

Artist believes practical approach is best

by SCOTT NEWTON

Roger Cooke has taken some art classes that he didn't get a lot out of.

That may explain his insistence that the workshop he offers in May provide instruction that can be applied immediately, even commercially.

"I guess the reason I have a more practical approach than a lot of teachers is because I'm making a living at it. That makes a big difference."

He said that for every artist making a living from his work, there's probably another 3,000 to 4,000, or more, who would like to.

"I have known students who have graduated with a four-year degree in art and they can't paint, and they're not good enough to make it in the commercial aspect. Yet they've been led to believe that

with all this good teaching they're getting they're going to have the world by the tail. (that they'll go out there and have a fantastic living. It's really sad."

Four areas will be covered, one each day of the workshop, which will be May 25-28. They include drawing, composition, color and lighting.

The goal for Cooke is to teach the basics, which can then be applied to oil painting, drawing, water color or etching.

Other experienced artists are expected to participate, and one can often learn from the others in attendance at such a workshop, he pointed out.

"I enjoy teaching," he added. "I enjoy seeing people get turned on to art, and develop an ability to where they can enjoy it."

Cooke described his own style as "a combination of traditional pain-

ting and impressionism."

He's a realist in that he paints the subject in detail, but an impressionist in that he doesn't put in every twig on a tree that's off in a distance.

"That's basically how your eye sees something. When you look at something you focus in on a certain thing and everything else is sort of blurred out," he said.

"I use my oils in a combination of thin washes and opaque painting, so I get the flexibility and the spontaneity of a water color and yet I still have the control of an oil paint."

Although Cooke is not the only one using this technique, he developed it on his own, and it took several years.

"It's worked out quite well," he said.

His paintings sell for \$1,000 to \$10,000, depending on size and quality. He also does drawings, a combination of pencil and pastel, which sell for \$85 to \$300.

Although he does a few landscapes, he prefers to have people in his paintings, and often the subjects include Indians native to Oregon.

He's also been doing historical paintings of Oregon.

"I think it's more interesting if there's something going on," he said, something to draw people into the painting.

He jokes about his "misspent youth," some of which he spent working for the Forest Service.

At one time he wanted to study forestry, but later changed his mind. "It's a nice occupation," he said, "but I saw a little too much politicking going on."

He grew up in the Beaverton area, and first moved to the Marmot area at 19. Five or six years out of high school he enrolled at Portland State University, and spent two years there.

After that he attended the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles, and more or less started over, as the Art Center wouldn't accept any of his credits from PSU.

About living in L.A., he said, "After living up here, it was a bit of a nightmare."

He spent five years after graduation at an art studio in Indianapolis, doing advertising and editorial illustrations.

He then moved to Portland, and did freelance work. During that time he taught at the museum art school, which is affiliated with the Portland Art Museum.

He was getting work from an agent in New York, and it appeared that there was an opportunity for making a good living.

Then he got in contact with the owner of the Husberg Fine Arts Gallery in Sedona, Ariz.

"The gallery owner told me that I'd be crazy to keep on illustrating when I can paint the way I do. So, I

more or less agreed with him."

Cooke has been selling through the Husberg Gallery for eight years now, and is pleased with how it's going.

Working as a painter, instead of, say, a commercial illustrator, gives him some freedom from deadlines, as well as other restrictions.

And, it may allow him more time with his wife, Edna, and his three children, who are Lance, 10, Stephanie, 3, and Brady, 2.

"Usually I get in the mood of a painting at the beginning, and I stay with it until it's over, and that's very important," Cooke said.

One doesn't have to be excited about a painting to do a good job on

it, he said, but it helps.

"I try to have a balance in my life between the mental, physical and spiritual.

"Now painting is primarily a mental exercise, and if that's all I did I'd be climbing the walls after 10 hours.

"So I have to get out and do something physical, work in the yard or go fishing or something like that (the Cookes live in a house on the Sandy River in the Marmot area).

"I can't paint as well if I don't get a certain amount of exercise during the day.

"And then we also have the spiritual side of our life, with our church, which I feel is important in maintaining stability and painting well."



Roger and Edna Cooke



This painting by Roger Cooke depicts the Sandy River as it looked in 1957. The home in which the Cookes live is near this site.

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