

Tip #18

Techniques for Painting Foliage in Watercolor

There are probably as many techniques for painting foliage as there are artists - or tree species! But here's some food for thought if you've gotten into a rut and want to try something new - at least one of these should get your creative juices flowing!

Consider the season - are your trees just budding, or fully leafed? Think about the types of trees in your painting - are they deciduous, losing their leaves in the fall, or evergreen, with needles or similar foliage? Are you painting spindly, graceful redbuds, urn-shaped elms, rugged oaks?

Art 18-1, Simplified Foliage in the Distance

When you paint trees in landscape, you can simplify a great deal-the foliage is too distant to see individual leaves. Let your lights and darks suggest tree forms in the closest areas, and the overall forest shape suggest the more distant trees. A few loose strokes at the edges will give the impression of leaves.



Art 18-1



Art 18-2

Art 18-2, Seasons and Techniques

Try a variety of techniques to suggest the seasons. At left, early spring buds were suggested with spatter and



pouncing motions with the tips of a bristle brush, spread with my fingertips. In the center, repeated dabbing with a natural sponge dipped in varied washes captured the look of a tree fully leafed but still a bit lacy. And at right, the mature tree sports thick foliage painted with a fully-loaded flat brush. Here, darker washes were flooded in wet-in-wet to give the impression of depth, and a bit of drybrush work at the edges makes individual leaves.



Art 18-3

Art 18-3, More Tools and Techniques

The oak tree at left uses a similar technique-notice how the limbs overlap foliage or peek through "holes" to give a realistic effect in the simplest possible way. In the center, drybrush on rough paper was applied *through* a hole torn in another sheet of paper - it acted as a stencil. When it was removed, I added a bit of loose work along the edges. At right are two very stylized foliage forms - see what speaks to YOU!

Art 18-4, A Combination of Effects ...

...is what you'll find in this finished painting, suggesting a mixed forest. This one's in Maine, so there are balsam, fir, and a variety of other trees.

You'll see more techniques for painting trees in my *Sierra Club Guide to Painting in Nature* and my North Light First Steps Series book, *Watercolor*. (Check www.amazon.com or your local book or art supply store.)

You'll find some of these images on new products in my Cafepress store, at http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson.

© Copyright Cathy Johnson, Graphics/Fine Arts
All Rights Reserved
Website: <http://www.cathyjohnson.info>
Email: graphicart@epsi.net



Art 18-4