

**Euclid Art Association**  
**May 1, 2023 Meeting**  
**Jeff Suntala, "Shape Language in Watercolor"**

The Euclid Art Association held its May meeting in-person at the church featuring artist, **Jeff Suntala**. Jeff did a shape study watercolor of the alleyway by CSU looking east towards terminal tower. The repeating shapes of the



buildings echoing each other appealed to him and would make a nicely designed study or painting. Jeff is well known in the Cleveland art community and many members and guests came just to see him paint. We had over 30 in attendance! Unfortunately, the meeting got off to a rocky start because our AV setup, which would have projected his demonstration on the big screen for all to see, did not work...Lee's camera malfunctioned. We just moved on. Jeff paints standing up with his 140 lb. rough watercolor paper securely fastened to his upright easel, with paints and water bowl



below. His back faced the audience so that we could see his painting. The audience asked if he could tilt the paper up a little more for a better view.



Jeff mostly paints plein air. It challenges him and he can complete a painting in about two hours. Many of his plein air paintings lined the church bench...an absolutely amazing display of his artwork. He loves repeated shapes and hints at shapes or 'shape language' in his paintings. "Just put in the symbols and let the mind fill in the rest." He doesn't paint everything he sees. He paints shapes, letting the shape of his brush do the work.



With a light sketch already on his paper, Jeff starts with a water wash (also known as a glisten), being careful to wash around the whites. He never uses frisket. (He acknowledged David Rankin as an expert in this technique and as a great teacher.) Jeff starts at the top with blue and transitions into yellow, creating a beautiful gradation in the sky. Having forgotten the foreground, he quickly went back adding a wash of warmer tones for the ground...a combination of burnt umber, alizarin crimson, ultramarine blue (his version of the primary colors mixed to a neutral shade). "Don't forget that the colors dry 30% lighter. So work darker!" Tip: His teacher at Cooper School told him, "Put a little bit of blue in everything you do!"

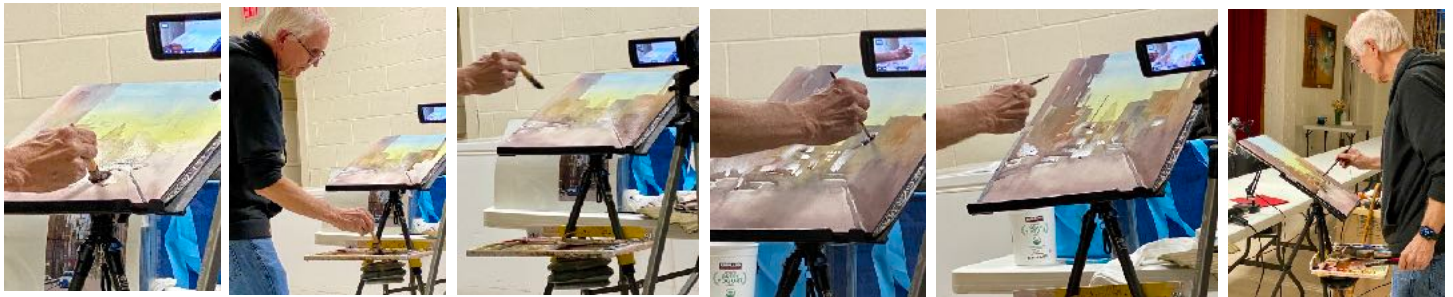


His favorite watercolor paints are M Graham, made with honey. "They remain goopier and don't dry out." His favorite colors include: several blues - cerulean, cobalt, ultramarine; cool yellow & red; warm yellow & red; Bengal rose; earth tones - raw umber, burnt umber, burnt sienna, alizarin crimson. He has lots of brushes, but only uses four or five of them. A large squirrel



hair mop brush is one of his favorites, which he used to design the larger shapes in his painting....dipping it in the water and shaking it twice on the floor! (*There was a tarp under his easel.*)

Jeff used the term, "Notan" when talking about shapes and design, a term unfamiliar to most of us. *The internet definition is: **Notan** is a Japanese term that literally means "light-dark harmony". Artists use "notan studies" to explore different arrangements of light and dark elements in a painting without having the distraction of other elements like color, texture, and finer details.* In other words, it's a Gray Study. Squint while painting to see the overall design. "You need to see the big picture," he said. After the initial wash, he reviews his work...it's part of the process - woulda, coulda, shoulda or wishing, lamenting, hoping. He strives to paint loose and aspires to be like Alvaro Castagnet!



Continuing on, Jeff works fast putting in the buildings on the left side, lighter in distance, using warmer colors closer to him and cooler colors further away. He likes gradations in his painting and softens the edges as needed, occasionally using a spray bottle. He hints at the cars, adds small window designs with his rigger brush. The shapes all relate to each other. All are rectangles, but each slightly different. We watched the cars come to life as he paints the tops and sides. And 'voila'...this amazing painting appears in just an hour and a half!

Jeff is a member of the Ohio Watercolor Society and is part of the Pretentious Cleveland Portrait Artists. He teaches at Cliffside Artists Collaborative in Hinckley. He is also known for his historic ballpark illustrations. It was Cleveland artist, Bob Moyer who taught him how to watercolor. Artist Fred Graff also influenced his work. In the last few years, he has been concentrating on urban plein air painting in Cleveland. His watercolor website can be seen at [suntalawatercolors.com](http://suntalawatercolors.com). Plus, a whole slew of ballpark posters that he created can be found [here](#).



Many thanks to our hosts for the evening, Jennifer Theil and Ginny Mancini their delicious treats of assorted fruits and veggies, pinwheel sandwiches, doughnut holes and brownies with mint and chocolate frosting.

