



Path To Limestone Canyon

Creating new work in water soluble wax: the process and conceptual background

By Erik Tiemens



Gouache with digital painting comp

A



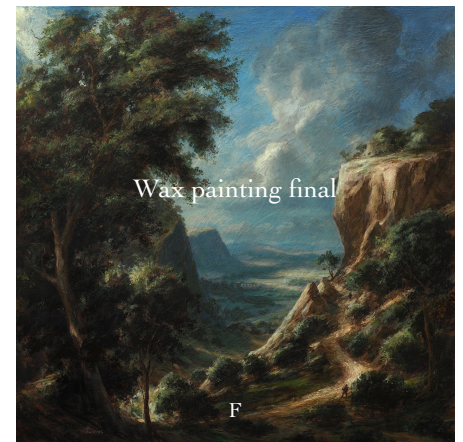
Tonal underpainting painting in oils

B



Wax block-in painting

C



The above images layout the basic process of creating the 18" x 18" painting on wood panel painting "Path To Limestone Canyon".

It has been a rewarding journey in crafting this painting inspired by past masters from Italy, the UK and the Netherlands, along with American painters from the 19th century (Thomas Cole and other Hudson Valley painters). I'm keenly interested in finding a synthesis from the past that blends imaginative landscapes with our California environment.

I love sketching on location and absorbing the smells and sounds of the outdoors. The practice of drawing from life also plays a role from working from your imagination in the studio. My interest in art history is a great key to understanding various time periods with their upheavals and visual innovations. "The Path To Limestone Canyon" is pure invention. It started with a small monochromatic gouache painting on paper. I scanned this and worked with digital color layers over the original to see how this could work. I later squared the picture and sketched out the composition onto canvas with a brush. As I worked up the block-in with warm earth tones using water miscible oils I introduced titanium white. Unfortunately for an underpainting, it contained safflower oil which took more than 3 weeks to dry, but still remained tacky. Usually I use traditional oils but was interested in using a solvent free solution. I did some searching and came across Ceracolors from Natural Pigments. They are an art business focused on historically accurate pigments and vehicles. I have used their Rublev Colours Artists Oil paint line for past works at the Holton Studio Gallery. I took the leap and started some studies on wood panels and others on thick paper. Being familiar with gouache, I found I was right at home with this new medium that I have never tried before. The waterborne wax paints can be thinned with water and dries very fast. They can also be cured by heat thus making them hold up to glazes without the underpainting lifting up too easily. I was able to paint normally but had almost no wait times for drying on the wood panel surface. I coated the panel with several layers of an absorbent gesso. This was then given an earth tone ground color which made for an inviting surface to start the underpainting. The abandoned oil painting on canvas I started with was like a warm-up. I transferred the design again using the same square composition. I found that with each layer I could take a somewhat soft brush and work the surface of the dried painting to a beautiful low luster wax shine. Layers were built up with fluid or gel wax mediums mixed with the tube colors. The painting took on more depth and character in the patina that was forming. In the final layers, the creation of details revealed the strength of this new medium. I experimented with scratching back into it, like a reductive etching process where you can reinstate forms scraping back into the lighter ground with a metal point. When I added figures to the painting, I easily edited them and refined to a much greater level of detail than with normal small brushwork, and anything revealed in the underpainting could be readjusted with additional glazes and direct painting. As the works are very stable and historically traditional encaustics can last for centuries, these will hold up with protective glass glazing for a very long time- a perfect archival solution with plenty of room to explore new techniques. The recent paintings really should be seen in person in order to appreciate the depth and nuance of the textures created with these new wax based pigments.