

Tip #102

Using String with Watercolors



As most of you know, my new book, the updated version of *Watercolor Tricks & Techniques* came out in January. I explored a LOT of new and different techniques, and updated others. Painting with string appeared in the 1988 version, but this time around I did a complete demo – which didn't make it into the finished book in its entirety.

So, not one to waste a step-by-step demo, I'm offering it here – and I'm not “stringing you along,” either! (Someone told me they remember this technique from grade school – there really IS nothing new under the sun...)

It was spring when I did this, and the birds were busy making their nests of bits and bobs, and pieces of string – seemed like a natural!

Art 102-1, Nest

I carefully drew my egg shapes and then put masking or drafting tape over them; this is yellow painter's tape that seems to be easier to remove without damaging your paper than most masking tapes. If you can find it, drafting tape works well, too.



Art 102-2, Cutting the Mask



Then cut around the egg shapes—you can see through the tape easily. Here, I'm using a Scotch Precision Cutter I found in the scrapbooking section of my local discount store, but a sharp craft knife will work fine, too. Pull the excess tape away slowly and carefully to avoid scuffing your paper.

Art 102-3, Jump in there!

Get out a selection of string and thread and yarn—you can get quite a nice variety of thicknesses and textures. Make up some nice rich puddles of color—what color you choose depends on your subject, but since I was doing a nest, I used natural earth colors. Dip the wads of string into the paint, and lay them on your paper in pleasing shapes and patterns. Overlap colors and values.

Then lay a clean sheet of paper, waxed paper or plastic wrap over all and press gently to make sure the string comes fully in contact with the paper. Remove the paper or plastic wrap to check your progress, and if you like the effect, pull off the string -- carefully.



Art 102-4, Getting there!

When that's dry, remove the mask and paint your subject. I decided to add another layer of subtlety – that's why there's more tape here.



Art 105-5, DONE!

I added shadows and spatter, let them dry thoroughly, and removed the mask – I liked how this turned out, a lot! And of course you could use a similar technique to depict seaweed, hair, abstract textures, you name it. I hope you have fun exploring...



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