

Tip #107



Unusual Tools

Necessity IS sometimes the mother of invention ... and even if your necessity is just a burning need to experiment, you'll enjoy keeping an eye open for unusual art tools. Some are familiar with a different medium, and some you may not think of as typical art supplies – most likely you won't find them in any catalog! (On the other hand, maybe you will ... I recently saw one of my old tricks now turned into a texturing tool...)

107-a, Here, a palette knife and a stick!



You're probably familiar with using palette knives with oil or acrylics, but they're fun with watercolor too! I like a flexible, pointed one...be advised you'll need to sand off the lacquer or hold it over a flame briefly to burn it off in order to make it hold the liquid watercolor. Make a nice puddle of paint, lay your palette knife into it, and play with various effects! Try the flat, the point, and the edge...you may want to make your first mark on scrap paper, but you'll find this a very handy tool capable of making interesting, lively marks.

Another handy tool is a stick—perhaps a bamboo skewer, sharpened chopstick, dowel rod, or even a twig broken off a nearby tree. You can dip one into a pool of rich color and draw with it like an ink pen, or scratch into a damp wash—this bruises the paper and makes a dark line.

107-b, Cut-up!

About the BEST use for credit cards (expired or otherwise) is to cut them up into various shapes for free art tools, thereby saving you money in more ways than one! I keep a piece of one in my watercolor box to scratch into that damp wash with an edge to make lines, or to push color out of the way when a wash has begun to lose its shine. That makes a lighter color that can be handy for modeling rocks, light-struck roofs, weeds, twigs and more.



107-c, Draw and drag



You can pull paint out with that credit card edge too, to make fine lines as I did on this bottle brush tree.

107-d, A toothbrush makes a great spattering and texturing tool.

Dentists recommend that you retire old toothbrushes after a few months, especially if you've had a cold or such. Wash well (even rinse in peroxide if you wish), and use it to texture with. It does a great job with spatter! Use paint, or spatter back into a damp wash with clear water, for lighter specks. Experiment with holding it at different angles to your paper. You can even have a bit more control by rubbing the brush over a bit of old metal window screen held over your paper.

Have fun and keep your eyes open and you'll think of new uses for unusual tools, too — please, share them!



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