



Tip #129

STOP -- Quit While You're Ahead!

Everybody, but EVERYBODY, manages to go just a little too far sometimes. You lose the creative spark, you muddy a wash, you add just one thing (or color, or texture, or value, or medium) too many and make your composition busy as camo fabric instead of delightfully complex. We want to add too much. We don't feel quite through. That bit doesn't look quite right, maybe we need to *fix* it. We have a little more time so why not keep working?

And before you know it, you're thinking WHY DID I DO THAT?!

- * Sometimes it helps that I only have a short time to work – I HAVE to stop. I may be frustrated at the time and wish I could go on and on, but looking back I'll think "hey, I caught the essence!"
- * Sometimes it can help to step back and get away from what you're doing – go get a cup of tea, take a walk, write a letter, take a cold shower, have lunch.
- * Or put your painting or drawing upside down and look at it from across the room.
- * Look at it in a mirror to reverse the image ... you can often see if it needs anything tweaked or not.
- * Scan it or photograph it. I often see where something could use some help, once it's scanned. And sometimes I find that it doesn't, so I *stop*.
- * Set it aside overnight, if that helps ... I often find something I'm not happy with at the end of the day looks a lot better once I've slept on it.
- * Enlist someone's help – and listen to them! My first husband used to save a number of my paintings, just by saying "stop before you mess it up!" He was often right – and when he wasn't, a breather was good, too.

But if you still need to add something? Then maybe that will help after all, when not just working in the heat of the moment, or when you're tired at the end of the day!

And if you've really messed it up, overworked it, and it just *can't* be rescued? (Many things actually can -- take a peek at this tip, cathyjohnson.info/tips/tip93.pdf)

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Well, surely there's a section you really like. Sometimes composition-by-scissor works miracles! Make a couple of L-shaped pieces of paper and position them here and there on your painting. (And no, I actually like this painting, I just grabbed it to show you how the L-shapes work!)

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You may be able to get more than one smaller piece out of it! I may end up with just an ACEO*-sized piece like these here (or even a small stack of them, if I've started with a large boo-boo!), but at least I've rescued *something*!

Or use it as a background for something else! Use a soft sponge and clear water and wash off as much as you can. If you're using acrylics, just put on a new layer of gouache and start over, or a simpler glaze of a lighter or darker color – give it some interesting textures and see what it suggests to you.

*ACEOs are "artist cards, editions and originals" in case you're unfamiliar with the term.



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