

Tip #112



Painting Still Water in Watercolor

This is easier than painting moving water, really, but you can still use a few tricks of the trade, and be aware of things to watch for. (And of course many of the same principles apply, whether you're using watercolor, acrylics, oils or whatever!)

For instance, unless you're on the storm-tossed ocean in a wildly pitching boat with 20-foot waves (in which case you may not be painting!), most likely the horizon is going to be flat. Ocean, lake, pond, the distant edge will be level. It's like in a glass of water that you tip from side to side...the water surface itself seeks the level, a straight line. Funny how often we can forget that!

112-1, Still Water 1

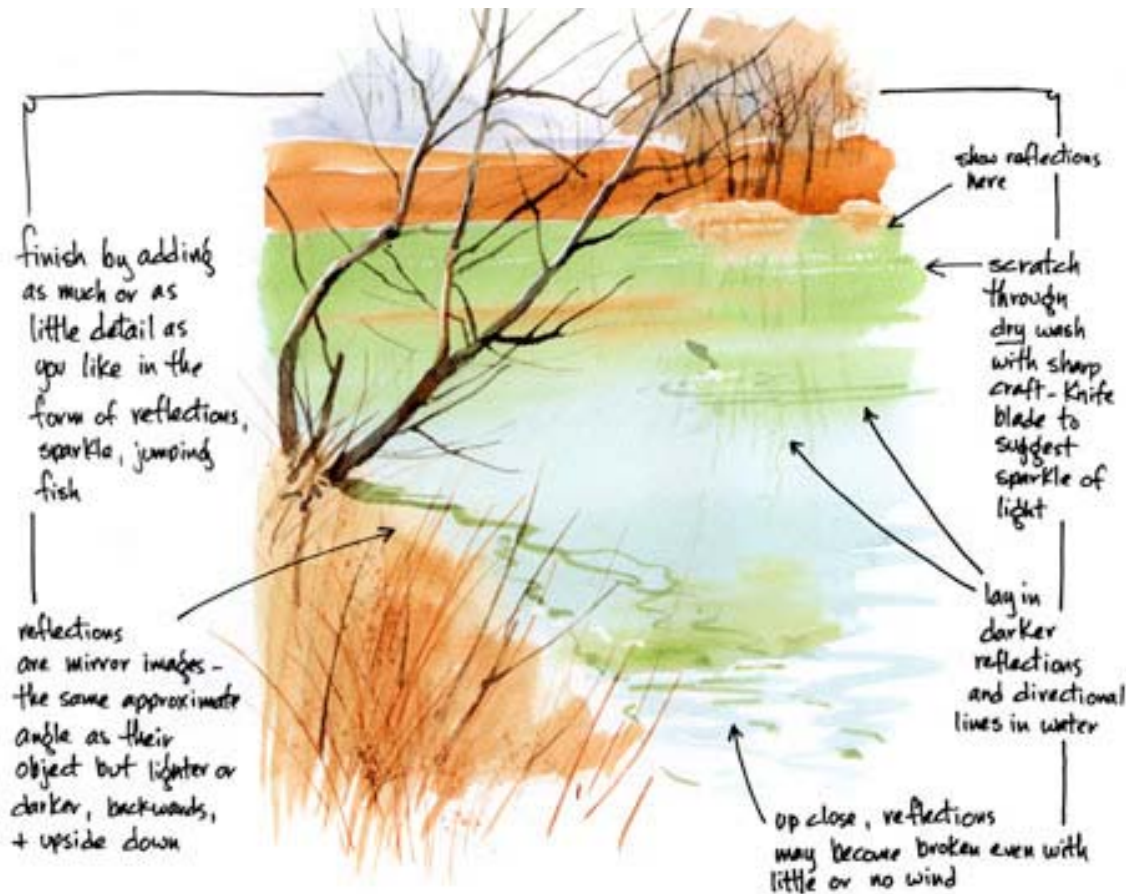


Here's a quick demo from my North Light book, *Creating Textures in Watercolor*, <http://www.cathyjohnson.info/bookpages/creatingtextures.html>.

I like to do a smooth underwash, if I have time, with some soft variation on color and value. As noted, you can dampen the paper first for a smoother application of watercolor. Keep that distant shoreline relatively flat! You can do a broken edge up close to suggest the ripples and wavelets we often see at the near shore.

While this has begun to lose its shine, you can lift a bit of color with a brush that's barely damp ... swish it in clear water, then wipe on a towel or wring out the excess water with your fingers. Run it in a horizontal line and you'll see it picks up some of the color!

112-2, Still Water 2

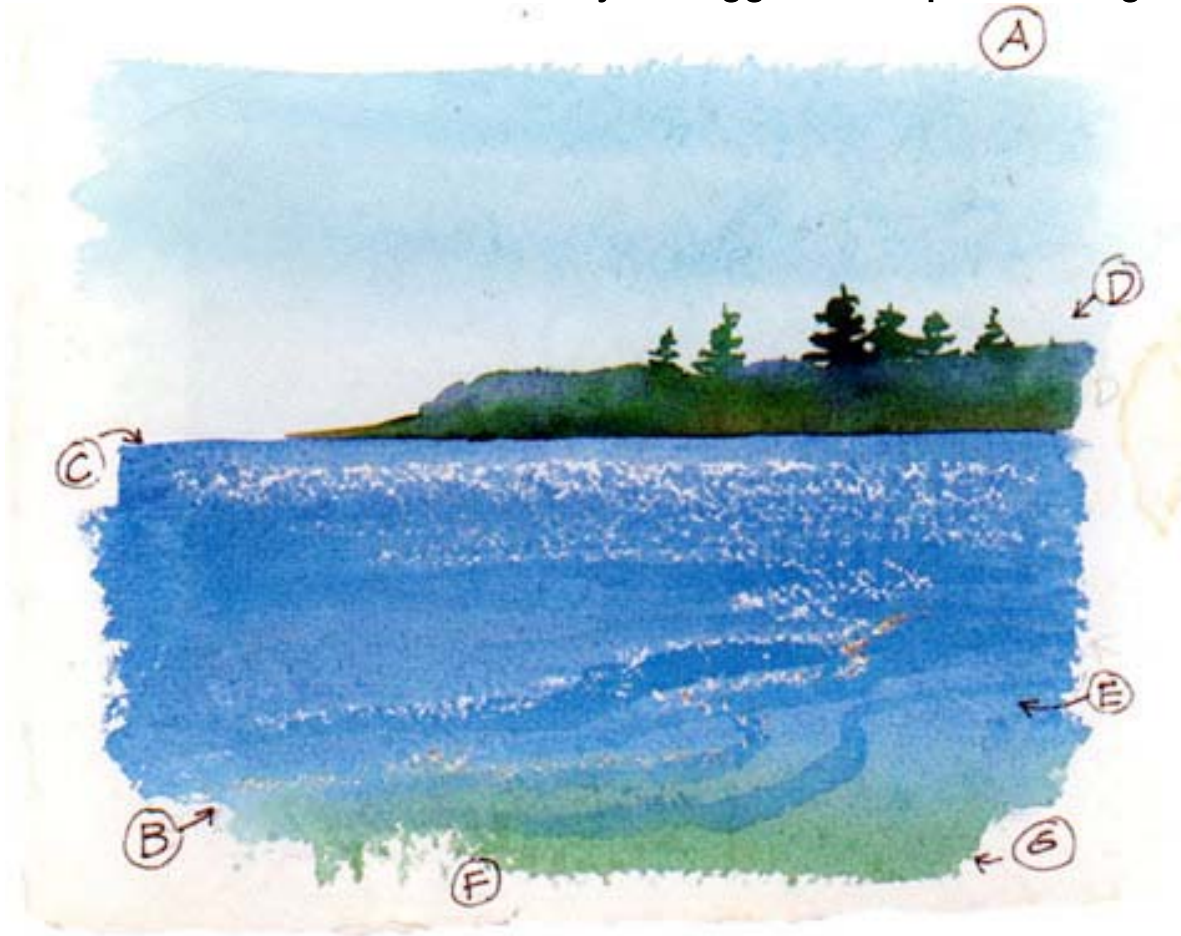


When your water is completely dry, you can add as much or as little detail as you like ... weeds, brush, trees reflections and more.

A sharp blade like a craft knife, pocket knife or even a box cutter can be scraped lightly across the surface of the water to suggest that sparkle of light.

Remember that reflections go the same direction as what casts them. If a tree or post leans to the right, its reflection is not going to lean left...

112-3, Wax Tricks – another way to suggest the sparkle of light on water.



This is from my *Sierra Club Guide to Painting in Watercolor*, <http://www.cathyjohnson.info/bookpages/painting.html>, a quick trick that may come in very handy for painting on the spot. Tuck a bit of wax or an old candle or a child's white crayon into your kit to use as a resist.

A. I used a soft, wet in wet wash for the sky.

B. I planned where the sparkles should go on the water and used a bit of paraffin before I ever started to paint.

C. When the sky wash was dry, I added the water, keeping that horizon flat. A little variation in color suggests the shallower water near the shore. The white paper shines through where the wax is, reading as sunlight on water.

D. Then when the water dried, I painted in the distant shore, again maintaining the horizon line.

At E. and F., I added the suggestion of wave action with darker lines ... looks like Maine, and it is!

If you haven't seen it already, you'll find lots of tips on painting still water in this Sunset Mini-demo video I put up on YouTube, located here <http://youtu.be/rVTZ6S0wg-4>.

Please drop by my artists blog, <http://katequicksilvr.livejournal.com/>, my fine arts gallery blog, located at <http://cathyjohnsonart.blogspot.com/>, where I often offer mini-demos, my CafePress store, located at http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson, where you can find instructional CDs for artists, or drop by for a visit on Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/cathy.johnson1>!

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