

Tip #35

Sky Effects

Things are looking up! Or anyway WE are, when we pay attention to that big, gorgeous sky overhead. As I write, huge puffy white clouds drift by, with broad stripes of blue in between - a lovely change from all the snow we've had lately!

Unless we live in a crowded city where the sky is only glimpsed directly overhead or in bits nipped off between skyscrapers, the sky can play a major part of our landscape paintings. It can provide mood, drama, excitement, value, light ... it's amazingly versatile. (I've even left the sky as pure white paper to suggest that kind of glaring, hot August sky - it was quite effective! Since the sky is often the lightest value in a landscape, that made sense...)

Art 35-1

Remember to notice aerial perspective when painting skies - the clouds closest to you usually appear largest and highest in your composition (though not always), and most often they are the ones with the most rounded shapes. As they recede nearer the horizon, they appear smaller and flatter. Watch where the shadows fall, too.

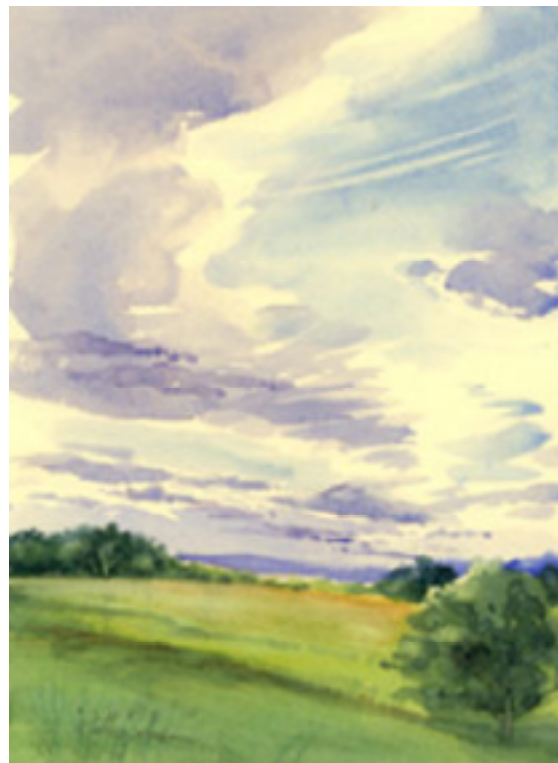


Art 35-1

Art 35-2, Dramatic Skies!

Notice movement and drama in the skies, too - allow that big sky to dominate your composition, and keep the horizon line low. Work fast, if you need to (the light was changing rapidly when I did this one!)

You can pick up pale, streaky "mare's tail" clouds with a damp brush, as at upper right on this painting. I allowed my painting to get almost dry, then pulled the pigment away, blotting my brush on a tissue.



Art 35-2



Art 35-3, Let there be light!

Utilize that same technique when streaks of sunlight pierce the clouds in what I used to call "halleluias"-just notice that they're usually quite directional and angular, and often have a kind of fan shape, narrower near their source and opening fan-wise near the ground.

Notice, too, that the distance makes far hills progressively paler as the water molecules in the sky come between you and those peaks (these are in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia). Paint the sky first, then add a slightly darker value for the most distant hills. When that's dry, add another and another till you get to the closest hills, which can be much more colorful. Finally, lift out the streaks of sunlight, blotting your brush to keep it clean. (You can also wipe these out with a clean paper towel or rag, but I used a flat aquarelle brush.)



Art 35-3

You can find more on painting skies in several of my North Light books, including *Painting Watercolors* - from your local bookstore, from North Light Books, <http://www.artistsnetwork.com/nlbooks/index.asp>, or from Amazon, <http://www.amazon.com> - or buy it direct from me and have it signed, <http://www.cathyjohnson.info>. There's also more in my Sierra Club book, *The Sierra Club Guide to Painting in Nature*, available at Amazon.com as well. For more on painting skies, check my online art classes or go direct to http://groups.yahoo.com/group/watercolor_online/ for further information.

You'll find my artwork on new products in my Cafepress store at http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson and original fine art auctions on eBay at <http://members.ebay.com/aboutme/cathyjohnsonart>.

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