

Tip #70

Capturing Light in Landscape

Very often, light is what *really* attracts us to the image we paint-not so much the subject itself, but what light and shadow do to it. Buttery, golden light of late afternoon; a winter sunset; a subtle, glowing over-

cast; long, calligraphic shadows; reflected lights that bounce color back onto your subject; the filtered, dappled green light of a forest. Light defines and explains our subject, and literally illuminates it for us.

When you paint plein air, on the spot, you realize how important that light is, and how quickly it can change. A subject that demanded painting, only an hour before, loses its luster when the light changes too much, requiring that we work fast or make good clear notes and sketches of what it was that caught our eye in the first place. Photos can help, but they often flatten out the deepest shadows into nearly black blobs, on a sunny day-honing your powers of observation is your best tool, followed closely by good notes or sketches!

Remember that when you work with watercolor, the paper itself is your lightest light-you get maximum sparkle by leaving it untouched. A light tint of your chosen color will give almost as much light impact, though, particularly if that color is warm, as most light is.

Art 70-1, "Shenandoah Afternoon"

Here, the light struck this old dead snag just right when we arrived at the banks of the Shenandoah River-I just had to paint it! By the time I'd finished, the light had moved enough that the whole tree was in shadow, so I'm glad I captured it first!

I kept the warmest colors on the tree in the light-struck area, and used color colors for the shadows. I put it in my Flickr album, with notes, here:



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/25146557@N00/651203173/>



Art 70-2, March 11



Art 70-2

Sunsets can be difficult to capture, and it's all too easy to get them too garish. The light changes very rapidly, so you need to work FAST. I suggested more than spelled out here, filling a page in one of my hand bound journals, keeping the sky and hill simple and only adding the silhouette of the bare winter tree. See Flickr album, here: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/25146557@N00/111090168/>.

Art 70-3, "Williamsburg Shadows"

Sometimes it's the shadows themselves that give the impression of light-or at least strengthen it. In this little sketch of a brick building in Williamsburg, I used the broken shadows of foliage on the roof to suggest the sunny day. See Flickr album, here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/25146557@N00/104238556/>.

Be sure to look for my NEW CDs for artists in my Cafepress store, http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson, and watch for my fine arts auctions weekly on eBay, <http://members.ebay.com/aboutme/cathyjohnsonart>.



Art 70-3