space and the client. Basically, this is the purpose of all sections under the ‘Trompe l'oeil’-umbrella. And that wide span of possibilities within Trompe l'oeil is big. Mind you, it takes a lot of effort studying, failing and practicing to be a good, full range decorative painter. Graining, marbling (we should at least know how to execute twenty woods and marbles), ornamentation, ceilings, signwriting (knowing the laws of letter fonts and how to draw a straight line), murals, restorations and imitations of other fashionable structures is quite a lot to be very good at. It's a plunge into technical painting. And you can be super good at it. But if you cannot communicate in a gentle way or cannot fulfill the expectations of your client, nor "sell" (commercially) your abilities, then in the end it will be useless. Except maybe only to enjoy yourself.

“A business model is ridiculous, because decorative painters sell a small form of emotion.”

A painter is most often a ‘one man-show’. Having a business model like a corporation does is not the aim. The aim for any sincere decorative painter is to make beauty and to sustain one’s life needs. When the decorative painter wants big profits and a large bank account something else will be damaged. Nobody (or perhaps the sole genius) can use their time twice. Sure enough have I witnessed big decorative companies. And when you examine how they do their business you get envious. Their public relations are very good. You should always remember you are forced to sell somebody else’s emotion: either that of the client or architect. Invest your time in your abilities and stay sharp on your desired future. The ‘business model’ will follow your path.

You might have a great business model and set-up, but it fails when you cannot fulfil a commission technically. Your name will be damaged quickly. Andy Warhol was right! Everyone became an ‘artist’ or photographer. And it all speeded up thanks to mobile photography and social media. Modern media works as a possible business model. It must be important to have knowledge over commercial values. Your website is your portfolio instead of the traditional photo book. Nevertheless sitting with a client in a meeting with such a traditional photo book has a good charm. It's one-to-one, real communication. Instead of a possible client who swipes away picture after picture without any connection to their own needs.

Art doesn't have to be charming or beautiful like decorative painting does. (L.Berghuis )

When Art Nouveau came into fashion the majority thought it was ugly and tasteless. Nowadays people find it to be charming and beautiful. About the same time Dada was born. Which was a revolution. Even Dada is now considered decorative. So, what happened here? The value changes and people change. Even better: fashion changes. We move on. These styles were created in a certain time and period and are thus an expression of their historical context. Like all styles they end up being embraced by decorative painters, to be of use for the satisfaction of individual personalities of their clients. As where art is the expression of the new world and future: decorative painting is the past.

There certainly are many 'isms' that were confronting to look at. For example brutal art or horror art. As Bowie said: Death and murder are the ultimate art form. In other words: shock and aw. I just only want to see things in perspective here. Beauty lies in the eyes of the withholder. Beauty is personal within a time frame. When time passes so will the perception of beauty. As said earlier:

**“Art is the future. Decorative painting is the past.”**

Never forget that art is very personal. Decorative painting gets far more universal acceptance. Isn't that just swell! A decorative painting probably has more success than a piece of art. The reaction to a decorative painting ("Ooo beautiful!") might just also be saying a lot about the person who says it.

My point is that decorative painting has its' origin in the past and rarely evolved. As where art *did* evolve. Decorative works are recognized better as a display. Because we've seen it before in castles, mansions, in books. The purpose of decorative painting is to uplift and cover walls and furniture. Frolicking and dolling up the environment. Well, we can say the same thing about classic art and contemporary art, when it's bought to hang above your settee or couch to fit in with the colors of the room. That classic or modern painting on canvas gets another purpose and uses its power somewhere. Following the quote above, one could say that the moment new modern art is produced, it instantly becomes history and loses its actuality.

“Eventually, all art ends up in a museum losing its meaning, turning into a mere decorative painting.” - (Patrick Kirwin)

Decorative painting will never have to compete with actuality. It doesn't have to fulfill any political or fashionable urge. Contemporary art and art movements are a reflection or reaction of and on society in a certain range of time. When time changes, the art is still there unchanged and its' value changes.

“Museums are the graveyards of art.” Bob Dylan

Do we find decorative paintings in museums? Not so much. Obviously, there are specific specialized museums for such. As, for example Trompe l'oeil museums in Belgium and France.

Special exhibitions will shine a light on the specific decorative painting whether that happens in a gallery or museum. Point being: decorative painting is the past. Biblical displays made by well-known painters in the past always possess a high illustrated function. Even the big altar pieces in catholic churches are confirming something that happened in the past. What I want to say merely: museums come in all sorts.



**Nikolai Makarov**



And at some point even the newest art will become old and will represent nothing more than a period in time. It's strange, and maybe personal, but when I see revolutionary art from Dada or Zero in a museum, I still find it new and contemporary. And they never become decorative. A Mark Rothko is always new. Maybe because it looks so bold and unsuspected. When there is a special exhibition in a museum that is about a concept or period of time, or about only one artist; that's when you can comprehend the developments easier. It becomes an educational trip.

Decorative paintings are seldom to be found in galleries or museums. At the Louvre in Paris and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London you'll find special departments and they are complete museums on decorative arts. As they call it. Even panels of Thomas Kershaw are in the staircases of the V&A. And then we're not even mentioning the Versailles Palace in France, Pitti Palace and Uffizi Gallery in Italy or the Neuschwanstein Castle in Germany. They are the epitome of decorative paintings. Think about the works of Tiepolo in Venice and Vienna on the walls. The wall is the canvas. So yes, now and then you'll find decorative paintings in museums. Most often also on the walls as part of the architecture. There it has a supporting role.



Stefano Luca

**“Decorative painting is the package, art is the content.”**

Ornamental works like the one's produced during the Italian Renaissance always mesmerized me because of the content. There is a story or message that is portrayed in the architectural composition. What contents or story does decorative painting have? Will it give us a new understanding of view on society? As long as the decorative painter follows the fashion of interior decorating there will never be a new view on things, except for a view on how trends and fashions change. I am however convinced that decorative painting can be ahead of its time.

An example would be Guiseppe Maria Crespi (1665 - 1747), Giambattista Tiepolo (1696 - 1770) or Andrea Pozzo (1642 - 1709). Their works tell a story with a new view on 'decorative' painting. Drifting away from altar-painting they often used the same techniques but with a different story. The story of



wars or great happenings Kings. In a more freely manner, or with a humorous twist. How about imitating new modern materials in a new concept? Well with that we are again the servant of an environment. The moment pictorial storytelling comes into view, a whole different angle on decorative painting will reach a higher value. One might see it as decorative painting having a supporting role to an environment. As where contemporary art is the main object. Now a new assignment must be that decorative painting becomes the main object with a story or a total concept. When a decorative concept in a room becomes a sort of illustration of a story or an emotion maybe only then the word 'art' is applicable.

Zuber wallpapers come close to this subject. But one might wonder how long the effect lasts. If something is painted in a less

storytelling manner (less symbolism or details) one can longer enjoy it without annoyance. Because nowadays people are not used to decorative painted rooms. It is temporary pleasure and here we come to the crucial point:

**“Temporary pleasure equals decorative painting.”**

Leonardo da Vinci was very outspoken about different art forms. He claimed painting as the highest form of art. After that nothing follows. He put sculpting, music and writing at very low ranks. A writer needs a book to describe a story that a painter will make clear in one painting. He also wrote that music has to be revived constantly. And it disappears. Recorded music could be the solution. But that becomes a representative trick too: as long as you own devices and electricity. Nowadays temporary pleasure is addictive. You must recall and revive it. A decorative painting is a temporary pleasure too. Let me emphasize here that many branches within decorative painting are based on momentarily "shock" (for example scanimation, 3D painting, double vision (Salvador Dali), anamorphisms, illusions, perspective tricks, grisailles and Trompe l'oeil ). They are all frolics for the first instance amazement. .Once you have experienced it, the surprise is over. The cute paintings and displays of Norman Rockwell have a great humor value. They're also illustrative. Nothing wrong with that, it's still an expression of what a painter can do.

**“An artist does not know what he is doing. A decorative painter does.”**

The complete mad artists working out their personal problems on a canvas is an image well known. And to be fair, modern contemporary art most often isn't produced by common people from the street. But... be careful here with judging people. There is no need. Take for instance an important artist from Holland, Jan Schoonhoven. A well-known Zero artist who worked daily at the post office going up and down the stairs of the office, each same day taking the same train. People like Antonio Mancini are true artists who don't know the outcome of a canvas. A real artist might have an idea or 'inspiration' to follow up. To have it evolve on a canvas.



Antonio Mancini

“Between thought and expression.” (Lou Reed)

The idea itself is theory, the execution involves technique, a sparkle and improvisation. The only recipe is in the artist's own developed technique. The decorative painter is trained. And knows how and what. Because conversations with a client about their own projection of what to do are super clear.

How to get there in the end is a result of practice, laws and orders, self-discipline, and persistence. The repetition of work schemes and recipes will help to succeed. References of the desired outcome are crucial. Mind you, many artists from the past (from Rembrandt to Rubens) collected etchings from as many other artists possible.

Nowadays with the Internet and social media one can have a reference library beyond imagination. Which is very handy. If you have to paint curtains on walls, it's just one or two clicks away to have perfect examples to study from. Saying an artist doesn't know what he's doing means more that he is *searching* to express a feeling, emotion, or expression. The decorative painter thinks of a concept and fills it in with the proper images (unless it's all about plain graining or marbling). Decorative painting is mainly technical. Most of the time decorative painting is well detailed and figurative. You can see what it is and it charms everybody. A decorative painter does not always have freedom in what they paint. There is a job, there is a client, and there is a task to perform and a goal to achieve. To do something the client is not able to do. But contemporary art is total freedom without boundaries and an open heart without judgements. Art is the revelation of everything without hiding behind certainties of techniques and craft. It's like life itself: you have to start over each day again. Art has no rules.

“Character of style, design and concepts are boundaries to art.”

This doesn't mean art has no character. Art is character by definition, namely the one of the artist. The number of 'isms' in art are almost uncountable. A few (or many) who paint in a common manner in a certain time have a character or style. Some painters stay there their whole life. The one trick ponies. Some are just there for a



David Kynaston

certain time and use it for their own evolution. But '-isms' are a boundary. A border; a frame within one can find a secure operation field. Decorative painters dwell in these boundaries like actors who just need the script because otherwise they're lost. Simply put: in techniques you want to know where and how to get there. A free artist is not interested in that. When a decorative painter does not follow the rules and laws of a recipe the end result may not be successful. Because quality depends on the craft of the decorative painter. As where an artist has improvisation talent and the ability to create that extra sparkle. A canvas can actually never fail because of the talent of the artist. Artists can adjust and improvise easier in their composition.

There are a lot of copy-paste techniques to sustain your reproductive quality on 20 doors with oak-graining. I like to call it 'drone painting'. It doesn't tell anything about the painter. Yes, it even lacks emotion. Right... but how about a painted ceiling with clouds and figures? Maybe a thin story might come to awareness. But there must be a load of technique.

A good explanation of Brian Eno on art:

"Art is to make original choices. Ideas are the issue, as well as the approach and process. An artist is interested in a kind of experiment, wanting to find. Other ways of approaching and the problem of "How to make decisions" and "How do I arrive at decisions." It is entirely intuitive. What feels right. (Brian Eno 2016 )

Or as Lou Reed put it: "Between thought and expression". So that means the *planning* of a decorative scheme or concept for a room might be the only thing in the process to be art.

Decorative and sign painters have a secure, technical panorama. Decorative painters are to be the well-behaved civilians of the arts. Anybody can achieve quite a good level of decorative painting. That is also due to the reproductive character of the craft. When your concept contains a story, a mystery or even a classical theme and it is well thought out and original, then we might call it art. But when the execution and production is of low standard, then it fails anyway.

"You cannot plan, deal or order Art."

It's evident here that decorative painting isn't art. Because decorative painting really must be planned. And a client wants to know when it starts and where it ends. Only when all criteria are right, will they place the order. There is an important Rembrandt quote:

"The painting is ready only when the painter says so"

Funny thing is that guys like Rembrandt or Rubens were working by contract. You could order a Rembrandt. Can you imagine that? These orders were portraits or Bible sequences. A lot of craft came



Egon Schiele

with that. Rembrandt was a master. He did a portrait with an art-twist. With a hidden message and with a technique never seen before. Anyhow, a free modern artist paints what he or she wants and the client can choose anything that is available in his or her collection.

“Art is like a religion it tells you about its maker.”

The character and personality of an artist is always very present in the picture. The chosen subject and the signature style reveal the maker. I can show a Klimt drawing and it's very clear and obvious it's him. That should not be the case with decorative painting. A typical signature style in marbling or even a grisaille should not be important, should be avoided even. Imitations (and that concludes everything in decorative painting!) should be *just* that: imitations of real stuff.

Then slowly artists started to write about art to explain their paintings and movements in the context of clubs they did belong to. Let us foremost consider Andre Breton and his book on Dada and Surrealism. Explaining in writing how to achieve decorative painting or art has become a new trade. At least 95% of the people in art business nowadays are not.

The laws and rules within decorative painting are about technical skills and the right materials to reach a satisfying result. Now, writing down essential rules for making art is so random and difficult. Contemporary modern art is very personal. Where decorative art is more general and about imitation. Art should never imitate but *sublimate*. Art should be different and surprise people. It contains a different meaning. Art should be revolting because safe art doesn't exist.

**“Decorative painting is a dildo, art is throbbing dick”**

I know this sounds unfriendly. A harsh quote. But it tells you instantly that decorative painting hides behind imagination. Imitation can never be art because it is not original. Imitation is artificial.

"Real modern art must deal with an unsuspected choice" Brian Eno

Art says: make a difference. Art must be about making a solution to the question of creating. To create something never seen before.

“Art is allowed to fail”

Suppose you have a hundred references for a new painting and you're going to choose three of them to make a painting or mural. The real artist in the end even throws the three references away. Or starts even without that. In order to do something else, to take a chance and take that risk. Decorative painting is most often without risk. The decorative painter will say: "Is this what you wanted, do you like it?" But the artist will not ask such a thing. Doesn't accept anybody's influence. The artists' reply to anyone questioning their art will say: " .....ooooo.....piss off"

“Art cannot be learnt, only guided at most”

Decorative painting must be taught. There are laws, rules, techniques, and studies. The craft is enormous and complex. A contemporary artist will run away after a few hours practicing a marble imitation because it is a very intricate that repeats and repeats. Something one must learn with persistent self-discipline. A trait of character most contemporary artists don't have. As a decorative painter you paint what is successful. The goal: satisfaction by visitors or clients. If you stick with that, you are not free, and it becomes a fraud. Unless you leave your plan then art is will do something else for you. Take a chance, take that risk. One must be careful not to become that one trick pony. The more versatile you are the better chance for survival. Decorative painting is limited freedom. Art is totally free. Art is one-on-one. As opposed to art; decorative painting is universal and for everybody. Most people will find decorative paintings 'beautiful'.

## Conceptual decorative painting



Coming now to conceptual decorative painting: decorative painting is the (historical) writer's official language that has its origin way back in prehistoric times. Scriptures and lettering eventually changed thanks to decorative painters, and developed into conceptual themed rooms, which were very common during the Baroque and Renaissance times. And for the clever ones: the idea of a fully painted room can be applied to modern concepts as well. Well known are children's rooms decorated in any Disney or fantasy surroundings. But a certain fashion or art form is also easy to use. The main goal is to enhance your feeling in a room.

Most people will apply a nice repetitive wallpaper or uniform color latex paint, which is just a poor way to do something with walls. I know not all people can afford a decorative painter, but fact is that architects and interior 'designers' are making it a big thing to choose something from a wallpaper sample book or a color number from color samples. The evolution of wallpaper is evident and becomes smarter still, due to modern printing possibilities.



Originally, these backdrops come from small painted panoramas in museums, behind a display of stuffed animals. Backdrops were very popular in the beginnings of portrait photography. Backdrops are decorative paintings for sure. With

photography it became possible to print backdrops on large scale paper. Nowadays the developments are absolutely fantastic: forests, landscapes – anything you want is available as a décor in a room.

Prints of antique walls from palazzos, castles or even blown-up Rembrandts. They even print old documents of Zuber and Dufour... you name it. Is such a development a hazard to the decorative painter? I don't think so, because it cannot be a competition to begin with. It's like comparing apples to eggs. Look at a painted panorama or wall again and again and you will find new details every time. Shading, blending, pure colors – they will always stand out and technically last.

Now, for the decorative painters afraid of the 'wallpaper competition' reading this: there is enough for everyone. Relax. See photographic wallpapers as yet another inspiration to steal some really original ideas from. Because you know what, they stole from us to start with. Let's steal back. Some of these modern backdrops used for weddings and baby showers or sweet sixteen parties are really wild and too good to ignore.

### **Photography and decorative painting**

“The individuality of the artist cannot show itself in a photograph” – P.H.Emerson

Photography is not art. Photography is *useful* as documentation. A reference, if you wish. Nothing more than a catalysator between source and end goal. Using photography for painting and sketching is a *tool*. Like Vermeer and many other painters did: they used photography to help them paint. It even clearly shows that a photograph has been used in a painting. But that's ok as long the painter did something with it. Like changing composition, color and form. Consider this that the success of a photograph depends on a second. The photographer cannot change the moment of luck as where a painter is in fact always successful. Adjusting a painting can take weeks – years. A photographer can never show any emotion or thrill of himself. It is machinery and too much depending on a technical apparatus. Let alone the photoshopped alterations and enhancing of a photograph. It is the lowest form of art.

Practicing one of the highest forms of art, though, are painters who create hyper-realistic images. Take Gottfried Hellwein as an example, who creates large scale photographic realistic paintings on shocking, often political, topics. His skills are technically very high. Another high skilled painter/ airbrusher is Dru Blair. He also adjusts an original photograph. Both painters are a leap ahead of photographers. Their displays live .... and astound each time again and again.



**Dru Blair**

Then there are photographers that imitate painters. The moment photography became really popular Alfred Stieglitz started a magazine and formed the group 'Camera Works 291'. Their half-tone dreamscapes of daily life were very painterly. Those photographs were 'printed' on special paper and retouched. Let us not forget the invention of color photography (by Maxwell and the Lumiere Brothers). These pictures are now called Autochrome and will charm you all the way by the pictorial, soft quality. It was a new way to compete with painters. But for us decorative painters, photography is a reference, maybe a document. We know our end- goal and seek technical solutions to get there. Just like a photo-realistic painter, or any 'realistic painter'.

"Art should be magic and not entertaining" – R.G.Collingwood

I couldn't agree more. Decorative painting is a craft that results in entertaining. As put earlier: decorative works entertain the client's own character and taste. Does it create magic?

I don't think so. When you compare a white plastered wall with one that has a panorama painted on it... yes something 'magical' has happened. An entertaining kind of magic. For a certain amount of time. Every time one enters the room again, a bit of that magic will vanish. The power of art is that the magic stays.



## **The Golden Rule**

There are two ways of explaining The Golden Rule.

The first is the principle of treating others as one wants to be treated. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. In other words: mirror yourself. And a mirror is a repetition. Repetition becomes a form of recognition. Have you ever noticed how people tend to fall in love with someone who resembles them physically? Or how some dog owners look like their dogs? People fall in love with themselves and seek this in their partner, be it human or animal.

Both decorative painters and artists want to connect with people. In that sense Bob Ross was very clever about painters and people who paint (there is a difference!).

Painters are nice people. We are all family, seeking our own family.

"Open your eyes" – Bob Ross

Poor Bob has been ridiculed by contemporary artists. What he did accomplish though, was to get people painting and get them in action. It was unbelievable to see Central Park in New York packed with amateur painters and have him walking around stimulating and encouraging. He could mix with everybody. He opened eyes. For everybody and not just a small elite clique or circle of people.

"I am lucky I don't have to work but sit and paint all day." - Bob Ross

In a big sense Bob Ross was the ultimate decorative painter. Nice happy fluffy clouds. I salute you Bob Ross!

"Decorative painting is for everybody. Art is one on one."



For the second explanation of The Golden Rule, we look at Fibonacci, also known as Leonardo of Pisa. He was considered "the most talented Western mathematician of the Middle Ages" and introduced us to the sequence of Fibonacci numbers. It goes like this:

$$1 + 1 = 2$$

$$2 + 1 = 3$$

$$3 + 2 = 5$$

$$5 + 3 = 8$$

$$8 + 5 = 13$$

Etc.

And here is a surprise. When we take any two successive Fibonacci Numbers, their ratio is very close to the Golden Ratio " $\phi$ " which is approximately 1,618034.

In fact, the bigger the pair of Fibonacci Numbers, the closer the approximation.

$$3 / 2 = 1,5$$

$$5 / 3 = 1,666$$

$$8 / 5 = 1,6$$

$$13 / 8 = 1,625$$

Etc.

Using this ratio, this Golden Rule, in art is about finding the perfect balance. Regular formats, measures, soft tones and structures will please a lot of people. But pleasing an audience is not art. Illustrators and advertisers are very aware that the attention of the public requires mostly human topics and emotions. Humor, religion, erotica, anxiety, fear, despair, safety and happiness are excellent topics to sell anything. For a painter this might be a keystone as well. Another trick in painting is to always use all colors, one way or the other. You might have a main color scheme in a painting, but one can insert other colors as an accent. Successful images depend on the public or client's taste and the times we are living in. What we are trying to sell them is the Secret of the Universe.

## **Glitters**

As soon as you add tricks and glitters, short amazements, stories and legends into a painting, be sure that you are leaving the path of art. The more general a painting becomes, the more decorative look it gets.

"Glitters are the lice for the arts."

The conclusion is that an art painting on its own on a wall of the gallery won't sell itself. It's the owner of the gallery that welcomes you or calls you. Firstly you will be told what you are about to see (building a right expectation). Then you will be presented to the work. And then you will have a lecture on what you saw as if he was fighting bees (as once cleverly described by Austin Kleon).

These glitters might sell the work. Whether that is a Renaissance Italian ornament or a Mark Rothko. The seller will have more trouble with the Rothko than with the ornament. The main reason for that is obvious. A decorative painter must be compared to a magician, creating moments of pleasure and enjoyment. Decorative painting is about pleasing others. Art comes from pain and is about pleasing oneself. Art is random and stupendous. Decorative painting is always nice. Nice sells. In art one must differ from the norm. In decorative painting one must follow the norm. Therefore, decorative painting is a craft. And you must have a plan to execute any craft.



This doesn't mean that the artist will not have a plan. But surely will own references and a notebook full of ideas. Which might be altered or forgotten or ignored whilst working. Like Picasso, the artist starts with an idea and then it becomes something else. Improvising seems to be the keyword here. And yes, the decorative painter *does* and *has* to improvise as well. Mostly on technical level and to solve technical problems. Not even to think about the client who will be there doing the criticizing and commenting. There are quite enough differences between artists and decorative painters. I feel that the mindset between the two is obvious. I dare say even that the more autistic, the safer the art. I acknowledge the fact that there are artists with autism. I am not a psychologist, but I do know that a form of Asperger's is typical for decorative painters.

They own a form of single-minded approach to painting. Having said that:

artists that make paintings in the same style their whole life are also single-minded one trick ponies. But you know what?

“Doing things is more important than being able to do them well.” - A. Corbijn

The game is called: Do it. Keep busy, draw and paint and make beautiful mistakes. The artist will even use mistakes. The decorative painter will keep practicing doing things well. Being slave to the detail. Decorative painting is all about detailing and the perfection of it. Three things that will separate an artist from a decorative painter:

- Detachment: an artist wants to make something that raises above reality;
- Unveiling: the artist wants to make something visible that has been covered because of reasons of taste
- Disguise: the artist wants to create a mystery and a secret to cover it up.

## Commercial aspect

Then there is the tax man and the government. It will be different in each country, and you can easily find the regulations of the government on art. It's not about "beautiful or ugly". It's about money and how it will be taxed. To be an artist you got to be part of a local or national arts circle. You must exhibit a few times in a year. You must sell the artwork yourself, so not from the possession of an art dealer. And the object or painting must be original. Only then a low rate tax is applicable.

Objects for usage, like furniture or jewelry are high rate tax. Even murals and ceiling paintings are high tax. But that's the government who want their part of the deal. Both artists and decorative painters are the ones that produce. The ones that went through ordeals to get from A to B up to Z and start over again. When selling your painting you must know your viewer. Tell stories and convictions about yourself and the desired object. A pleasant talk, with humor, does way more than a small description next to a painting. Be informal and personal. Start always with something you have in common. The simple things in life, non-political news, family and other light conversation topics. Because the brains from clients will block formal conversations. That's how you'll approach someone's heart and desires. You need to know these things to deepen any conversation. If you want interest people in what you do, you must explain to them what they see or want.

To charm and excite people, you need to exaggerate a bit. Give them the "You-show". Tell people the whys, the hows and the inspirations. In other words: use your ability to fascinate and create emotion. Get into their skin and be a temporary actor without lying to or losing yourself. Stay confident about your work, art and knowledge.

## Artists who decorate

So basically, decorative painting has a significant role in interior architecture and most certainly also exterior. Now I ask: can a decorative painter be an artist in the sense of a contemporary modern artist? Can they be both? I know modern artists who do fantastic marbling. However, imitation is a step back for an artist. We may consider it as recreating forms and structures. The modern artist has to follow rules and laws. This is just not what the artist is used to. To follow a work schedule or recipe.

But mind you that the best canvas artists were fantastic in painting marbles, woods, ivory and more (take Lawrence Alma-Tadema for instance). Decorative painters being modern artists as well is a different story. The decorative painter must own a different drive, a different mindset compared to the artist. Because they are used to copy and will always seek handy references to repaint. But the decorative painter should show their inner emotions. Just another mindset. The copy paste motto signifies the



Jeremy Mann



Zin Lim

decorative painter. Even copying behavior and personality and style. A decorative painter can be compared to actors who copy a personality and make it trustworthy. A modern artist possesses the original personality.

“I work for pleasure and myself, not for a client.” -

“Decorative painting is done with the hands and logical mind. Art is done with the heart.”

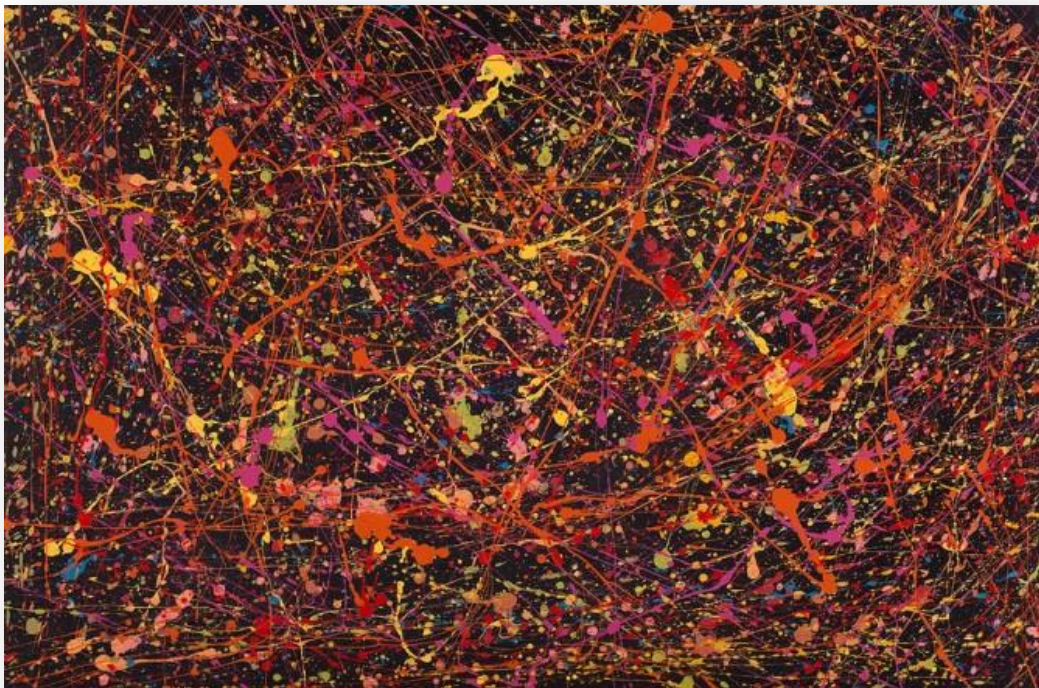
I don't mean to say that a decorative painter doesn't put their heart and soul into the painting. They do. And it surely becomes a journey just as it is for any artist. But evidently it's a different struggle. The fight on a canvas painting (art) becomes a personal quest to express an emotion or concept, where the viewer or public will read the message.

“My only goal with a painting is to show the viewer how beautiful the scene was.” - William Turner

“Art has to change the original plan. Because when it is planned it is boring.” - F. Mercury

## Teaching

One can teach decorative painting because it is defined by techniques and rules. One could even say this also applies to art: the existence of academies says enough. *But* the discipline of the teacher in an art academy is to *accompany* the student on their path. The art student will be *led* to examine their own personal goal in painting.



Jackson Pollock

By the way

Teaching isn't equal to progression.

No professional teacher on decorative painting or art will be able to develop progression in their personal painting life, unless that teacher will be painting after school hours as well. It is said that when you cannot make it as a professional decorative painter or artist, you can always become a teacher.

When you say that you are a teacher is a safe excuse. People will be careful to make a comment on your work. To prevent those comments the biggest artists proclaimed that they were just starting amateurs. This is way safer also. It is often better to excel in one particular area of art or decorative painting. The decorative panorama is so wide that being a master in all fields is just sheerly impossible. Therefore, it is safe to say that you are an amateur. You will get compliments easier this way.

## Safe art

“What kind of boring can I come up with that everybody likes?”

This quote proofs to me that safe art is no art. Decorative painting is the safe way to enlighten any environment. It is recognizable and has a soothing, relaxing effect. It should not shock you. Any art that most people like will become boring. It loses any meaning in time.

“Healthy people with regular lives don't make stupid stuff”

Except for Jan Schoonhoven. The post-office worker who came up with sensational new art. It's certainly true that only a few artists can only produce when they live a regular live. To have a regular daily program creates discipline. Start early in the morning and produce. No time to wait for inspirations.

“Periods and series are a hiding place.”

When an artist goes from one period to another we see them developing. It's a next stage in their style, meaning that the style is evolving. Together with the character of painting and personality of the artist. But it should not be a hiding place. “I am having a blue period,” one often hears. As a sort of ridiculous state of being. But any artist should grow fluently into the next new thing. As where the decorative painter might have months, years of imitating marbles. And that may only become technically improved.

The only new thing to do will be something those decorative painters has never done before, like ornamental works. To switch from a certain technique to another.

So, switching to another form of decorative painting just means a different study of a different area. More practicing. The artist on the other hand is in search of renewing themselves. Decorative painters that do go into art and canvas paintings will have to invest time studying new and old artists. And to free themselves from the theories they learned as a decorative painter, to find their own style.



Jan Schoonhoven

Once I was advised to work in series. That was a good advice. I could develop a theme in all its appearances and possibilities. So, if your interest goes out to seascape paintings, make a series of more of less ten paintings on that topic. Then shift to another series. It is in fact the same actor role that decorative painters take when working for a client. Except you work for yourself. Doing a series of paintings is a safe harbor where we don't lose ourselves. But it is not what a *real* artist will do. Working in series is examining all possibilities of that one theme you chose as a central role.

With series you can change the subject each time. Which is in fact typical for decorative painting. So do series and produce paintings of the same kind. Choose a concept. And now you are going into a niche of mythological, horror, illustrations, legends, history of biblical displays. Whatever.

And hopefully the decorative painter will find their own style. But it will be difficult to become free of everything that has been learned in the past.

“Art is to derive from the norm.”



### **Finally, the end!**

I can go on with quotes and other wisdom to compare the differences between art and decorative painting. And surely, I am not the only one on this subject. Like others I have been collecting quotes for so long and trying to make sense of them by comparison.

Some writers about art are really on spot of things. Austin Kleon and Andy Warhol came up with straight answers to what art is. Obviously the meaning of art changes all the time. New art becomes old art becomes decorative painting. Very rarely it is the opposite.

However, I worship decorative painters. Especially the "all-round" ones. Because the discipline and craftsmanship are their highest goal. The joy of painting is #1. The deceptive illusions decorative painters can create are always a joy. Seeing and experiencing conceptual decorative painting in a room or environment is so overwhelming! The all-around 360 degrees painted rooms with ceiling are a marvel. Especially in certain Italian palazzos and castles and palaces in France and Germany. There is no machine that can create such. No wallpaper, neither photographs.

Yes, there are modern contemporary artists that paint all-around rooms as well. And to me it is a weird, disturbing experience. The personality of the modern artist becomes strong in presence. Here the ball misses the goal. An artist will not make a decor for the room, the room instead is a canvas for expressing his character.



**Gustave Courbet**

I do hope that the thin line between decorative painting and art is more clear now.

And I hope you don't agree!!!!

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Corrections by L.Olsson

