



Sarah-Marie

SARAH-MARIE'S BEGINNER PAINTER'S RESCUE GUIDE

DON'T BIN IT YET!

Practical fixes for the awkward middle of a painting

First: breathe.

Almost every painting passes through a stage where it looks nothing like the picture in your head. That is not proof you cannot paint. It is usually proof that you are still building it.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

- A calm five-minute check
- Fixes for dull or muddy colour
- Fixes for shape and background
- A printable emergency checklist

The golden rule

Do not make ten changes at once. Decide what the painting needs most, change one thing, then step back again.

Progress over perfection.

Keep this guide nearby for the next moment your inner critic gets louder than your paintbrush.

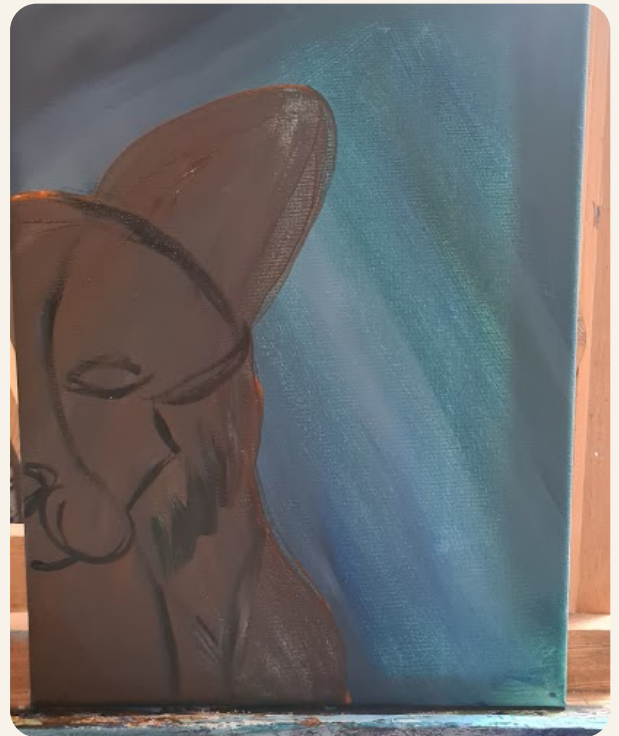


The five-minute rescue pause

A painting is much easier to fix when you identify the actual problem instead of attacking every area at once.



ROUGH SHAPES ARE A BEGINNING, NOT A VERDICT



DETAIL COMES AFTER THE BIG SHAPES

1

Step away

Put the brush down and look from at least two metres away. Close-up marks often make sense only from viewing distance.

2

Take a photograph

A phone photo makes the painting smaller, which helps you spot uneven shapes, poor balance and anything grabbing too much attention.

3

Try it in black and white

Use a black-and-white phone filter. Can you still see clear light, middle and dark areas?

4

Name one problem

Choose the biggest issue: too dark, too pale, muddy colour, a wrong shape, a harsh outline or a distracting background. Fix only that first.

5

Let it dry

Wet acrylic can look streaky, pale or muddy. Once it is dry, your next change will be much easier to judge.

Workshop truth

The awkward middle is where the painting is being built - not the finished result failing.

When the painting feels muddy, flat or lifeless

1 My colours have gone muddy

Stop mixing on the canvas and let the area dry. Mix a fresh colour on your palette using only the paints you really need. Add it in a few confident strokes and leave some of the dry layer showing. Too much stirring can turn bright colours into a dull brown or grey.

2 Everything looks flat

Your painting may need clearer light and dark areas. Decide where you want people to look first. Add one or two deeper darks and a few small brighter lights nearby. Do not outline everything. The biggest difference between light and dark should be near the most important part.

3 It is much too dark

Let it dry before judging it. Mix a little white into the colour already used in that object, then add a few lighter areas and let each layer dry. This will look more natural than scrubbing thin white paint over everything.

4 It looks pale or washed out

Add darker areas only where they are needed. Instead of reaching straight for black, try a darker version of the colour already there. A little deep blue or brown can make a rich shadow without draining all the colour from the painting.

A quick light-and-dark check

Squint at your painting or look at a black-and-white photograph of it. Ask:

- ☐ Can I easily find the brightest area?
- ☐ Can I easily find the darkest area?
- ☐ Is the biggest light-and-dark difference near the important part?
- ☐ Can I clearly see the main subject against the background?

White paint is not the only way to make light.

Lighter and darker areas usually still contain colour. Keeping some colour in them helps the painting feel lively instead of grey.

When the main subject isn't working

1 The shape feels wrong

Do not keep adding detail to a shape you do not trust. Let the area dry, cover the troublesome part with the colour around it, then draw the large shape again. Check its width, height and angle before putting the small details back.

2 The subject disappears

The subject and background may be too similar in colour or in how light or dark they are. Change the background just beside the important area, or make one edge clearer. You rarely need to repaint the whole background.

3 Everything looks outlined

Gently paint the nearby colour over parts of the outline. Keep the clearest lines around the area you want people to notice first. Let less important outlines soften, break or disappear. This usually makes the painting feel more natural.

4 I have overworked it

Stop adding paint while the surface is wet. Let it dry, decide which marks really matter, then cover the fussy or messy parts. Replace lots of tiny marks with two or three simple shapes. A few fresh strokes can bring the energy back.

Use the background as a tool

The background is not simply the space left over after painting the subject. You can use it to:

- correct the outside shape of the main subject
- help the most important part stand out
- soften an outline that feels too harsh
- hide drawing lines and unwanted marks

Permission to repaint

Acrylic is forgiving. You can let an area dry, paint over it and try again. Correcting part of a painting is not cheating; it is painting. Nobody viewing the finished work needs to know how many attempts are underneath.

The middle is not the ending

This duck did not begin with confidence, detail and personality. It began with broad colour, uncertain shapes and plenty still to solve.



THE AWKWARD MIDDLE



THE FINISHED CHARACTER

What changed?

- The large shapes were corrected before small details were added.
- Deeper darks and brighter lights made the duck look more solid.
- A few dark lines made the face and feathers clearer.
- Loose blue marks connected the figure to the background.

Do not judge a painting before it has had the chance to become itself.

Painting Emergency Checklist

Before you abandon a painting, work through these questions in order. You may only need one small decision - not a complete restart.

- ☐ Have I stepped at least two metres away?
- ☐ Have I taken a photograph and viewed it small?
- ☐ Have I looked at it in black and white?
- ☐ Can I name the single biggest problem?
- ☐ Can I clearly see my brightest and darkest areas?
- ☐ Is the biggest light-and-dark difference near the important part?
- ☐ Can I clearly see the subject against the background?
- ☐ Can I use the background to correct the subject's outer shape?
- ☐ Do I need to soften some less important outlines?
- ☐ Am I adding detail to a shape that still needs correcting?
- ☐ Would a fresh dry layer solve the muddy area?
- ☐ Have I left it alone long enough to see it clearly?

My next single change will be:
