

Tip #25

Putting People in your Paintings!

Try saying THAT fast 5 times! The fact is, though, that adding people to your paintings, even a landscape, literally adds LIFE. A bit of interest, a focus, a sense of energy, scale, motion, color-you name it! Our eyes go where the people are-we're programmed that way.

This needn't be a complex issue. You don't have to paint a recognizable portrait - or even a crowd scene unless you just want to. Some shorthand brushwork will suggest lively little shapes!

It also needn't be obtrusive. Your landscape doesn't need to be about people. They don't need to detract from it. They just add a tiny bit of interest - and sometimes a question-what is he doing there? Why is that girl walking where she is? It engages the viewer's interest - and imagination!

Art 25-1, Little People

(Courtesy The Artist's Magazine)

It's not necessary to add color, or even to pre-draw the shapes you want. I used the tip of a round brush to describe these little folk, using a blue gray, shadowy wash. I could have flooded in a bit of color while the paint was still wet to add still more interest.



Art 25-1

Art 25-2,

People in Color! (Courtesy The Artist's Magazine)

Add color, either letting the wet areas dry completely before adding another to keep everything crisp, or allowing the areas bleed into each other for an energetic feel. Again, you needn't draw in the shapes first unless you just want to.

These are not much more than stick figures, fleshed out a little. Give them personality, if you will-look at the Attitude of the girl in the red boots and T-shirt, the purposefulness of the man with the briefcase, the delight of the little girl in the rain slicker!



Art 25-2



Art 25-3, "Fishing River Bridge," 3x5" sketch

Even a tiny dot or squiggle can suggest that there is someone there! In this little sketch, I suggested the fisherman in his bright red shirt, and even brighter reflection in the still pool. If you look closely, you can see this doesn't really resemble a human - it's anything but portraiture! But yet you know what it is...



Art 25-3



Art 25-4, "Harris at the Wildlife Area Dam" (Courtesy The Artist's Magazine)

Of course if you prefer you can make your person not only a focus but a recognizable entity. Anyone who knew my tall, skinny husband would recognize him in this ... and in this case, I did draw the figure in carefully, and painted his shape in with liquid mask, to preserve it. Then I could paint my landscape right over it when the mask was thoroughly dry without worrying about losing the accuracy of the shape.

When the painting was nearly finished and completely dry, I removed the mask and carefully painted in the figure, using value to give dimension to the arms and legs. I didn't want him to look pasted on!

For more on these techniques, see *The Sierra Club Guide to Sketching in Nature*, *The Sierra Club Guide to Painting in Nature*, both from Sierra Club of course, and my North Light book, *Creating Textures in Watercolor* from your local bookstore, North Light Books online at <http://www.artistsnetwork.com/nlbooks/index.asp> or <http://www.amazon.com>.

You'll find my original artwork on new products in my Cafepress store, at http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson.