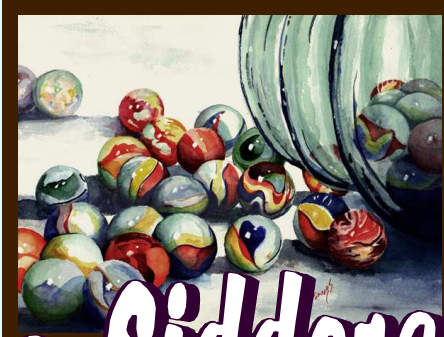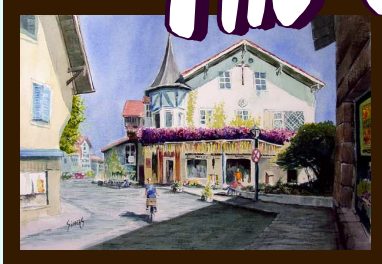# AN INTRODUCTION TO WATERCOLOR PAINTING !

The Sam Sidders way !

A few tips, from Sam, for painting with transparent watercolor and a brief look at the terms, techniques and materials that he uses.

Introduction to Watercolor !

WHAT WATERCOLOR MEANS TO ME: More than 50 years ago, I decided to teach myself to paint. I had been given a small set of oil paints and a couple of brushes, so I thought I was ready. It was fun, but sometimes frustrating for me because I had no formal training and I also grew impatient with waiting for the paints to dry. My pursuit of art was interrupted, for a time, when I received a draft notice from the U.S. Army, but after being discharged, I again decided to try my hand at painting and it wasn't long before I decided to study art at Southwestern Oklahoma State College. The school was not a major university, but the art department had a respectable reputation and the school was not far from my home.

Soon I was in the midst of all kinds of artistic endeavors, including my first formal painting course, **_"watercolor 101"._** It was totally different than the oil painting I had done on my own and I hated it ! But, I continued my art studies, concentrating mostly on sculpture, pottery and other 3 dimensional art forms. However, I also continued to study painting and somewhere along the way, after many more painting courses, I found myself drawn more and more to watercolor. To me, the unpredictable nature of watercolor made it exciting. I also liked the fact that supplies were minimal and cleanup was easy. Soon, I was hooked and other than a few ventures into "Mixed-Media" painting, I have been a "transparent watercolorist" ever since.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED A WATERCOLOR PAINTING ?

Traditionally, watercolor used only thin, transparent washes of pigment. Some beautiful paintings have been produced using this method. However, the term "Watercolor" has come to cover much more than the traditional transparent style of painting. Contemporary watercolor covers many styles, techniques and materials. The American Watercolor Society now recognizes watercolor, acrylic, casein, gouache, egg tempera and more as acceptable aqua mediums..

The area of mixed-media painting opens up many, many possibilities and blending watercolor with ink, pastel, collage and other water-based media is one of the most exciting and addictive forms of art expression. The process of building up, altering, editing, destroying and rebuilding allows a painting to develop a life of its own. The artist, almost becomes an onlooker, who is simply watching and assisting as the painting finds it's own direction.

IS IT OK TO BREAK THE RULES OF TRADITIONAL WATERCOLOR PAINTING?

I am sometimes asked if the use of a particular technique, painting method or painting tool is "cheating" or "against the rules"! Of course, I can only speak for myself, but my answer to that question is that doing a painting is not a contest or game, so there really is not a way to "cheat" or "break the rules"! Fitting into the traditional definition of watercolor is of little importance to me. Unless, of course, you are planning to enter the work in a competition that enforces such definitions. Following rules should be low on your list of priorities. So just get some pencils, paint and paper and have some fun. Don't worry too much about what it is that constitutes a "proper" watercolor painting.

If you are doing your paintings to sell or if you are just concerned about the longevity of your paintings, I do feel that it is important that you use good materials that will result in a quality finished product. Use light-fast pigments from reputable manufactures, choose a good quality acid free paper and be sure whatever you use on it is neutral pH.

A few basics about Watercolor Painting !

Working with watercolor may at first seem strange and difficult. Especially if you have previously painted with opaque mediums such as oil or acrylic. The first and most obvious difference is the fact that watercolor is transparent. This means you must decide from the very beginning where the areas of white will be in your painting. And, with the exception of minor highlights, you must save those whites as you work.
They usually can't be successfully added later !

THUMBNAIL SKETCHES :
Small thumbnail sketches allow you to move your subject around and adjust the composition before you start to paint. It is much easier to avoid composition problems if you have a plan for the painting to begin with, particularly when it comes to arranging (light/dark) contrast. Break your thumbnail sketches into about three or four different tonal areas and shade them in. This lets you manipulate the lights and darks so the maximum contrast occurs at the center of interest.
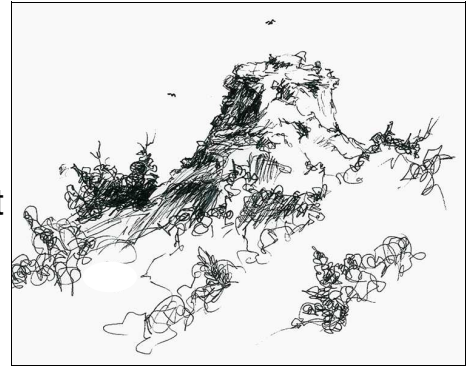
THE PROGRESSION OF A WATERCOLOR PAINTING :
The process for successful watercolor painting, is to avoid the areas to be left white and apply the lightest washes first, gradually working your way towards darker washes. Try to cover large areas fairly loosely in the early stages of the painting, applying tighter detail towards the end.
A light pencil drawing of the painting subject is first drawn on to the paper and color washes are applied as illustrated here:
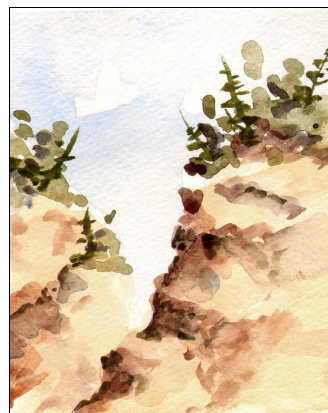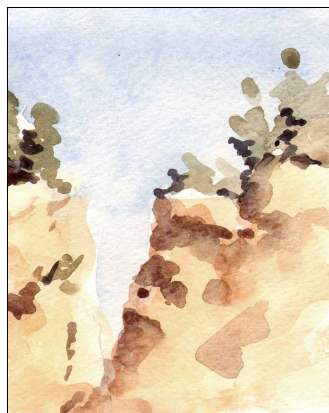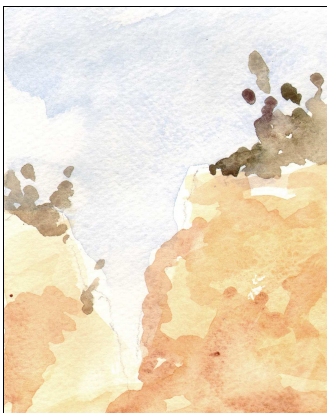
COLOR HARMONY - These are a few things to remember to help maintain color harmony throughout your painting:

Limit your palette: It is tempting to use lots of different colors, but that usually results in a confusing or muddy work. Limit your colors to just two or three, particularly in the early stages of a painting. Your subject will dictate which ones to choose. For buildings, landscape etc. starting with washes of earth colors - Raw Sienna and Burnt Sienna plus a little Ultramarine or Indigo, depending on

These paintings were done using only a
Dark Blue and Burnt Sienna

what sort of atmosphere you're after. Using a limited palette will give a harmonious under painting to work on. More intense colors can be carefully introduced later if desired.

Foreign colors : How often do you look at a painting and see an area of color that doesn't seem to fit? A group of trees done in an "out-of-place" green, a discordant blue river or a purple flower that seems to jump out of the bunch. The remedy to this problem is simple, introduce more of the discordant color to the rest of the painting.

Tie up color : A few fine calligraphic lines in a harmonious color will usually tighten up a disjointed color arrangement. Use a #1 or 2 liner brush. It is important to use varying values of just one color for these lines or you run the risk of adding to the confusion. Using a "splattering" of color will soften the lines and create some interesting effects. Additional feathering effects can be achieved by quickly following the spattering with a fine spray mist of water or touching the area with a wet brush.
.

Darks : (Avoid neutral darks) - a painting will have more life and character if the darks tend to either warm or cool. To mix a rich strong dark **do not** use an opaque Yellow. Too much of any yellow tends to make muddy darks.

These illustrations
demonstrate the
use of line and
splatters.

CENTER OF INTEREST : For a painting to be successful the center of interest should be obvious and well positioned. Avoid placing the center of interest in the middle of a painting (either horizontally or vertically) unless you are after a static, formal composition. Keeping the center of interest an unequal distance from each side helps position it correctly. **Mentally** dividing the painting surface into 9 equal parts as demonstrated in the following illustrations can assist you in proper placement of the center of interest.   It usually works best to place the main subject near one of the four intersecting points in the center area of the composition.

These two illustrations demonstrate suggestions for proper placement of the primary point of interest

DON'T OVER WORK :   A painting filled with carefully labored detail from one edge to the other can be difficult to look at. If you like to work with fine detail, consider including some areas of relief.

In these paintings the viewer's eye can wander between the interesting textures of the subjects and the relief provided by the flat areas of the foregrounds and backgrounds.

- PLAN, PLAN, PLAN before starting your painting !
- Practice Drawing! Painting is nothing more than drawing in color ! If you can't draw, you can't paint !
- You can't create in a vacuum ! Familiarize yourself with your subject !
- Leave white areas in your painting !
- IT'S WATERCOLOR ! Paint with tinted water, not thinned paint !
- Get clean water frequently !
- It's OK to experiment with new techniques and technology !
- Use whatever tools and materials that it takes to get the result that you want !
- Paint what you see ! NOT what you think you see !
- Don't get too dark too quick !
- Do NOT overwork your painting ! STOP before you think you are finished !
- Enjoy your mistakes ! And, learn to create from them !

A few things to remember while you are painting !

DRAWING TIPS: **_Practice:_** It doesn't matter what you draw, you have to train your eye to accurately judge proportion and your hand to accurately convert these judgments to marks on paper. There are no shortcuts here, lots and lots of pencil shavings are the only answer.

No matter what you are drawing it is important to first consider how your subject will be placed on the page. Again, the small thumbnail sketches are a good way to work out the composition before you start your drawing.   Start your drawing by mentally reducing the subject to a few simple shapes. Sketch these in lightly and accurately, then proceed to break these up into smaller more detailed shapes.
DON'T **_start at one corner of the subject and work your way across to the other._**

The strongest tonal (light / dark) contrast should be placed at the center of interest. Have some areas of the drawing less detailed than others. Try and keep most of the detail in the area of the center of interest. Leave something to the imagination of the viewer.

Tips for Painting from PHOTOGRAPHS !

In the ideal setting, the artist would be able to always have a model to work from or always have a beautiful day to paint on location. However, we do not always have those luxuries! Consequently, many painters have come to rely on the use of photographs as reference material for much of their work. Digital photography has provided the artist with an inexpensive means to accumulate large quantities of reference material. Also, there are millions of photos available for viewing on the internet. Although the use of photographs is an accepted aid for painting, the following are a few things that the painter should remember when using them.

SNAPSHOT PHOTOS ARE USUALLY NOT GREAT COMPOSITIONS:

Occasionally, the pictorial composition of a snapshot photo is suitable for use as a painting just as it was taken. However this does not happen often and even when it does the artist must use caution about trying to duplicate EVERYTHING in the photo. Again, I strongly recommend doing thumbnail value sketches to help determine just the right amount of detail to include in the painting. Usually, even an interesting photo will require a considerable amount of modification to be a successful painting composition. In the illustrations on the next page, you will see some photos as they were taken and be able to see the changes that were made in the finished paintings.
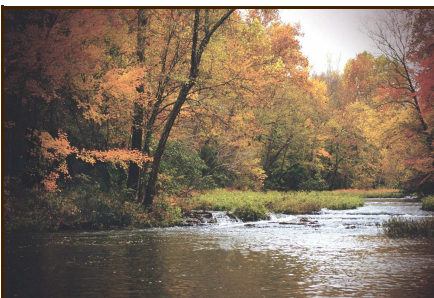
Although some minor details were changed in these paintings, there was very little change made in the photographer's original composition.

CROPPING A PHOTO TO IMPROVE THE COMPOSITION

The following illustrations show how a horizontal photo was cropped to create a vertical painting composition. Artistic license was also exercised is altering some of the details.

ADDING TO A PHOTO TO IMPROVE THE COMPOSITION

The following illustrations show how an appealing photo was expanded through sketching to plan a more pleasing composition.
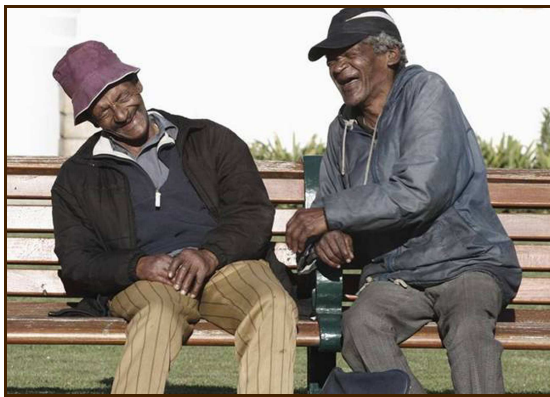
The original photo was digitally copied to larger piece of paper to allow planning for the composition.   A thumbnail value sketch was also done to assist in placement of the light and dark areas of the final painting.

Using Basic Washes in a Simple Landscape Painting

This is a quick, simple little exercise for practice in applying washes. It also is helpful in practicing the use of a wide brush to apply paint and softening paint edges. This exercise will not produce a painting masterpiece, but it will help with your painting skills and is fun to do too ! Once you have done a few of these, you will be able to incorporate what you have learned into a more involved painting composition.

Use a 1/4 sheet of paper or smaller for this exercise. If you use less than 300 # paper, it should be taped or clamped to a stiff board to minimize buckling. Mix wash of a pale rose color. I will be using Alizarin Crimson, but Rose Madder or Permanent rose will work just as well. You can also do this exercise using a bit of Cadmium Orange instead of the pink. Wet the paper and apply a pale band of the pink color horizontally to the center third of paper. Blend the rose color into the upper and lower thirds of the paper using a wide brush. A clean damp (not wet) wash brush works well for this. The pink wash should remain light as it will become the soft sky on the horizon behind your foliage and trees.

MATERIALS
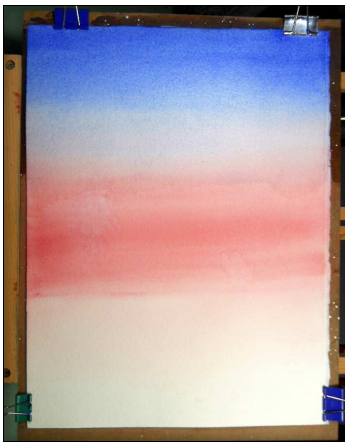
Brushes
1" flat
#1 or #2 Rigger
2" Wash Brush

Paper
1/4 sheet 300gsm Arches

Paint
Yellow Ochre or Indian Yellow
Burnt Sienna
Raw Umber
Alizarin Crimson
Ultramarine Blue
Cobalt Blue

Allow the thin pink wash to dry completely before going on to the next step. Even thought the paper will be wet again for this next step, it is necessary that the first wash be completely dry to eliminate the possibility of unwanted effects when new colors are added.

Using clean water, again wet the top half of the paper. Then begin applying a graded wash of Cobalt Blue from the top down, thinning the wash as you go down the paper. This wash should be almost clear water by the time you get down to the pink wash at the center of your paper. Then while the blue wash is still wet. Use a clean, nearly dry, wash brush to even out any brush marks. This should be done by lightly stroking, the brush horizontally, using quick, short strokes, working from the bottom of the wash and moving slowly upward.

While the blue wash is drying, you can begin painting in the foreground area, using a wash of "dirty yellow". I used a combination of Alizarin Crimson, Ultramarine blue and Gamboage. Other yellows, such as Yellow Ochre, Indian Yellow or Yellow Azo also work well. A mixture of just about anything that will give an "earthy" feeling is what we are looking for here. This mixture should remain thin in the beginning and should be applied with irregular strokes to indicate the textures and shapes that one might see on the ground. The edge of the foreground at the horizon should also be irregular with some hard edges and some that are soft and blended into the sky. Use a little clean water to soften some of the spots if necessary.

Once again, allow the washes to dry completely before moving to the next step. Again, using clean water, wet the paper in the area above the horizon line and using a large brush with a stronger mixture of the same colors that you used in the foreground, drop some strong areas of color along parts of the horizon line to indicate a distant tree line or bushes. Don't get too carried away or too dark with the first applications here. Then allow the "foliage" to dry a bit and drop in a few more areas of even darker pigment. Again using clear water, touch a few areas of the applied color to soften some of the edges to allow blending, but do not over-do this step. Leave some distinction in the light and dark areas of the distant foliage. Again allow the paper to dry completely.
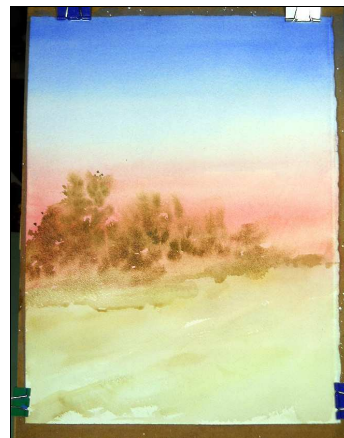
Now it's time to muster up your nerve and apply some strong, contrasting color. Mix a dark green using Cobalt Blue, Burnt Sienna, a bit of Ultramarine blue and a Yellow. This needs to be heavier mixture than the previously used washes, but it still needs to be fluid. Don't worry about making it too dark. As you apply and feather it out with water, it will lighten. Apply the paint in random, fractured shapes to the dry paper. Use your 1" flat brush or even a larger brush. Keep the brush at about the same angle throughout this process and use a scrubbing action to get those rough, uneven edges. This step should not be particularly neat. Don't try to make everything too precise. As the paint dries, use a clean brush and clean water to achieve variations in the edges of the foliage. Some spots should be very soft and other remain sharp. Dropping in a few more dark areas or varying the color will also add interest. This is not as easy as it sounds! Try to make it appear spontaneous, even if it isn't.

Now we are ready to make these bold, dark areas into trees by adding the trunks and branches. Your 1" flat brush should be used for the larger part of the trunks and a #2 rigger brush for the main branches. If you have a smaller rigger brush, it can be used for more detail. Add some random texture and shapes to the foreground to help to hold the viewer's eye. A cool blue-gray wash will give the feeling of shadows beneath the trees.   In this demonstration, I used some Alizarin Crimson to add color interest. A few sprigs of grass and a little spattering of color will also add interest.

Using Basic Washes in a Simple Landscape Painting
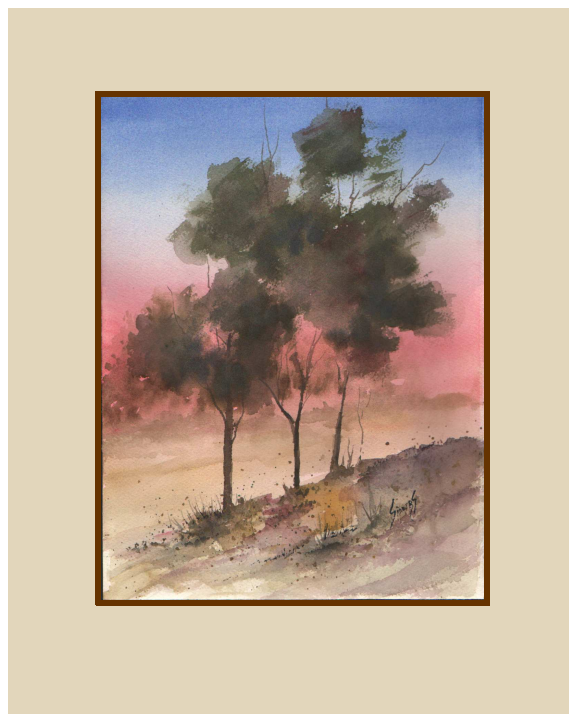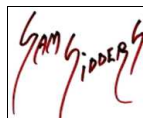
Preserving WHITES in Transparent Watercolor

The white areas of a transparent watercolor painting are **NOT** painted. They are obtained by using the white of the watercolor paper. The following are a few methods to help you preserve or reclaim white or at least light areas in transparent watercolor painting. Other methods are available, but these are the most commonly used.

PAINTING AROUND the white areas

This method requires that you do a bit of advance-planning by doing a LIGHT pencil sketch on your painting surface to help you remember where the white areas of the finished work will be. Once you have the white area indicated, you just carefully paint around them, leaving the white paper visible. The sharpness of end result will depend on the moistness of the surface when the paint is being applied. Dry paper will produce sharp edges, while damp paper will provide soft edges. Experimenting will assist you in achieving the effects that you desire.

SCRAPING OUT the white areas

For this method, the white areas are scraped out of the damp paint using the angled end of a plastic brush, a painting knife, razor blade, a piece of stiff mat board, a playing card or even an old credit card. This technique requires practice to find the correct dampness of the paper. If the paper is too wet, the paint will run back into the white areas and if the paint is too dry it will not be possible to scrape the paint out. Experiment on a piece of scrap watercolor paper.
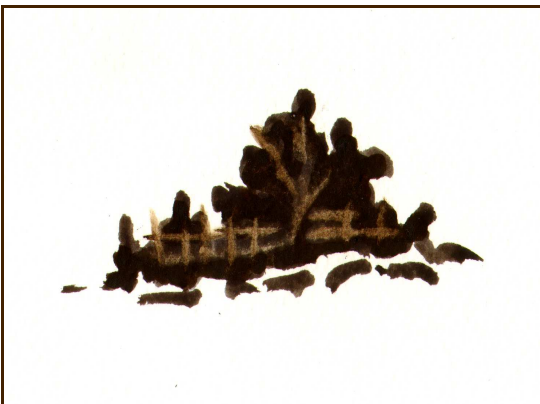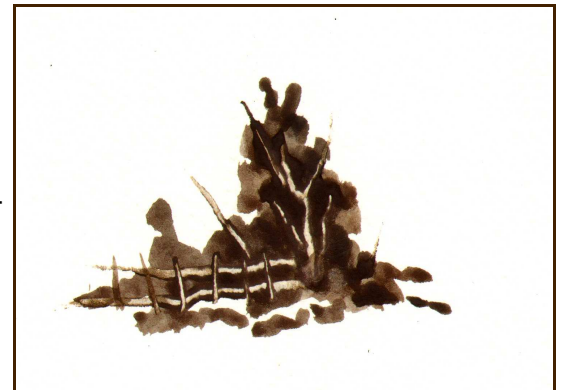
LIFTING or SCRUBBING OUT the white areas

This technique is helpful when you need a light area in a location that you failed to plan for. Using clean water and brush, wet the spot that you wish to lighten and let the water sit for about 30 seconds. Blot the moist area with an absorbent paper towel or tissue. This procedure can be repeated if necessary to make the area lighter.   It is sometime helpful to use a very small, oil painting type, bristle brush to scrub out the pigment. This method is probably the least effective in completely retrieving whites.

IT'S YOUR PAINTING ! HAVE FUN WITH IT !

PROTECTING the white areas with liquid mask

Step 1 - After sketching the "guide drawing" onto your painting surface, apply masking fluid, using a small brush, a *"ruling pen"*, or other fine pointed tool to cover the areas that you wish to retain as white. (Masque Pen brand fluid makes an excellent applicator for fine lines.)   DO NOT USE YOUR GOOD BRUSHES FOR THIS. If you use a brush, dip it in liquid detergent and wipe it with a paper towel prior to dipping it into the masking fluid. Be sure to clean the brush frequently during the masking process.
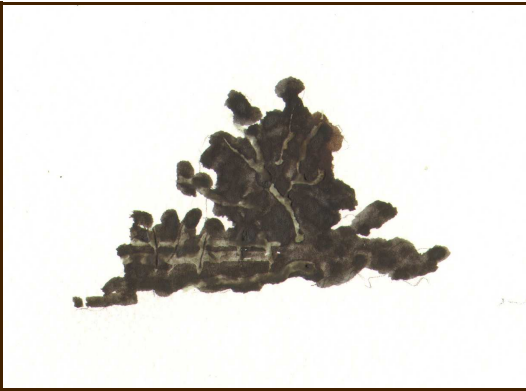
Step 2 - When the masking fluid is completely dry, apply watercolor washes as desired and allow them to dry completely. Do not force dry the masking fluid or the washes with a heat gun or hair drier, the heat may make it impossible to remove the masking film. The masking film should be removed as soon as possible, but do not rush it. Attempting to remove masking fluid from moist paper can cause smudging of the washes.

Step 3 - When the paint is completely dry, remove the dried masking fluid. It is usually easily removed by rubbing with the thumb, but a rubber "frisket remover" pickup tool is available for that purpose. The white areas can be soften by touching them with clean water or they can be tinted with thin washes.

A few important things to remember when using masking fluid:
◊   Do **NOT** use good brushes.
◊   Do **NOT** apply to damp or wet paper.
◊   Do **NOT** get the fluid on your good clothes.
◊   Clean tools **thoroughly** & **frequently** during use & **immediately** after completion of application.

Other, methods of retaining or retrieving whites include scratching highlights into dry paint with an x-acto knife or razor blade, "wax resist" and restoring highlights using dots of opaque white paint. However the techniques discussed above are the most commonly used.

Use whatever tools and materials that it takes to achieve the result that you want !

ADDING FIGURES

Placing figures in a painting often adds life and interest that can make the difference between an ordinary painting and a good one. The subject of a painting can change with the inclusion of figures. Emphasis shifts from the surroundings to the activity in which the figures are involved. In the examples below the figures change the subject of the painting from what would be fairly bland empty paintings of build-

(Fig. 1)

(Fig. 2)

ings to people visiting on the street (Fig. 1), and people walking on a busy city street (Fig. 2). The subject becomes more personal and easier to identify with. Although some of the figures

(Fig. 3)

(Fig. 4)

(Fig. 5)
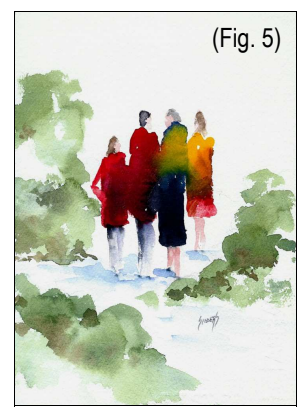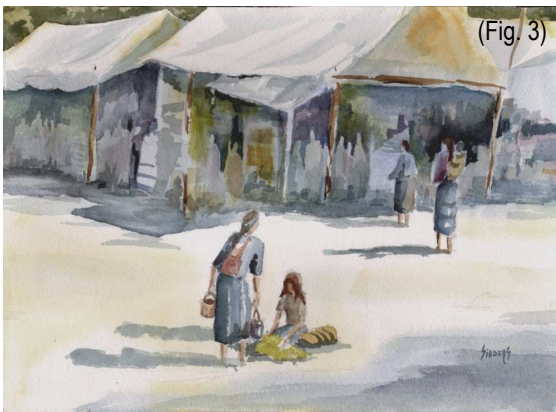
in these examples are somewhat detailed, it is possible to achieve the same effects by using figures that are very simple and understated. The figures in (Fig. 3 & 4) are suggested rather than carefully rendered. It is important to keep the heads small and not to fiddle too much. The beauty of these figures lies in their simplicity. In (Fig. 5) some colored shapes are put in to suggest the bodies – don't worry too much about accuracy or keeping the shapes separate. The shapes have bled into one another. This adds character and makes the group more interesting. The main thing to remember is to vary the size color and spacing. Heads and legs were added with a light mix of Alizarin and Raw Sienna.   Dragging a damp brush through the bottom of the legs softens where they meet the ground and helps to anchor the figures. Using a darker gray, shadows were put on some of the legs and dark marks were added to indicate hair. To increase detail a little, an arm was added to the figure on the left and a skirt to the figure on the right.

Distant figures can be treated in a similar way but with cooler more subdued colors.
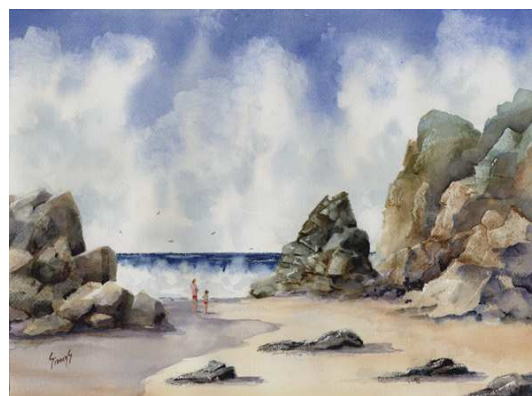
The bridge was added to this painting after completion to unify the composition.

After Thoughts !

The figures were added to this painting 3 years following completion to add interest.

FINALLY AND IMPORTANTLY,
ENJOY WHAT YOU HAVE DONE !

Put a mat around your work, sit down with a cup of coffee, and look at all the good things you have done. It is important to feel good about your work. Dwelling on mistakes or problems is disheartening and makes it difficult to move on.

I have yet to see a painting without some good points.

Concentrating on the positive aspects of your work gives you confidence and

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13

Recommended Supplies & Materials for Sam's Classes & Workshops

Watercolor paper :
ROUGH or COLD PRESS surface, mold-made paper such as Arches or Saunders-Waterford
approximately 11"x15" (¼ sheet size)
I prefer the use of 300# paper to eliminate the need for stretching, however, 140# paper is an acceptable substitute, Paper lighter than 300# will require the use of a stiff backing board, or a "Watercolor Block" to reduce buckling. It is also a good idea to have a small pad of inexpensive watercolor paper available to use for checking color mixes and practicing brush strokes.

Paint: I use the following colors regularly:
Raw Umber, Cobalt Blue, Burnt Sienna, Ultramarine Blue, Alizarin Crimson, Hookers Green Deep, Cadmium Yellow Light, Cadmium Red Lt., Yellow Ochre, Raw Sienna.

Colors that I use less frequently (not required):
Cadmium Orange, Burnt Umber, Indigo, Thalo(Phthalocyanine)Green, Thalo(Phthalocyanine)Blue, New Gamboage.

Colors that I use occasionally (not required):
Payne's Gray, Davy's Gray, Cerulean Blue, Lemon Yellow, Sepia, Sap Green,
A small tube or bottle of white (acrylic, watercolor or Gouache)

Brushes:
I suggest that you do **NOT** purchase the absolute cheapest brushes that you can find, However, I do **NOT** suggest that you buy the most expensive brushes either. Medium quality student grade brushes are quite sufficient. The "soft" brushes may be of the synthetic hair type.

Soft Hair Brushes: #8 or #10 Pointed Round , #6 Pointed Round, #2 Pointed Round, #0 Pointed Round, #1 or #2 Rigger (Script Liner), 1" Flat.

Other Brushes: 1½" to 2" Hake Flat for wetting the paper. (Hair type makes little difference and can be of the house painting variety), Old or very inexpensive **small** artist brushes for use with masking fluid.

Other Items that are used regularly:
Eraser (Vinyl), Paper Towels, Pencil (2B), Spray Bottle, **white** watercolor palette with mixing area (a white plastic dinner plate works well), Liquid Frisket Masking fluid – there are several types and brands of this, but the one that I recommend is a product called" Bish's Tear Mender". It is actually a fabric glue, but it works great as a masking fluid. Other brands that I like are "Masque Pen" and "Incredible White Mask". Masking Tape (¾" or 1"), Razor Blade (Single Edge), a wide mouth water container, Liquid Detergent, Table salt, Natural sponge, Small hair dryer, Frisket remover tool, Facial Tissues.