

Tip #84

Sketching on the spot in cold weather

As winter draws near in my hemisphere, I'm thinking more about cold weather sketching -because I'll be doing it, I always do! Here are a few of the ways I've found to deal with the elements. I hope you find them helpful...

Dress sensibly, of course. Layers work - silk underwear and fleece layers let me work in January in the snow, without getting chilled. Wear a head covering - despite the myth that you lose the most heat through your head in winter, it's really any exposed body part. Still, it's sensible to wear a hat or hood if it's really cold. Myth or no, you really feel the cold when your neck and ears are freezing!

You may look like a polar bear, but you WILL be able to sketch longer. (Fleece gloves are light and flexible - I like them for winter sketching.)

84-1, winter journal sketch



84-1

I kept my ink pen in an inner pocket until I was ready to use it - that kept the ink flowing! I added color later, when I got back to my car.

Find a place that's protected from the wind, if you can - and if it's getting sun, all the better! A building, a boulder, a vehicle, a wall, all these things can offer a bit of comfort, and can even capture the sun and bounce it back to you like a solar heater! I've been quite cozy sketching on a snowy day, under the right circumstances.

If you stand while sketching, that's fine - if you need to sit, consider a thin foam pad to keep your backside from chilling! I bought a cheap pad for use under a sleeping bag and just cut off "situpons" as I need them. A thick pad of newspaper works too...



You can buy hand-warmers in the camping section of sporting goods or discount stores or even online at Amazon. This is the kind my dad used -- <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000CGG5EC?ie=UTF8&tag=httpcathyjohi-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B000CGG5EC>, but picked up some HotHands -- <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0007ZF4Q8?ie=UTF8&tag=httpcathyjohi-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B0007ZF4Q8> -- and loved them for outdoor work!

They're quite useful. (In grandma's day, kids put a baked potato in their pocket on the way to school - that works, too, and you can always eat the potato for lunch, like she did!)

Work small if you need to, when it's really cold - no need to try for a normal-size sketch or painting! Small often equals quick, and you can get back into a warm place that much faster.

Pencils, either graphite or colored pencils, are probably your most dependable when it's really cold. Ink can refuse to come out of your pen if it's too cold out. Maybe it's more sensible than we are!

You can keep your paint water from freezing if you add a bit of rubbing alcohol (or vodka!) to it. I learned that from my old mentor, John Pike! (But drinking alcohol doesn't really keep you warm ... it expands your blood vessels and exposes more blood to the weather, making your body temperature drop, after a bit.)

You can also use this as an opportunity to train your color memory - do the on-the-spot work in pencil outdoors, then add the color when you get back inside. I've done that a lot!

Of course there's nothing wrong with working from a sheltered spot, even your car. If you need to, you can run the motor and turn on the heater for a bit, but remember to keep a window cracked for ventilation.

84-2, bedroom window

And I find I still sketch a lot from a warm spot by a window - a café, hotel, or even my own bedroom provides ample inspiration and lets me stay cozy!

I covered working in all kinds of weather in much more depth in my Sierra Club Guide to Painting in Nature, of course! You can find it here -- <http://www.cathyjohnson.info/bookpages/painting.html>.

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