

## Tip #28

### *Painting Horses in Acrylic*

Acrylics are wonderfully versatile, rich, and very, very different from watercolor! I love my watercolors, have been painting with them for 30+ years (not counting my childhood Prangs, of course!), but sometimes the freedom of not having to plan ahead to preserve those lights is very intoxicating. Painting small, crisp whites last rather than preserving them from the first requires thinking in a completely different order, and making ourselves do that from time to time is part of what keeps us fresh and on our toes.

There are textural advantages with acrylics, too, so I very much enjoyed using them for this painting of "A Table for Five."

Like many kids, I desperately wanted a horse when I was growing up ... and never quite got over my fascination with these powerful, beautiful animals. I have hundreds of horse photos and sketches, and a few paintings - and at least I don't have to worry about finding a good source of hay and a barn, with "my" horses!

#### **Art 28-1, Beginning with Background**

I chose a good canvas and an array of subtle colors to work with, blues and earth tones predominately. The original scene was a bit too busy, with an abandoned shed and a truck up on the far hill-I didn't want to detract that much from my subject, so I followed Thoreau's advice and simplified! Mostly using a flat 1" bristle brush, I laid in the landscape forms and trees with broad, energetic strokes, mixing mostly on the canvas surface rather than my palette (an enamel butcher tray for easy cleanup) in order to keep things lively. I suggested evergreens with a very dark, varied green, paying attention to those conical shapes, and suggested small oaks still clinging to their red-brown leaves in the middleground.

A fan brush worked well for the bare winter trees, allowing me to suggest lacy twigs and branches. Then, as in our very first tip, I "punched holes" in the far trees using the sky color, to further suggest the shape of the trunks and limbs.



#### **Art 28-2, Sketching in the foreground shapes**

At this point I realized the sky and background were too bright and would pull the attention away from where the main subject would be, so I did a glaze of pale blue-gray over the sky and the far hill, then wiped back a bit in the area of the trees to keep everything softer.

I roughed in the haystack and its metal container, allowed the initial layers to dry, then sketched in the horse shapes directly with a small, round brush. I didn't worry too much about making them accurate at this point ... they were more like guidelines.



### Art 28-3, Almost done ...

I painted in the horse shapes using a #8 round brush, then added details with a smaller one. The rough grasses and hay were mostly painted with the edge of a 1/2" flat brush - I find I get nice sharp lines with that brush. I had signed it at this point, but didn't feel finished, yet ... I let it "gestate" for a week or so, then returned to it with a fresh eye.

### Art 28-4, Table for Five

I continued to refine the big red horse that's the center of interest, improving the shape of the face, ears, mane, rump, and especially the shadows, and played down the white horse just beyond him. The black horse on the left had given me trouble from the first-getting the head right as it was turned to look out of the picture plane was tricky, so I worked on it some more (and still not quite satisfied-but are we ever?!)



Art 28-3

*This is one of the great advantages to working with acrylics, though - I could keep refining as long as I wanted, and if I lost the freshness all I'd have to do is add a new, crisp layer without lifting or muddying previous ones.*

I added a bit more rough grass and carefully painted the shapes of the starlings in the foreground, and called it done.

This painting was another out-take from my new North Light book, *Drawing and Painting Animals*, (I always over-produce!) from your local bookstore or art supply store, from 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](http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson).



Art 28-4