

Tip #98

Putting People in your Paintings – again!



We covered this originally in Tip #25, and it's about time to revisit. Here, we're not talking about portraits or even closeups, particularly, but just putting a sense of life into the scene. This can even be *implied* – a hint of smoke from a campfire, and old farm shed, an abandoned bicycle. Something about a touch of the human is affecting and poignant to us.

The trick is to practice, and keep practicing. It's fun! I keep my sketchbook journal with me constantly, and wherever I find myself with a few moments on my hands—in the doctor's office, waiting for a plane, at a concert – I sketch. These are necessarily fast and loose, usually – I don't stress about likeness or capturing the details of clothing or hair. (I also almost never get bored if I have my sketching tools with me!)

These figures or faces can appear later in your paintings – the practice you've gained in observation will help you add the human touch believably.

Art 98-1, Quick Draw McGraw!

OK, I'm dating myself here, but speed IS necessary when working on the spot. Shoppers in the parking lot, fellow diners, musicians at work—none of them is going to sit still for you to sketch at your leisure. So – work fast! It's fun to use a brush or a brush pen as I did with the larger shopper in the foreground. (I like a Pentel Brush Pen which has waterproof India Ink in it – sometimes I add watercolor, sometimes I don't...)



Art 98-2, ... like this jazz drummer at The Elms Wine and Jazz Festival in my town.

I just went right for color, using a waterbrush and my travel palette! The necessary speed caught something of the intensity of his performance (I think the red-orange color helped too!)

Notice that neither of these has much detail ... you can get down the basics and capture the pose and mood for later works.



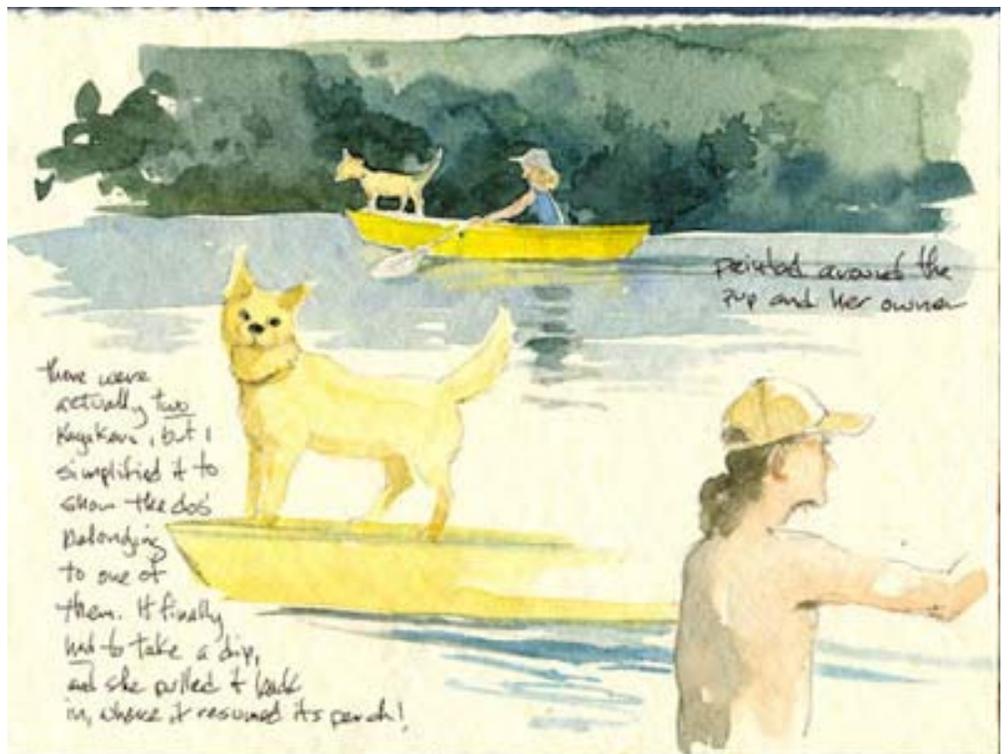
Art 98-3, Pencil People

Use whatever tools you're comfortable with, of course. These are done with a soft pencil, but if you like an ink pen, a fibertip – even ballpoint! – use it. It's getting in the practice work that will make your people believable.



Art 98-4, Closeups or distance, take your pick

...whatever will enhance your journal page or painting. Here, I combined two people from our day at the lake – Joseph fishing, and a girl and her dog out in a kayak. Both are fairly simply, but add that touch of life.



Art 98-5, Zero in if you prefer ...

Sometimes I like to allow my “human touch” to take center stage! It can be a very effective way to invite the viewer right into the picture plane. Here, a quick sketch of my husband looking out over the lake. Would I do this in a formal painting rather than a journal sketch? Yes, if I wanted to, and thought it would benefit the painting!



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