

Watercolour Techniques (3)

by Jan Colbeck

Some more watercolour techniques to help you create some exciting pictures. Remember it is very rare for the techniques to use in isolation, normally you will find many techniques used in a single picture, however don't go overboard!! Too many will look gimmicky, but for now practice these and watch what actually happens.

Textures (continued)

- **Gum Arabic** – one of my favourites to use to make thick juicy washes for background effect. Gum arabic is already present in watercolours as it is used to bind the pigment however when you add more it makes the watercolour thicker and glossier and enriches the colour. I normally use about 1/3 water to 2/3 gum arabic in a mix. Mask out (*see 'Masking' below*) some areas that you don't wish to paint, either by using masking fluid or drafting tape or film then apply a thick juicy wash, and scrumple some cling film or tin foil and place it on the wash. Leave it until it is absolutely dry then lift off – and see the results!! Some other ways to use it is to mix several different coloured washes together on the paper and watch how they run together then resist.
- **Splattering – similar to stippling** – colours and tones are built up from small spots of colour. Splattering with a variety of different brushes produces exciting random effects and feelings of movement. Generally just use it in small areas of a painting as too much can appear rather mechanical and overbearing – use it with discretion! Good examples to try is on rocks, to create rough pitted effects – when the paint is dry the shapes can be worked back into and by applying highlights and shadows you can create a 3D illusion. Excellent also for snow – load an old toothbrush with a thick wash of white gouache and splatter that across the scene – however always do a 'test run' first to make sure you have got the consistency of paint right to produce fairly even droplets.
- **Lifting Out** – this simply means removing small areas of colour and is often used to correct mistakes or to lighten colour. However it is useful when painting bricks and mortar. Lay in a pale wash using a 'staining' pigment – when this is absolutely dry wash over the brick colours using sedimentary pigments then when that is dry, by using a flat brush you can lift out some of the brick colour to expose the mortar. Soft brushes, sponges and tissues are normally used for lifting out. Lifting out is only successful on good quality paper, soft paper will roughen up and by lifting out you may end up with a hole in the paper.
- **Highlights** – creating highlights is normally a matter of either adding or removing (lifting out) colour. Highlights are the 'icing on the cake' when you are close to completing a painting it is very satisfying to finish off with just a few little touches that give the picture that excitement and brings it to life. In watercolour you cannot add a light colour over a darker one so you need to first decide where the brightest light are going to be and preserve the white of the paper by either painting around it or masking them off. If you wish to create a highlight in a previously laid wash, try lifting out the colour or scrape back to the white paper with a scalpel or craft knife though make sure the paint is absolutely dry before you attempt this.
- **Masking** – as watercolour is transparent, it is impossible to paint a light colour over a dark one so you need to plan carefully where the light areas are going to be and either paint around them or preserve them. Masking fluid is a rubbery solution that can be painted over the areas to preserve then once it is dry it is safe to apply paint and washes. To remove, it care is needed to ensure that the washes are completely dry then rub gently with a finger to remove the 'mask'. Always use an old brush or 'shaper' and clean it immediately to prevent the solution from drying hard and clogging up the bristles. Masking tape and film are also very useful but be careful not to leave it on too long as I have found that the adhesive can dry into the surface of some papers making it difficult to remove.