

QUALITY of Life

By Anthony M. DiLeo

ON ARTISTIC ENDEAVOR

Having more confidence than skill, I started with a 99-cent watercolor paint set in about 1979. When the *Louisiana Bar Journal* editor asked for a painting for the magazine's cover, as well as a few words about the artistic process, I thought about why I had started painting — and I thought mostly of my mentors. Many in the legal field also were engaged in other activities: writing, art, music, family, so many things outside of their practice of law. (Judge Alvin Rubin, for example, wrote haiku while waiting for the jury to come back.)

My goal here is simply to encourage others to consider an artistic endeavor as a pastime — just to have the experience of doing it.

So often we don't try something new without a goal of it achieving some expectation, or of it pleasing someone else. The process of painting is about the experience of doing something in a way that is immediate and experimental. The only standard is that, as you do it, you get as aware of the process as you can and simply be reactive, so that you are only trying to be spontaneous. This applies to whatever design, shape, color, style and material you are using. There is no way to make a "mistake." Each attempt is its own adventure; each attempt is its own thing all by itself. If you can do that, you'll discover that you can, in fact, "do it." The endeavor gets spoiled only if you need to meet a specific goal, if you need someone to say to you "I really like that," or if you're doing anything other than getting your most immediate focus on the process while you are working on it. Sometimes it is called "*alla prima*."¹

I recommend to anyone reading this to make an attempt — remembering to try to follow this method and path — and I believe you'll discover an experience of personal self-expression that will be pleas-



The Trees (30" x 36").

ing. (After all, this isn't our day job.) The next time you may try something entirely different, with different material, in a different way, and that is good, too.² It really is about the experience and the moment, and not about anything else.³ It feels great to use the other side of our brain!

If it becomes about gaining admiration from another person or selling something, you are likely to lose out on the experience.

Trying to think in a commercial way or in an analytical way can spoil the process and make it more like a work assignment or a task (and we already have lots of those). It can defeat the exhilaration and the purity of detachment and the exuberation of a very personal connection. The irony of this is that the more you detach from fulfilling an expectation, the more you can connect with it and you get, surprisingly,

a bond with the experience. After all, it's only about the experience.

This same process applies to any creative or athletic endeavor, to writing or music or gardening or running or sailing.

For those of you still reading, I hope it encourages you to make an attempt, any attempt in any artistic field. I recommend you not do this with anyone else around because *unconsciously* we start wondering what they might think and feel about it, and that is taking yourself out of the equation. And *you* need to be primary in that equation.

You've worked really hard, so give yourself a bonus, give yourself permission. That's the hardest part.

Leave reason behind for just a brief moment and it will be waiting for you when you are ready. There are no rules here.

It's not a discipline; it's an undiscipline.

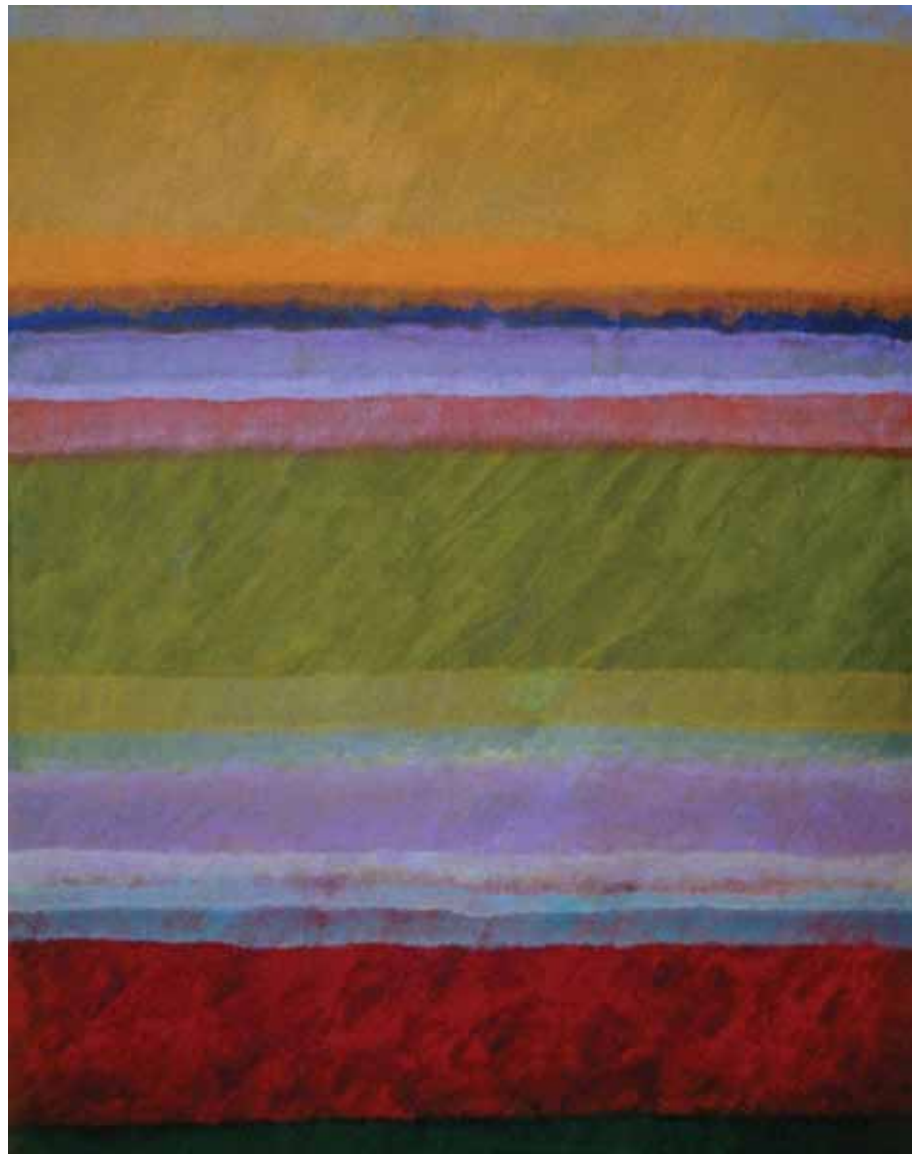
If you get that down, everything is great.

Do it.

FOOTNOTES

1. Wet-on-wet, or *alla prima* (Italian, meaning *at first attempt*), is a painting technique, used mostly in oil painting, in which layers of wet paint are applied to previous layers of wet paint. This technique requires a fast way of working because the work has to be finished before the first layers have dried. It also may be referred to as "direct painting."

2. Whatever you have by way of materials is okay — pens, pencils, crayons, watercolor, paper, canvas, acrylic, oils, etc. A lot of my



Morning Landscape (53" x 72").



Artist Anthony M. DiLeo.

paint I buy from the back of the store at Sherwin Williams for \$1 per quart. They call these their "mistakes" and there are *great* colors in there!

3. Sometimes, if I don't like the way a painting comes out, I cut it into pieces, then rearrange the pieces to a surprising result. Or I paint over it with the underlying colors giving depth to the new result.

Anthony M. DiLeo, a solo practitioner based in New Orleans, also is an arbitrator and mediator, handling more than 400 cases in 20 states for local, national and international parties. After Tulane Law School (Law Review, Order of the Coif), he received an LL.M. from Harvard Law School in 1971. He served as law clerk to Judge Alvin B. Rubin (U.S. District Court) and Judge John Minor Wisdom (U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals). His largest painting, Vespertine, is 96" x 120" and is located in the lobby of Ochsner Hospital. His artwork can be viewed online at: www.dileoart.com. (tony@tonydileo.com; Ste. 2350, 909 Poydras St., New Orleans, LA 70112)