Tip #31

Step by step painting of the ocean

Well, best laid plans...it's a good thing I decided to work on two paintings at once, this time, because I was scanning the steps and my scanner crashed. Naturally I hadn't saved them yet...ouch! This isn't the painting I'd actually planned to use for this demo, but I like it and it is instructive, sooooo...

I love the way the waves recede and leave an almost smooth, glossy stretch that is not quite ocean, not quite beach. It's in this zone that you get the most reflections, and that effect fascinated me. A day of intense but soft light, the long white rollers following one another in to shore, and the people there to enjoy the day, as I was-I had to paint it, and will again and again, I'm sure!

Art 31-1, Step 1

I had a number of sketches that I'd done on the spot, but of course I also took resource photos-you can see the one that inspired me, here. There's no need to try to copy a photo, though - they are just resources. I raised the horizon line for a better composition-that line in the photo was almost dead center. I also simplified the scene a great deal - it seemed more expressive to simply have the boy and his dog rather than a beach full of people as you see in the photo.

Art 31-1

I raised the horizon line for better composition and simplified the scene...

source photo...

I just sketched in the major lines-hills, dune, beach-and drew the figures more carefully, then protected the latter here and there with liquid maskoid, to preserve the whites. I wet down the entire paper with clean water and a large brush, then laid in a graded/variegated wash with cobalt, a bit of ultramarine blue, and a touch of sap green, keeping the lightest area near the horizon to suggest the foggy distance. I lifted a suggestion of clouds with a damp paper towel, and let it dry enough to scan.

Art 31-2

Art 31-2, Step 2

The far hills in were laid in with small, graded washes in varied colors, blotting here and there to give a bit of definition, then I added the dune and beach with a 1" flat brush. I like the freshness a flat brush offers - and the bigger the brush the less likely I am to get niggly with details too soon. The land is mostly yellow ochre and raw sienna with a bit of blue to cool and gray them, and the dune grass is a mix of olive and hooker's green.
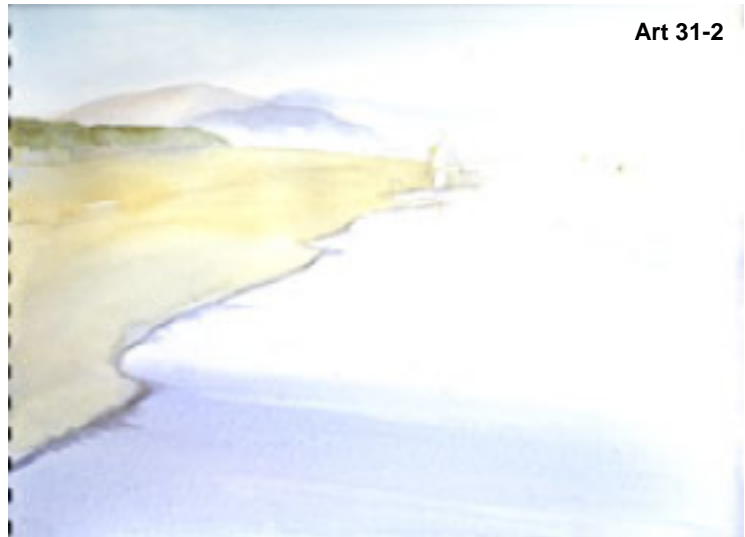
Art 31-3, Step 3, and the Problem ...

I added more detail to the land and sea, paying attention to perspective and the vanishing points of each-that helps suggest distance. The boy and his dog and their reflections were painted using a small round brush-but something bothered me. I left this to percolate overnight and realized in the morning that the values were too harshly defined, and the figures looked as though they were cut from black paper and pasted on! I wasn't trying to copy the photo, but recapture the day - so I wasn't wanting the exact values. Keeping it lighter in value captured the feel of the day at the beach, but the contrasts were simply too great, as you can clearly see in the detail inset.

Art 31-3

Too harsh, too dark--
the figures look pasted on!

Art 31-4, Step 4 - the Fix!

So I lifted some of the paint with a small bristle brush and clear water, blotting as I went, then refined the shapes again with slightly more color. The beach got another light layer of color to darken it somewhat, and I was much happier with the effect and the relationship between elements in the whole!

This is a wonderful, hard-surfaced watercolor paper, Canson Montval, so I could lift washes easily without damaging the paper-that was very helpful as I tweaked the waves and the area of reflective wetness in the fore-ground, as well! Just be sure to keep the water in your brush clean when you're lifting areas, rinse it often, and remove the excess pigment with a clean paper towel.

Art 31-4

For more on painting the sea, check my North Light book, Watercolor Pencil Magic, (pages 64-66) from your local bookstore, or from North Light Books, http://www.artistsnetwork.com/nlbooks/index.asp, or from Amazon, http://www.amazon.com, or buy it direct from me and have it signed, http://www.cathyjohnson.info.

I'll be addressing this subject further in my "Watercolor-Online!" classes -- check my website for more informa-tion on starting dates and so forth!

You'll find my artwork on new products in my Cafepress store at http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson and original fine art auctions on eBay at http://members.ebay.com/aboutme/cathyjohnsonart.