

Artists from around the country flock to Jeremy Lipking's workshops to learn the secret of the young painter's success. As he proved in a recent figurative workshop in California, however, the only secret he's harboring is a mastery of the fundamentals.

—
by Michael Zakian

Jeremy Lipking:

Careful Observation, Conscientious Rendering

WHEN JEREMY LIPKING RETURNED TO THE CALIFORNIA ART INSTITUTE (CAI), IN WESTLAKE VILLAGE, TO TEACH A THREE-DAY WEEKEND WORKSHOP THIS PAST SPRING, IT WAS A HOMECOMING OF SORTS.

As enthusiastic students gathered for the first class, everyone noticed a distinctive antique Chinese chair already sitting on the model's stand. Fans of the artist's work immediately recognized it as a prop he has used in some of his best-known paintings. When Lipking arrived and was asked about it, he mentioned that he had brought it for last year's demonstration and had never bothered to pick it up. He knew that it would be waiting for him when he returned for his annual workshop the following year.

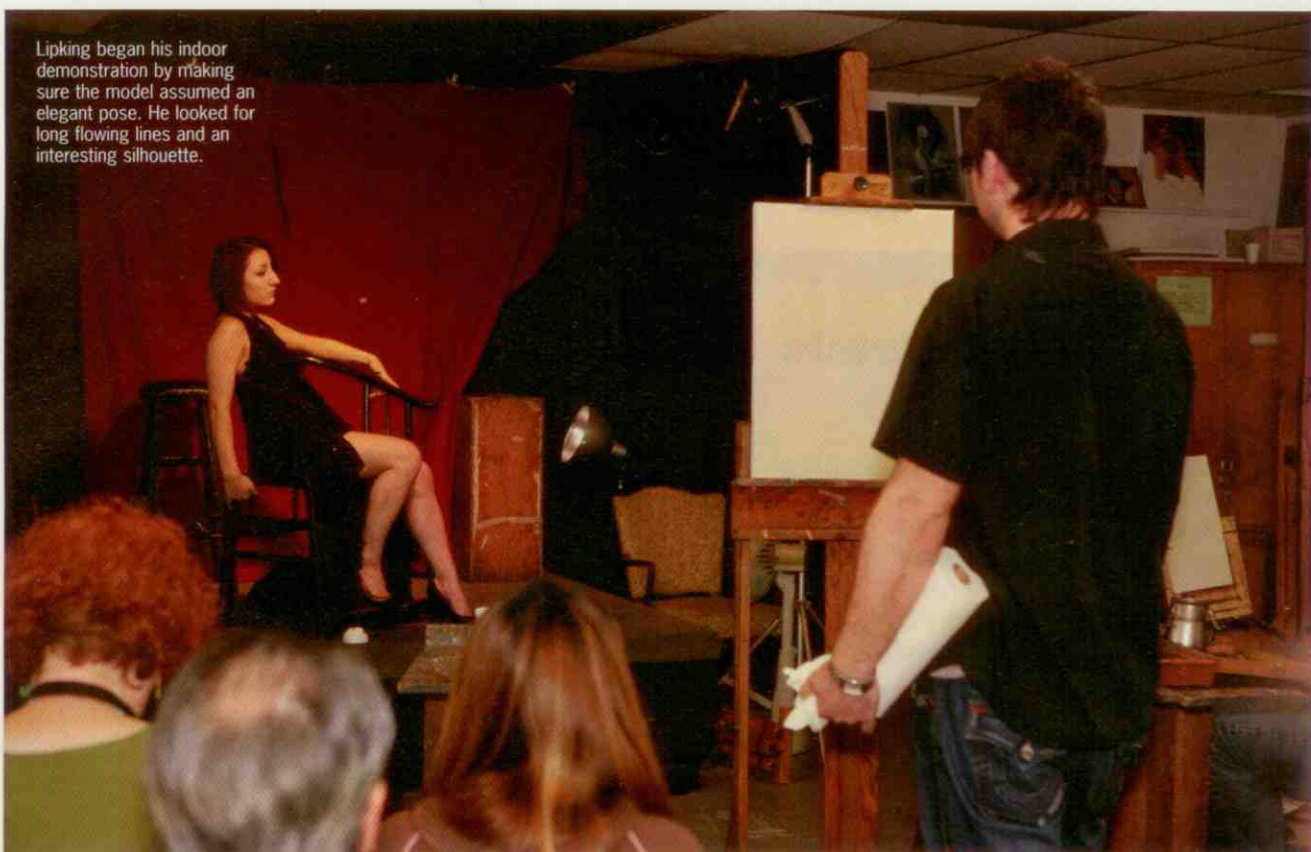
Lipking has been holding these spring workshops at the CAI since 2002, and they always sell out well in advance. As usual, eager participants traveled from around the country for the opportunity to learn the secrets of his method. This year students traveled from as far away as Baltimore and Raleigh, North Carolina. There was also a small handful of regulars, including several locals who have taken his workshops before and crave every opportunity to study with the young master.

As an artist highly sensitive to the subtle nuances of light, Lipking designed the workshop to show students how to approach two different lighting situations. The first two days were spent in the studio painting a female model under warm, incandescent light; on the third day, everyone met for a demonstration at a local park in the Santa Monica

Mountains, where Lipking painted the same model posed outdoors in a cool, natural light. It was especially instructive to observe how he used his basic palette to handle two dissimilar types of light.

Lipking began the workshop by introducing his materials and palette. A careful craftsman, he likes the smooth surface of Claessens double-primed Belgian linen, No. 13. The artist prefers two types of brushes: filbert bristle brushes, sizes 8 to 20 for preliminary lay-ins; and Royal Langnickel sable flats (5590), Nos. 4 to 12. His palette is a simple array of the bright mineral colors, arranged from left to right on a glass French Companion as follows: titanium white, cadmium yellow medium, yellow ochre, cadmium orange, cadmium red, alizarin crimson, burnt sienna, ultramarine blue, cobalt blue, viridian, and ivory black. Noticeably absent were the heavy earth tones—the umbers and iron oxide reds—which he rejects as too weighty. One special color the artist keeps on his palette is a cool, light purple that he mixes from alizarin crimson, ultramarine blue, and white. He often turns to this premixed color to modulate skin tones and to create the feeling of atmosphere. For a medium he employs a standard mixture of 1 part stand oil and 1 part dammar varnish to 5 parts mineral spirits.

Lipking began his indoor demonstration by making sure the model assumed an elegant pose. He looked for long flowing lines and an interesting silhouette.



The artist paused often to answer questions. Workshop participants gained insight from the work of former students and instructors of the California Art Institute, which lined the walls of the room.



BELOW RIGHT

The instructor's goal during his indoor demonstration was to capture the dramatic contrast of the model's warm skin tone against the deep red background and dark black dress.

Lipking's Materials

PALETTE

Gamblin, Rembrandt, or Winsor & Newton oils in the following colors:

- titanium white
- cadmium yellow medium
- yellow ochre
- cadmium orange
- cadmium red
- alizarin crimson
- burnt sienna
- ultramarine blue
- cobalt blue
- viridian
- ivory black
- a premixed purple (alizarin crimson, ultramarine blue, and white)

SURFACES

- Claessens double-primed Belgian linen, No. 13
- New Traditions oil-primed linen mounted on birch panel (for outdoor work)

BRUSHES

- filbert bristles, sizes 8 to 20
- Royal Langnickel sable flats (5590), Nos. 4 to 12

MEDIUM

- 1 part stand oil and 1 part dammar varnish to 5 parts mineral spirits

OTHER

- Open Box M easel for outdoor painting
- French Companion glass palette



Setting Up the Model and Applying Color

After discussing his materials, Lipking began a demonstration by toning a white canvas with a mixture of burnt sienna and ultramarine blue (his favorite dark), which was generously thinned with mineral spirits. He then wiped the surface with a paper towel to eliminate excess moisture. As he let the surface dry, he turned his attention to posing the model. "This is a very important step," he explained, "because the pose creates the visual dynamics of the composition." While Lipking had the model try different positions, a student asked, "What do you look for when posing a model?" "I look for long lines within the figure and big movements," the instructor responded. "If you don't have energetic pictorial relationships within the figure, it is difficult to make a painting that has energy and life."

Once he decided on a near-profile seated pose for the model, Lipking used a No. 8 Langnickel flat (his main brush throughout the demonstration) and his basic dark (burnt sienna and ultramarine blue) to mark off the large parameters of the silhouette: top and bottom of the head, front and back of the head and torso, and curve of the torso. Drawing was kept to an absolute minimum, but Lipking made sure that the few marks that were drawn were carefully placed and accurate.

BELOW

During each break, students studied the instructor's painting closely and discussed the decisions he made in each stage.

BOTTOM LEFT

Lipking shared some tips with an advanced student.

BOTTOM RIGHT

The artist attracted a crowd even when working on another student's painting.



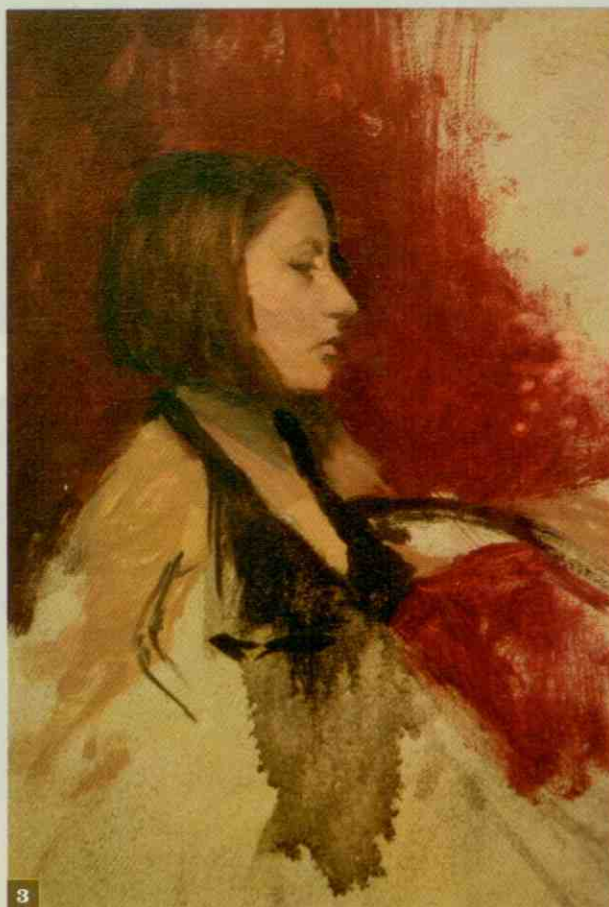
Demonstration: Liz



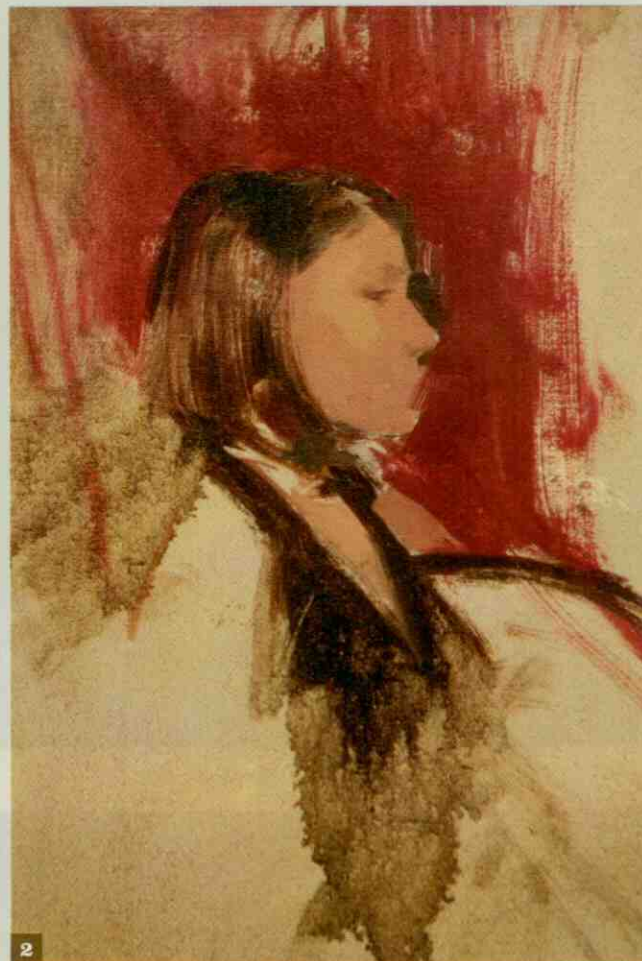
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Step 1

After establishing the general placement of the figure using a few long lines, Lipking laid in the general color of the model's face.

Close Up

A close-up view of Step 1, showing how Lipking modeled the light on the cheek and shadow around the eye and nose to create a sense of scale and volume.

Step 2

Before developing the face further, the artist added the general color of the red background and black dress, using thin washes of color.

Step 3

Once the trio of colors was established for the skin, dress, and drapery, Lipking concentrated on modeling the figure's face with small planes of color that varied slightly in temperature and value.



Step 4

Lipking continued developing the figure by modeling volumes using subtle changes in the temperature and value of a color.



Step 5

This close-up shows the delicate brushwork used to render the figure's face. The hair was painted as large planes of light and dark brown.

ABOVE RIGHT, THE COMPLETED DEMONSTRATION:

Liz

2007, oil, 24 x 18.

Light is an important element of Lipking's art. The completed demonstration shows how successfully he captured the general mood of the light, as well as specific details of the model's appearance.

FAR RIGHT, THE COMPLETED PAINTING:

Liz

2007, oil, 24 x 18.

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Kevin McGurty.

This is the finished version of *Liz*, which Lipking completed in his studio a few days after the workshop. Using photographs he took of the model, he resolved the lower section of the figure and refined the legs.



Lipking pointed out how to correct problems with the drawing of the figure.



After establishing the placement of the figure, Lipking turned his attention to laying in color, beginning with the basic flesh tone of the face. The artist mixed what he called “a wild guess,” using white, cadmium red, cadmium yellow, and a touch of viridian to cool the mixture. “I don’t try to match what I see in front of me,” he said. “I focus on relationships. I want to lay in a color area that I can modify later.” Many of the students thought this flesh color was too dark, but the instructor pointed out that this gives him room to go lighter as he models the forms. Lipking is also famous for using flesh tones that tend toward greenish grays. When he adds touches of warmer color against this predominantly cool base, the passage acquires a magical inner glow, mimicking the appearance of living flesh.

Lipking finds his color the old-fashioned way—by looking, mixing, and matching. Rejecting simple formulas and short-cuts, he typically begins with a mixture of three or four pigments, which he continually modifies to meet his desired

color. Rather than blend colors in discrete mixtures on his palette, he prefers to work with large puddles generated from a base mixture. To test a color, the artist places a dab on his canvas; if it doesn’t look right he continues to mix until he achieves what he wants. As he proceeds he freely modifies this basic pool by introducing additional pigments at the edges. For example, to lower the intensity of a warm tone he adds a cool—a blue or viridian (depending on prevailing light). If that is too gray, he might warm the mixture with cadmium orange. This approach allows him to subtly modulate a color between warmer or cooler, lighter or darker variants of a basic hue. His mastery of these subtle shifts in value and temperature helps give his paintings their powerful illusion of form.

Modeling the Form

To suggest the volume of the head, Lipking added a few touches of darker flesh tone to model the shadows under the eyebrow and nose, but then abruptly stopped. “I don’t

The model was seated in the cool shade of a large tree, which created challenging lighting effects because her entire figure was in shadow.



want to paint too much without adding the background," he explained, "because the bold red will alter how the flesh tones are perceived." Knowing that colors on the canvas influence one another, Lipking's goal was to relate the three large color areas, namely the skin, red background, and the black dress. "This trio of color notes will provide the basis for the entire painting's color harmony, so they have to read well together," the instructor told the class.

Participants in the workshop were most surprised to see that Lipking's actual brushwork was rather loose and free. People assume that since his paintings seem highly realistic, his technique must be precise and meticulous. Just the opposite is true. He tends to work thinly and broadly, laying in large areas of diluted paint to establish basic relationships. As he proceeds to model form, he slows his pace and adds more carefully mixed and precisely placed variations of color to create a sense of volume. The thinness of his paint was surprising to many. Photographs of his paintings in progress

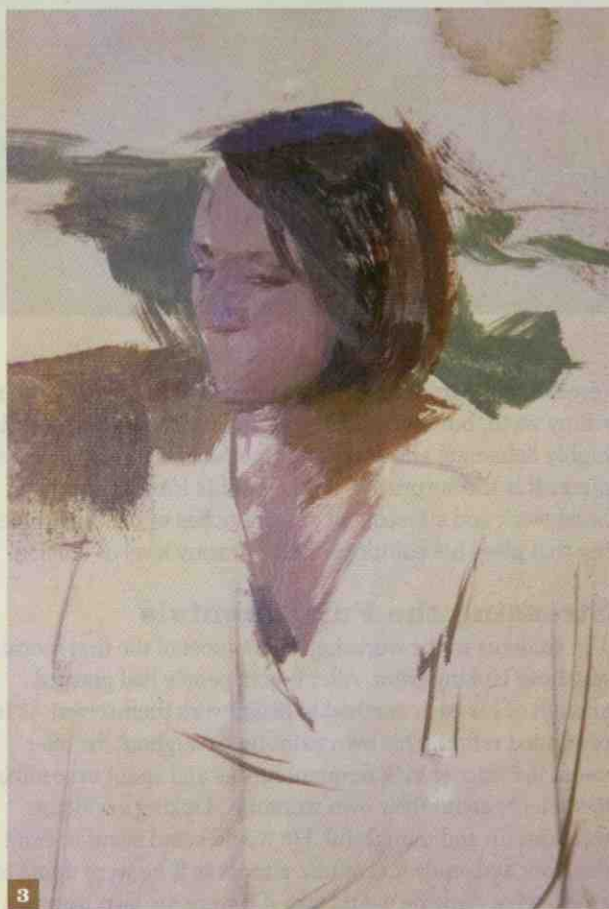
reveal that the underpainting is often little more than a thin, runny wash, but each subtle shift in tone in the first layer is highly deliberate and plays an important role in the finished piece. It is the surprising contrast of his irregular initial brushwork and subsequent small touches of delicate modeling that gives his paintings their uncanny level of illusion.

Stressing the Fundamentals

The students in the workshop spent most of the first morning watching Lipking paint. After lunch, people had grasped enough of his basic method to begin work themselves. As he continued refining his own painting throughout the afternoon, the teacher took frequent breaks and spent time talking to students about their own paintings. Lipking's critiques were careful and thoughtful. He would stand silent in front of the work and study it carefully, almost as if he were trying to assess what steps he would take if it were his own painting. For most of the beginners, the comments focused on pointing

Learn to start your own art business with this step-by-step guide to creating a successful art business. This book is written by John F. Lipking, a professional artist and art business expert.

Demonstration: Liz Outdoors



Step 1

To begin his outdoor demonstration, Lipking toned his canvas with a thin wash of burnt sienna and ultramarine blue. Lipking's outdoor easel is an Open Box M, which he prefers for its stability and ease of transport.

Step 2

The instructor's goal in applying the initial spots of color was to establish a relationship between the skin tone and the dark hair. He created the flesh color with a cool mixture of yellow and purple.

Step 3

As Lipking modeled the head, he used color to help define planes. He divided the mass of hair into a top plane that had more blue, a side plane (which was the darkest), and a rear plane that contained brown.

RIGHT, THE COMPLETED DEMONSTRATION:

Liz Outdoors

2007, oil, 14 x 11. Collection the artist.

The completed demonstration still had large areas of loose brushwork, which contributed to the lively, spontaneous feel of the finished painting.

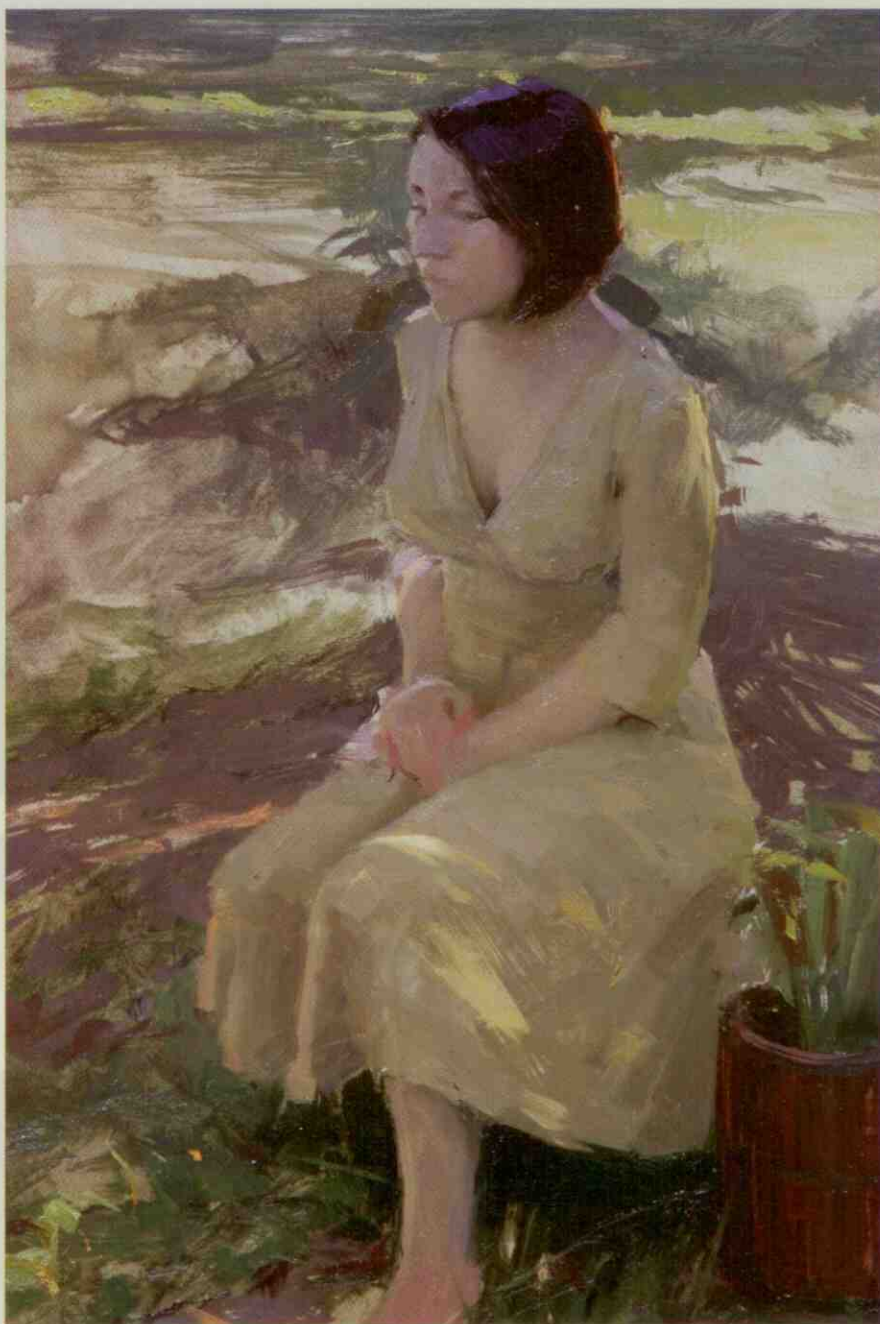


Step 4

The color of the dress was a variant of the basic flesh tone and was applied thinly and loosely.

Step 5

Lipking developed the volume of the body by using subtle shifts (lighter or darker, warmer or cooler) of basic color mixtures.





out ways to correct flaws by concentrating on the large shapes and major pattern of light and dark. According to Lipking, good drawing lies at the heart of every good painting.

Lipking's favorite mantra from his days as a student is "shape, value, edge." He encouraged students to focus on these elements, as he believes they are the key pictorial building blocks of a painting. "If your painting does not look right," he told the class, "there are basic problems with your shapes, values, and edges." The instructor advocates that students pay constant attention to the large visual forms of the subject, trying to analyze what they see in the underlying two-dimensional shapes. To help the students learn how to control their values, Lipking recommended using a range of no more than four or five. Edges should also assume four basic types—hard, firm, soft, and lost—in order to create the simple but striking illusion of forms projecting forward and receding back into space.

On Saturday, the second day of the indoor workshop, Lipking had the model assume the same pose while he finished refining his painting. The majority of his work involved making very subtle adjustments to planes and values. He took frequent breaks and spent most of the day offering critiques of student work. The instructor has an ability to perceive the individual strengths and weaknesses of each student—whether beginner or advanced—and make the necessary suggestions that will push that student to the next level. The participants in the workshop all appreciated his insights.

On the last day of the workshop, the group met at Peter Strauss Ranch—a public park within the Santa Monica Mountains—to paint and to watch Lipking do an outdoor demonstration. Lipking had the same model pose under a large tree, so that the moving sun would not create shifting shadow patterns. Sitting on green grass in the shadow of the tree, the model was bathed in cool light—creating a lighting effect dramatically different from the studio the day before. Lipking selected a small, 11"-x-14" linen canvas already adhered to a thin wooden panel (he chose the smaller size, he said, because he only had a day to finish the painting), pointing out that the wood prevents light from bleeding through the weave of the canvas.

To begin this outdoor figure study, Lipking first established the dark of the hair. "The darkest dark in the subject is easy to define," he said. "The rest of the figure comprises a range of grays that are harder to judge. Get the dark right and the rest will fall into place." To capture the cool skin tones, Lipking reached into his paint box and pulled out a new color: Rembrandt permanent lemon yellow. "I often

OPPOSITE PAGE

Because the model was posed close to the ground, the composition included a large expanse of flat ground. Lipking's challenge was to design the grass into an engaging visual pattern.

BELOW

To work on his outdoor demonstration, Lipking chose a spot in the shade of a large tree so the light pattern would not change throughout the day.

BOTTOM

While working outdoors, Lipking used a baseball cap to shield his eyes from glare.



Lipking's Work



ABOVE LEFT
Reclining Figure in Kimono
 2004, oil on linen,
 46 x 54. Collection
 David Shedlarz.



ABOVE RIGHT
In the Doorway
 2002, oil, 50 x 30.
 Private collection.
 Image courtesy
 Arcadia Fine Arts,
 New York, New York.

RIGHT
Danielle
 2004, oil on linen,
 40 x 30. Collection
 David Shedlarz.



FAR RIGHT
Danielle in Profile
 2006, oil on linen,
 16 x 20. Private
 collection.





FAR LEFT
Winter Contemplation
2003, oil, 40 x 24.
Private collection.



LEFT
Rachel
2006, oil on linen,
9 x 12. Collection
the artist.

BELOW
Red Shoes
2007, oil on linen,
18 x 24. Courtesy
Arcadia Fine Arts,
New York, New York.



BELOW RIGHT

The setting for the outdoor demonstration was Peter Strauss Ranch, an oak woodland in the beautiful Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, the world's largest urban national park.

Lipking's Strengths

The success of Lipking's painting style can be attributed to a number of specific skills:

- An acute sensitivity to color temperature and value
- A sound command of drawing and two-dimensional design
- A light but emphatic touch
- An ability to create complex color mixtures (of five to six pigments) while avoiding muddiness
- An ability to paint so thinly that he can continuously add refining touches
- A tendency to gear his flesh tones toward grayed greens so that warm highlights glow by contrast



About the School

The California Art Institute, in Westlake Village, was founded in 1983 by Fred Fixler, an illustrator who studied with Frank J. Reilly at the Art Students League of New York, in Manhattan, from 1947 to 1949. Fixler inspired a generation of Southern California artists, including Morgan Weistling, Greg Pro, Mark Westermoe, and Glen Orbik. Instructors at the California Art Institute have included David Jonas, Neil Boyle and Max Turner. Current instructors continue to carry on the traditions first established by Frank Reilly. For more information, visit www.calartinst.com.

use a special color if it makes my job easier," he confessed. To everyone's surprise he mixed his dominant flesh tone using white, lemon, and purple (his premixed ultramarine blue and alizarin crimson). Although the entire class doubted whether these colors could produce a natural-looking skin tone, once the artist placed his brush on the canvas, it was exactly the right choice to capture the light falling on the model's face. Lipking proceeded to block in this outdoor demonstration in the same manner as his studio painting. Once he had the dark for the hair and the basic flesh tone, he turned his attention to capturing the green of the background grass. With these three color notes in place, he had established the terms of his color harmony and proceeded to lay in the rest of the composition.

Because this painting was so small, he paid more attention to bringing the head to a higher degree of finish during the first stages. "People are predisposed to focus on the face," he explained, "so I want that to be an anchor that will



provide a standard of finish for the rest of the composition." The model sat on a small stool, low on the ground and below eye level. Her body appeared as a simple blocklike mass set within an open space. Lipking used the basic structure of her form to dictate the development of his painting. This time he paid far more attention to planes, modeling parts of the figure as more distinct top, side, and front sections. This attention to solid massing imparted a gentle monumentality to his painting, despite its modest dimensions.

Watching Lipking do two different paintings in two days taught the workshop participants that there is no substitute for fundamentals. Lipking's success derives from his simple mastery of the basics. There were no great secrets behind his method, just a steadfast commitment to careful observation and conscientious rendering—the essence of all great representational art. ■

Michael Zakian is the director of the Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art at Pepperdine University, in Malibu, California.

BELOW LEFT

As was the case during the studio demonstration, most of the students spent the first half of the day watching Lipking work.



About the Artist

Jeremy Lipking was born in Santa Monica, California, in 1975 and was raised in Southern California. A fourth-generation Californian, he is the son of Ronald Lipking, an advertising designer, children's book illustrator, and landscape painter. Despite his artistic background, Lipking's first passion was music. It was not until after he graduated from Royal High School, in Simi Valley, in 1994 that he contemplated becoming an artist. He discovered the California Art Institute in nearby Westlake Village and, after only two years of taking classes, was asked to join the faculty. Lipking continued to hone his skills as an instructor and at the age of 25 had his first solo exhibition at the Morseburg Galleries, in Los Angeles. He has received both the Gold Medal and the Museum Director's Award at the California Art Club's 91st Annual Gold Medal Juried Exhibition. Since his first solo exhibition, Lipking's art has appeared in the pages of *American Artist*, *Art & Antiques*, *ARTnews*, *SouthwestArt*, and many other publications. He sees himself continuing the tradition of such 19th-century figurative realists as William Bouguereau and Jean-Léon Gérôme; the late Victorian painters Frederic Leighton and J.W. Waterhouse; and the American Impressionists John Singer Sargent and William McGregor Paxton. Lipking is currently represented by Arcadia Fine Arts, in New York City, and by American Legacy Fine Arts, in Pasadena, California. For more information on Lipking, visit his website at www.lipking.com.