1. Technical Exercises

Goal:
to reacquaint you with the activity of painting and to briefly expose you to several new technical approaches to painting. Specifically: wipe-out, glazing, impasto, and block painting.

Wipe-out- Essentially a thin value painting that gives you a value structure over which you can glaze with color. You need a smooth, gessoed board. Your composition is roughly painted in flat tones of a single color- warm brown. Then with rags, brushes, q-tips, etc. the light and the whites are created by wiping away the excess wet paint.

Glazing- A classic “old master” technique that involves laying one sheer color over another; the effect is much like creating a painting out of colored sheets of acetate. Transparent colors lend themselves to glazing; opaque colors, like the cadmiums, can not be made transparent. Glazing allows for painted light to show through color. You start with an underpainting that is light in tone so that there is room for paint to darken the layers of colors. Usually this monochromatic (value) painting is known as grisaille. Glazing colors are thinned out with medium and applied from lighter to darker in subsequent layers. Each layer must be dry before the next is applied.

Impasto -This is the term for painterly texture in painting. One builds up a heavy surface to the paint, giving the painting a tactile quality and making it more of an object and less dedicated to pure two-dimensional illusion. Working with a textured ground creates an immediate surface that catches and holds color. Initially concentrating on layering areas of different color over one another is very effective since bits of color will start to show through at various layers. Using a palette knife to create strong textures, particularly later in the painting, helps enhance surface appeal. Again, emphasis on value changes that are strong and broad will help establish form. Any “fussy” detail will only be lost in the texture.

Block painting- color, volume and planar changes are all indicated by a myriad of color patches. You are probably familiar with the “block” painting method if you have seen Cezanne’s paintings. You will start your block painting with broad, simple strokes of different color/value, and then proceed with smaller and more complex break down of
Technical exercises continued.

areas into strokes of different color and value. The big difference is that you are not mixing wet-into-wet. Instead, you make decisions about how to break an area down into color/value changes and then you mix the colors on the palette and apply to the canvas. The effect is chunkier—more like a mosaic. Round objects will look more like they are carved out of color since you will avoid blending down to intermediate tones between colors.

We will do a series of exercises where you try your hand at all these techniques. You will work from life for the subject matter of these paintings. You will need to set up a simple, single object still-life. Because we will be working quickly, we will work on small panels. This eliminates (unfortunately) much manipulation of scale and spatial relationships within the paintings. However, as with all paintings involving imagery, light—how it operates across and around forms, how it is absorbed and reflected by the surface, and the overall mood and quality it establishes—is key. Therefore, success of these paintings is dependent on your choosing an object over which light and space moves in an interesting way (i.e. no teeny-tiny things; no objects so broken up that they neutralize light.) And, success depends on your setting up an effective lighting arrangement. Your best bet is to find a good balance between simplicity and complexity. Take your time to make a good set-up. If you go on in any design field--graphics, architecture, professional photography, commercial art and advertising, filmmaking, etc-- you will use the same skills and aesthetic eye necessary to create a good set-up. Start practicing now!!

A final word of advice:
All these paintings require you build your paintings up in terms of broad color/value changes. Details are only added at the very end of the painting. Look for the broad, underlying structure. This is the key to all visual work, whether it is fine art, commercial, graphic, etc.