

Tip #16

Painting wood textures in watercolor - step by step

If you paint landscapes and nature at all, sooner or later you'll find yourself faced with the challenge of painting the texture of wood. Really, it's no more difficult than anything else, if you take it step by step.

When painting bark, it isn't necessary to do a completely detailed and accurate rendering of each tree species- unless you're illustrating a field guide! It IS nice to give a suggestion that matches the tree at hand, though- shagbark hickories are very different from oaks, and both are different from smooth-sided birch.

If you are painting the side of a barn or an old wooden fence, the process of painting is the same...observation and a bit of patience while you wait for the washes to dry are really all that's required.



Art 16-1

Art 16-1, Manmade Wood Texture

Old lumber often weathers beautifully ... if you're painting a barn door, an old house, or other surface, try this sequence. At top left, flood in a varied underlayer, using warm and cool shades and allowing them to blend.

Then, when that layer is completely dry, use a drybrush or fan brush (or both!) to suggest the grain of the wood, as at upper right. Use a linear approach and follow the grain of the wood, then let dry.



Finally, add any details you want, as at bottom center-as much or as little as you like. Knots, cracks, the spaces between boards-a small round brush works well for this, and a stencil brush or old toothbrush is great for adding spatter for texture. The tiny dots look like insect holes...be careful not to make them too uniform, and blot some of them with a tissue for an interesting variation.

Art 16-2, Tree Bark

Just as you did with the old boards, use the same technique for the trunk of a tree, but try to capture the sense of roundness. The sides can be darker and the center not only lighter but even try a bit of lacy drybrush to give the impression of light-struck wood. Again, vary the color and temperature a bit, for interest.

Tree bark color is seldom brown, as we're often tempted to paint it-try mixing burnt umber and ultramarine blue for a lovely, varied gray, or use a bit of burnt sienna for warmth. You can make beautiful tree color using a little brown madder alizarin, if you have it.

Any of the blues and browns mix well to suggest a variety of tree colors-try raw sienna and cobalt, or burnt sienna and ultramarine, too. The warmer color used on the light-struck side of the tree will give the impression of roundness, too.



Art 16-2



Art 16-3

Art 16-3, Go for it!

Go for color as well as texture! This watercolor pencil sketch shows a great variety of color in the tree's trunk. Push color for more exciting effects...here, burnt sienna and ultramarine blue are cooled by a bluish lavender in the shadows-definitely NOT boring!

For much more on painting wood textures, see The Sierra Club Guide to Painting in Nature, from Sierra Club books, <http://www.sierraclub.org/books>, or Creating Textures in Watercolor, from North Light Books, http://www.artistsnetwork.com/nlbooks/about_nl.html.

Both can be found at your local bookstore, art supply store, or online from places like <http://amazon.com>.