

Tip #21

Painting Rocks in Watercolor step-by-step

Rocks are a frequent element in landscape, formed by a variety of means-among them the dramatic violence of volcanic action and the slow, sedimentary buildup of tiny bits of silica or lime. They may be rough or smooth, tiny pebbles or boulders as big as an elephant-or a mountain! They might be striated, light, dark, angular, rounded, or as full of holes as a piece of Swiss cheese. Pressure, heat, cold, erosion, all play their part in creating this marvelous variety of forms and colors, always challenging for the artist to paint believably.

Fortunately, watercolor offers us many options for capturing this subject...layering, shading, wet-in-wet, scraping, scratching, spatter...even Sumi-e techniques! Combine them to capture the rocks most prevalent in your locale...

Art 21-1, Taking it slow and easy

Sketch the basic shape of your rock or rocks, paying attention to angles and planes as well as fault lines, if any. Then lay in a wet in wet layer of watercolor, using the largest brush you comfortably can for the size of your work, and varied tones for interest. Here, warm and cool combine to make a pleasing effect. Blot with a tissue, if you like, to suggest a light-struck area.

Allow this to dry, then begin to model shadows and larger details.

Finally, finish up with cast shadows, spatter and some drybrush work to suggest texture, following the basic form of the rock.



Art 21-2



Art 21-1

Art 21-2, A versatile technique!

Here, you can see that the same technique works on any number of types of rock. At upper left is a granite boulder, smoothed by time and grinding beneath a glacier before being deposited near my home. A little salt sprinkled into the still-damp wash suggested the sparkles of lighter rock usually visible in granite or pink quartzite.

At upper right is a bit of a limestone cliff...the color and

the direction of your brushstrokes make all the difference in the type of rock it appears to be, and different landscapes have different rocks.

At bottom center you'll find the warm striated sandstone so common in the desert Southwest, created with burnt sienna, raw sienna, and cobalt blue. A spatter of dark pigment gives the sandy texture-I like to use a stencil brush for spattering, but some prefer an old toothbrush.



Art 21-3

Art 21-3, Putting it all to work...

I used the sandstone layering technique to paint this scene from Nevada's Red Rock Canyon, where I came upon the art of the ancients. The darker rock in the foreground is coated with "desert varnish," the staining that occurs naturally in these regions. I used a liquid mask to protect the pictographs before adding my final layer of dark, bluish desert varnish, and removed it when the paint was completely dry.

For more on these techniques, see *The Sierra Club Guide to Sketching in Nature*, *The Sierra Club Guide to Painting in Nature*, both from Sierra Club of course, and my North Light book, *Creating Textures in Watercolor* from your local bookstore, North Light Books online at <http://www.artistsnetwork.com/nlbooks/index.asp> or <http://www.amazon.com>.

You'll find my original artwork on new products in my Cafepress store, at http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson.