

Tip #71

Using Liquid Mask

White paper is traditionally your lightest light, in watercolor -- just the opposite of opaque mediums, it's the transparency of watercolor that gives it the illusion of light.

Liquid mask, maskoid, masking agent, whatever you choose to call it, this is a handy tool for preserving light values in watercolor by keeping

that white paper untouched until YOU want to alter it. Mask can be applied with a brush, a pen, a toothpick, a sharpened stick, or even one of the new Masquepen offerings that have a tiny nozzle that feeds the liquid mask onto the paper.

Art 71-1, Masquepen

There are several sizes of Masquepen nibs - this is the one that comes with the basic package.

If you choose a brush, be sure not to use your favorite sable or it can be ruined with dried maskoid! Use a less expensive manmade brush, but even then it's usually a good idea to wet the brush with water and a bit of liquid detergent, or run it over a bar of soap. Then when you're done, rinse immediately to save your brush for another day.

Some artists choose cheap brushes meant for kids' craft projects, but I prefer more fine control than those brushes usually offer. They're great for some effects, though! Try spattering the mask on with a bristle brush for small sparkles in your finished work.

Liquid mask can be thinned with water, if need be-- experiment with how much you need to add. You can get quite delicate results if it's at the proper consistency, but if it's too thick, it will be blobby and difficult to apply.

If it smells really awful, you may have an old bottle--that may or may not cause problems, but if the smell is too much for you, get a new bottle.



Art 71-1

Art 71-2, Step one, Fourth Lake Demo

Here's a quick demo on a simple use of liquid mask...I did this painting of Fourth Lake, in the Adirondacks, at one of our art crawls for my demonstration. I've applied the liquid mask (this one is blue!) and let it dry thoroughly before adding wet-in-wet washes for the sunset sky.



Art 71-2

Art 71-3, Step two, Fourth Lake Demo

Now, after the sky washes are dry, I've gone back and added the trees on the hill-where they're silhouetted against the sunset light, I pushed the color a bit, even warmer, and used a rich mix of Thalo Blue and Burnt Umber for the shadowed hillside. You can see that I painted right over the mask, again, and let everything dry.



Art 71-3

Art 71-4, "Sunset, Fourth Lake, NY," 9 x 12 watercolor



Art 71-4

I removed the mask by rubbing it gently with a fingertip to start loosening it from the paper, then pulled gently till it was all gone. You can also use a rubber cement pickup for this.

Then I added the tiny limbs and trunks with the same rich mixture that I used for the hillside -- a sharpened stick worked well to drag the pigment out into fine lines, integrating the areas that had been protected by the maskoid. The bird was painted last, using warm colors to suggest that the light was striking it.

If you'd like to see the working notes for this small painting, you'll find them in my Flickr album, here, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/25146557@N00/538768939/>.

You can see more on using liquid mask in my North Light books, *Watercolor Tricks and Techniques* and *Creating Textures in Watercolor*.

Be sure to look for my NEW CDs for artists in my Cafepress store, http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson, and watch for my fine arts auctions weekly on eBay, <http://members.ebay.com/aboutme/cathyjohnsonart>.