

# Watercolour Techniques (1)

by Jan Colbeck

Here are some watercolour techniques to help you create some exciting pictures. It is very rare for the techniques to be used in isolation, normally you will find many techniques used in a single picture. The best way to start is to practice some of these techniques on their own, watch what actually happens then you will be able to choose what will be the most effective for your picture.

- **Wet into Wet** ~ this is perhaps the most exciting but unpredictable technique and involves applying each new colour without waiting for earlier ones to dry so that they merge together with no hard transitions of one colour to another. The effect will vary according to:
  - whether the paper is wet or damp to start with, there will be crisp edges formed where the paint reaches a dry area
  - how wet the paint is
  - the colours themselves, different pigments 'perform' differently some will repel and push away other colours whilst some 'mingle' nicely together.

Wet into wet can create lovely soft atmosphere, it is very useful for landscape, distant hills and trees. It is also useful for adding another dimension to any subject by working wet into wet in small areas only so that you contrast with soft, blurred edges. Care needs to be taken though to avoid the picture looking too formless and undefined.

- **Wet on Dry** ~ this is the classical way of building up a watercolour painting. Watercolours are transparent so consequently paintings are built up in layers, working from light to dark. It is most important that you allow each layer to become absolutely dry before you add the next colour. When each wash dries it forms hard edges – these are a positive feature as they add a crisp energy to the image. There is a danger that you can muddy the colours if you allow too many layers to accumulate so it is important to be really positive with your first washes.

To be successful, the wet on dry technique relies on careful planning. As a general rule limit your washes to just three otherwise the colours will begin to lose their clarity and the edges can start to look too hard.

Wet on wet is very useful when you need crisp sharp edges, also for leaving edges that will serve as highlight. Also useful for areas in the foreground to act as a contrast to looser areas and helping the perspective of the painting.

- **Variegated/Gradated Wash** ~ these are laid down in the same way as a flat wash working either dark to light or adding another colour. I find it easier to work with very slightly dampened paper and always mix the colours in advance. For a single colour gradation, mix 3 or 4 puddles of the colour you are going to use each one with more water in it then starting with the strongest work the first area keeping the paint as fluid as possible so that each brushstroke flows from one to another, then continue loading your brush with each successive wash, never be tempted to work back into the wash or you will produce backruns or stripes.

For a variegated wash such as a sunset blending from blue at the top to red, oranges and yellows mix up the suitable colours in your palette and lay them in stripes one under the other so they blend gently into one another – once again I find that a slightly dampened paper works best and working with the board at an angle until the effect has been achieved, then lay board flat to dry completely.

Useful for creating moods and atmospheric effects especially sunrise or sunset