



Tip #118

Pen and Ink

Challenging and versatile, working with a pen and ink is both tradition and as new as tomorrow. New inks, pens, and surfaces have joined the old favorites of India ink and a croquill pen, and make my fingers itch to try them out!

Of course good old India and a dip pen are wonderfully versatile—artists have been using them for generations.

Sure, if you make a “mistake” in ink, it’s there. You can’t erase ... but really, that’s kind of liberating! You can restate a line close to the one you didn’t like but in the correct position and it makes a nice vibration. It almost invites the viewer into our creative process—and it certainly lets us “learn as we go.” When sketching, there ARE no mistakes, only process ... it’s a journey, not a destination.

118-1, Watkins Woods



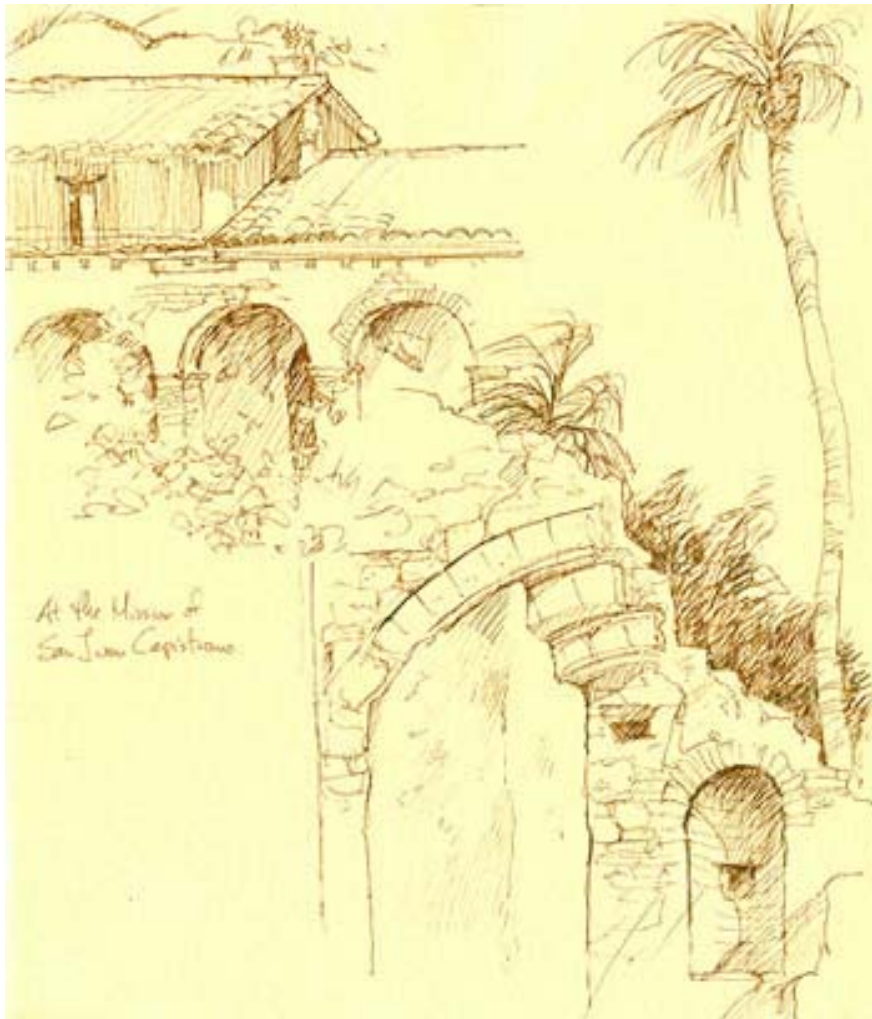
It's a really effective technique, but carrying a dip pen and a bottle of ink with you can be tricky! I turned an ink spill into a nice rich dark in this sketch ... and came home with black fingers!

For convenience, especially if you draw on the spot frequently and don't want to risk spilling a bottle of ink, you can choose inexpensive throwaway fiber-tipped pens in a variety of widths, or fountain pens, which are returning to popularity these days. I love being able to refill a favorite pen and have a good idea how it's going to handle, instead of tossing yet another plastic pen into the landfill or gambling on whether it will dry up or make blobs! I loved the color variety of Nexus pens but they tended to leak, and ESPECIALLY when flying. (Of course some fountain pens can leak when flying, too...best to put them in a ziplock bag till you land!)

118-2, Pen Tests



Get to know your pens, whether they're disposable, dip, or fountain pens. Some fountain pens have a lot of flex, giving you a variety of line widths. You can use a calligraphy pen for almost the same effect. Put them through their paces! Make a variety of marks.



118-3, San Juan Capistrano

Both disposable pens and fountain pens can have colored ink, of course! It can really create a different, more atmospheric effect, so choose ink color according to the effect you want. Here, a sepia ink suggests the great age of this California Mission, as well as the dry air.

118-4, Amana Molly



You can do a really, quick loose sketch—trust yourself and don't worry about the end result. Here, I was sketching fast, using a Lamy Vista pen with an EF nib (it's the same as the popular Lamy Safari, only transparent.)

118-5, Little Missouri Falls



When you have more time, or you're in a contemplative mood, let your ink lines follow the contours of your subject, as I did on the stones and water here. You can suggest tone or value by spacing your lines closer together or farther apart, or overlapping them in a cross-hatched effect. Use all the tricks in your arsenal—here, the quick, scalloped lines suggest both foliage and foaming water.

Don't be intimidated – give ink a try! Next time, we'll talk about ink and watercolor wash, one of my favorite techniques for journaling and travel sketches.

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 catalog, located at <http://www.cathyjohnson.info/catalog.html>, where you can find instructional CDs for artists, or drop by for a visit on Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/cathy.johnson1>!

© Copyright 2011 Cathy Johnson, Graphics/Fine Arts, All Rights Reserved