

Turnbull Art Tips #4

“Design is an editing process.” George always offered that sage wisdom at the beginning of every workshop or course he taught. It was, and still is, a great guide to all things artistic.

Why? Because what’s NOT there is as important as what IS there. It’s about positive and negative relationships. It’s just as true for music as it is for the visual arts. The great musical genius, Duke Ellington, once offered some constructive, but gentle, criticism on a pianist’s otherwise stellar performance by telling her “You play so many notes.” She realized that in her zeal to showcase her many skills, she was losing the purity, the essence of the music.

The visual artist who can’t bear to leave anything out often finds the work overcrowded, confusing, and lacking any compelling focus. Using the entire drawing surface does NOT mean covering that whole surface with marks. The viewer’s eye needs places to rest. Just as the skilled actor uses silences and pauses, the visual artist needs to respect the power of empty space.