

Tip #42

Found Art Supplies

Artists are indeed creative people! That can apply to our art supplies as well as our work, of course. Have you ever noticed how much fun it is to find something on your own to substitute for the more expensive stuff?



Granted I don't skimp on paint -- artists' grade every time, and the best I can afford at the time. (The good ones are more pigment dense, mix better and last longer.) But some of the other tools we need can be downright serendipitous and fun -- AND frugal -- if we keep our eyes open!

- When I need an impromptu palette and I'm not near my studio, I've been known to use a recycled plastic tray from the grocery store, or even a Styrofoam plate. Works well, it's lightweight, and it'll see you through in a pinch. They work fine with watercolor, gouache, and acrylics!
- A good field palette for watercolors, gouache -- or even, in a pinch, acrylics -- can be a 7-day (or more) pill box -- inexpensive at a discount store or REALLY inexpensive at a thrift store.
- A more permanent palette could be a white porcelain or ironstone plate, a deviled egg plate, or even a muffin tin if you use large amounts. I used one of the white ironstone plates for years, for my acrylics.
- A folding oak TV table makes a great taboret -- you may find one secondhand, but even new they're very inexpensive at the discount stores.
- A folding table of any sort will do for a portable work surface, like the one in the photo, and a chipped coffee mug can be recycled for a brush container.

Art 42-1 **Improvise, when working outdoors or in!**

- Speaking of discount stores, a field kit can cost \$20-\$60 and more from the better art supply stores ... consider a mini-messenger bag from the purse and school-knapsack department, or even a many-compartmented purse from your local thrift store. I found one for a quarter that worked great. It holds my hardcover sketch journal, my traveling watercolor kit, a tin of watercolor pencils, and a pencil box with pens, pencils, brushes, erasers and what have you. A few Niji waterbrushes or a small container of water, and I'm set, for a fraction of the price of most artists' travel cases!



Art 42-1

- Look at the thrift store or Army/Navy Surplus for something to use for an artist's travel case, too! I found this old Army surplus messenger bag, dirt cheap, and used it for YEARS. It's even waterproof...

Art 42-1

I found this old rubberized canvas messenger bag in an Army surplus store 25 years ago, and I'm STILL using it for one of my painting kits, raggedy as it is!



- A broken or sharpened stick or dowel rod makes a good drawing tool, with ink or watercolor --and you can customize your "nib" just as you like it.

- When I need a short travel brush to fit in my field kit, I may just cut the end off an existing brush and stick it in a pencil sharpener ... then I can paint with one end and draw, scratch, or scrape with the other.

Art 42-2

- An expired credit card, cut up in various shapes, is very useful as a scraper tool -- make darker lines when you bruise the paper under a watercolor wash, or lighter ones when you push washes out of the way just as the paint loses its shine. You can also use the credit to spread glue evenly.

- You can apply paint with a Q-tip, if nothing else is handy, or with a frayed piece of rope, a sponge, a wadded piece of plastic wrap -- even with your fingers! Have fun with it -- I've done some cool little thumb- and fingerprint art! Use a natural or manmade sponge or the edge of a piece of matboard as a stamping tool -- you can get some very interesting effects with these unusual goodies.

Art 42-3

I found this old rubberA natural sponge makes a great tool for painting foliage.

These tips are only the beginning -- once you open your eyes and look around, you'll see literally dozens of things to adapt to new and more creative uses.

Check out my Watercolor Online classes at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/watercolor_online/ for more 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>.



Art 42-3