



### JANUARY 2020 – STUDYING COMPOSITION: Armatures: The cruciform



#### IMPORTANT STUFF

**Let's keep it simple.** The nice thing about art is that the details can keep you learning for the rest of your life. How exciting is that! But, for now, we are keeping it simple. Your entries can be simple, or museum quality works of art. **Just concentrate on the single design principle we are proposing this month.**

We have studied most of the “Elements and Principles of Art” and are now ready to use them, along with “Armatures,” also known as “Compositional Schemes.” (Mark Mehaffey<sup>1</sup> calls it a “Scaffold.” to create paintings that will appear pleasing to viewers, without their actually knowing why.<sup>2</sup>

**Armatures help create the path of the eye through the painting, drawing the eye through the MAJOR VALUE SHAPES.**

But, what to do first?

- Study the Armature of the month. There are 8, possibly 9. (If there are additional tips, try to use them also.)
- Think of (or find) a subject that would fit this Armature well.
- Decide what size and shape your canvas will be<sup>3</sup>:
  - Large – majestic, awe-inspiring, impressive, expansive
  - Medium – comfortable, adaptable
  - Small – intimate, delicate, modest, quiet
  - Square—solid, strong, straight forward, formal, rigid, direct
  - Strong Vertical—dramatic, exaggerated, powerful might, dignified, proud
  - Strong Horizontal—dramatic, exaggerated, precarious, reclining, restful, panoramic
- Determine where your center of interest will be. If there are horizontal or vertical lines, be sure they do not dissect the painting in half.
- Do a thumbnail. (yes...sorry...a small sketch. Especially when painting with watercolor. Once done, you can breeze through your painting.)
- **IMPORTANT!** In your thumbnail, identify 3 or 4 values, and mass the shapes together to get some interesting patterns, some intersecting shapes, etc.

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1. “Visual Layers in Blue,” on Yupo Mark Mehaffey,  
2. “Bill James Masterclass,” International Artist Magazine, Bill James  
3. “Painting Better Landscapes,” Margaret Kessler, pg. 30-31  
4. “Mastering Composition” Ian Roberts, pg. 26



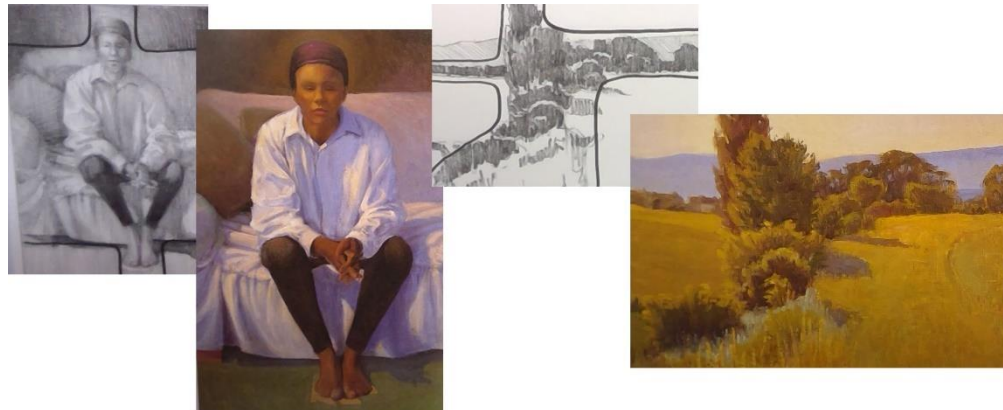
## ART CHALLENGE 2020

### THE CRUCIFORM

A cruciform is just what it sounds like...a cross. Anyone who has taken a class from Jennifer Stone ([jstone@wat.midco.net](mailto:jstone@wat.midco.net)) knows this shape well. It is great for abstract work. Square canvases (paper) work great for this design. Notice the lines reach out to the edge of the paper. This is Jennifer's submission for the October\_2019 Art Challenge.



The following are examples as to how you can use the cruciform in representational art. Don't forget to pay attention to the shapes of the negative spaces in the corners!<sup>4</sup>



So, give it a try. I can't wait to see what happens.

Cheers,

Barbara Sparks

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