Bringing Forth A World

Axioms of Subcreation
by Daniel Mirante

V.01

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Painting by Joseph Gandy
Axiom 1

Where is the light coming from?
“Let There Be Light”
Light is visual form.

Everything in this world is seen through Light.

By asking ourselves about the source of light, we begin to move closer to 'subcreation'.
Questions

Does the Sun shine from the top of the piece, the far right, far outside of the canvas itself. Is the sun setting? Has it set completely? Is the moon shining?

Or is there a candle or a fire? Or is the piece self illumined from within?

Is the source of light - as in some Van Eyck paintings - coming from the direction of the viewer, bathing the whole scene in the illumination of the viewers gaze?

Is the Light a metaphor for Awareness? Gnosis?
Underpainting- The Study of Light

Because the underpainting is monochromatic, we get to focus on the poetry and logic (psyche and techne) of light to describe not only form but energetics.
Théodore Géricault - 
Satyr and Nymph, 1817
Artists study sculpture, because they can focus almost entirely on the play of value (light - midtone - dark)
The Logic of Light

We see because of directional lighting, and many of the forms and structures we perceive, we gain additional information through the play of cast shadows. Cast shadows allow the painter to describe additional dimensions of an object or subject represented, but one must have defined the light source.

This appreciation of the logic of light, is what gives something imagined its definition, and solidifies the substance of what is created, allowing it to exist within the laws of light, even if it is a fantastical creation in itself.
The Play of Light

Light is so dynamic in its nature; reflecting, bouncing, scattering, splitting, that it is experienced as a wonderous play of appearences, revealing a world of infinite complexity.

Therefore the artists study of light also accommodates what we could call the 'play' of light, not only the 'logic'. This could also be called the mood, the poetry, the expressiveness of Light.
The 'play of light': the artist is not merely a copier of optical representation, but a poet of Light. After all, art may describe not just 'vision' but total awareness.

Here Rembrandt both describes the light on the subject but also manages to convey a sumptuous numinous dimension of light through energy, interpretation, shape and brushwork.
'Self-Luminous' Forms

Forms exhibiting an unusual or internal source of light, similar to the way certain crystals channel light like a fibre-optic.

Painting by Robert Venosa
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Painting by Ernst Fuchs
Axiom 2
Atmospheric Depth
The 'atmosphere' in our world is not empty vacuum but filled with gas, water vapour, dust, pollen, etc.

It reacts with light and depending on conditions, can 'veil' the landscape so that things at distance 'merge' with the atmosphere.

An extreme example is a foggy day when the landscape vanishes into mist.

Contrast, edge definition, detail, values, are aspects the painter can consider to emulate 'atmospheric perspective'.
The space in this world we inhabit is filled with a mixture of gases that result in things at distance being perceived more bluish. When one is up a mountain looking across a valley to an opposite mountain, one can sense the blue of the sky filling the space, like a substance with volume. The general perceptual rule is that things closer to us have more red and yellow in their balance, they are warmer, and as things recede they become cooler.
Not only do they become bluish and cooler as they recede, they lose detail, and they lose contrast, and become fuzzy.

Objects further from us contain the highest pitch of highlights and the deepest shadows - objects closest to us are warmer, sharper and have more contrast.
Fairies on the seashore – engraving by William Miller after Francis Danby
Aleksey Savrasov, Lell
We work with a mop or dry hogbrush to create more blending and softening in our background, and use more delination and solidity in our foreground.
Axiom 3

Temperature
(foreground-background temperature contrast)

Painting: John Martin
Exploring this general guide as a painter may mean that we distinguish which pigments we use, and use different pigments between foreground and background, we keep the warms more forefront and reserve our cools for the space of expanse.

After all, a strong red, white or gold is most likely to catch the eye to a focal subject
This principle also works inverted, during the setting and rising sun, or where we witness a sundrenched scene from a viewpoint of cool shadow.
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John Martin, using his skill of ‘light before dark before light’ with ‘warm before cool before warm’
Another example, in this egg tempera by Vitiaco, temperature is to distinguish between different realms of day and night occupying the same painting. So these axioms are useful in the process of upholding a 'fantastic' subcreation, whilst sustaining a 'conviction of reality'
Nicola Samori
This principle is so fundamental it is even used in the highly stylised abstracted art of Buddhist art and tantric diagrams.
Axiom 4
Silhouette Shape
The species of a tree can be identified by silhouette of whole tree or even leaf, silhouette holds that much information.
In terms of painting plants, this principle is very helpful as it is efficient. Following the axiom of 'general to specific', the tree can be described mainly in blocked in silhouette form, with dapples of leaves being described in 'borderline areas' or where the tree catches light.
Considerations of the power of silhouette shape need not be confined to vegetation but any form.

Anything can be described by strong attention to silhouette and edge.
Silhouette forms allow opportunity for ‘nested compositions’
Axiom 5

Scale Cues
The size and scale of shapes or objects play an important role in creating the illusion of spatial depth. A shape motif repeated at different sizes informs our understanding of scale.
This principle applies as much to the concrete as the abstract
Some examples of axioms in concert
Axiom 6

Light Before Dark Dark
Before Light
Light Before Dark Dark Dark Before Light

One way to organise complex layered compositions is to explore the *dark-before-light, light-before-dark* rule.

This rule allows for distinction of layers, of foregrounds and background in a composition, much the way layers of a stage set may be designed to distinguish themselves from each other.

If the composition reads, iconographically from a distance due to these distinctions, it is then possible to pursue detail whilst keeping iconographic boldness, that will allow a painting to be appreciated from afar or in very small scale, whilst rewarding closer attention and exploration.
'General to Specific'

So the guide-rule is fractal, creating a general the 'dark-before-light, light-before-dark' iconographical logic, and within those zones, creating further 'dark-before-light, light-before-dark' layerings, that conform to the general macro-view.

The following images are by John Martin, the quintessential master of this vision logic.