



Life as an Artist

People often ask me how did you get started in art. Well it was pretty simple. About six years ago a friend told me he had an appointment with a gallery to show his art to a curator, so I asked if I might paint something and go along with him. He said OK. I painted that night for the first time. We arrived at the gallery, myself with one canvas, my friend with six. The curator laid them against the wall, picked up mine – laid it against another wall and studied it for about twenty minutes. He sat on the floor, so I sat beside him.

My first painting that day sold for a thousand euros. So the journey began, and it's taken me all around Ireland, teaching other people how to do it. When your eyes first encounter that blank white canvas it can be daunting, but smile; therein lies a great mystery of life and art to your life that's dead simple to explain. Here goes – some handy tips to maybe get you started.

I knew nothing about art, so the first point I want to make is you don't have to know anything about art to begin with. Down through the last few years giving classes I would say to people who didn't even try to paint – let your heart dictate to the canvas. Yes, blend a load of colour and see what arrives. Don't restrict yourself by saying I can't paint – just hit the canvas and keep going.



The Tall Ships



Clouds on the Water



A Study in Light



Ballet Night

Use Vaseline to keep your hands supple and after painting it's easy to remove the paint. Some people like to use gloves but I find it restricts the movement in my hands. A couple of days before I begin a canvas I use tea and white spirits to clean my brushes thoroughly. On some canvases I use a wash of white spirits and beer. I find it gives a nice gleam to the surface with some linseed oil.

I like landscapes and abstracts. If you're into abstract art, remember – people buy more for colour rather than content. They see colour and think of the walls in their sitting rooms and halls and I bet they will like your colour so don't worry too much about content; the best thing is just hit the canvas. Don't try to paint, but let the brushes just roll on the canvas. Don't worry about copying someone else. A lot of people like Monet's paintings but if you study the master's works, JW Turner's style is much the same. As Monet was living in London I would say its a good bet he copied Turner.

OK, I hope you enjoy reading this. Have fun, and see where it goes.

Zeus Cooney is a self-taught artist based in Dublin