

## Tip #17

### *Capturing Excitement and Drama*

So much in life moves quickly. Still lifes and landscapes are wonderful subjects for the artist, allowing us to explore slowly and contemplatively, but - sometimes we want to paint something that just hums with excitement! We see a subject that would make a wonderful painting, but ... we're a bit intimidated by the motion and drama. A horse race, a flood, a storm, the ballet, a fire, they're great subjects...but HOW?! These things move, and move fast! They move us, as well -- with motion and drama comes *emotion*.

Well, one of the best ways to capture the essence of the subject is to sketch on the spot, using some of the techniques explored in the books on drawing - Betty Edwards' *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, or my own *Sierra Club Guide to Sketching in Nature* (\*Check [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or your local book or art supply store.) Try gesture sketches, where you spend from 2-3 to 15 seconds on your subject, getting just the bare bones.

Did I say *seconds*?? Yes, seconds. Your hand/eye coordination gets a workout and you learn to draw FAST.

#### **Art 17-1, Gesture Pup**

This playful little guy could be captured with a quick gesture sketch, lightly done in pencil-then you can go back and add details from observation. If you can do THIS, you can do any moving subject, be it a horse race or a fist fight.

#### **Art 17-2, Prairie Fire**

Memory drawings work, too-let your mind take in what you see, pay attention, ask yourself questions to fix it in your mind, do what you can on the spot, and then finish later, when you can recall the essence.

In this sketch, done at the Martha Lafite Thompson Nature Sanctuary in Liberty, Missouri, I drew while they burned off the prairie in late winter. It was exciting, and a little bit dangerous as well-I had to remain aware of where the fire was moving at all times. I did the rough sketch using a fibre-tipped pen, added what color I could on the spot with colored pencils, then finished the rest from a safe distance. Memory helped, too ... I added more back at the Nature center. I could do a complete painting from the information garnered from this sketch, and my written notes on the next page.



Art 17-1

NEVER put yourself in unnecessary danger, but don't be afraid to take on challenging subjects! This is one place you may HAVE to rely on a photo-fast speed film or even a digital camera can capture things much more quickly than we can, after all! 1/125th of a second is fast!ultramarine, too. The warmer color used on the light-struck side of the tree will give the impression of roundness, too.

### **Art 17-3, Water in Flood**

Watch for repetitions - a pacing or running animal may repeat the same action, so if you don't get it all, don't worry. Moving water repeats approximately the same actions, because whatever is under the water's surface doesn't change-it makes repetitive shapes, too. You can capture a river in flood using this kind of awareness of repetition.



**Art 17-2**

Notice in this ink drawing-the rocks determine the shapes of the water. It's moving fast, it was VERY loud and exciting, but there was a certain pattern to it.



**Art 17-3**

You'll find some of these images on new products in my Cafepress store, at [http://www.cafepress.com/cathy\\_johnson](http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson).