

The Artists Almanac

January 2004

January is the hinge of the year.

Resolutions are only a sterner name for plans, and this is the month for those.

As dark days and weather limit our activities and force us inward, we turn to thinking, reading, and our seed catalogs. Here our gardens grow without weeds and we are given a respite from bugs, sweat, and mowing the lawn. Obligations imposed by the sun don't yet burden us; even the early peas don't go in until February.

With Christmas past, the dark quiet forces us to introspection, Florida, or interior work.

For the artist, it is the month of the studio. Except for those hardy few who prefer gray skies, monochromatic palettes, and snow, obligations to paint outside are no more. Like playing golf in the rain, it can be done, but the results are not worth it. Especially considering the alternative.

For now comes the rich harvest of ideas and motifs gleaned from a busy year. Reference material is sorted and sketches are realized in living color. Briefly, now, light comes within our control, and it is a good season for portraits.

No more racing the changing light, but the long winter night with steady illumination in which to work a theme through to its resolution, or abandonment.

Then, when we least expect it, we enter the zone in which a chance splotch brings out the meaning of the thing.

At that moment, we, like our ancient ancestors, know in this dark season one sure thing: the weak sun which skims our southern horizon will return one day to warm us and to grow the seeds we plant in January.