CHINESE
LANDSCAPE PAINTING
techniques for watercolor

LIAN QUAN ZHEN

Chinese Techniques for Watercolor

Lian Quan Zhen

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Introduction

NEW ENGLAND FALL
Watercolor on 140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed watercolor paper 15" × 22" (38cm × 53cm)

My goal for this book is to show you how to paint landscapes in both Chinese painting and watercolor. Whether you are new to painting or a professional, I aim to introduce you to proper painting materials, fundamental techniques, general composition methods and theories, and many step-by-step demonstrations of the Eastern and Western art.

For beginners, it is a good idea to practice the short exercises and basic techniques in chapters 1 and 2 before attempting the larger paintings in the later sections. I have found that practicing Chinese painting, especially in the spontaneous style, has helped me tremendously in regular watercolor. Chinese painting has trained me to use minimum strokes and fewer colors to achieve maximum effects. It has also helped me learn how to control water and color on raw Shuan paper (nonsized rice paper), which is similar to paper towels in its absorbance and blending. Chinese painting has helped me not set

out to paint each artwork as a masterpiece, but to respect the piece as a work in progress. After years of practicing Chinese painting, I have found painting watercolor on watercolor paper to be a piece of cake!

Remember, you don't have to be a master to enjoy the painting progress. Keep an open mind and try to explore new techniques. Happy painting!
—Lian Quan Zhen

Foreword

There are occasions in life when we are in the presence of someone for the first time and we just know we are meeting someone very special, someone who is destined for greatness and fame in their field. This was the case when I first met Lian Quan Zhen. I knew instantly that he was special, talented beyond ordinary talent. Then I sat in on a demo and I was hooked! He's not only a world-class artist but also an artist who can relay his talent and techniques like a Pulitzer Prize winner. The ability to communicate and weave together Eastern and Western art and philosophy like a fine tapestry is just one of the many talents of Lian. I feel it a real honor that he is my friend. We, the wannabe artist community, will benefit greatly from this book.
—Joe Miller Struggling artist and founder of Cheap Joe's Art Stuff

A Brief History of Chinese Landscape Painting

The three traditional categories of Chinese painting are figure paintings, landscapes and flower-bird paintings. Leading up to the fifth century, Chinese artists painted landscapes mainly as backdrops for their figure paintings. Landscape elements such as mountains, rocks, trees and lakes were underdeveloped, out of proportion and lacking delineated techniques.

Toward the early part of the Sui Dynasty through the Tang Dynasty (approximately a.d. 589–906), Chinese artists started painting landscapes independently from figures. Their techniques were simple. Dominant landscape elements such as mountains, rocks, clouds, rivers and boats were outlined with thin and uniform ink strokes and filled in with vivid colors such as greens, blues and sienna. A variety of strokes were used to suggest texture, and over time proportions were rendered more accurately and objects were overlapped in a contrasting fashion. This era represented the emergence of the blue-green landscape.

Landscapes continued to evolve dramatically between the Five Dynasties Period and the Sung Dynasty (a.d. 907–1279) into two main styles: blue-green landscapes and water-ink landscapes. Early blue-green landscapes were embellished with gold outlines, and over time developed into a loose style of painting that emphasized ink embellishments and renderings. Today this spontaneous style of painting, sometimes referred to as scholar style, continues to dominate Chinese landscape painting. Water-ink landscapes also became important aspects of Chinese landscapes. These simple, spontaneous-style paintings relied heavily on inks and vivid brushwork. They are called shui-mo hua in China and sumi-e in Japan.

YELLOW MOUNTAIN

Ink and color on raw Shuan paper

22" × 16" (56cm × 41cm)

Spontaneous-Style Painting

Also known as scholar style, this form of Chinese painting developed during the Sung Dynasty and continues to dominate today. It is characterized by the subtle use of ink as well as expressive brushwork to indicate the textures of mountains, rocks, water, clouds and other natural elements. In spontaneous-style paintings, color is secondary to the ink renderings.

Early Sui to Tang Dynasty Chinese Landscape
An early example of a blue-green style Chinese landscape painted by Zhan Ziqian featuring mountains and trees thinly outlined with ink and filled in with vivid greens,

blues and browns.

Pre-Fifth Century Chinese Painting
This sample of a long scroll painted by Gui Kaizhi circa a.d. 380 is an example of an early Chinese painting of beautifully rendered figures and small, unstylized trees and hills.

Throughout feudal China, the goal of the scholarly painter remained with capturing the spirit and truth of nature. Art from the Yuan Dynasty (a.d. 1279 –1368) into the early Ming Dynasty (a.d. 1368–1644) was known as literati painting. Inks and elaborate brushwork were used to embellish subjects with the goal of capturing the spirit and beauty of nature. Skilled landscapes were not merely impressions of nature, but revealed a harmony between humans and nature: art as poetry. Chinese landscapes continued to progress in this way with the goal of mastering the spiritual and personal side of art rather than literal interpretation and formal technique. During the Ming Dynasty, artists began inscribing poems into their landscapes to express personal feelings and philosophies.

During the Ch'ing Dynasty (a.d. 1644–1912), landscape painting trended to the copying of ancient masters. Critiques of painting shifted away from nature and personal spiritual attainment to technique. Toward the turn of the twentieth century, however, Western art styles began to influence Chinese artists, and new blended styles began to emerge. Zhang Daqian is a well-known Chinese artist noted for his splashed-ink pouring technique, thought to be derived from the abstract expressionist movement popular in the United States.

From the early 1900s through the 1950s, a group of Cantonese painters from the Guangdong Province next to Hong Kong developed a new movement combining traditional Chinese painting with Japanese and Western painting styles. Their goal was to shift Chinese painting history into the modern age, away from feudal China and into modern society. Not only did they master traditional theories and techniques, they also sketched outdoors to observe their landscapes firsthand, thus developing more natural colors and accurate proportions and perspectives. They also used nontraditional Shuan paper to suit their particular painting methods. This new Chinese painting school is known as the Lingnan School of Painting and today is popular in southern China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and abroad.

Ling Nan literally translates to southern side of the mountains in reference to Guangdong Province. I was born and raised there before I moved to the U.S. I enjoy

Lingnan School paintings in general because they have beautiful colors with traditional Chinese painting techniques. Most importantly, I admire the courage of the style's creators to break free from the Chinese painting styles of history.

Early Blue-Green Landscape From the Tang Dynasty
As the blue-green style of painting evolved into maturity, the style was characterized by nature elements depicted in greens, blues, reds and sometimes outlined thinly in gold.

SERENITY

Joan Chan Lok Chinese ink and color on Japanese cotton paper 16" × 25" (41cm × 64cm)

Lingnan School Landscape Painting

This painting was completed in the Lingnan School style by Joan Chan Lok, president of the National Sumi-e Society of America.

Five Chinese Landscape Styles

The following five exercises depict the common landscape methods that have evolved throughout the history of Chinese painting. I used the same scenery so you can compare the techniques. Choose one of your favorite types of landscapes and experiment with the styles.

BLUE-GREEN LANDSCAPE | COMPLEX

This early style of landscape paintings evolved from a.d. 600–1300 and is characterized by thick blue and green colors outlined with decorative gold.

1 Outline the scene using Chinese ink, Chinese brushes and slim, uniform strokes.

2 Apply a layer of Burnt Sienna to the scene. Use less pigment on the clouds and apply a few layers to contrast the rocks and mountains.

3 Apply thick layers of Mineral Green and Mineral Indigo on rocks and mountains, and white on the clouds and waterfalls.
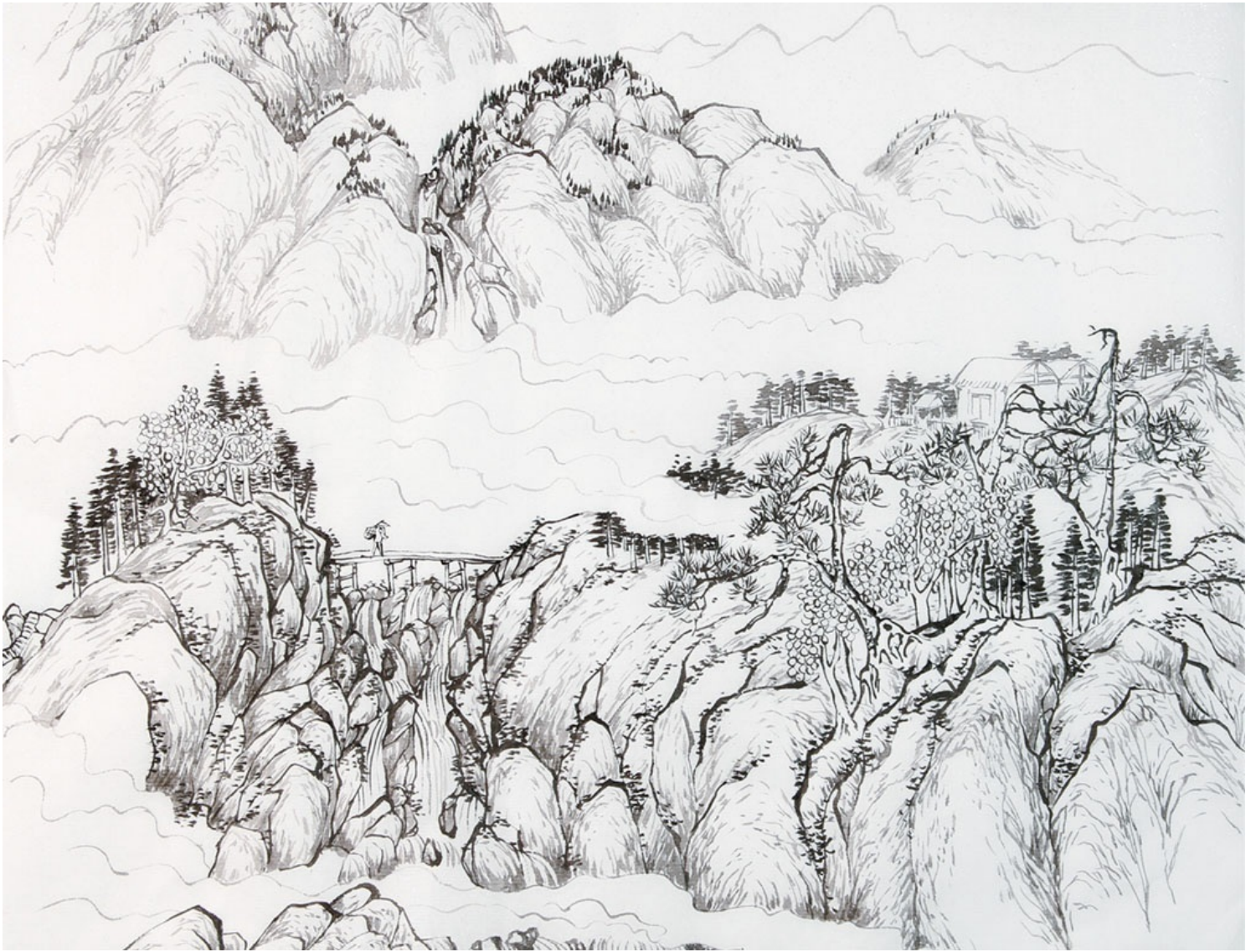
4 Outline the rocks and mountains with gold to give it the finished Chinese landscape look that emerged during the Tang Dynasty. I mixed the gold with just three Chinese painting colors: yellow, white and a little Vermilion.

BLUE-GREEN LANDSCAPE | SIMPLE

The simple blue-green landscapes developed around a.d. 700. Artists manipulated their strokes freely and focused more on ink and less on the blue and green colors, and typically did not outline subjects with gold. The style declined when intellectual Chinese painters of the time began to associate these types of paintings with less educated craftsmen, and styles subsequently shifted to a looser style of landscape with a more progressive brush technique.

1 Use ink on Shuan paper to outline objects with a variety of strokes to suggest textures of rocks, mountains, trees, waterfall and clouds.

2 Apply Burnt Sienna to the scene, overlapping greater amounts of pigment between the rocks and mountains.

3 Mix yellow and Indigo into green for painting rocks; then apply a thin layer of Mineral Green and Mineral Indigo.

4 Apply Mineral Green dots on rocks and distant mountains to highlight their vegetation and trees.

SPONTANEOUS-STYLE LANDSCAPES

This style of painting, sometimes referred to as the scholar style, is the reinterpretation of nature rather than direct copying. It evolved during the Sung Dynasty more than 1,000 years ago. Spontaneous paintings are metaphorical depictions of the spirit of objects, rather than exact replications. Brushstrokes are applied in an abbreviated manner. As a result, paintings can be semiabstract. This style of Chinese painting remains popular in contemporary painting.

1 Outline the scene using a variety of brushstrokes and ink tones, avoiding slim and uniform strokes.

2 Loosely render more details with a mixture of ink tones and brushes. Apply your strokes freely as you would when creating pencil and charcoal sketches in Western-style landscape drawings.

3 Apply a thin layer of Burnt Sienna to the rocks and mountains after the ink dries.

4 Apply thin layers of Indigo to suggest foliage. The color should not overlap the ink, and the ink should not overcome the color, creating an expressive interpretation of the subject matter.

WATER-INK LANDSCAPES

Water-ink landscapes are spontaneous paintings done with ink alone. Ink is a main pigment in Chinese paintings and can take on a variety of tones and textures. Traditionally, water-inks are done on raw Shuan paper. Spontaneous water-ink paintings evolved at the beginning of the Sung Dynasty as a way to unite humans with nature in a harmonious fashion, often as a means of escaping political and social injustice.

1 Use medium and light ink to sketch the landscape.
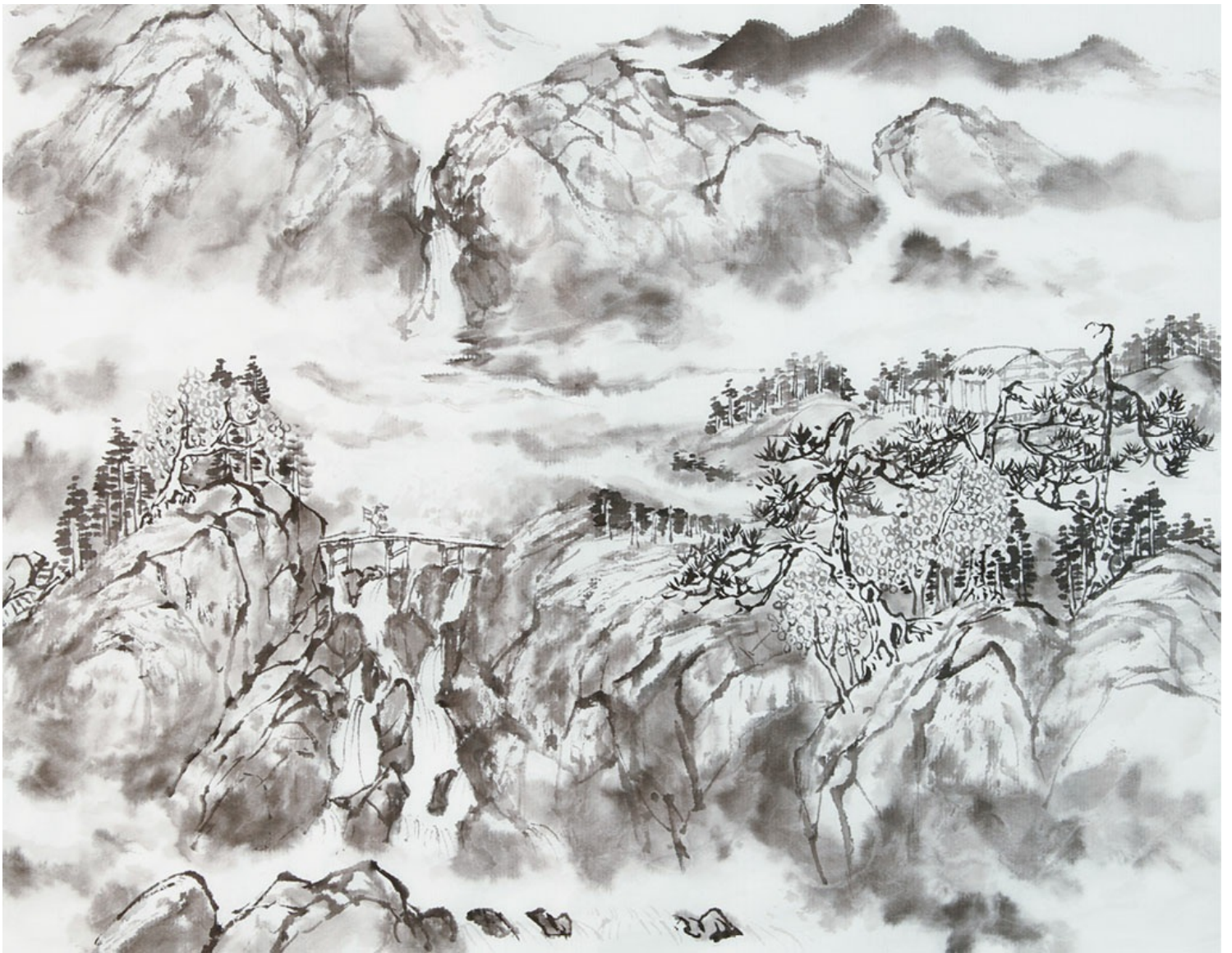
2 Use multiple ink tones to render mountains, rocks, waterfalls and trees roughly with side and center brushstrokes.

3 Add details at the foreground with darker ink.

4 Add details at the background. Finally add black dots to highlight vegetation.

INK-POURING TECHNIQUE

Ink-pouring is a contemporary style of Chinese painting innovated by Zhang Daqian, one of the most well-known Chinese painters of the twentieth century. It can be considered an extreme form of spontaneous painting. It is not necessary to literally pour color; you may use a large brush loaded heavily with paint or ink.

1 Load a large brush generously with Phthalocyanine Blue, then dip its tip in lots of ink and paint the top portions of the rocks and mountains. Next, load your brush with Burnt Sienna and ink to paint lower portions of rocks and mountains.

2 Apply Mineral Indigo and Mineral Green on upper portions of rocks and mountains.

3 Load a small brush with a good amount of ink and define the trees, waterfall and rocks at the foreground. Improvise and keep your strokes loose.

4 Use a clean small brush with white on its tip to paint the distant waterfall. Load a small amount of medium tone ink on a medium brush, and hold it sideways to suggest the textures of the rocks and mountains in the background.

Western Painting vs. Traditional Chinese Painting

There are many differences between Chinese and Western painting other than mediums and ink.

DIFFERENCE 1: PHILOSOPHY

Chinese artists use their imaginations to paint expressive interpretations of nature, staying true to the Taoist philosophy of achieving harmony with nature. Western artists rely on shapes, colors, lights and shadows to convey a scene. Chinese painting uses the power of suggestion to capture the essence of objects, while traditional Western painting relies on the meticulous depiction of the object's forms.

DIFFERENCE 2: PERSPECTIVE

Chinese artists imagine themselves flying over mountains like birds to observe landscapes creating a moving perspective. The goal is to invite the viewer to wander over and through the landscape. In contrast, Western landscape paintings usually have one-, two- or three-point perspectives that attempt to accurately depict a scene as it might be captured in a photograph.

DIFFERENCE 3: STROKE TECHNIQUES

Chinese artists use simplified, minimal brushstrokes to delineate subjects as they see and feel them. Western artists render objects according to light source to depict an object's surface, using more technical brushstrokes.

DIFFERENCE 4: LEAVING THE WHITES

Chinese landscape paintings usually have a lot of unpainted areas while Western landscapes sometimes do not leave whites.

  To Chinese painters, unpainted areas are as significant as painted ones. White space is valued to allow the painting to breathe and to enable the audience to use their imaginations to interpret the scene.

DIFFERENCE 5: THE POWER OF SUGGESTION

Chinese artists rely on the power of suggestion to depict night and rain scenes. A night or rain scene would be the same as a daytime scene, simply adding a moon or umbrella

to distinguish the scene. Western artists attempt to capture the night scene as dark, using glittering lights to suggest stars, moons and night lights, and similarly, using water in action to depict rain.

			人
			山
			水
			云
			木
			石

Chinese symbols evolved from artistic depictions of subjects. Here are six easily recognizable common characters, from top to bottom: people, mountains, water, clouds, trees and rocks.

WHITE CHURCH
Oil on canvas 11" × 18" (28cm × 46cm)
Many modern Chinese-style paintings are a combination of Western and Eastern techniques, fitting nicely in the Taoist and Confucian philosophy of moderation.

CHAPTER 1
Tools and Techniques for Chinese Painting

Many beginning artists think they need expensive and exotic materials for Chinese paintings and watercolor, but I believe that great paintings come from innovative minds and skillful hands, rather than fancy materials. For Chinese painting you need only Shuan paper (rice paper), Chinese painting brushes, ink and a few colors. Keep it simple and you will save money, paint easily and create paintings you love.

Chinese Paints and Inks
Here's a selection of my Chinese paints, inks and a ceramic palette for mixing.

A Set of 12 Chinese paints

B Chinese ink box

C Chinese ink in a mixing dish

D Mixing palette

Paper and Ink

PAPER

Shuan paper (rice paper) is made of different cellulose fibers grown in mideastern China such as rice straws, bamboo, hemp, mulberry and wingceltis. It comes in two types: raw (nonsized) and mature (sized). Raw paper is used for spontaneous-style paintings, and is absorbent and good for blending. Sized paper is coated with alum liquid making it unabsorbent and better for highly detailed paintings.

Another popular paper for Chinese painting is Masa, which is made of sulphite pulp from Japan. It is less absorbent than raw Shuan paper, but more resistant to tearing and better at tolerating lots of brushwork and layers of paint. Lingnan School artists use it to create smooth washing effects when painting sky and water, which is not easy to do on raw Shuan paper.

INK

For centuries, Chinese artists ground ink sticks on ink stones with water to obtain liquid ink for painting, calligraphy and writing. However, quality bottle inks have been available for decades, and that's what I've used for the demonstrations in this book. Bottled ink dries permanently and will not bleed. When diluted with water it yields a variety of nice gray tones similar to graphite. Ink is very important in Chinese painting for defining building structures.

Before painting, pour a small amount of ink into a small dish. Once it dries, do not use it because it will have become clumpy. The clumps will then bleed during the stretching process, which is a necessary part of painting on Shuan paper.

COLORS

Similar to watercolors, modern Chinese paints come in tubes. They are more opaque than watercolor, and more transparent than gouache. These colors are water soluble and made with binding glue so that they attach firmly to Shuan paper.

STRETCHING

When finished, Chinese paintings need to be stretched. All of the water shrinks the paper, and stretching helps smooth the wrinkles and bring up the colors. We learn how to stretch paintings later in the chapter.

front side of paper   back side of paper

single-layer raw Shuan

multi-layer raw Shuan

Masa

sized Shuan paper

Types of Paper

Notice how different papers yield different results. The paper in the left column is the front of the paper, the right column is how the paint looks on the reverse side of the

paper.

Brushes

Unlike watercolor brushes, Chinese brushes don't have a numeric sizing system and simply range from small to large. Chinese brushes are made with bamboo handles and come in three textures: soft, medium and hard. Soft brushes are made from soft fur such as goat or rabbit. They are usually white in color and are good for painting soft-textured objects such as flowers. Harder brushes are made from brown fur such as weasel or horse. Hard brushes are good for painting rough-textured objects such as rocks and tree trunks. Medium brushes are typically made from a combination of soft and hard hairs and are good for a variety of textures. To start, you will need a variety of brushes from soft to hard, ranging from small to large.

CARING FOR YOUR BRUSHES

I recommend you get the best Chinese brushes you can afford. A good brush will have hairs that are firmly attached to the handle and will lose its hairs at a much slower rate than a poorly made brush. It's okay if the hairs stain with ink over time; the inks won't bleed onto the rice paper once they are dry. I tend to rinse my brushes infrequently so they can sometime appear more dirty and used than they are. Do not leave your Chinese brushes sitting in water as the bamboo shafts will absorb water and eventually crack. When you are finished painting, simply rinse the brush hairs in cold water, blot with a paper towel and let dry in a jar with the tips facing up.

OPENING A NEW BRUSH

An unused brush has firm hairs glued together and covered by a plastic cap. Before using the brush, unbind the hairs by leaving the hair portion of the brush in cold water for several minutes (up to an hour) until the glue dissolves and the hairs loosen.

HOLDING THE BRUSH

To comfortably hold the brush, use your index finger and thumb to grip the middle of the handle, then close the other three fingers loosely to reinforce the grip. Do not hold the brush like a pencil or pen, or it will be more difficult to manipulate beautiful strokes. Keep practicing and you will achieve perfection.

Chinese Brushes

Here are two sets of brushes from small to large. The set on the left is new and capped; the set on the right has been used.

Side Brush Technique

Holding the brush sideways will yield broad, rough-textured strokes (side brush). The lesser the degree of the brush angle, the wider and rougher the stroke. Rough strokes are good for rock textures, mountains, tree trunks and washing large areas.
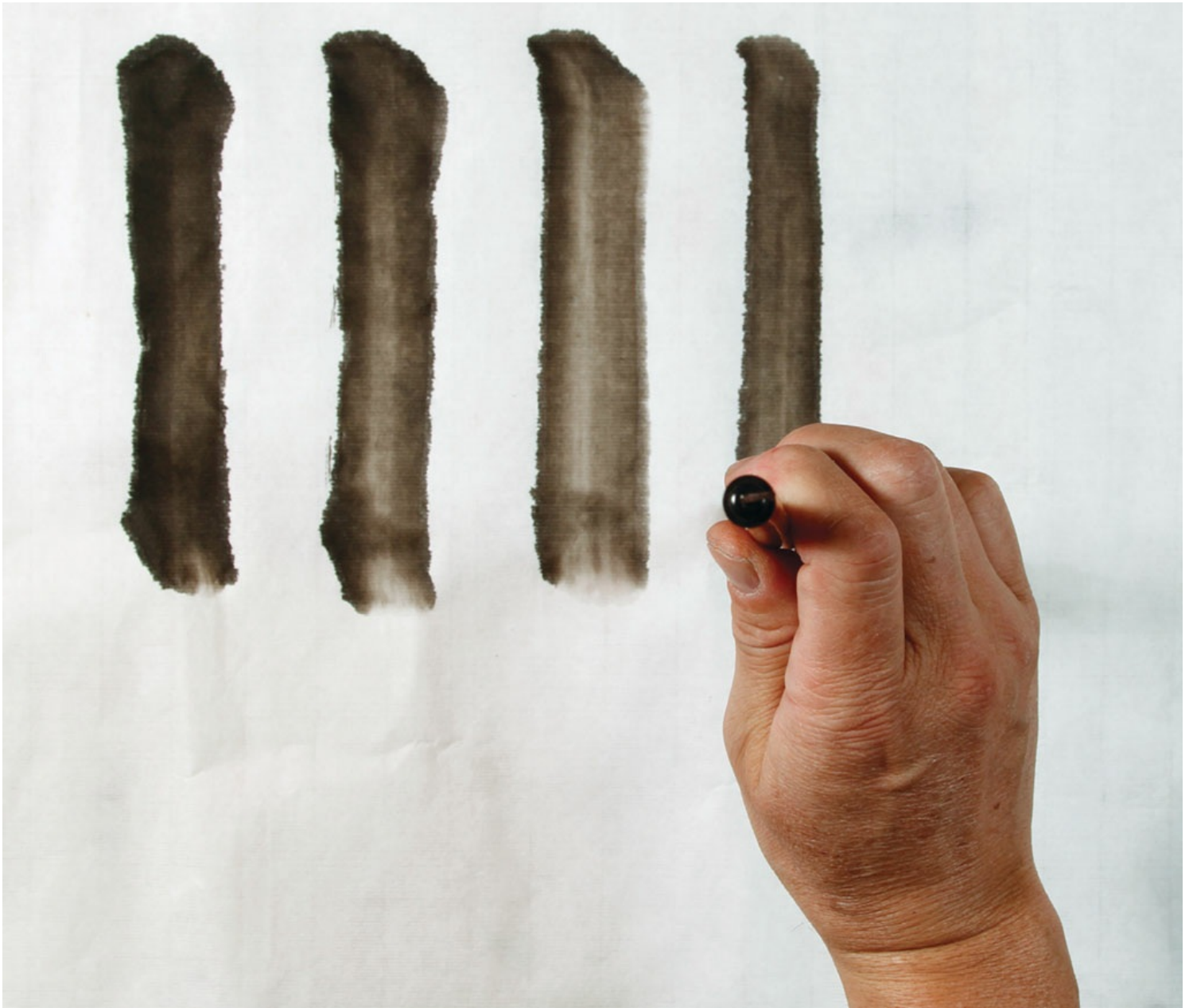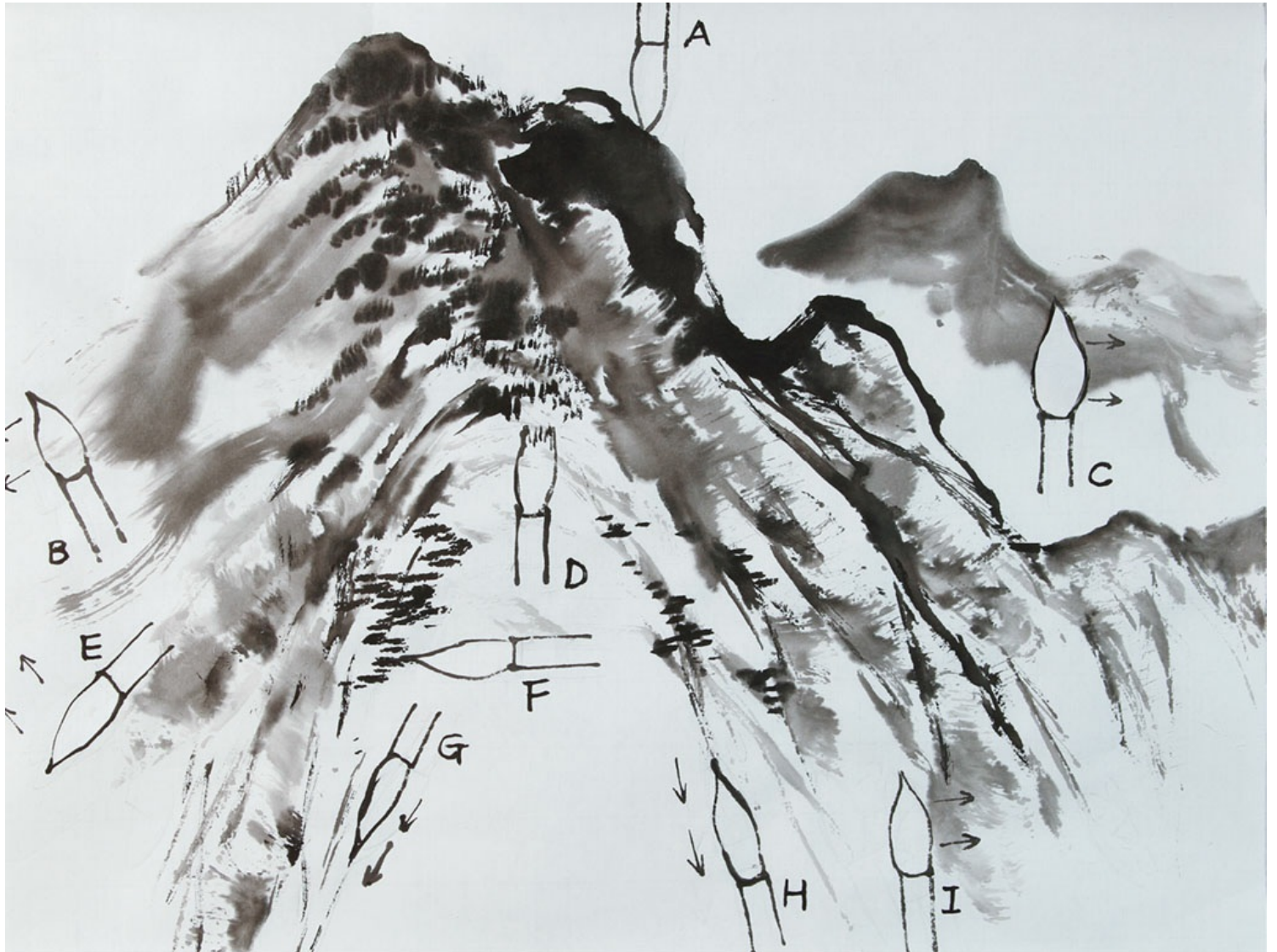
Center Brush Technique

Holding the brush perpendicular to the surface of the paper (center brush) will allow you to create full, round strokes. It takes time to learn how to control the amount of water, ink and color in the brush to paint the right strokes on Shuan paper.

Applying Ink and Colors

In Chinese painting, the artist uses minimum strokes to achieve maximum effects. Mastering your brushwork will enable you to paint an endless variety of shapes and textures. The amount of water, ink and paint you load on your brush affects the way the ink blends on the Shuan paper—the less water or ink, the greater the textures. You can also load multicolors or different ink tones into a brush to paint and attain this goal.

Brush Techniques for Landscape Textures
Here are some common ways to manipulate the brush for a variety of natural textures for landscape painting.
A Center brush to outline the mountain
B + C Side brush to suggest ridges
D Splayed brush tip held sideways to paint vertical trees
E + I Side strokes to suggest rock textures with a lightly loaded dry brush

F Side brush small horizontal dots to suggest broad tree foliage
G Side brush moves brush tip down (or up) to outline rocks and ridges
H Drag the tip of a side brush backward or forward to outline rocks and ridges

Load Multiple Colors on One Brush

You can load several colors or inks on a brush to achieve beautiful effects in a single stroke. Here I loaded yellow closest to the heel of the brush, then Vermilion up to the middle of the bristles and Carmine from the middle to the tip. Dip in a touch of ink, then hold the brush on its side to achieve a beautiful multicolor effect. You can practice this technique with different toned inks as well, allowing you to move from dark to light as you paint.
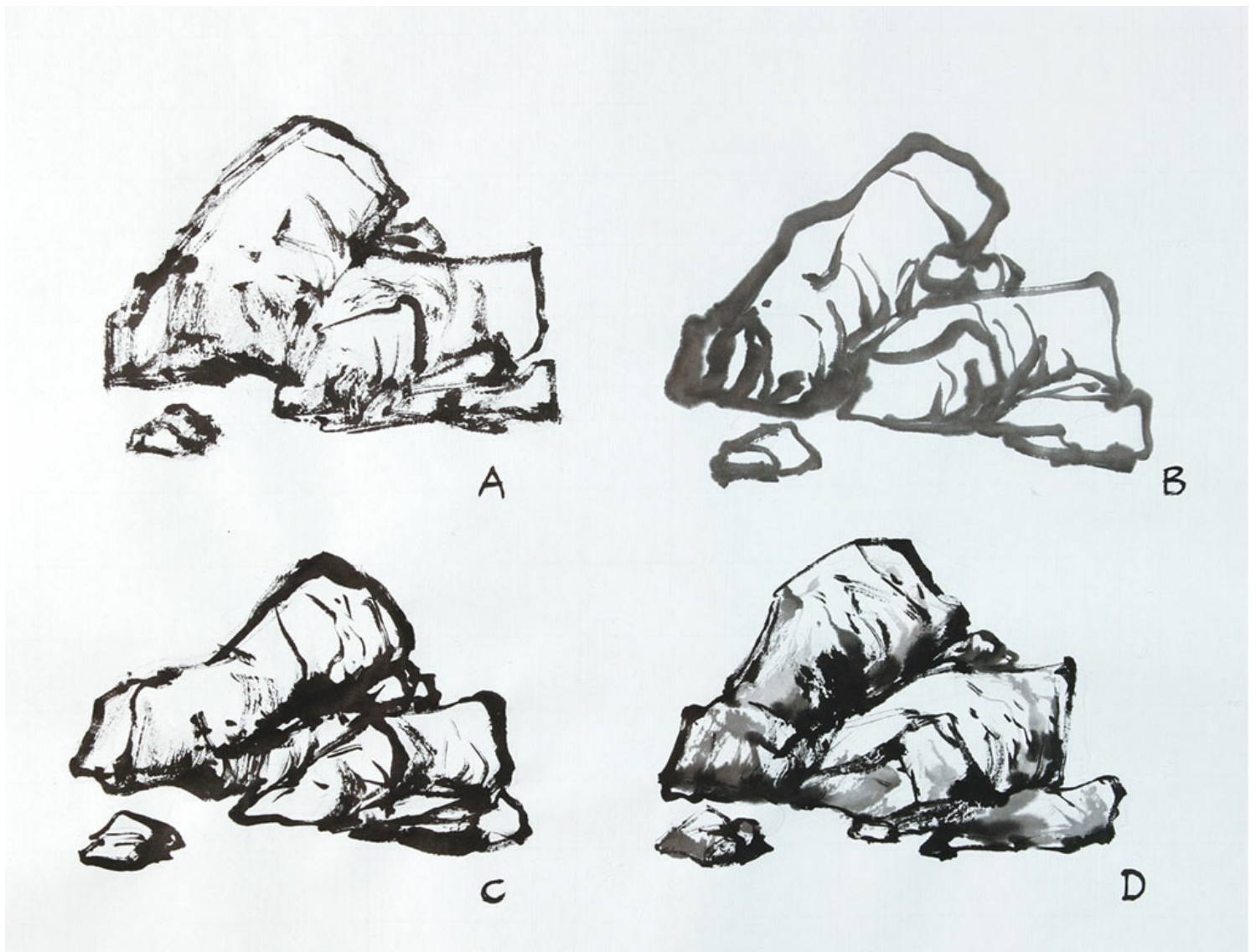
Applying Inks and Colors

Use a combination of dry and wet brushstrokes loaded with a variety ink tones to achieve beautiful effects.

A Drybrush (lightly loaded) with dark-toned ink

B Wetbrush (heavily loaded) with midtone ink

C Semi-drybrush (medium loaded) with dark-toned ink

D Combination of dry and wet strokes with multiple ink tones

Other Chinese Painting Materials

CHOPS AND ROUGE

Chops are carved stamps commonly made of soapstone that are used to seal the finished painting and to balance compositions. Every Chinese painter has at least one name chop and a few leisure chops, which are inscribed with short phrases or poems such as "less is more" or "no free lunch." Each finished Chinese painting should have a name chop as a seal below the artist's name. In some cases, more than one chop can be used. Chops are easy to find online, where you can request your name to be translated phonetically into Chinese and carved into soapstone. If you want to use Chinese painting chops on regular watercolor paper, use red watercolor pigment instead of the oil-based rouge used for Chinese papers like Masa and Shuan.

PAPERWEIGHTS

Shuan papers are twice as large as a full sheet of watercolor paper and are usually folded for transportation and sale in stores. You'll need paperweights to hold the paper flat on your working surface. It is not necessary to get fancy ones like my wooden set; a few small rocks will do.

PAINTING MAT

A painting mat is a light gray piece of fabric approximately ⅛" (3mm) thick that provides a soft and absorbent surface for the Shuan papers. Most Shuan papers are semitransparent, so it's best to use a light-colored mat to allow you to judge the true colors that you are applying.

CHARCOAL STICKS

Since Shuan papers are fragile in nature, soft charcoal sticks are a good choice for applying rough pre-sketches. Before you start applying ink or paint, use a clean, dry brush to lightly brush off excessive charcoal dust.

My Chop Set and Paperweights

My chop set (upper left) includes a red oil-based rouge and chop for stamping. Also pictured are a light-colored painting mat, two paperweights and ceramic dishes for mixing colors. The lower left pictures some of my leisure stamps.

Stretching a Chinese Painting

When ink and colors dry on Shuan paper, the paper wrinkles and warps. The pigments also sink into the fibers making the colors appear dull. To flatten the paper and make the colors pop, Chinese paintings need to be stretched. This is done by adhering another layer of Shuan paper or hot- or cold-pressed watercolor paper to the back of the original painting and allowing them to dry together.

What You'll Need

• *Methyl cellulose adhesive or clear wallpaper paste. Use one with a neutral pH so that it will not discolor or disintegrate over time.*

• *Flat, soft-haired brush. For small paintings a 3-inch (8cm) brush will work well, and up to a 6-inch (15cm) for larger paintings.*

• *Backing paper cut 2 inches (5cm) larger than your painting. Here I used 90-lb. (190gsm) watercolor paper, but Shuan paper, or hot- or cold-pressed watercolor paper, also works well.*

• *A clean, smooth and even surface for stretching such as a countertop or Plexiglas table. Its size should be larger than the backing paper.*

• *Hardboard for stapling down the backed painting to dry. I like Gator board because it is lightweight and easy to staple with a regular stapler. Smooth plywood would also*

work. Avoid flimsy boards such as foamcore that can warp easily.
- *Spray bottle and paper towels.*
- *Cutting mat and craft knife.*

1 Place Your Painting on the Plexiglas
Lay the watercolor paper on a Plexiglas surface, aligning it with the edges and corners of the glass. Flip your finished painting upside down and center it on the watercolor paper. Use one hand to hold the painting in place while you slowly pull out the watercolor paper.

2 Lightly Spray the Painting With Water

Spray water on the painting until it is lightly wet, which will allow it to flatten. Continue spraying water to flatten it more, but don't soak it. The paper will be ready after a slight wetting. Use your hands to carefully lift and pull the edges to flatten any warps. Be careful not to rip the paper.

3 Brush the Painting With Cellulose

Use a large soft-haired brush to apply wallpaper paste to the back of the painting. Start at the center and work out to the edges and corners. Apply paste until there are no air bubbles between the painting and the Plexiglas. For this small, 10 ½" × 13 ½" (27cm × 34cm) painting, I used 1 teaspoon of pure methyl cellulose and 4 ounces of cold water. After stirring with a plastic spoon, I let the mixture sit for 1 to 3 hours.
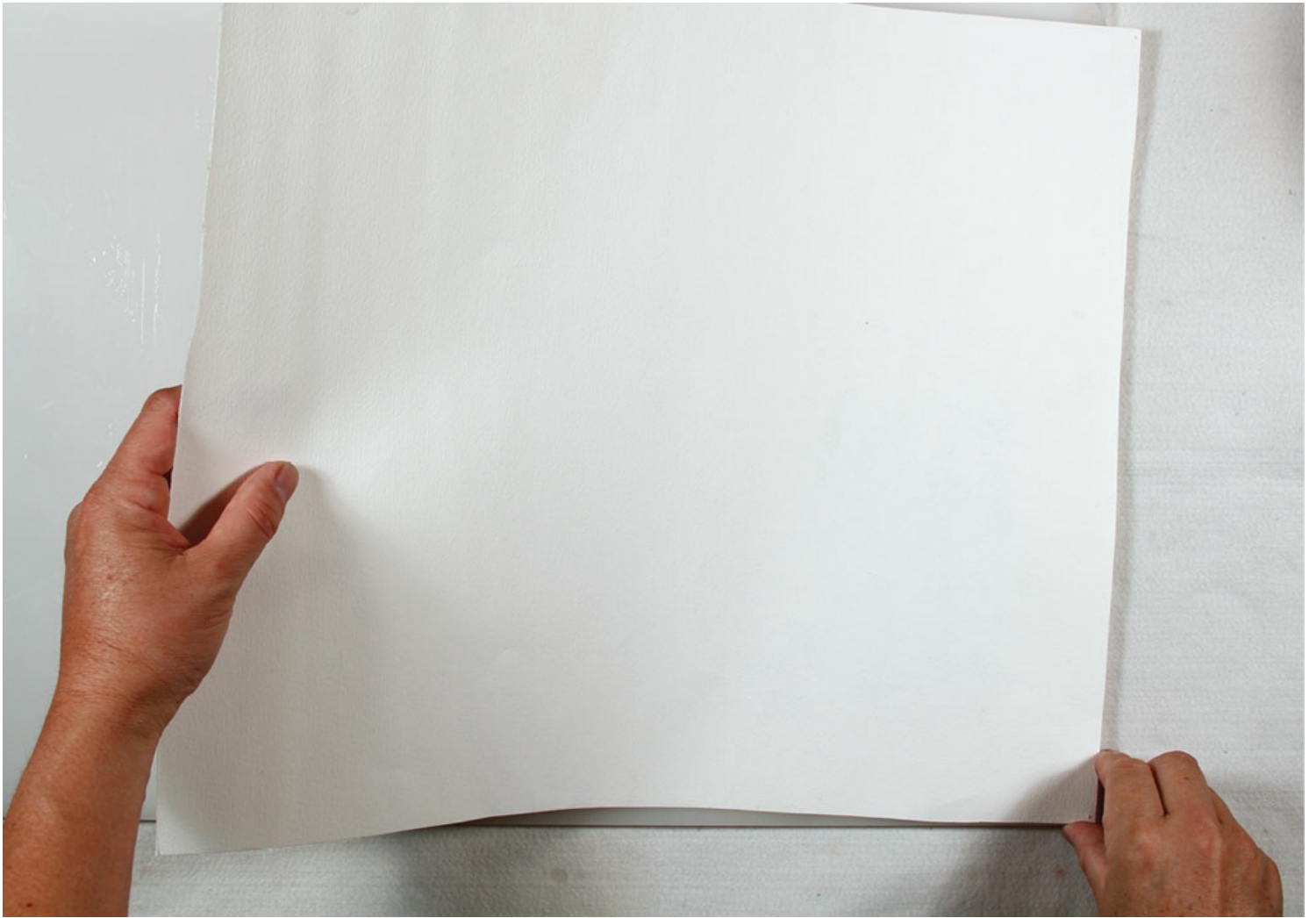
4 Attach the Backing Paper

Attach the watercolor paper to the painting. Use one hand to carefully line up the watercolor paper to the corner of the Plexiglas. Slowly lay the watercolor paper down onto the painting while continuing to match the edges to the glass.
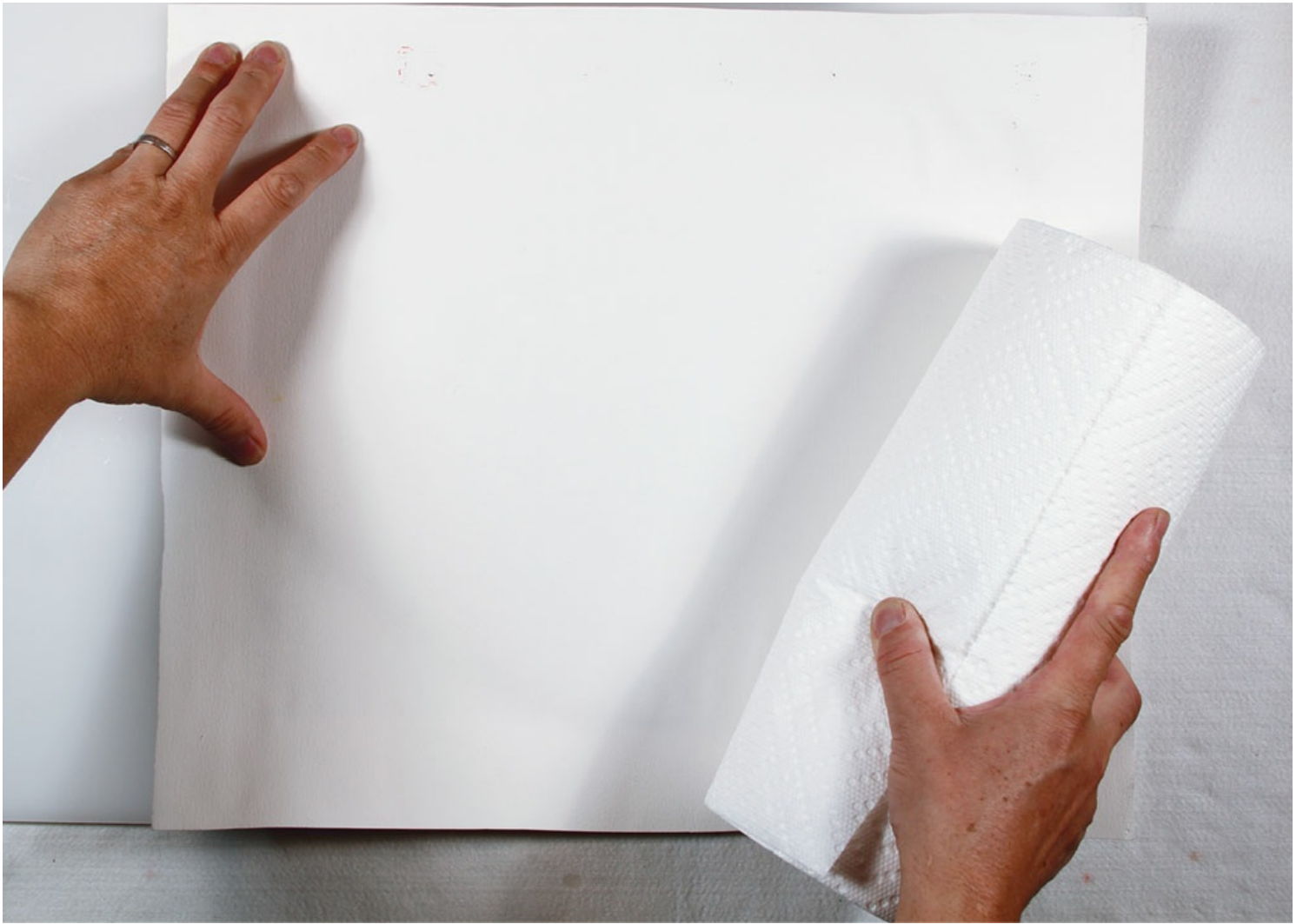
5 Secure the Backing Paper

Use a paper towel roll to push the watercolor paper down onto the painting until you have a firm attachment.

6 Lift the Painting and Backing Paper
Using your hands, slowly lift up both the watercolor paper and the painting together from one corner at a time. Sometimes you can lift on the first try; other times you will need to try all four corners.

7 Attach the Painting to the Board
Place the painting and backing paper face up on Gator board or another firm surface. Use a stapler to fasten the edge of the watercolor paper, placing about 1 ½ inches (4cm) between each staple. If you are using a hard surface such as plywood, you will need to use a heavy-duty stapler.

8 Let the Painting Dry

Allow your painting to dry for 5 to 8 hours, depending on the humidity. Once dry, unfasten the painting and backing paper from the board. The painting should have no wrinkles or warps. If you want to make small touch-ups, do it before you unfasten the surfaces and allow the painting to dry again.

9 Trim the Painting

Trim the watercolor paper at about ⅓" (8mm) to ½" (13mm) away from the painting.

Your Chinese painting is ready for matting and framing just like a regular watercolor.

Four Basic Chinese Painting Techniques

These are the four basic Chinese painting techniques that will allow you to achieve wonderful color and ink variation in your landscapes: wet-on-dry, wet-into-wet, ink breaking and ink pouring. Experiment and combine techniques to see what works for your subjects.

Wet-On-Dry
Wet-on-dry is when you add ink and color to a brush and paint directly on Shuan paper. This technique is good for outlining and rendering textures. The example on the left is just ink, the example on the right is ink and color.

Wet-Into-Wet

Wet-into-wet technique is when you apply paint to a wet surface. It is useful for painting clouds. After you wet the paper and apply ink, you will achieve smooth ink perfect for color washing and blending.

Ink Breaking | Light Into Dark

Ink breaking is a wet-into-wet technique where you add (break) light-colored ink with a darker-toned ink when the first ink is halfway dry. Apply the first ink and wait about 5 minutes, then add a slightly darker-toned ink to create new shapes and paint fine details.

Ink Breaking | Dark Into Light

Here, I sketched the mountains with a heavy-toned ink. After letting it dry for 5 minutes, I broke the ink with a middle-tone ink to form new shapes and textures.

Ink Pouring

This loose, spontaneous-style painting technique is common in modern Chinese painting because it's a blend of Western and Eastern style techniques. You can either pour the color on the paper or use large, heavily loaded brushes to freely apply pigment to the paper. Gradually pour more color and improvise with smaller brushes to reveal interesting shapes.

Small Waterfall

Small waterfalls can be graceful and serene like the Iao Needle waterfall in Maui, Hawaii. In this demonstration we use only Chinese ink to depict the scene. It can be diluted with water to obtain a variety of tones—similar to sketching on paper with charcoals. It is considered a foundational pigment in Chinese painting and can be used to create a whole painting.

1 On a piece of single-layer Shuan, use a small brush, very light ink and a variety of thin strokes to sketch the waterfall, rocks and vegetation.

2 Use a medium brush and a variety of ink tones and strokes to define the texture and shapes of the rocks.

3 Load a bit of light ink on a small brush and then midtone ink at the tip. Hold it slightly sideways to paint the water. Before this dries, add a little dark ink to the tip and paint the upper portions of the falling water you depicted with the light ink. The dark ink at the top suggests rocks seen through water, and the light ink at the bottom indicates a heavy flow over the rocks. Continue to suggest movement of falling water, defining fewer details in the distant water. Remember to leave plenty of white space to indicate highlights, splashing and waves.

4 Use a small brush and midtone and dark inks to paint weeds in the foreground and the trees at the top of the falls. To finish, load multiple ink tones on one medium-sized brush. Load the entire brush with light ink, midtone ink from the tip to the middle of the bristles and a touch of dark ink at the tip, then hold it sideways to suggest the background mountains.

Large Waterfall

This is Elbow Falls near Calgary, Canada, in winter. When painting waterfalls, make sure to leave plenty of white on the paper for highlights, splashes and waves. Since water is transparent, it will reflect colors from its surrounding environment, so apply rock and sky colors on the falls. Here we paint the top view of Elbow Falls during winter on mature Shuan paper. Unlike raw Shuan paper, it is nonabsorbent and similar to painting on hot-pressed watercolor paper.

Reference Photo

1 Load Burnt Sienna on a medium brush then load ink at the tip. Hold it sideways to paint the rocks. Immediately load Phthalo Blue to paint the water next to the rocks. Sized Shuan paper does not absorb ink and color so they blend nicely into each other similar to watercolor pigments on watercolor papers.

2 Use the same brush to load light Burnt Sienna and hold it sideways to paint more falling water. Next load more Burnt Sienna and dark ink from the tip to the middle. Hold it slightly sideways to paint the rocks while carefully leaving whites to indicate falling water.

3 Continue painting the left rocks in the same way. Load Burnt Sienna onto the medium brush and a little Phthalo Blue at the tip. Hold it sideways to paint the rocks in the lower right, leaving whites for snow and water. Use a small brush to define details at the falls using a mix of Burnt Sienna and dark ink. Paint the rocks beneath the water while carving out the shapes of splashes and flowing water.

4 Load Burnt Sienna and dark ink into a medium brush to paint the rock details on the lower right. At the edge of the snow, use a small brush to apply light Phthalo Blue and ink. Use a large brush to paint the distant trees with yellow, Phthalo Blue and ink, leaving some white spaces for snow.
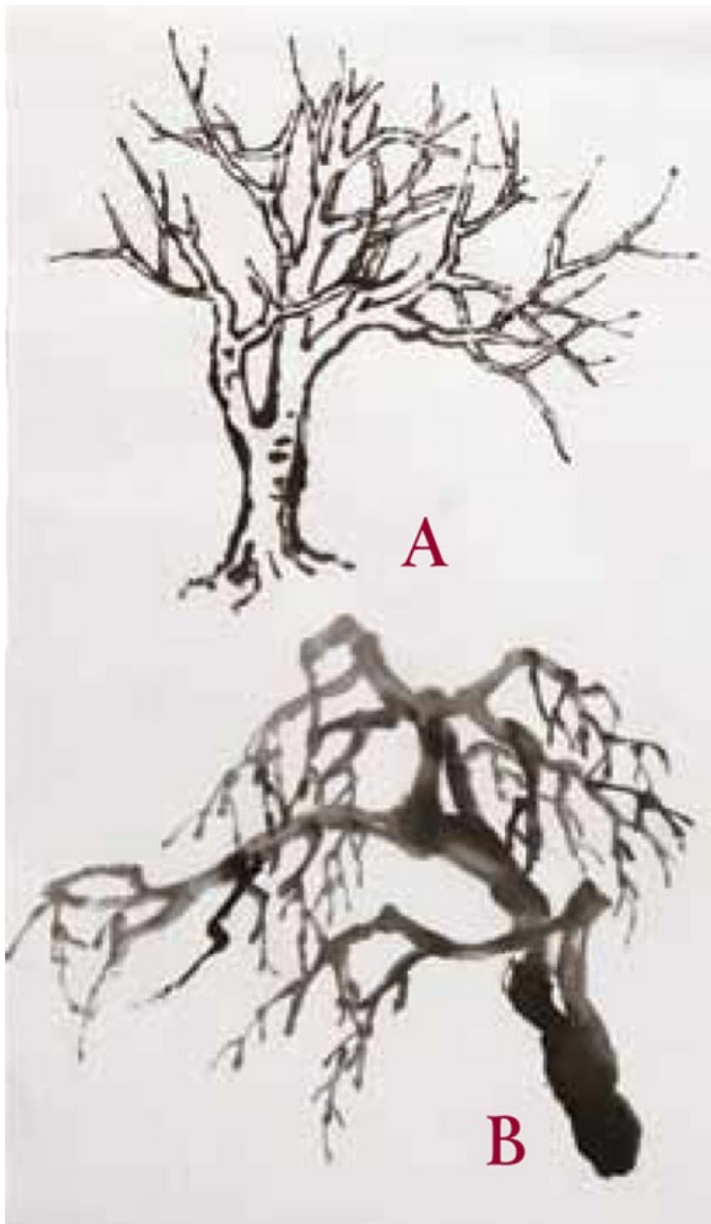
Basics of Painting Trees

Trees, along with rocks, mountains and water, are important subjects in Chinese landscape painting. Traditionally trees and leaves were done in a stylized manner to capture the impression of the scene, rather than the exact likeness (see the top row of leaves in the "Painting Leaves" example below).
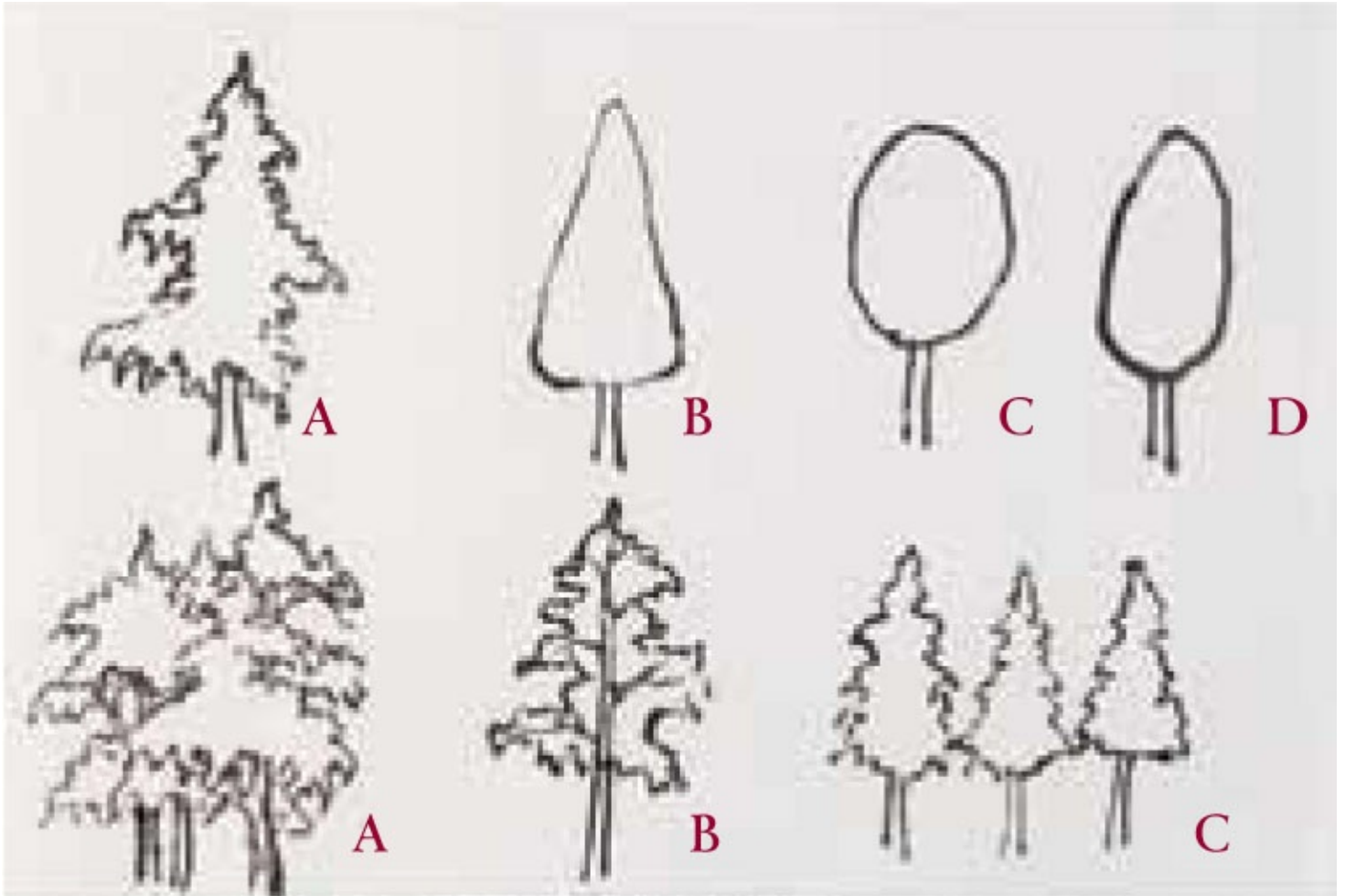

Do's and Don'ts of Drawing Trees

When drawing a tree, depict its perimeters with irregular contours and avoid uniform shapes. When depicting a group of trees, aim to overlap them and avoid drawing them side by side. Also, avoid drawing the tree trunk all the way from the bottom to the top without any foliage to bring it together.

Trunks and Branches

Diagrams A and B show two ways of painting trees. After painting trees with method A, only ink, the next step is to fill in colors. When painting trees using method B, you can use ink and color together at the same time. Diagram C is a combination of both A and B techniques.
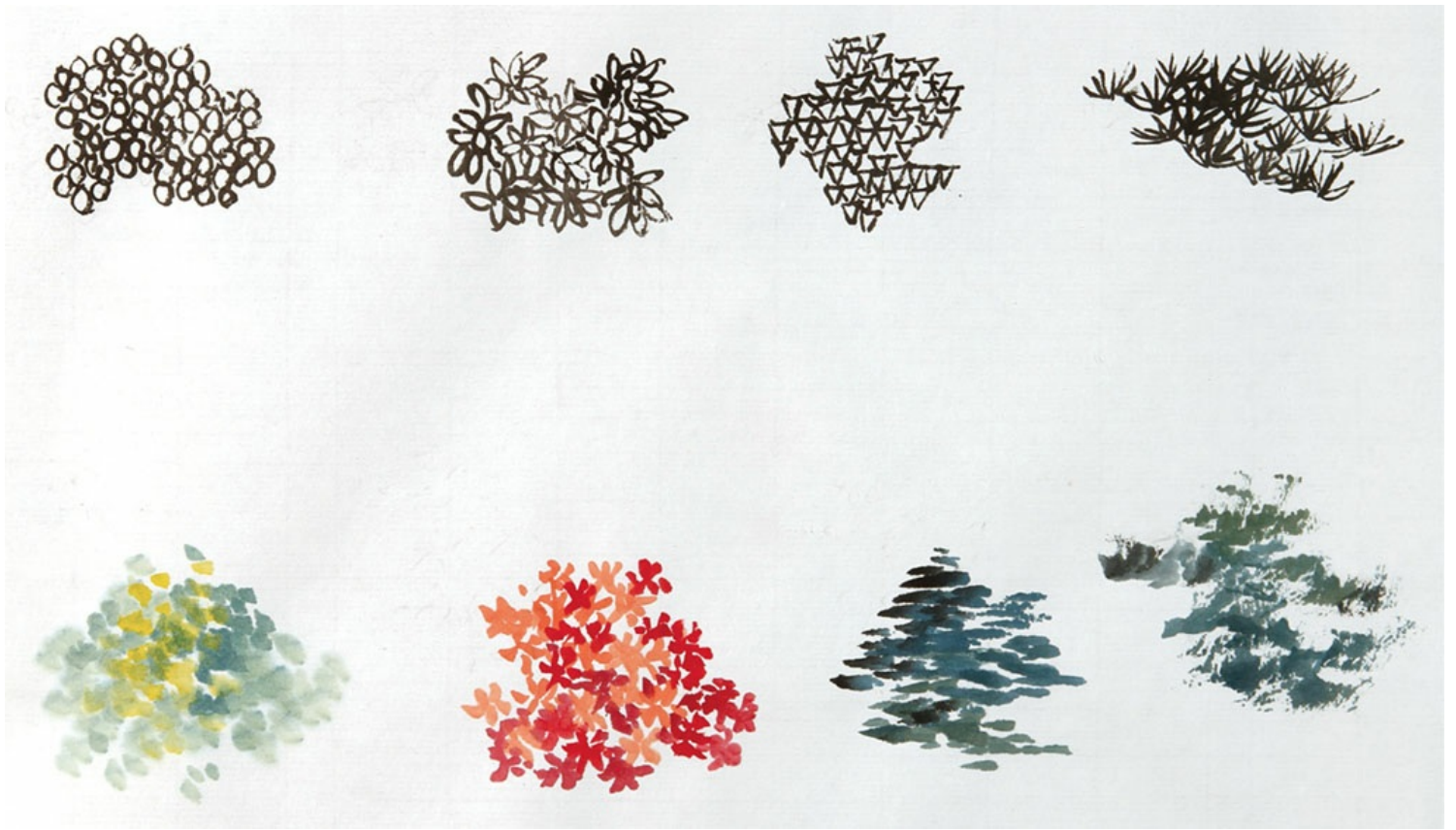
Painting Leaves

It is impossible to paint every leaf on a tree, but we can simplify them. The top row of this example shows generic leaves outlined with only ink. To finish them, fill them with color after the ink dries. To paint multicolored leaves, layer a variety of small dots as you might do in watercolor. A combination of ink and color can really make your foliage pop.
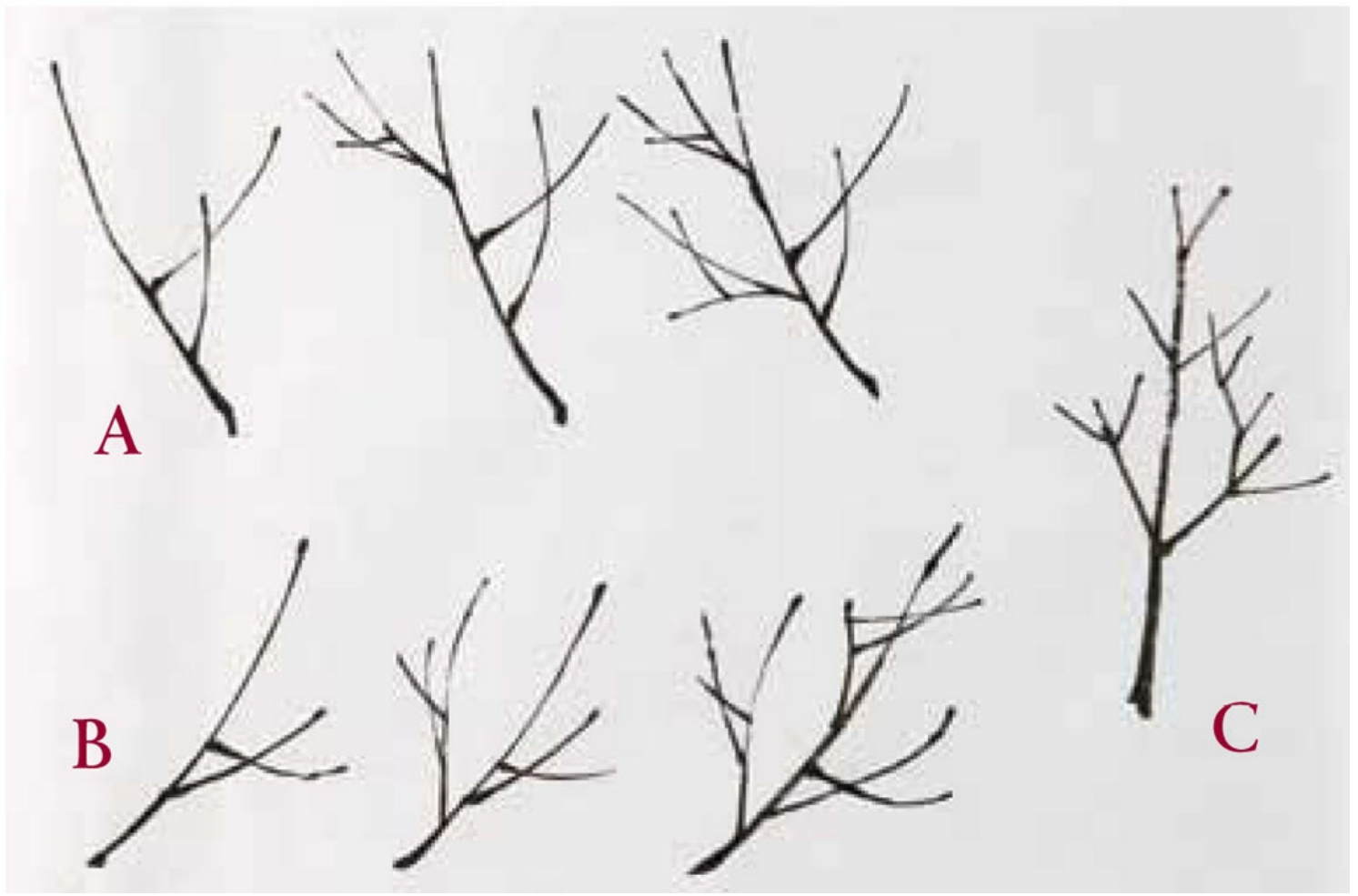
Branch Details

To depict nice-looking branches, paint three strokes in a group with one long and two shorts overlapping each other. Repeat this triple stroke until you achieve nice-looking branches (A and B). Avoid painting your branch ends like forks (C).

Mossy Oak Tree

The twisting shapes of oak trees in Muir Woods, California, are quite beautiful and resemble Chinese chirography. Here we paint these trees on raw Shuan paper, which is absorbent and good for blending inks and colors gracefully to create texture.

Reference Photo

1 On a piece of raw, single-layer Shuan, outline the trunks and branches with a small brush loaded with light and midtone inks using center and side strokes.

2 Load a medium brush with yellow from tip to heel, then Indigo from the tip to the middle and dark ink at the very tip. Hold it sideways and paint the trunk and main branches. Immediately use a small brush to paint ferns growing on top of the branches with yellow and Mineral Green.

3 Paint the other branches and the background trunk on the left using the same method as step 2 and a variety of ink and color values.

4 Outline the shrubs and rocks in the foreground using a small brush and dark ink. When dry, apply medium Burnt Sienna and Indigo on the midground rocks and vegetation. Finally, use a small brush to highlight the ferns and branches with Mineral Green.

Bare Trees With Snow

I took this picture in Bryce Canyon, Utah, while it was snowing. It is typical for Chinese artists to leave unpainted areas as snow, instead of using whites. When painting trees, practice using a variety of ink tones and change the sizes and texture of your strokes often. If we apply colors after ink rendering, it is called the *bone method*—using ink to build the backbone of objects by outlining them first in ink.

Reference Photo

1 On a piece of raw, single-layer Shuan, load a small amount of light ink on a small brush and lightly outline the tree trunk and main branches.

2 Load small amounts of midtone ink into a medium brush and dark ink from the middle to its tip, then holding it sideways, paint the trunk and large branches with short strokes. In this early stage, leave plenty of white for the snow. Using a smaller brush, paint the small branches in the same way.

3 Continue to use your brushes to paint other branches with a variety of inks, layering dark into light. The lower portion of the trunk should be a bit lighter since it's in the background. Similarly, use a medium brush and light ink to paint the background tree. *The end result is similar to a Western pencil or charcoal drawing.*

Pine Trees With Snow

Unlike previous exercises where we use only ink, here we mix Chinese colors and ink to depict pine trees in the Sierra Mountains. This way of painting is called non-bone method. In this chapter, the large waterfall, mossy oak tree and backlit trees exercises used the non-bone technique. This is a common technique used by many modern Chinese painters.

Reference Photo

1 Load Burnt Sienna on a medium brush and then dip it in dark ink from its tip to its middle. Hold it sideways and paint the trunk from top to bottom. Reload the brush with more dark ink and indicate the branches, leaving white areas for the snow.

2 Load midtone ink and Indigo on a medium brush, then dip the tip in a little dark ink to paint the foliage with center and side strokes. Paint continuously until you achieve dry-brush strokes that suggest needle-shaped pine leaves. Reload the brush and continue painting foliage in this same way, about 4 times until it's completed. Use a small brush loaded with Burnt Sienna and midtone ink to indicate the small trees in the background.

3 Use a medium brush to paint the foliage in the background trees in the same way as step 2 but with lighter ink and Indigo pigments.

4 Use a small brush to suggest the distant trees with light Indigo and light ink. Use a medium-sized brush and light Indigo to indicate the front ridge and the distant background trees. The foreground is watered down Indigo, as well.

Backlit Trees

These beautiful, backlit pines are located in the Yosemite Valley situated against distant granite rock mountains. When painting trees in back lighting, you can either leave their edges or paint lightly around the edges with light pigments while apply dark value colors in the background.

Reference Photo

1 Load yellow, Indigo and a little Vermilion on a medium brush and then paint the base layer of the trees on a piece of raw, single-layer Shuan while holding the brush on its side.

2 Load Burnt Sienna on a small brush, then dip the tip in light ink. Paint the branches and trunks using the center brush technique. Load yellow and a little Indigo on a medium brush and a touch of Burnt Sienna on its tip, then paint the foreground with the brush on its side. To paint the brown grass, load more Burnt Sienna on the brush, then splay the bristles with your finger before painting.

3 Load Indigo and dark ink on a medium brush to paint background trees; leave some light edges on the foreground trees. Use a small brush and Burnt Sienna to call out individual grasses in the foreground. Use a large brush to paint mountains with light Indigo and Burnt Sienna. When the mountains are dry, load a small amount of light to midtone ink on a medium brush to call out rock textures.

Colorful Fall Trees

This exercise is also done with the non-born technique by applying color first and then a mixture of color and ink. Learn to define the trees in the foreground by painting those behind darker. This is a typical technique used by both Chinese painting and watercolor artists.

Reference Photo

1 On a piece of raw, single-layer Shuan, paint the base layer of the trees with yellow, Phthalo Blue, Vermilion and Carmine using minimal side strokes. Load Burnt Sienna then ink on a brush, and paint the foreground and middle ground. Use a large brush to paint hills with Burn Sienna and ink, adding Phthalo Blue to indicate the most distant mountains.

2 Load Carmine then rouge on a medium brush to paint the lower portions of reddish orange trees. Load midtone Indigo and ink to paint the lower parts of bluish green trees.

3 Mix Carmine with a little ink and paint the lowest portion of the reddish yellow trees, while carving out the yellow-orange and blue-green trees in the foreground. Load heavy Indigo and ink to paint the bottoms of the blue-green trees in the foreground.

4 Mix rouge and ink on a small brush and paint the trunks and branches of the red, yellow and blue-green trees in the middle ground. Load thick white on a small brush to paint the aspen trunks and branches on the right. Mix white with a little yellow to highlight the shrub details in the foreground.

CHAPTER 2
Tools and Techniques for watercolor Painting

In China I grew up without enough food, clothes and material possessions, so I tended to make the most out of everything I had. My minimalist upbringing has influenced both my life and way of painting. As with Chinese painting, you don't need fancy or pricey materials to paint successful watercolors. In fact, the fewer materials you have, the better. All of the watercolor demonstrations in this book have been completed with just three colors, less than ten synthetic brushes and sometimes masking fluid.

My Watercolor Tools
You don't need many tools for painting successful watercolors; just three colors, some synthetic flat and round brushes, and masking fluid will do.
A small, round plastic dishes containing pigments diluted with water for color pouring and blending
B a variety of synthetic sable flat and round brushes
C mid-size spray bottle

D masking fluid

E glass palette

F blue, red and yellow pigments in the tube

Paints and Brushes

PAPER

For painting watercolors in the studio, I prefer Arches 140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed watercolor paper. It has a nice sizing (absorbency) and is resistant to tearing when removing masking. For plein air, I prefer Fabriano 300-lb. (640gsm) cold-pressed paper or Arches 300-lb. (640gsm) cold-pressed paper. This weight of paper does not warp and is easy to handle outdoors.

PIGMENTS

I use only the three primary colors in my watercolors: blue, red and yellow. For my palette, I select two tubes from each primary group from a variety of brands. Paint brands and quality vary widely, so select the best you can afford and avoid student-grade, if possible. Some paint colors that I like that many brands manufacture are Prussian Blue (American Journey) or Antwerp Blue (Winsor & Newton); Naphthol Red, Quinacridone Rose or Pyrrol Red (M. Graham & Co.); Hansa Yellow Deep and Azo Yellow (M. Graham & Co.) or Arylide Yellow (Da Vinci Artists' Watercolors). When I begin a watercolor, I choose one pigment from each group to use from beginning to end.

   To obtain very dark, black-like colors from three pigments, simply mix a thick amount of paint (fresh out of the tube) of blue and red, and a very small amount of water. Light blue pigments such as Cobalt Blue or Ultramarine Blue won't work for the 3-color method because they can't easily be mixed with red to make black.

BRUSHES

For watercolor, I use synthetic sable brushes because they are pliable and easily form points at the tip. I do not like to use Chinese brushes for watercolor because they are too soft and retain a lot of water. Conversely, I don't like to use watercolor brushes for spontaneous-style painting because they cannot be loaded with a lot of water, ink and colors. I use a variety of flat brushes and round brushes from small to large sizes. The wedge-shaped end of a flat brush is useful for applying masking.

PALETTE

I use a glass palette that allows me to see the colors I mix as they will appear on paper.

It has 14 wells on each side and 3 mixing areas in the center. I use the left side for watercolor painting and the right side for Chinese painting. On the watercolor side, I use at least two wells per color, one for mixing with other pigments on the palette, and one for picking up pure color. This brand is called the Bullet-Proof Glass Palette by Martin Universal Design.

MASKING FLUID

In the beginning stages of painting, use masking fluid to preserve detailed areas during the color pouring and blending process. I prefer Pebeo drawing gum for its light gray color, high quality and ease of use. It doesn't matter what color of masking fluid you use, but keep in mind that brightly colored fluid can distract your eyes and interfere with your color perception.

When you open a new bottle of masking fluid, the solids are usually condensed in the neck of the bottle. I use the handle of a small brush to stir the solids back into the liquid. Don't shake the bottle since this will create bubbles. After applying masking fluid, replace the cap immediately. It's not a good idea to use masking fluid that has been opened for more than a year. Old masking fluid is difficult to apply and remove. Worst of all, it can become permanently stuck to the paper.

Using Watercolor Pigment

USING A LIMITED PALETTE

There are many benefits to using a limited palette. With the three primary colors you can create many secondary colors. Also, it's easier to achieve a dominant color in a painting. A limited palette also helps keep the painting from becoming muddy. For whites, I preserve the white of the paper. Sometimes I use masking fluid to help me do this. To get dark colors, I mix undiluted blue with a little undiluted red and a small amount of water (see below).

COLOR POURING AND BLENDING

Color pouring and blending is a wonderful technique I use in my watercolor paintings. It is achieved by wetting the surface with a spray bottle, and pouring diluted pigments next to each other so they follow the water and run into each other. Spray the poured pigment with more water and use your fingers and brushes to mix and blend. You can also tilt the watercolor paper to flow the pigment or use your mouth to blow the paint to dry areas of the paper. Once you are familiar with how color liquids behave and their effects under various amounts of water, you will be able to achieve endless effects in your paintings.
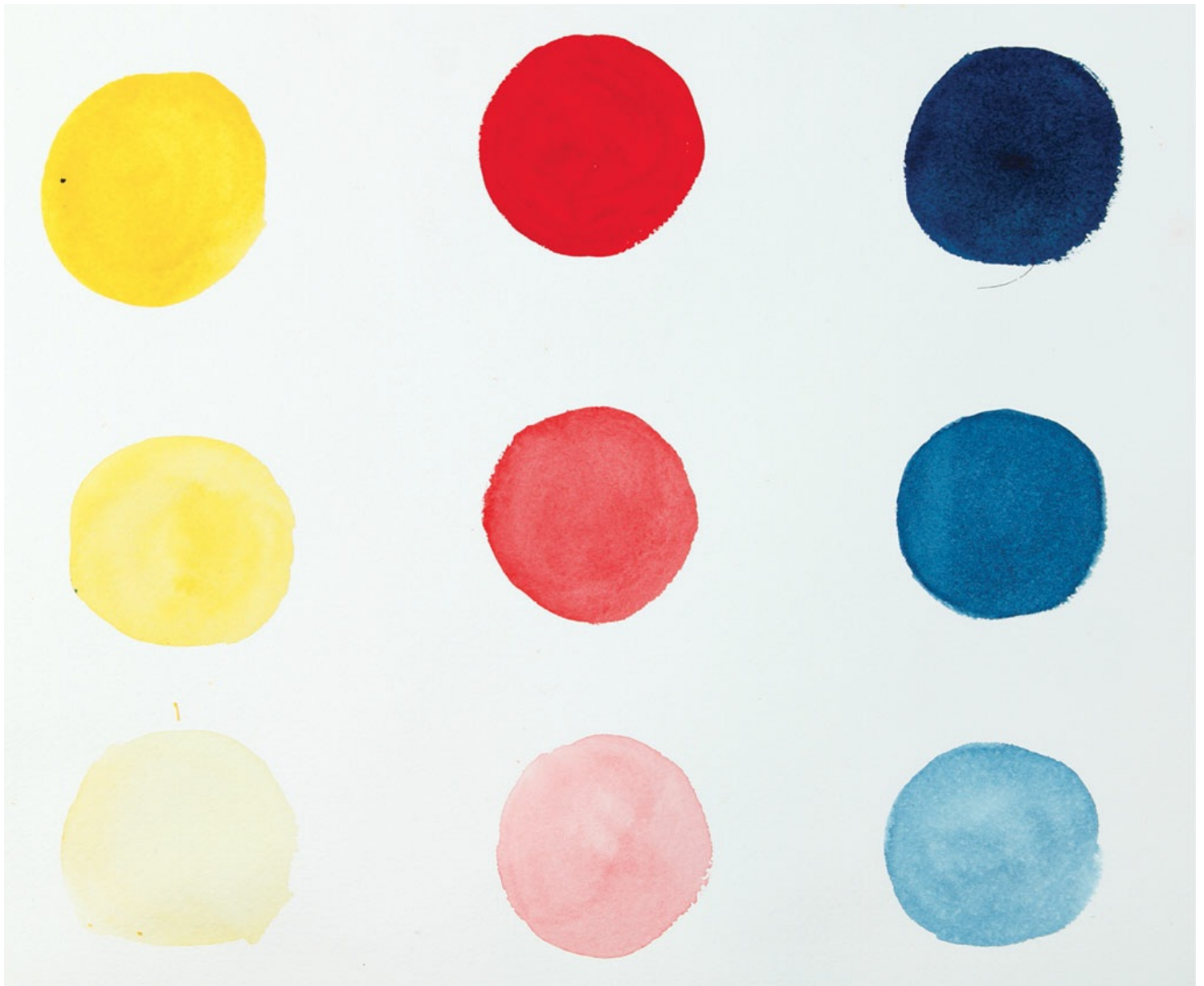
Mixing Middle Values

For the pouring and blending technique, you generally want to mix a medium value, in between a dark, thick mixture and a light, runny mixture. Here, the top row shows fresh and thick pigment just out of the tube and diluted with very little water—much too thick for color pouring. The middle row is diluted to a middle value, ideal for the color pouring and blending technique. The bottom row is diluted with a lot of water and is much too light for color pouring and blending.

Diluting Paint for Color Blending

To prepare diluted paint for pouring and blending, mix each color with clear water in a small dish, using a separate brush to stir each color. There are two rules of thumb for making diluted colors: first, to darken the value of a painting, use stronger values of the blue and red mixtures. To lighten the value, use weaker values of the blue and red mixtures. Second, never create anything darker than a medium value of yellow or it will become muddy.

Practice Mixing Colors

Experiment with color mixing and diluting those mixtures with water to achieve middle values. From left to right, the mixtures here are yellow and red, yellow and blue, red and blue, and a blend of all three mixtures.

Applying Masking Fluid

Masking With Fingers

I use my fingers to apply masking fluid to large areas.

Masking With Brush Handle
Use the end of a brush handle to create small branches and grasses with masking fluid.

Removing Masking

Apply 2-inch (5cm) pieces of tape to the masking and peel the tape up to remove the masking.

Color Pouring and Blending

Masking is a watercolor technique used to preserve areas to later uncover. In this exercise, we use masking fluid to save the snows from contamination while executing the color pouring and blending technique.

Reference Photo: Snowy Trees in the Rocky Mountains
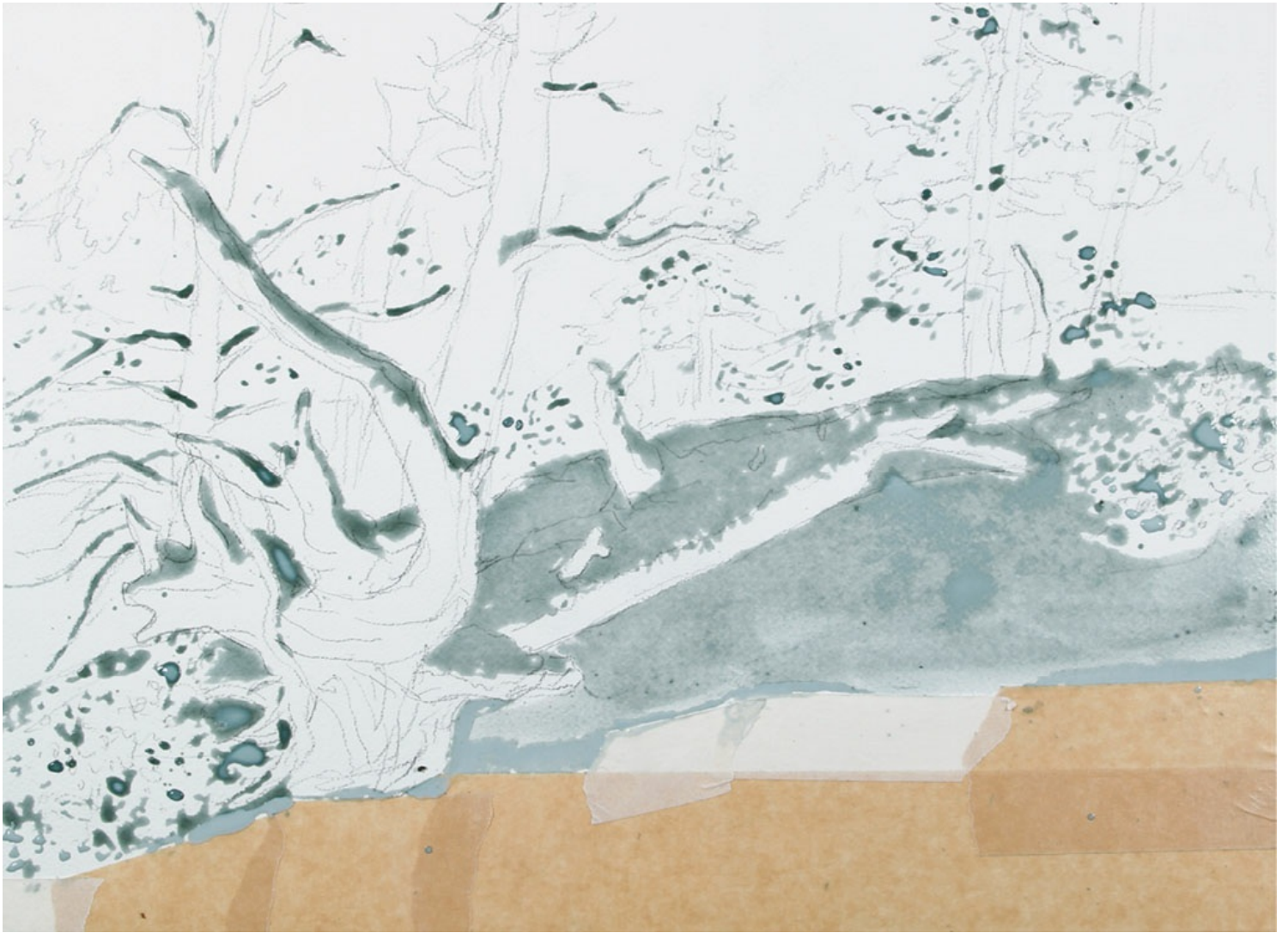
1 On watercolor paper, sketch the landscape with a no. 2 pencil. Use the wedge-shaped tip of a ¼-inch (6mm) brush's handle to apply masking fluid blocking out the snow on the foliage, branches, trunks and large log. To block the large snow area in the foreground, pour masking liquid directly on the page and use your fingers to spread it out. You can also use masking tape to block the large areas, saving time and fluid.

2 Using a medium-sized spray bottle, wet the left side of the paper a few times, then drop a variety of liquid paints at the root area of the fallen tree. Use a different brush for each color to keep the pigments from mixing.

3 Spray the paints a few more times to encourage them to mix and blend together.

4 Use your fingers to guide the paint, dragging the liquid paint to indicate the trees and branches. The masking fluid and tape is keeping any color from hitting the paper that will be snow.

5 When the paper is about halfway dry, use a ¼-inch (6mm) brush to paint the trunks and a no. 4 round to paint the branches with red and blue in thin, even strokes.

6 When the painting is dry, remove the dried masking with packing or masking tape. Cut the tape into pieces about 2 inches (5cm) long and press the adhesive side on the dry masking. Carefully drag to peel it off from the paper. Simply use your fingers to pull off the masking tape covering the snow areas.

7 Use a no. 4 round brush to paint light to medium blue on the lower foreground, as well as the snow on the foliage, branches and large fallen log. Use the same brush to add details on the log with mixtures of dark blue and red. Use a ¾-inch (19mm) brush to suggest creases in the foreground snow with light blue and a few strokes. While this area is wet, dip a no. 8 brush in a little water and softly blend the upper edges of the creases with the nearby snow.

Mixing Colors on Paper

Mixing pigments on the palette then applying is a common watercolor technique, but can lead to muddy results when overmixed. By allowing the colors to mix directly on the paper you can create beautiful, unintentional results. Before pouring on pigment, it is helpful to mask out your main subjects for adding detail later. Let's practice.

Reference Photo: Lower Eagle Falls at South Lake Tahoe

1 On 140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed watercolor paper, sketch the landscape with a no. 2 pencil. I moved the large tree at left closer to the big rock at the upper right for better composition. Use the wedge end of a ¼-inch (6mm) brush to apply masking fluid for blocking water and a few branches.

2 After the masking fluid dries, use a ¾-inch (19mm) brush to apply light to medium blue on the sky, trees and rocks.

3 Immediately use the same brush to apply yellow on the trees and rocks. It will mix with the blue to turn a nice yellowish green. Use a no. 4 round to paint the tree trunks at the top of the paper with a light to medium red. The red will mix with the blue and yellow to create a nice brown tone.

4 While the yellow waterfall area is still wet, use a ¾-inch (19mm) brush to apply midtone to dark red followed by a midtone to dark blue. Allow them to mix together, creating beautiful rock colorations.

5 Using the same brush, tone down the reds to achieve darker rocks by adding a thick amount of blue pigment while the area is wet. Use a no. 8 round to apply a little more blue to the tree's foliage, painting around the trunks.
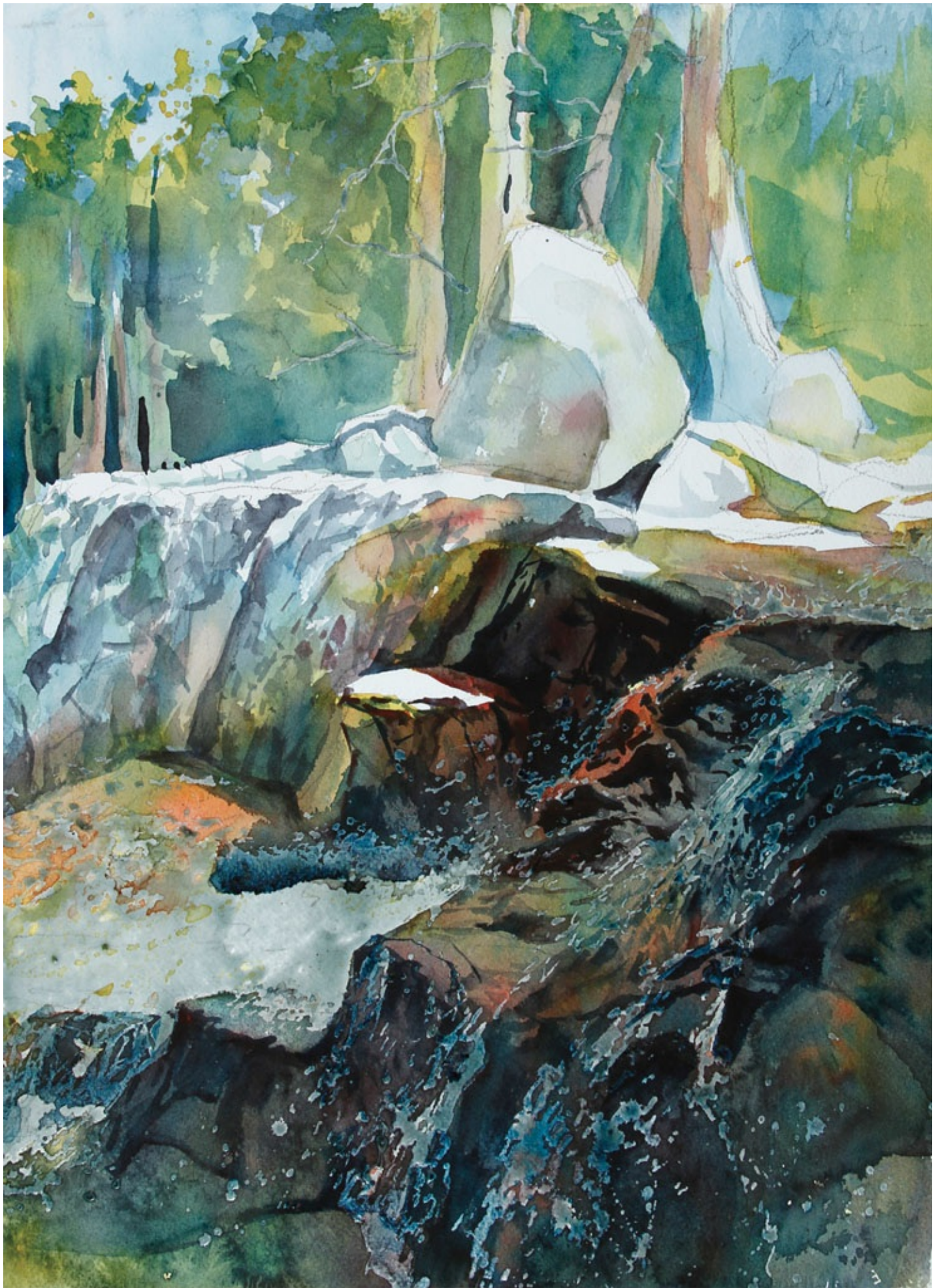
6 Create a thick light-toned mixture of blue and red on your palette with a no. 4 round and paint the shaded sides of the upper rocks. Next render some texture on the falling water by using a no. 8 round and light blue followed by light red in a variety of strokes.

7 Use a no. 4 round and a similar blue and red mixture from step 6 to render details on the tree trunks and more shadows on the rocks. Add more yellow and blue to the distant trees. When dry, remove the masking by applying tape to it and carefully pulling it off the paper. Use the no. 8 round to apply light to medium blue shades to the water to indicate movement. In the foreground, add a little more red to the water to indicate the rocks' reflection.

Negative Painting

I frequently use negative painting to define objects and create beautiful effects. To avoid confusing my students, I sometimes refer to negative painting as "painting around" instead. You can also apply this technique similarly in Chinese painting.

1 Rather than sketching out the composition, envision in your mind 2 or 3 groups of palm trees varying in height. Spray the top two-thirds of a piece of 140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed watercolor paper about 4 times, then pour blue, red and yellow (more blue than the other 2 colors).

2 Cover the paints with a couple of more sprays of water. Use your finger and brushes to guide them, allowing them to mix and blend into palm leaf shapes with soft and hard edges. Use your mouth to blow the color liquids from the middle left to lower left, and from the middle right to lower right to create the ferns.

3 While the colors are wet, use a ¾-inch (19mm) flat brush to mix dark blue and dark red on your palette, and while wet, drop it on the painting to indicate the shadow areas of the palm leaves.

4 Allow the painting to dry, then begin to carve out fern shapes with the negative painting method. The illustration on the right shows how. First, use a no. 2 pencil to sketch the fern shapes, then use a no. 4 brush to paint around them with light blue. Immediately, lightly wet another no. 4 brush and blend the light blue away from the defined fern gradually fading into the local color. The hand in the lower-left corner is a good example of negative painting. If you place your hand on the paper and paint around it, when you lift your hand, its shape will remain.

5 Allow the painting to dry and define another layer of ferns behind the foreground leaves. Using a pencil, sketch them in between them, and use a no. 2 round to paint around them with dark blue. Similarly, note how the hand has evolved. If you place your hand over the previous image and paint around it, you achieve new, layered results.

6 Continue defining other ferns and trunks using the paint-around methods from steps 4 and 5.

Negative Painting Tips

1. Paint around the object, but don't paint the object.
2. Retain the base colors as the object's colors even if they don't realistically represent the colors of the actual object.
3. Preserve the object's edges, while blending them smoothly into the base colors at the background.
4. The blending brush should be only slightly wet. If it has too much water, it will blend the color too much and wash out the base colors.

Painting Using Your Imagination

As artists and people, we view and interpret nature personally. Chinese master artists paint not what they see, but what they want to see. The impressions we have of the world and the ideal colors of our imagination are all we need to create harmonious landscape paintings. In this exercise I was inspired by the purplish brown colors of a log house in Switzerland contrasted against strong yellow and green trees. I allowed these dominant colors to inspire my own interpretation of this scene.

Reference Photo: Swiss Village

1 On 140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed watercolor paper, sketch the landscape with a no. 2 pencil. Use masking fluid and tape to block the sky, the house, a few branches and foliage, and the wall and ground where it catches the light. Spray the paper with water and drop diluted red, yellow and blue in a random fashion.

2 Spray the paint a few times, allowing the colors to run together, then blend with your fingers or brush.

3 Spray water on the tree and foliage areas and drop in blue and yellow with your brush. Add red and blue liquid to the doorway and spray a few times to let the colors mix. Tilt the painting about 5 inches (13cm) off your painting surface to let the colors flow into the rocks and foreground.

4 In the foreground, drop in diluted yellow, blue and red until the colors mix and resemble the color of the house. This is how I have imagined my house to look, much different from reality.

5 Remove the masking and tapes from the sky and foreground, then use a no. 4 round to call out details on buildings with blues and reds.

6 Remove the masking from the trees and house, and use a no. 2 round to fill in yellow and blue on the downspouts, and red and yellow on the beams and 2 rails.

7 Using the same brush from step 6, define the rock wall and staircase with red and blue. Paint the 2 dogs and leave white highlights on their backs and heads. I chose to put in the dogs to add some action to my imagined scene.

CHAPTER 3
Composition & Perspective

Getting appropriate perspective in landscape painting is not easy for students, especially beginners. It is why some artists are scared of painting landscapes, let alone complicated architecture scenes. Chinese painting allows us to determine perspective more loosely. A good composition is already half of the success in creating a painting. When we take a photograph, we zoom in to focus on our desired subject, and its surrounding elements become blurry. Painting is similar. Strive to be most clear on what we want our viewers to see.

SNOW HARMONY
Watercolor on 140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed paper, 16" × 20" (41cm × 51cm)

Planning a Chinese vs. Western Painting

Chinese landscape painting composition often depicts many perspectives at once including the bird's-eye view. It is full of artistic imagination and freedom. The Chinese artist willingly moves mountains, trees and rocks, and adds streams, waterfalls and dwellings to suit their needs in creating their ideal world they wish to see and live in. On the other hand, traditional Western landscape painting composition follows one-, two- or three-point perspective, such as captured by a camera, to create more realistic landscapes. Let's compare these two paintings depicting the same scene, one in Chinese painting and one in traditional watercolor. It is a popular place for visitors in the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. I was there when it had just stopped snowing and took many reference photos.

Planning a Chinese Painting Composition
When I plan a Chinese painting, I imagine myself flying like a bird looking downward at the scene, enabling me to envision more details than those that my camera is able to capture. I am free from proper scientific perspective. As a result, the painting is more about what I want to see than what I truly see. I practiced this visual method

while painting the Chinese accordion book featured in chapter 6.

Planning a Western Painting Composition
When I plan a watercolor painting, I use more accurate perspective like that captured in the reference photos. In this example, I combined the two pictures together and painted it more colorful and attractive than the real scene. It is less dramatic than the Chinese painting in terms of composition, yet still depicts the scene fairly accurately.

Reference Photos: North Rim of the Grand Canyon

Focal Point

A nicely composed landscape has one strong focal point. It is an area of interest designed to lead the viewer's eye. The focal point usually has more detail and stronger colors than other parts of the painting. In Snow Harmony on the opening spread of this chapter, the focal point is in the upper right of the painting where a group of trees elegantly stretch their branches and roots. When you view this painting from far away, the trees dominate the whole painting. Up close, you can enjoy their details and vivid colors.

Generally the focal point is located in one of four primary spots in a vertical or horizontal composition. Compositions centered in one of these four spots are naturally pleasing to the viewer's eye.
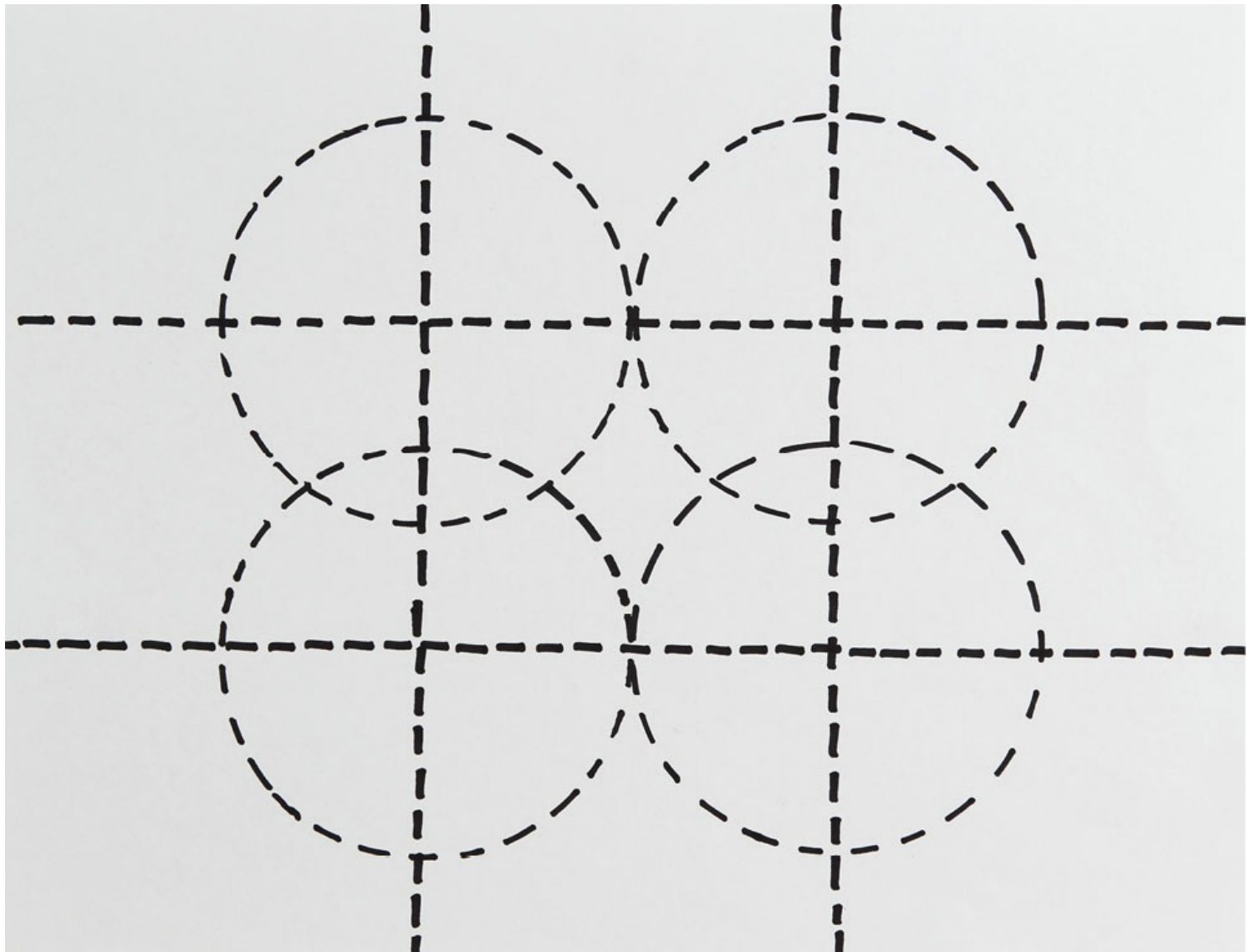
The Rule of Thirds
The rule of thirds is a common artist's tool for placing the center of interest. If you

divide a rectangular painting in thirds both horizontally and vertically, nine equal portions are created. The four points where the lines intersect are suitable focal points for your painting. This method works well for both vertical and horizontal painting formats. You can locate the focal point on one of four cross sections shown inside the circles.

focal point   focal point

SUNNY SWAMP
Watercolor on 140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed paper
22" × 30" (56cm × 76cm)
Relocating a Centered Focal Point
In Sunny Swamp, the main focal point is toward the center of the landscape in a group of swampy trees with reflections. Occasionally a focal point may exist toward the center and still work. However, when applying the rule of thirds, we see that the trees stretch to the left toward two pelicans flying from right to left. This visually shifts the

focus from the center to upper left, a more appropriate location to focus your painting.

focal point

BRYCE CANYON MORNING
Watercolor on 140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed paper
30" × 42" (76cm × 107cm)
Develop Details to Lead the Viewer's Eye
A centered focal point can be enhanced by defining details in the direction you wish to lead the viewer's eye. In Bryce Canyon Morning, I dragged the central focus down toward the left by defining more details and signing my name in the lower left.

Four Strong Compositions

When you are planning out your landscape, give thought to selecting your focal point. Choose what interests you most about a scene or photograph, and embellish the details in that area. Here are examples of the four ideal compositions resulting from applying the rule of thirds.

Focal Point: Upper Left

In this photograph of a village in the high mountains in southern China, I chose the upper left as the focal point. While sketching, I spent the most time on that area's details.
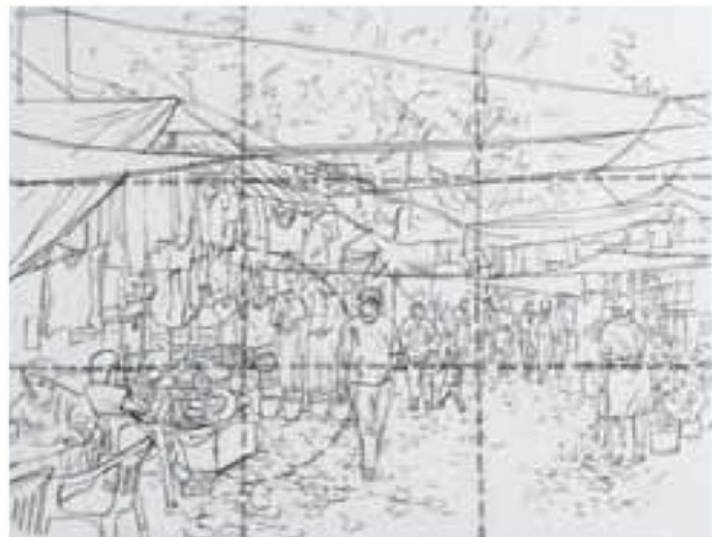
Focal Point: Lower Left

In this busy outdoor market scene in Mexico, there are many beautiful colors in the vendor's merchandise. To further emphasize this area as the focal point, I added a man walking forward and looking at the vendor's stall.
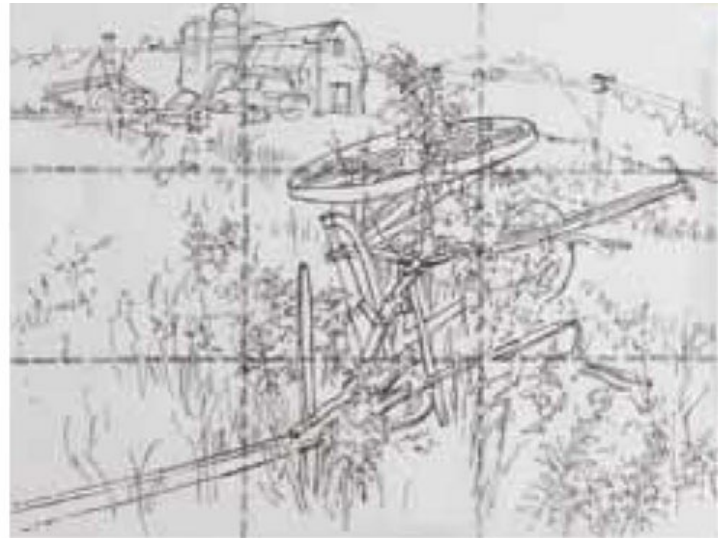
Focal Point: Upper Right

I was attracted to the big wheel and mechanical parts of this old abandoned farm machine on a field in Wisconsin, perfect for a focal point. To make the landscape more interesting, I added a building in the distance.

Focal Point: Lower Right

In this swamp scene from Wakulla Springs State Park, Florida, I chose to make the cypress roots and shadows in the lower right. I sketched fewer details in the lower third of the painting to help emphasize the focal point.

Techniques for Varying the Composition

What is good composition? I believe a good composition is a graceful and comfortable arrangement of objects in a painting, where the viewer's eye can travel with interest and ease. When composing your landscape paintings, you as the artist are the boss, not the scene. In Chinese painting, we paint not what we see, but what we want to see. Following are simple techniques for improving your composition. When you find a pleasing composition, you are halfway to creating a wonderful piece of art.

Add or Remove Objects From the Scene
Adding or removing objects from your scene is another way to strengthen and improve your landscape composition. This can be easily done when painting from photographs as well as plein air. While painting with a group of students at Spouting Horn in Kauai, Hawaii, I removed all the foreground trees because they blocked the view toward the horn, which was a hole in the rocks that splashed water up high and made fantastic sounds.
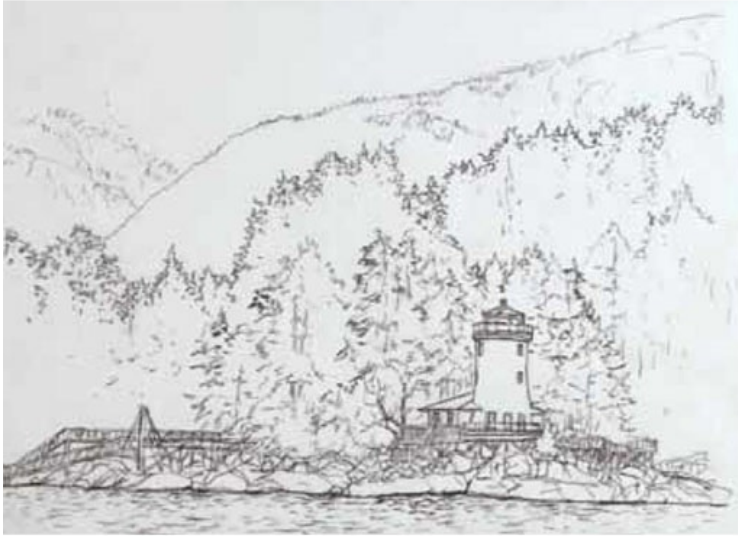
Break Up Long Straight Lines

Sometimes in a scene you may encounter a long horizontal shore of a beach. Here, the Sitka, Alaska, lighthouse is beautifully framed by trees, rocks and mountains, but the shoreline is a bit boring when sketched as is. I chose to break up the long line by adding a sailboat on the left. Other objects that might help break up a scene are birds, mist and fallen trees.

Move Objects Into the Scene

Often there is an object you want to include, but it's outside of your frame of reference or photograph. I snapped this photo of a shed in Florida from the angle I liked best, but I was unable to capture the haystack and chickens outside of the frame to the left. I relocated them into the scene to add a bit of action to the composition.

Change an Object's Height

Changing an object's height can also improve a landscape's composition. I sketched this scene of the Grand Canyon as is, but the way the treetop's height aligned with the canyon was unappealing and stiff. In my second sketch, I lowered the tree so that the cliff appears more tall and dominant. Adjusting the heights of rocks and trees is a great visual effect to make your scenes more striking.

Changing the Vertical Path of a Subject

Some landscapes have a major element that cuts through the entire scene, such as a waterfall. When centered, it can tend to look rigid and dull. Break up the object by changing its vertical path and adding trees, rocks and other subject matter. In my reference photo of Eagle Falls in South Lake Tahoe, the water drops down vertically dividing the landscape in half. I was able to climb to another location about 10 feet away to get a much better angle that depicts the water falling from right to left and back to right.

Generate Action in the Scene

You can easily improve a painting's composition by adding action and life. First, I sketched this rocky beach in Monterey, California, as is and found it boring. I added birds in the sky and splashing around the rocks, making it much more lively and inviting.

Enhance a Scene's Mood

Boosting the moods of a landscape is a nonphysical way to enhance a painting's composition. I did this watercolor sketch of a Tibetan temple during a light rain. To enhance the mood, I added more mist and rain with broad strokes of color in the sky, and painted fewer details on the foliage and building edges. I also added the figures' reflections on the ground, greatly improving the landscape's mood.
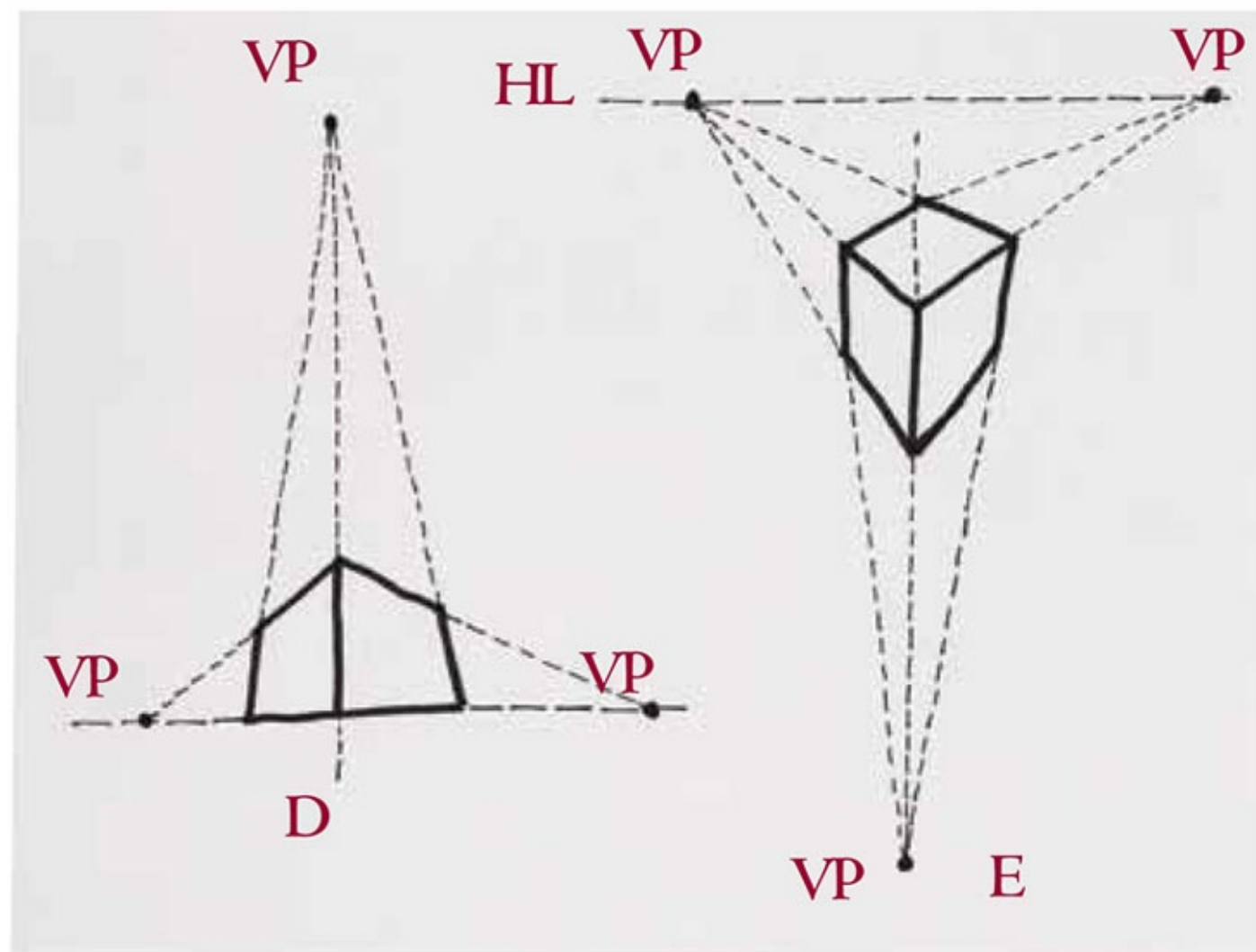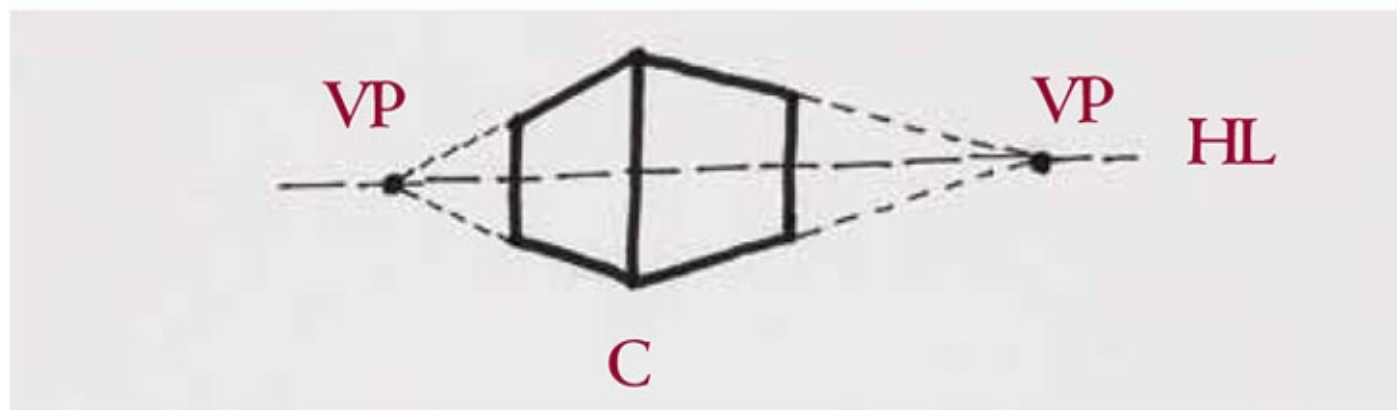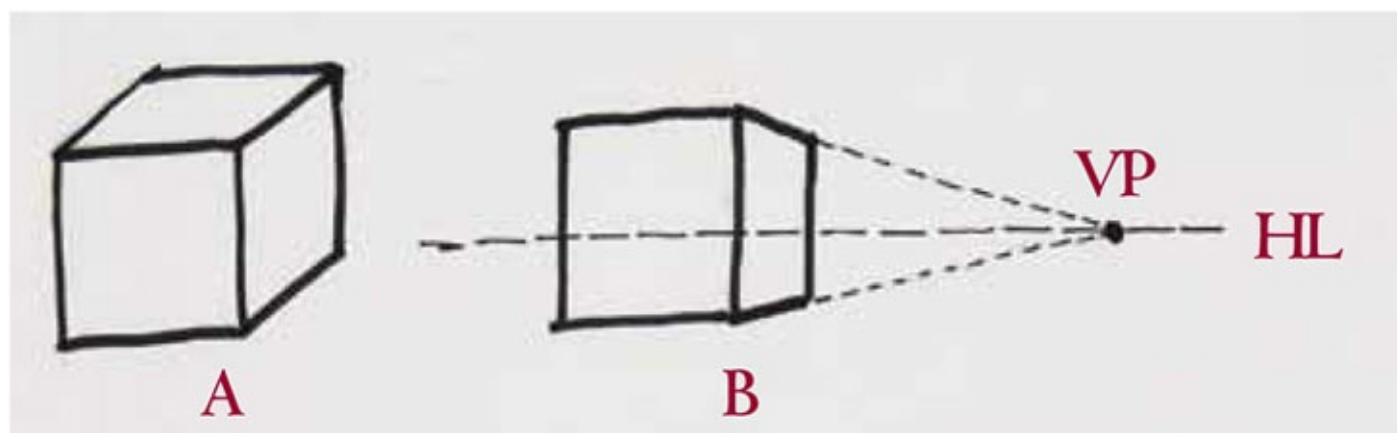
Perspective Basics

Linear perspective is a technique we use to suggest depth in our landscapes by making parallel lines meet. In reality, the lines only seem to meet because as an object recedes it appears smaller in the distance. The intersection of two-dimensional parallel lines is called the vanishing point and occurs at the horizon line (eye level). Every landscape always has a horizon line with one, two and sometimes three vanishing points on it. Keep in mind you might not see the horizon line on a picture if it is above or below where you are standing while capturing the scene.

A

B

VP

HL

VP

VP

HL

C

VP

VP

HL

VP

D

VP

VP

HL

VP

E

VP
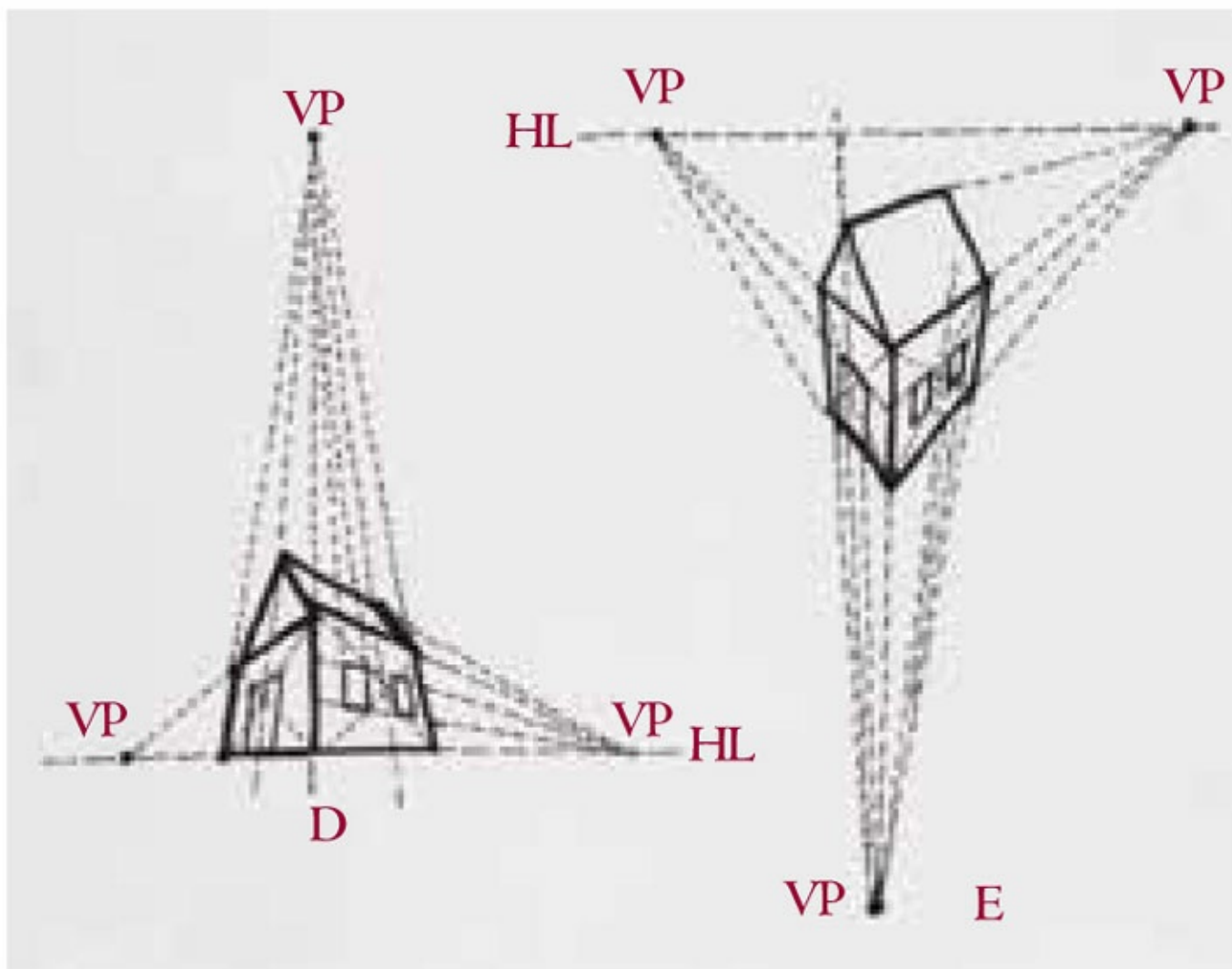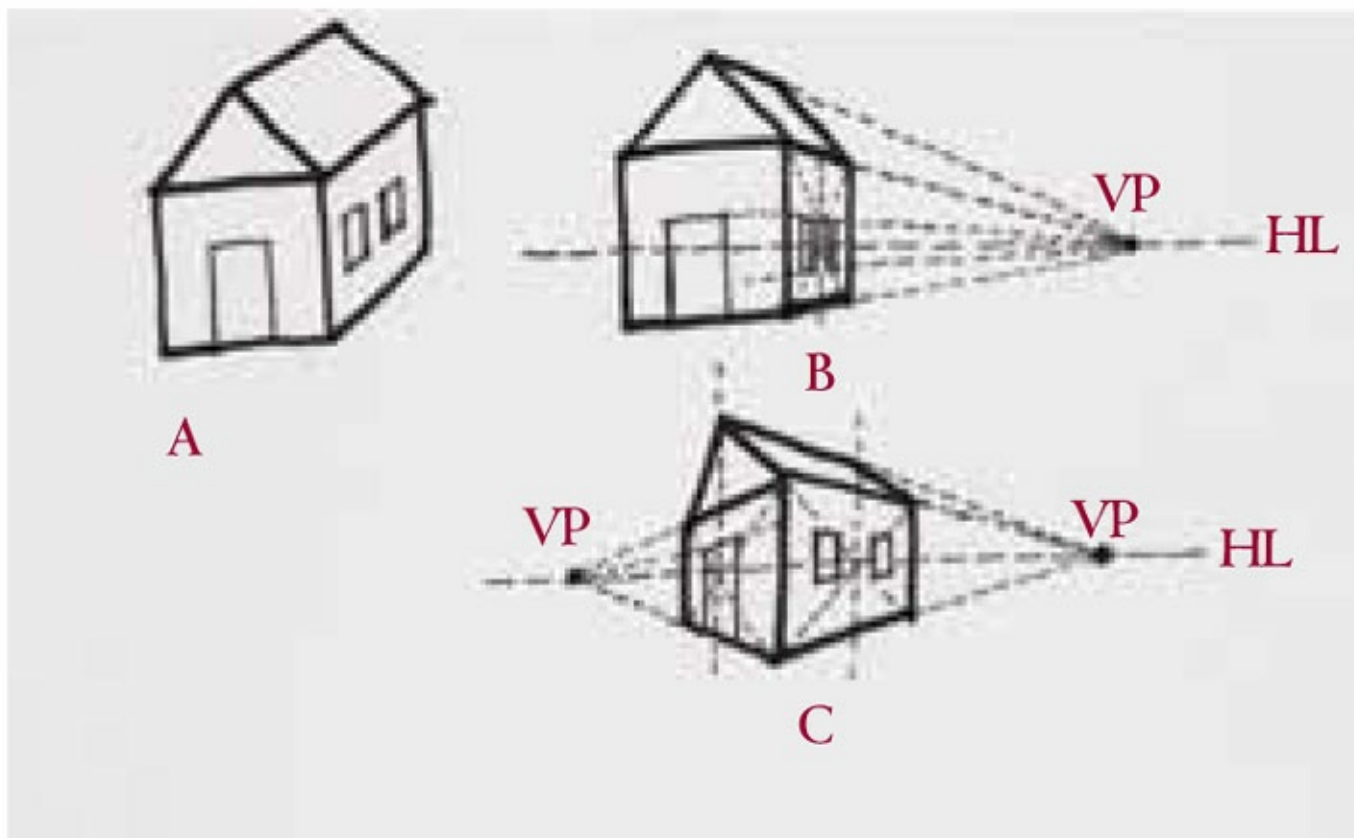
Complex Perspective

Create a simple house by adding a roof, windows and a door to the box. The perspective principles remain the same. All parallel lines on a face of the box will lead to the same vanishing points.

A

B

VP

HL

VP

VP

HL

C

VP

VP

HL

VP

VP

VP

D

VP

E

Basic Linear Perspective Terms

Let's start with a simple illustration to learn several basic terms of perspective.

A Simple square box about 14' × 14' (4m × 4m)

B Imagine standing about 20' (6m) away from the box and to the right. You are 6' (2m) tall and your eye level is the horizon line (HL). Note that the right side of the box appears shorter because it is further in distance. If you extend a line from the top and bottom sides of the box to the horizon line, they converge at the vanishing point (VP). This is one-point perspective.

C Imagine looking at the same box from about 10' (3m) away; you are standing in front of a corner slightly toward the right. Note that the horizon line is a little higher. If you extend the upper edges and bottom edges on both the right and left sides of the box to the horizon line, you get two vanishing points. This is two-point perspective.

D Here you are very close to the box looking slightly up (worm's -eye view), perceiving the box from below with a lower horizon line. If you extend all edges to their own vanishing points, you achieve three-point perspective.

E When you are looking down on an object, viewing it from above, you get the bird's-eye view with a higher horizon line. This is also three-point perspective.

One-Point Perspective

In this interior view of a building's courtyard, the red line is the horizon line at eye level. The blue lines represent the building's parallel lines—windows, wooden frames and floor tiles. They converge at the vanishing point to the left of the building.
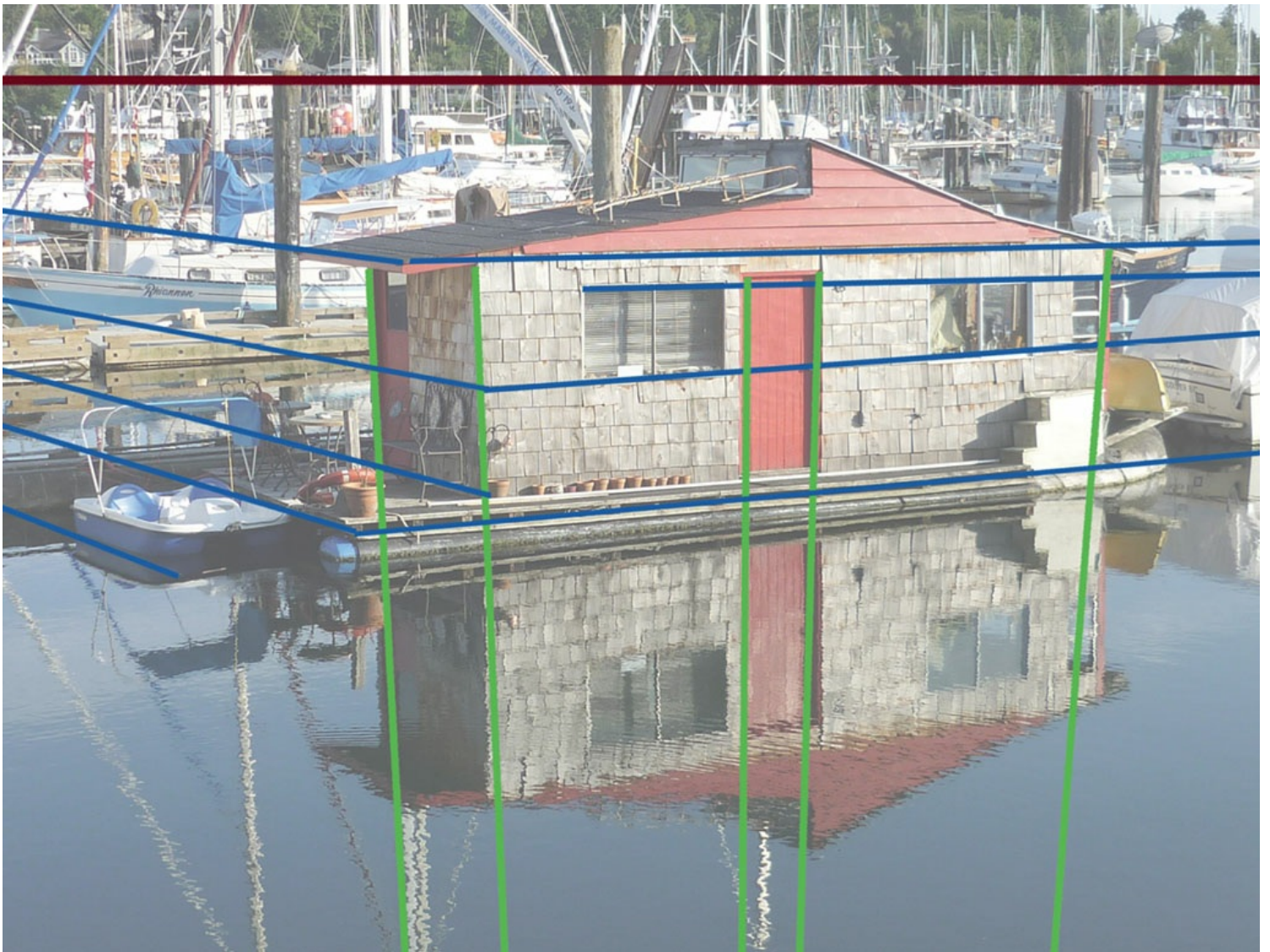
Two-Point Perspective

Here we view a house from a corner. The two sides of the house converge at two vanishing points along the horizon line. Use your imagination to follow the parallel lines to the second vanishing point far to the right.

Three-Point Perspective From Above

Here the scene looks down on the boathouse in a bird's eye view. Consequently, the horizon line is above the structure. The parallel lines of the building end up at two points, one to the left and one to the right. The green lines are the boathouse corners and door jambs extending downward to a third vanishing point.

Three-Point Perspective From Below

When you view an object from above or below eye level, it is in three-point perspective. Here we are viewing the stone castle from slightly below, resulting in a lower horizon line (red). The roof and wall's parallel lines lead out to the left and right, converging at two vanishing points (blue). When you extend the parallel lines (green) of the wall and window edges all the way up, they end at one point in the sky. This is the third vanishing point in three-point perspective.
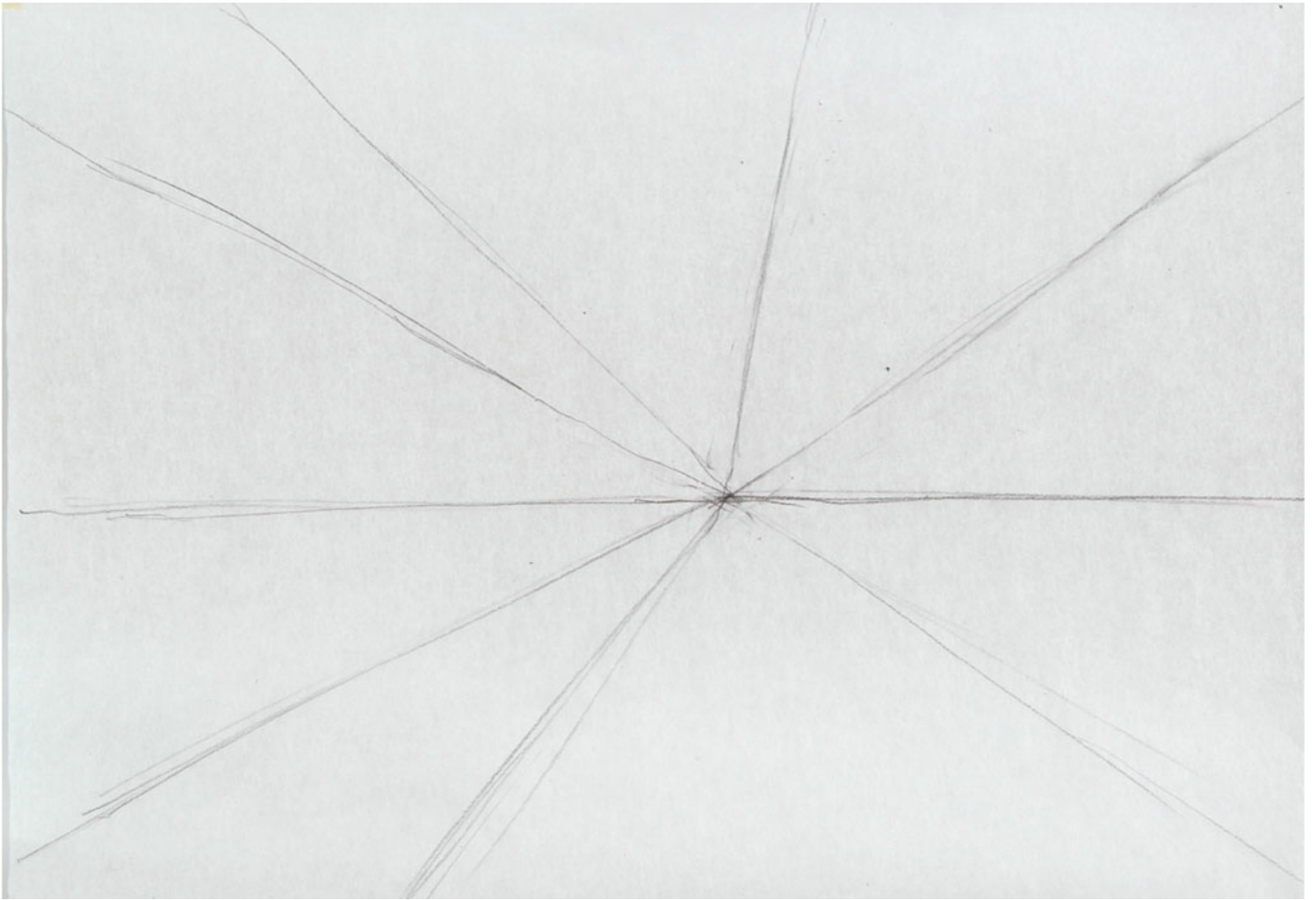
One-Point Perspective

One-point perspective is the simplest because it only has one vanishing point. Imaging yourself standing at the end of a rectangular-shaped classroom in the center of the wall looking toward a large chalkboard hung at other end. Your eye level is the horizon line and the center of the chalkboard is the vanishing point. The parallel edges of the walls and ceilings all continue to the vanishing point. When working out the perspective of an image, these lines are called construction lines.


Reference Photo: River Scene From Zion National Park

1 Draw construction lines that eventually lead out to the vanishing point. In one-point perspective, our eye is level at the horizon line. In the reference photo, you can see the road, the top edges of the mountains on the left and right, the creek and the trees that line the creek that lead all the way to the horizon line. This is the vanishing point.
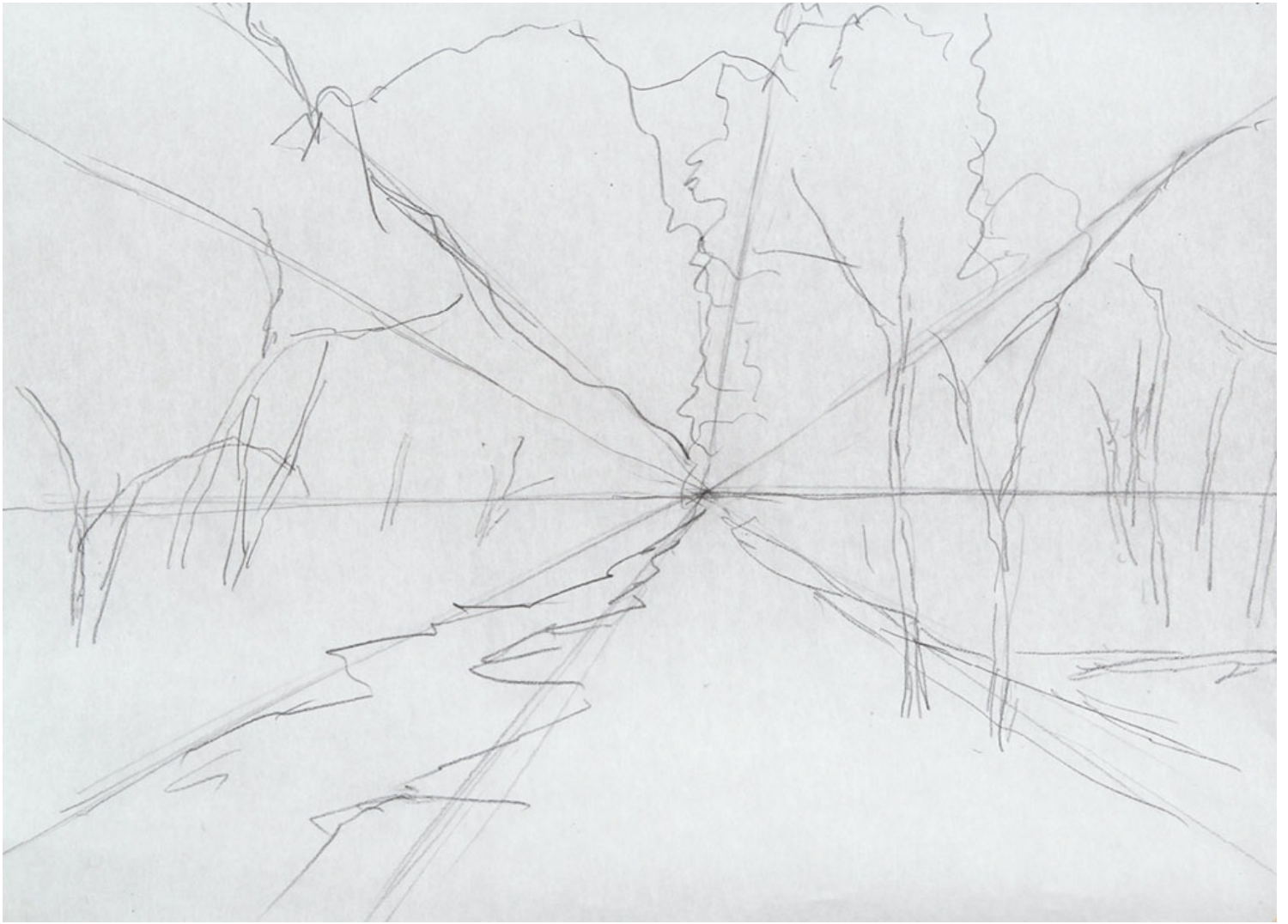
2 Using your perspective lines as a guide, roughly sketch the mountains, large trees, creek and path.

3 Begin sketching the details of the mountains, trees and creek. Sketch in the grasses. It's okay to leave the horizon and guidelines, but you can also erase them to clean up your sketch.

4 Sketch more details of the mountains, trees, creek, path and grasses. Add some shadows on the edge of the mountain to pull it into the foreground and create contrast.

Two-Point Perspective

Though this scene is technically three-point perspective, we are standing far enough away to disregard the vertical vanishing point. Simplify the house as a big box, ignoring the roofs, porch and stairs. Since we see two sides of the box, one at left and one at right, we know this is a two-point perspective scene with one vanishing point at left and one at right on the horizon line. To determine the horizon line, follow the house's siding. When the lines of siding begin to skew away from a horizontal line, you've found the horizon line. It is approximately at the bottom of the front door.

Reference Photo: Victorian House in Madison, Wisconsin
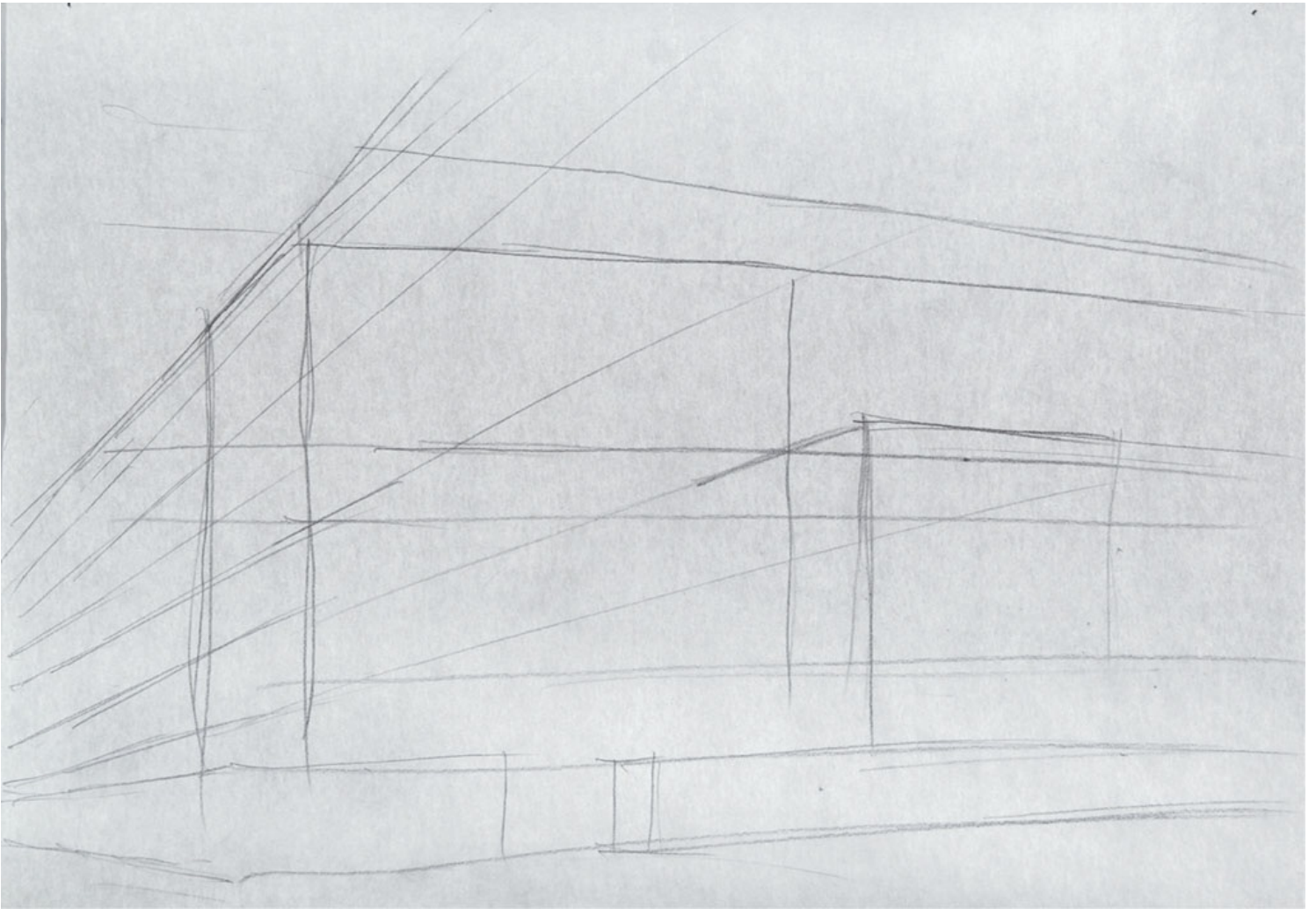
1 Draw construction lines that eventually lead out to the vanishing points. The horizon line is about at the top of the steps. Follow the vertical and horizontal edges of the house to draw construction lines that end with one vanishing point at the left and one at the right.

2 Using your first construction lines, draw the large elements of the scene, such as the house and tree trunks. In two-point perspective it helps to imagine the house as a big box without a roof.

3 Continue sketching more details such as the porch, staircase and fence, keeping in mind your construction lines.

**4** Sketch the siding and add shadows on the windows, door and trees to create some depth.

Three-Point Perspective Viewed from Above

In this exercise, we view the boat from above (bird's-eye view), so the upper portion of the boat seems larger than the lower portion, and the horizon line is above the boat. To simplify what we see, view the boat as two large rectangular boxes. One is the boat's hull, and the other is the upper cabin. When you view the boat from above, it appears larger at the top and smaller as the eye continues down.
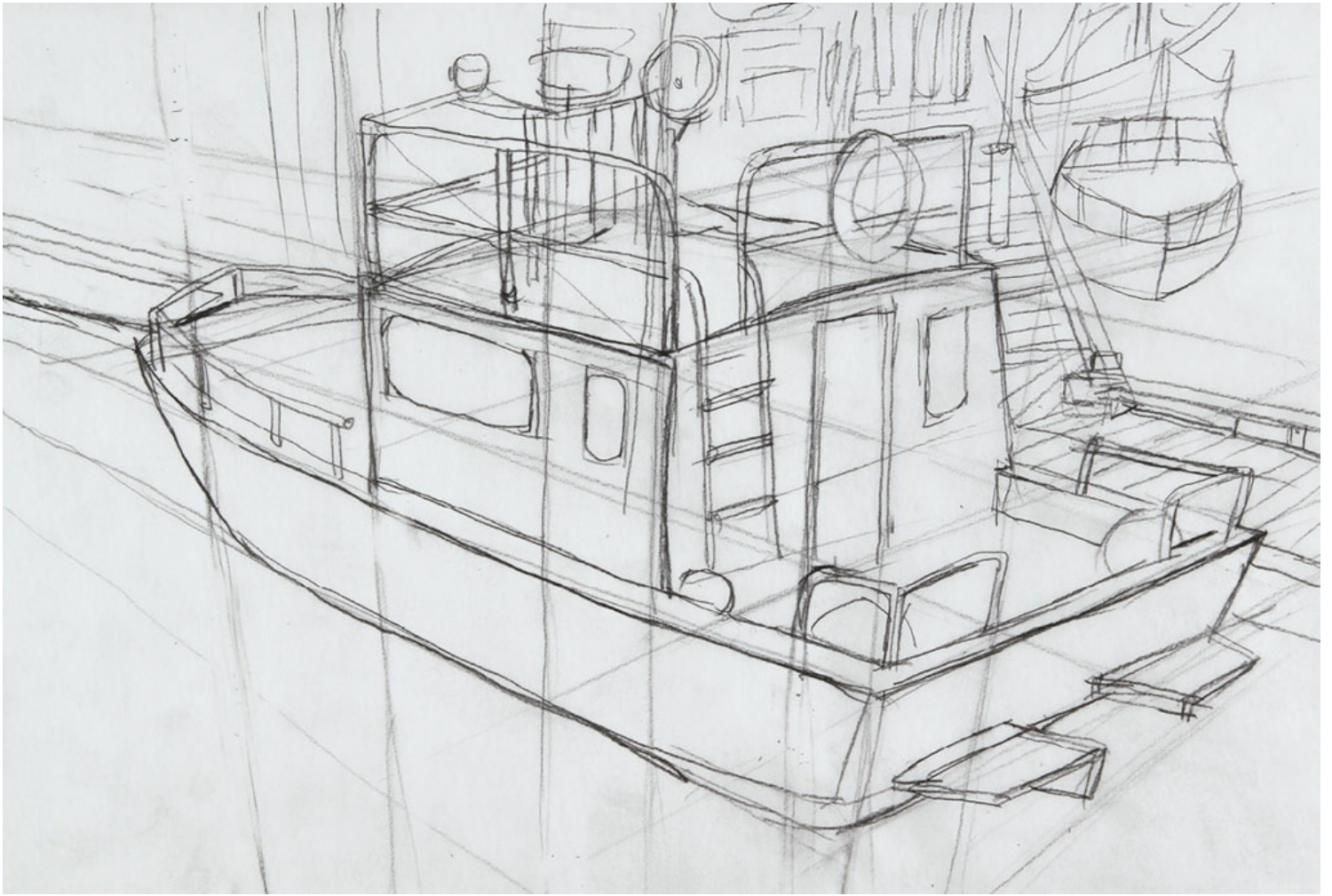

Reference Photo: A Water Taxi in Gibson Island, British Columbia, Canada
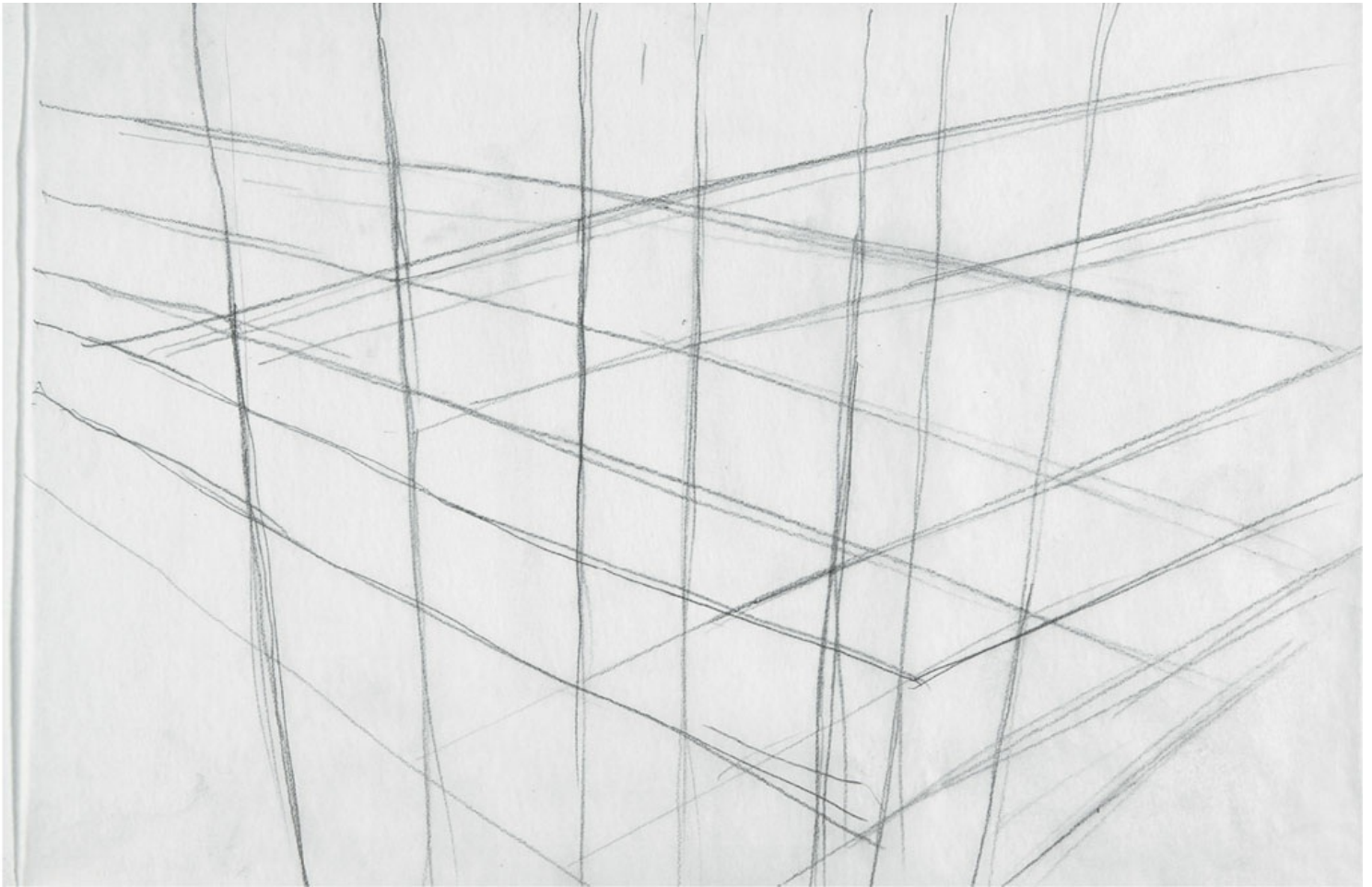
1 Use edges of the taxi boat and dock to draw construction lines that end in three vanishing points. Two will be on the horizon line and one below the boat (not shown here).
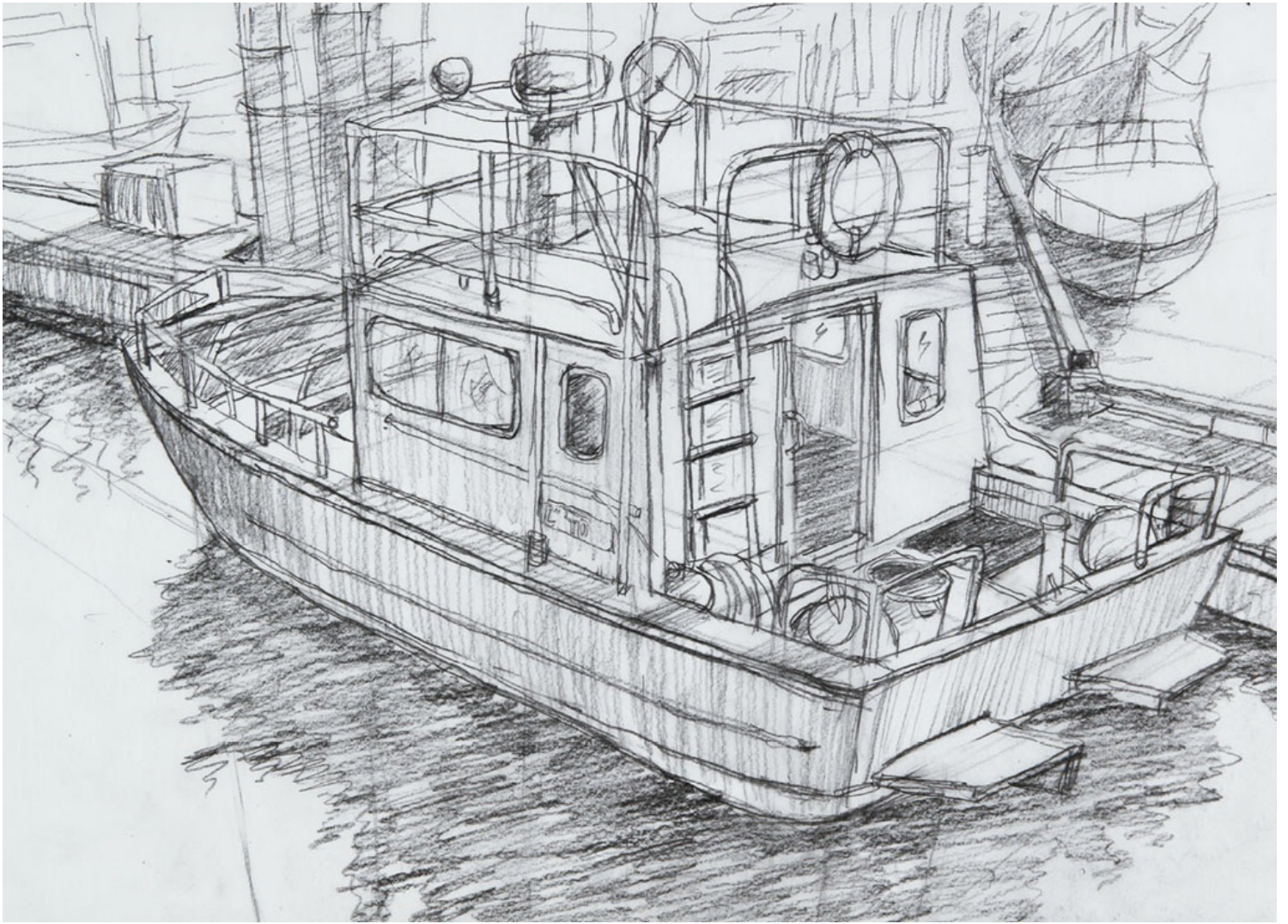
2 Following construction lines, roughly sketch the boat and dock.

3 Continue adding details on the boat and dock. Sketch the background objects without too much detail and indicate the boat's reflection.

4 Add some more shading to the boat and shadows to imply depth and dimension.

Three-Point Perspective Viewed from Below

In this exercise, we draw another three-point perspective scene in greater detail and viewed from below (worm's-eye view). Similar to the previous exercise, simplify this castle as a combination of several boxes: a large one at right, a slim one at the middle top wall, two smaller ones for the wood deck areas and one more at the lower middle portion of the castle. When we view the boxes from below, we see that they are bigger at the base, and smaller at the top. The horizon line is at our eye level at approximately the bottom of the picture.

Reference Photo: Castle Ruins in Nottingham, UK
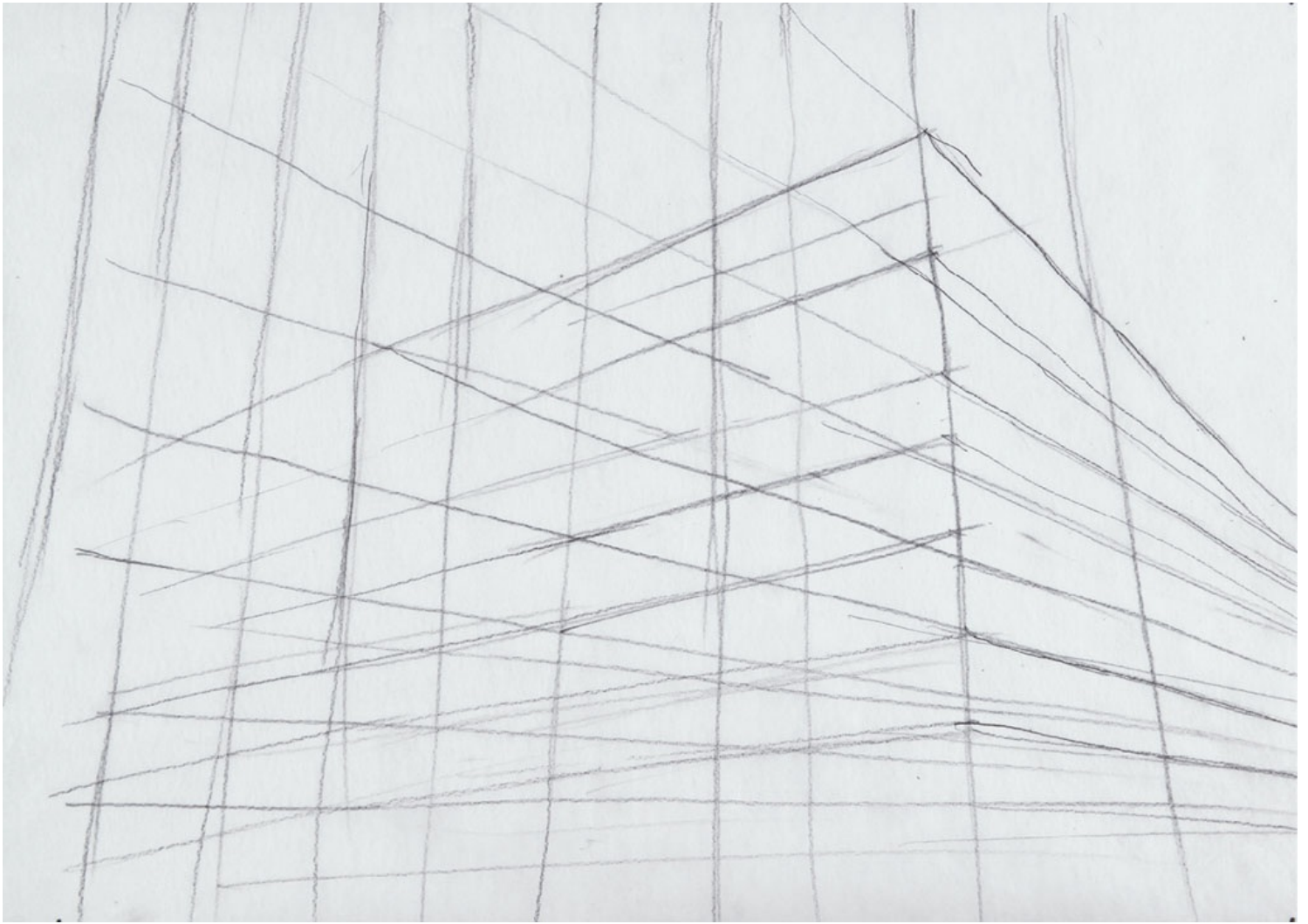
1 Follow the vertical and horizontal edges on the castle to create construction lines that end at three vanishing points. The horizon line is located at the bottom of the picture.

2 Follow along the construction lines, and sketch the large elements of the castle. It helps to imagine it as a combination of boxes.

3 Continue adding details such as the bricks and railing. Roughly sketch the trees and clouds, and add some tone to the bushes and the background tree.

4 To complete the scene, use a soft pencil such as a 5B or 6B to add darker shadows and textures to the trees and bricks.

CHAPTER 4
Depict the Four Seasons in Chinese painting style

In this chapter, we put our skills to use and attempt to capture the spirits of spring, summer, fall and winter in Chinese watercolor. I suggest to all of my students that they spend some time studying Chinese spontaneous-style painting. I have even noticed that some of my beginner students have a tendency to paint more loosely at first than my more advanced students because they have fewer habits to break. To practice Chinese painting, it is important to break out of your comfort zone and try new methods. You don't have to be perfect in each painting and try to paint a masterpiece; I encourage you to enjoy the learning process and to paint happily! My painting style has evolved over years and years of practice and studying both Chinese and Western styles. I am happy to share with you what I have learned to help you on your artistic journey.

Materials for CHINESE style paintings

Surfaces
raw or sized Shuan paper

Inks & Colors
light, midtone and dark Chinese ink—ink comes as a dark liquid that can be diluted with water into lighter tones
Chinese painting colors (commonly found in a set of 12)

Brushes
small, medium and large Chinese brushes

Other Supplies
chop set
soft charcoal stick

Spring Waterfall

In spring, the mountain snow begins to melt, the streams are full of water, trees start growing new leaves and wild animals emerge from the long cold winter. I aim to capture the earth's rebirth in my landscapes. Using the tools and ink-breaking technique we learned in chapter 2, let's paint this legendary waterfall in Chinese watercolor.

1 Load a small amount of diluted dark ink onto a medium brush, and holding it sideways, roughly sketch the mountains and rocks on raw Shuan paper. Use the center brush method to define the waterfall.

2 Load a large brush with a midtone ink, then dip its tip in dark ink. Paint the foreground mountain holding the brush on its side.

3 While the foreground mountain is still wet, load the same brush with dark ink at its tip and paint the distant trees. Add more details to the foreground trees.

4 Load a large brush with midtone ink, and paint the distant mountains with broad strokes, holding the brush on its side. Add a bit of dark ink to the tip and paint the trees before the ink on the mountains dries. Paint the cliffs and waterfall in the same way as the foreground mountain in step 2.

5 Paint the foreground pines with a small brush loaded with dark ink. Since they are so close up in view, they have quite a bit of detail.

6 Load a small amount of diluted light ink onto a medium brush, and holding it sideways, suggest the waterfall with stop-and-go strokes. Use the same brush and add a bit of midtone ink while the light ink is still damp.

7 After the ink dries, use a large brush to apply Burnt Sienna on the cliffs and both sides of the waterfall, adding more pigment nearest the falls and less on the cliffs. Next, add a little yellow on the mountain tops, and Indigo on the trees and around the waterfall.

8 While the colors from step 7 are still damp, add some Mineral Indigo to the distant mountains with a medium brush. Mix Burnt Sienna with a little Carmine and apply to the waterfall's surrounding rocks and the base of the distant mountains. Load Mineral Green onto the tip of a medium brush and paint dots on the tree areas to represent hightlights.
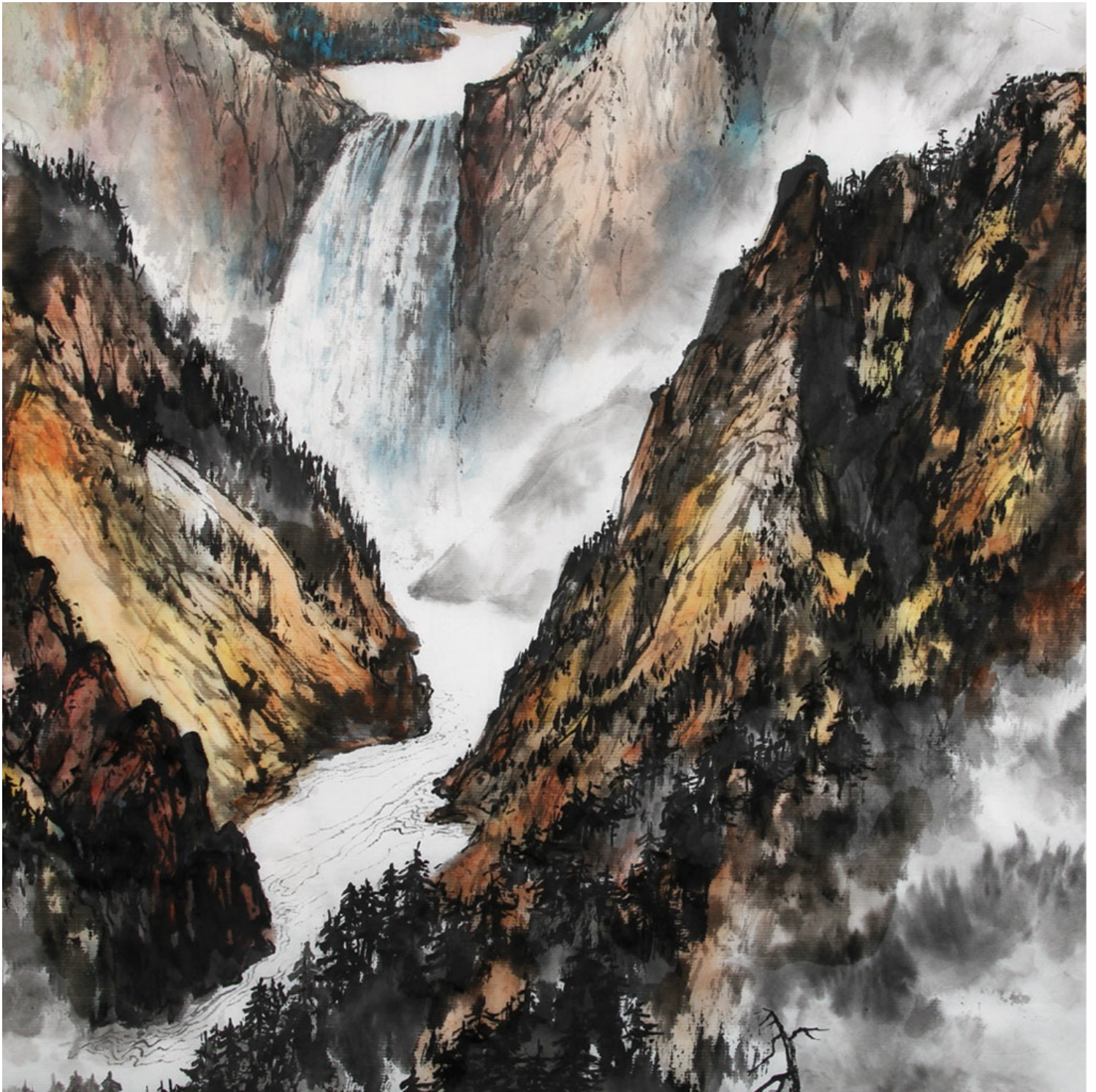
9 Use a large brush to paint the foreground mountains first with yellow, followed by Burnt Sienna and then a mixture of Burnt Sienna and Carmine. The colors appear vivid because they are wet. They will be about 35 percent lighter after they dry.

10 Load Indigo on the large brush and apply it on the trees on the foreground mountain. Load Burnt Sienna on the tip of the small brush and paint the pine tree trunks and their branches.

YELLOWSTONE WATERFALL

Chinese ink and color on raw Shuan paper 22" × 15" (56cm × 38cm)

11 With a large brush, apply yellow on the pine trees on the foreground mountains. When it mixes with the Indigo, it will yield a nice green tone. Use a medium brush to highlight the trees with both Mineral Indigo and Mineral Green. On the mountains above the waterfall, use a medium brush to add Mineral Green and a little Mineral Indigo. Use a small brush and diluted Indigo to add a few waves to the river above the waterfall. Finally, on the foreground hills use a small brush and Mineral Green to paint dots for the trees' highlights. Stretch the painting and allow it to dry completely. To finish, add one name chop to sign and balance the composition.

BONUS

Visit artistsnetwork.com/chineselandscapes to download a free bonus demonstration of a spring landscape in watercolor!

Summer Sunrise

Summer is full of sunshine, so let your landscapes capture the warmth of the season's energy. In this demonstration, we will create a simple blue-green Chinese landscape on sized Shuan paper, a style popular in ancient Chinese painting. This type of paper is less absorbent, allowing you to apply colors in layers without them muddying. The diffused backlighting of this scene creates a warm mood. Backlighting is great for Chinese painting because of the lack of detailed highlights and shadows. You can paint as you feel, rather than exactly what the camera captures.

1 Use a soft charcoal stick to roughly sketch the landscape without many details. If the lines are too dark, use a dry brush to brush some of the charcoal away.

2 Lightly wet a large brush and load with Burnt Sienna, then hold it sideways to paint the mountains on the right, varying the pigment and leaving some whites for the waterfall. Continue using the same brush and diluted Burnt Sienna to paint the distant mountains. Lightly indicate clouds in the sky with Burnt Sienna.

3 Use the same brush and a variety of tones of Burnt Sienna to paint the mountain at left (El Capitan). Blend its top into the clouds with a little water. Also, start painting the slopes and trees in the valley with the same brush and pigment.
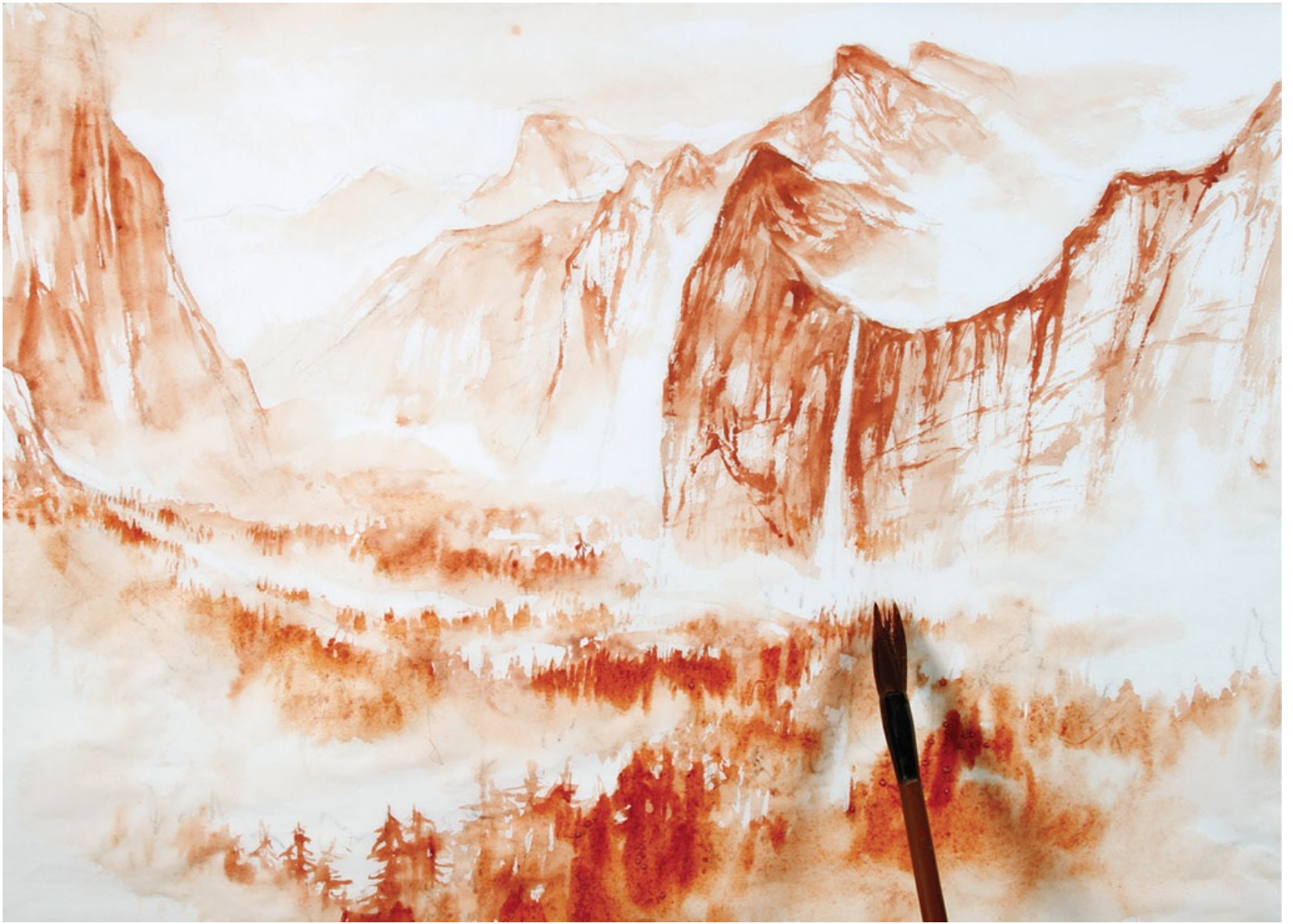
4 While the slopes and trees are still wet, load a small amount of Burnt Sienna on the tip of a medium brush, split the bristles slightly with your fingers and stamp the bristles on the paper to create the middle-ground's treetops. Using the same method and a large brush, stamp in the distant trees with fewer details, and use a small brush to define the foreground foliage.

5 Paint the foreground valley with a large brush and medium-value yellow. Dilute the yellow a bit and paint the distant mountains and rocks. Where the clouds meet the mountains and trees, use a large brush and a little water to softly blend the yellow pigment into the clouds.

6 After the yellow dries, use a medium brush to apply a thin layer of Mineral Green to the mountains. Immediately use a large brush with a little water to smoothly blend the Mineral Green into the mountains and clouds.

7 Continue applying and blending Mineral Green to the mountains and trees in the valley. Use a bit more pigment for the dark foreground foliage.

8 Allow the painting to dry, then call out the rock details with a small brush and a variety of Burnt Sienna tones. For the darker areas, mix Burnt Sienna with a little ink. Gently blend the clouds into the tops of the mountains with a moist medium brush to achieve nice, smooth edges.

9 Load Indigo on a medium brush and dip its tip in ink. Use the center brush method to paint the foreground trees and foliage details. Use a large brush with a little water to tone down the trees on the right, creating a bit of depth. Paint the middle ground trees in the valley in the same way but with a medium brush and a lighter mixture of Indigo and ink. The further away the trees, the lighter the colors and smaller the shapes.

10 Use a large brush to apply a mixture of Carmine and Burnt Sienna to the rocks. Load a mixture of Indigo and ink on a small brush to paint dots representing trees on the mountains. Add more dots in a variety of sizes and intensities.

11 Continue painting the dots on the other mountains with the same brush and lighter tones of Indigo and ink. At the right edge of the waterfall, use a small brush to apply lighter values of Burnt Sienna, yellow and Indigo.

YOSEMITE SUNRISE

Chinese ink and color on raw Shuan paper 15" × 22"(38cm × 56cm)

12 Stretch the painting and allow it to completely dry, then stamp a name chop on the lower left to balance the composition.

Fall Leaves

Fall colors are magnificent and brilliant, especially in the northeastern U.S. I first saw the changing leaves in Boston where I studied from 1994 to 1996. I was amazed by nature's splendid colors: green, yellow, orange, red and brown, sometimes on a single tree. It had a huge impact on the way I use color in my landscapes, inspiring me to be brighter and more imaginative. In this demonstration, we learn the crinkle method of Chinese painting where you crumple your rice paper before applying ink and color.

Referenceh

1 Roughly sketch the landscape on raw Shuan paper with a soft charcoal stick. Work gently to avoid breaking the paper.

2 Use both of your hands to gently crumple the rice paper, being careful not to tear it. Slowly and carefully open the paper and spread it out on your painting surface.

3 Dilute some ink with water and load it onto a large brush. Holding it sideways, paint a group of trees on the right. I call this brush technique "mopping the floor." It is important to keep your brush relatively dry or you risk losing the foliage textures.

4 After the foreground trees have been placed, use a medium brush and a midtone ink to paint more foliage and background trees using the same "mopping the floor" method. While damp, use a medium brush and dark ink to separate the foreground trees into two groups. Paint the background foliage at left with dark ink while defining the edges of the foreground trees on both sides.

5 Dip a small brush in dark ink and paint the trunks, branches, rocks and grasses using the center brush technique. Vary these strokes in width and length to suggest depth.

6 Allow to dry completely, then use a medium brush and light to midtone yellow to paint the foliage, leaving some whites around the edges.

7 Immediately load Carmine into the same brush and apply it to the trees. Use both midtone and dark Carmine to achieve interesting color variations. Use the same brush to paint the rocks with midtone Burnt Sienna and the grasses with a midtone yellow.

8 While wet, use the same brush to add medium Indigo and Phthalocyanine Blue to the trees and the lower portions of the rocks and grasses, creating some nice green and brown tones.

9 Create thick mixtures of yellow, Vermilion and Carmine with water and a ¾-inch (19mm) brush and separately splash them on the trees by knocking the handles of two brushes. It's okay if some color ends up on sky and water areas.

10 Load midtone to dark yellow on a large brush and apply to the water below the yellow trees. Next, load yellow onto the whole brush, then Vermilion from its tip to the middle, and Carmine at the tip. Holding the brush sideways, paint the water with a variety of reds and oranges.

11 Load a large brush with Phthalocyanine Blue from its tip to the heel, and ink from its tip to the middle. Hold it sideways to paint the reflections of the foliage in the water. Using a center brush technique, paint the reflections of the trunks and branches.

12 Load a medium brush with diluted Phthalocyanine Blue from its tip to heel, and

midtone Indigo from its tip to the middle. Hold it sideways to paint the distant mountains. While this area is still wet, load midtone Vermilion on the whole brush and a midtone Carmine from its tip to the middle, and indicate soft trees on the background mountains.

FALL LANDSCAPE
Chinese ink and color on raw Shuan paper, 16" × 20" (41cm × 51cm)

13 Load thick white pigment on a clean small brush, and paint the tree trunks and egrets. Use the same brush to add dark ink to the foreground rocks. Finally, use a small brush to highlight the rocks with Mineral Indigo.

Stretch the painting and allow it to dry completely. Then load a small brush with thick white pigment and touch up the splashed colors in the sky from step 9. Lastly, inscribe

the painting with a title, sign your name and stamp on a name chop. If you do not write Chinese or have any chops, you can just sign it like a watercolor.

Winter Snow

Snowing is a natural phenomenon that can change a landscape dramatically. Growing up in south China, I had never seen snow. I clearly remember the first time I saw snow while driving through the beautiful Sierra Nevada Mountains. The silver-white snow, blue-green pines, rolling clouds and flowing water from snow melting deeply impressed me. In this demo, we aim to capture the serenity of snow by splashing white pigment on Shuan paper and using sponges to create impressions. This is an experimental technique that combines old and new methods of painting. As the Chinese masters would advise, brush and ink should follow the change of the eras.


Reference Photo: Summit of Donner Pass, California

Materials

To begin, prepare your color liquids and ink for pouring. Clockwise from top left are white, yellow, Carmine, black ink, Mineral Green, Mineral Indigo and Phthalocyanine Blue (Burnt Sienna not pictured). In separate dishes, dilute them with 2 to 3 teaspoons of water to achieve a consistency like thick soup. Gather several small pieces of old sponges.
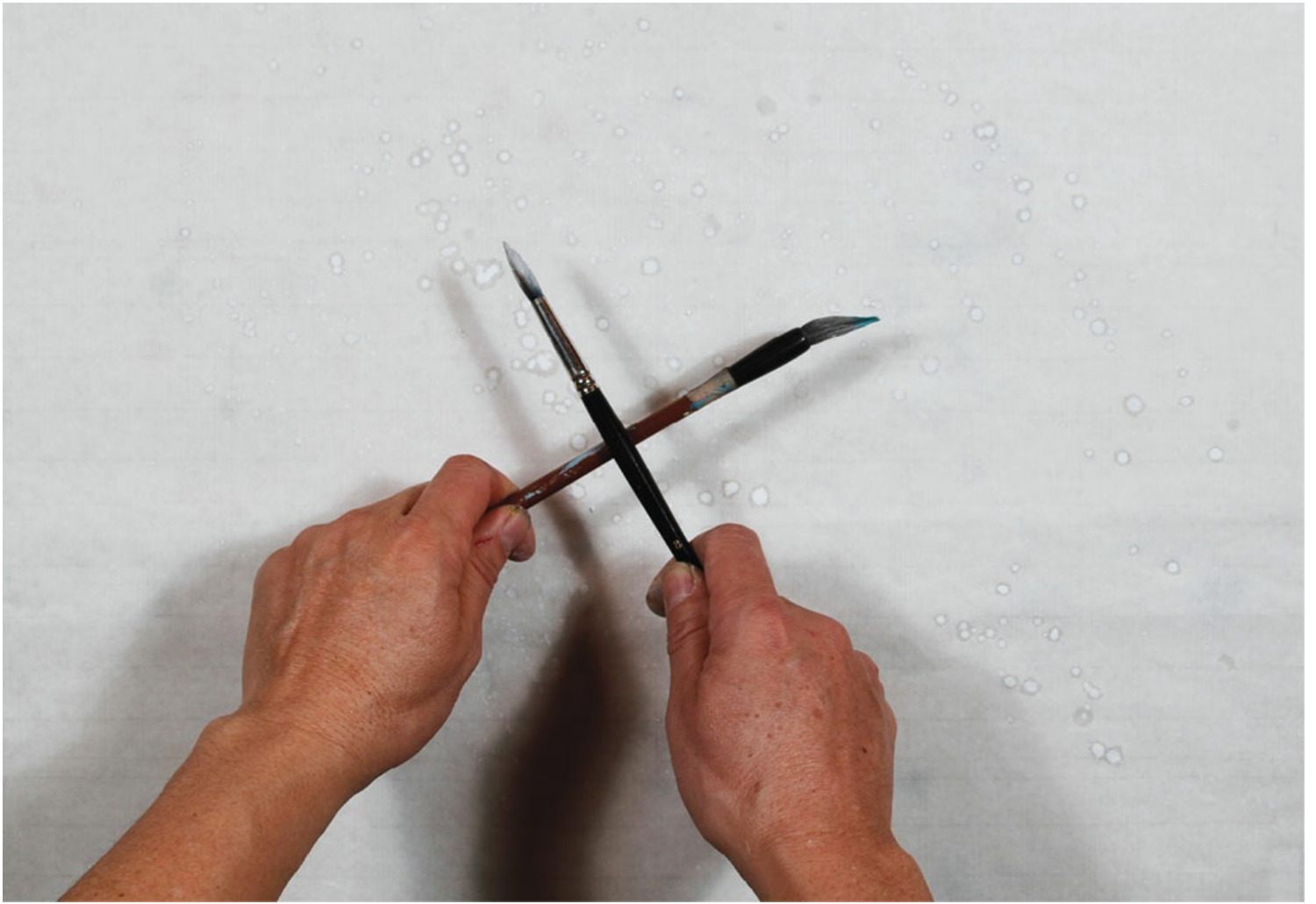
1 Lay raw Shuan paper on a large absorbent surface such as a Chinese painting mat. Load a no. 4 watercolor brush with diluted white paint, and knock the handle of a medium Chinese brush to splatter snowflake-like effects. Splash a little more white in the middle portion of the paper than other areas.

2 Dip a sponge in a little of the liquid yellow and Phthalocyanine Blue. Hold it at the edge and stamp out the tree areas. Try to work fast or you risk losing your whites. The sponge will run out of color after 5 or 6 stamps, so reload and continue in a variety of colors.

3 Continue stamping with Carmine, Mineral Indigo and Mineral Green to create a variety of colorful tree shapes. When one sponge gets muddy, change to another one. Save a lot of white space to later indicate snow piled on foliage.

4 Load yellow, Phthalocyanine Blue and black ink on a sponge, and stamp the trees in the background and lower portions of foliage in the foreground.

5 Load Phthalocyanine Blue liquid on a large Chinese brush, then dark ink from its tip to the middle. Hold it sideways to paint the creek, being careful to leave some white spaces. Indicate the creek's bank in the middle ground with a medium brush and light ink with light Phthalocyanine Blue at the bank's edge.

6 Use a medium brush to paint the background trees with light, midtone and dark ink. On the distant trees in the middle of the paper, use the small brush and dark ink to define trunks and branches using the negative painting (or paint-around) method.

7 Continue defining the trees with ink as in step 6. Use the same brush and dark ink to outline the roof, door and windows. When dry, use a medium brush to apply Carmine to the building's walls. Paint the trees behind the roof with light ink and light Indigo, leaving some white to indicate piled-up snow.

8 Use the small brush to define more trees by painting around their trunks and branches with medium to intense ink, especially around the house, which is the focal point. At the creek, use the small brush to outline rocks and add fresh, thick white pigment on their tops to show snow.

9 In the foreground snow, use a small brush to paint weeds and twigs with Burnt Sienna and ink. Leave some whites and add some thick white pigment to indicate snow.

SNOWING

Chinese ink and color on raw Shuan paper, 15" × 22" (38cm × 56cm)

10 Stretch the painting and allow it to fully dry before adding the finishing touches. Here I used a medium brush to paint the upper-middle sky with a little white and Indigo to define the edge of a distant mountain. I also used a small brush to add thick, white snowflakes on the painting. To finish, I signed my name and added a name chop to balance the composition.

> **BONUS**
>
> Visit artistsnetwork.com/chineselandscapes to download a free bonus demonstration of a winter landscape in watercolor!

CHAPTER 5
Capture the Moods of Landscapes in Watercolor

RAINING SWAMP
Watercolor on 140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed Arches 16" × 20" (41cm × 51cm)

Capturing mood is a challenging yet important aspect to creating successful watercolor landscapes. All natural scenes are different depending on the time of day and weather condition. Imagine the fresh air, songbirds and warm lighting of a sunrise, or a mountain sunset's red and purple tinted skies and slowly quieting atmosphere. We often think of rainy landscapes as mysterious and profound, while snow as calm and peaceful. These depictions are how our eye perceives the mood of a scene, though we can also determine a scene's atmosphere more internally, beyond personal observation. If we

are in a good mood, a landscape may seem magnificent regardless of the time of day or weather. Likewise, if we are feeling down, we might interpret a scene as such, even a spectacular sunrise morning. Our impressions on landscapes show in our paintings as well as how others view our work. Generally I try to convey a happy and cheerful mood in my paintings. Much like the Chinese scholar painters of ancient time, I try to capture the beauty of nature and the idea of human and nature as one.

In the following watercolor demonstrations, we use the same three colors and a variety of synthetic brushes to complete each loose, moody scene.

Materials for Watercolor Demonstrations

Surfaces
140-lb. (300gsm) watercolor paper

Pigments
Prussian Blue, Antwerp Blue; Pyrrol Red, Naphthol Red; Hansa Yellow Deep, Hansa Yellow Light—choose one each of blue, red and yellow

Brushes
$\frac{1}{4}$-inch (6mm), $\frac{1}{2}$-inch (13mm) and $\frac{3}{4}$-inch (19mm) flats
nos. 2, 4, 6 and 8 rounds

Other Supplies
copy machine, craft knife, light box, masking fluid, no. 2 pencil, paper towels, pen, spray bottle, tracing paper, water and mixing dishes

Morning Light

In this demonstration, we practice painting detailed architecture and warm morning light using the color pouring and blending technique. I was in London on a warm morning and saw this beautiful church surrounded by trees soaked in splendid light. It was a magical moment and I felt very happy. I love landscapes in morning light and have painted many of them. Sometimes I paint from pictures that I took during the middle of the day but render them in morning light to uplift the mood and beauty of the piece.

Reference Photo: Church in Morning Light

1 Rather than sketching this complicated scene, I chose to trace the details onto watercolor paper using a light box. First, lay a piece of tracing paper on top of the 11" × 8" (28cm × 20cm) photograph and trace the image with a pen. The only change I made to the composition was to remove the person lying down in the lower left. Next, enlarge the drawing about 190% on a copy machine and trace the scene onto watercolor paper with a no. 2 pencil and a light box. Cover the brightest white areas with masking fluid using the end of a ¼-inch (6mm) flat's handle.
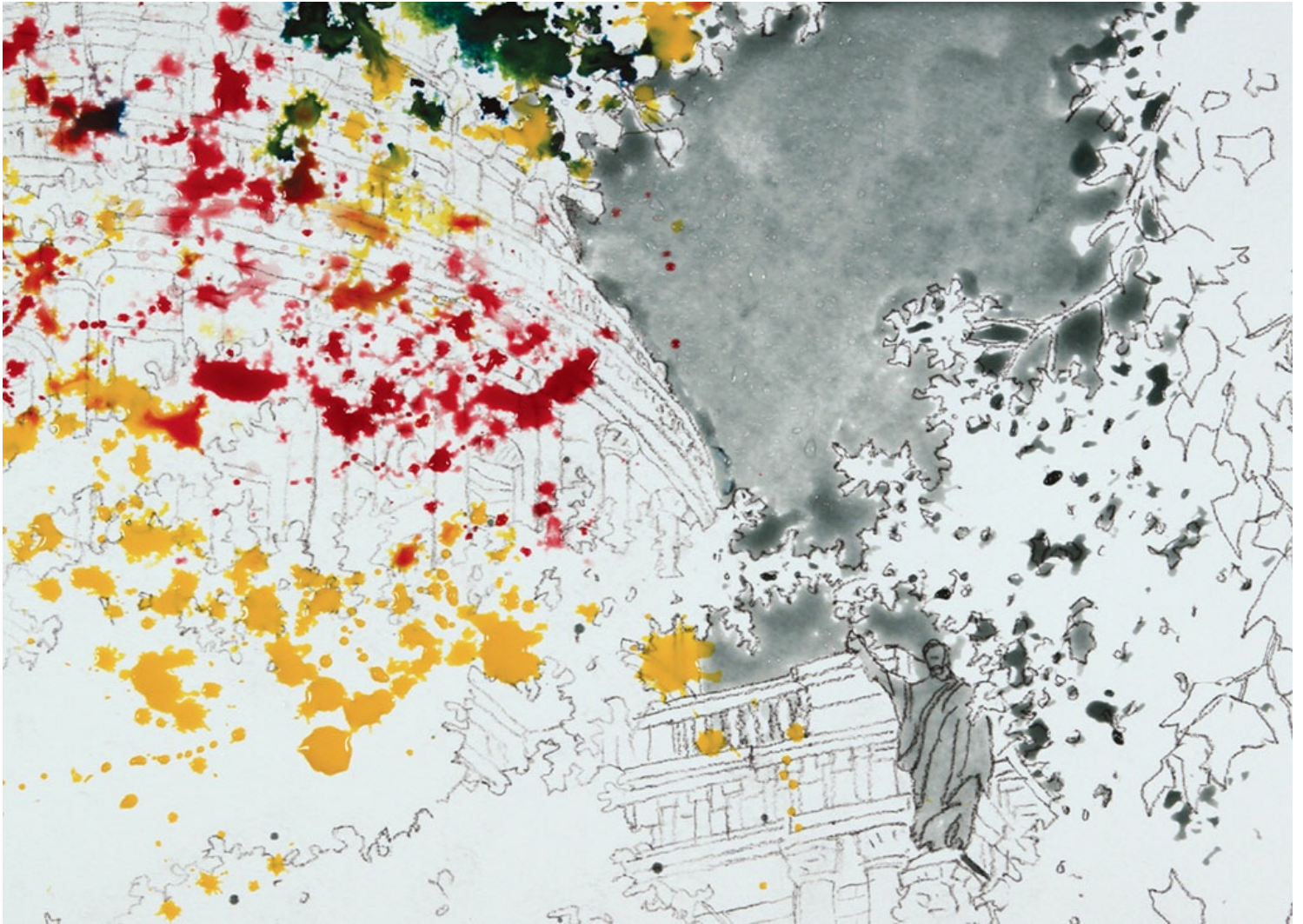
2 Spray water on the upper left area 3 or 4 times. Next, use 3 round brushes dipped separately in liquid red, blue and yellow, and drop color onto the paper.

3 Lightly mix and blend color liquids with your fingers or a ¾-inch (19mm) flat. Leave some white space in between. Do not brush on a same spot more than a couple of times or you risk muddying the colors.

4 Spray water on the middle and left of the page 4 or 5 times. Pour more diluted yellow and red in the middle, and yellow and blue on the left. Lightly mix and blend them with your fingers, creating a nice greenish mixture on the building.
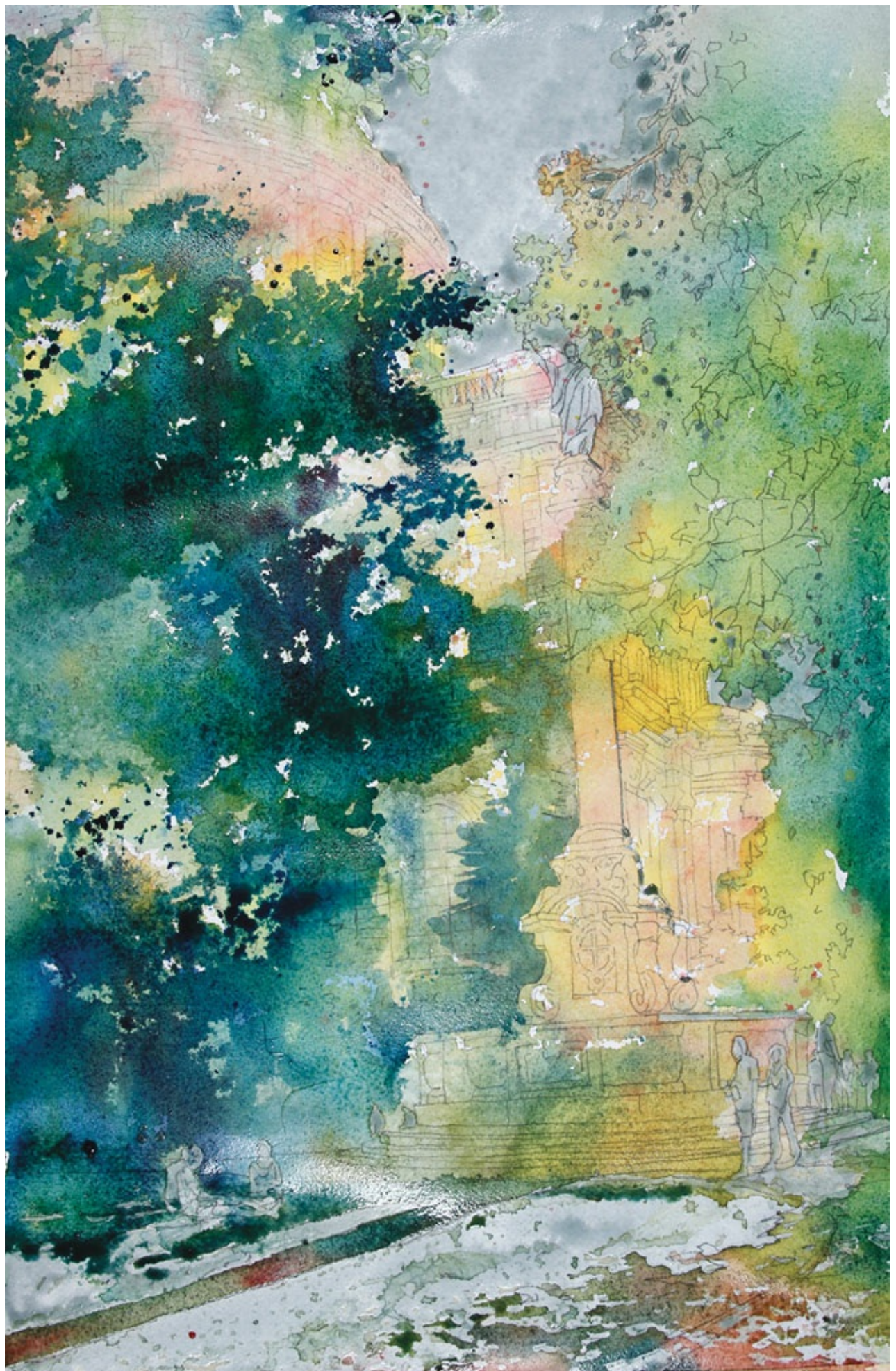
5 Continue spraying water and pouring liquid color as done in the previous steps to cover more of the page. Mix and blend, then lift excess liquids with paper towels.
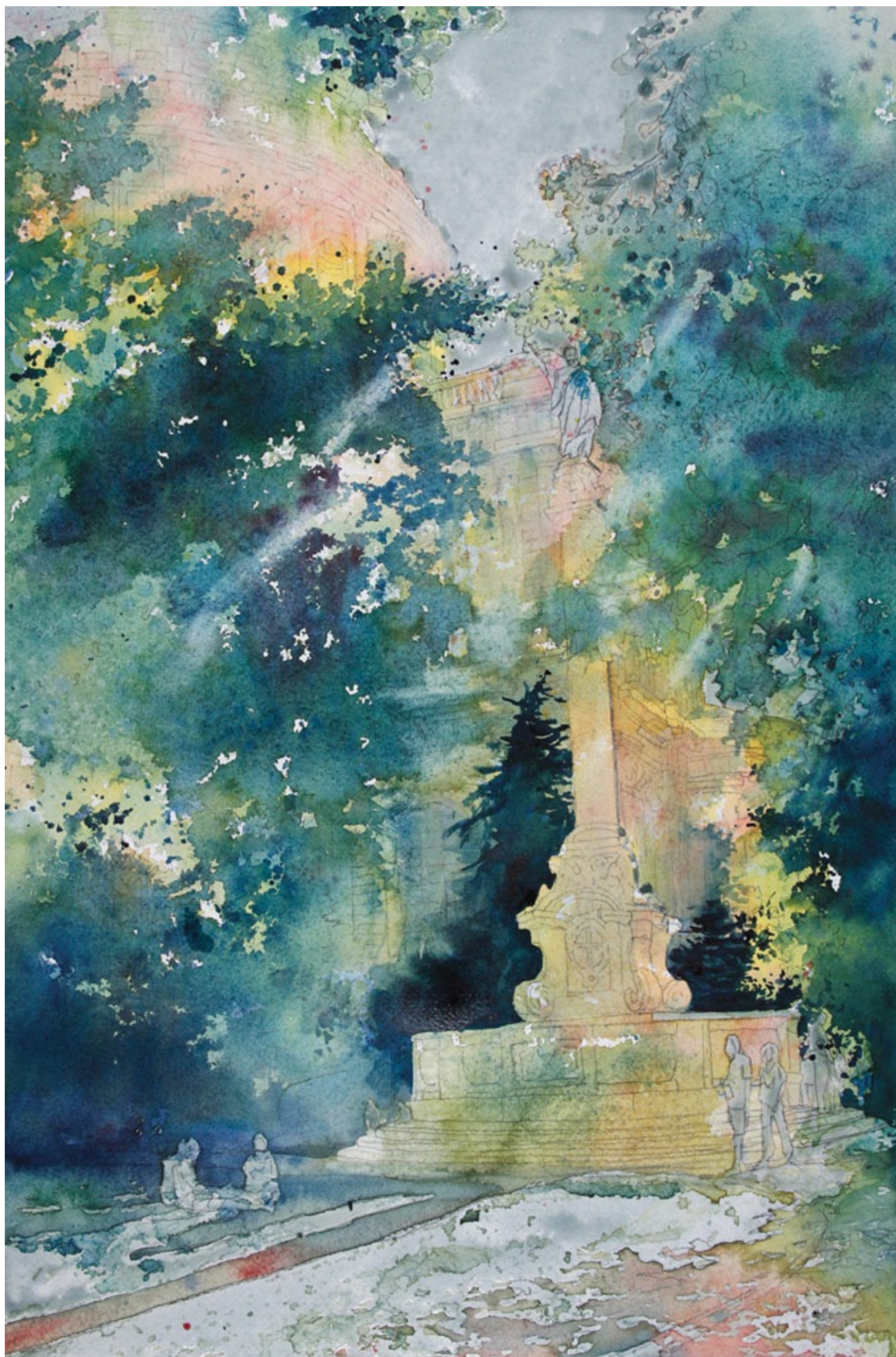
6 Using a ¾-inch (19mm) brush, mix a thick dark blue mixture with blue, red and a bit of water. Splash it onto the trees at the top left of the paper. Because the page is still damp, this dark blue color immediately blends. Use a no. 8 round to define the foliage edges with the same color mixture.
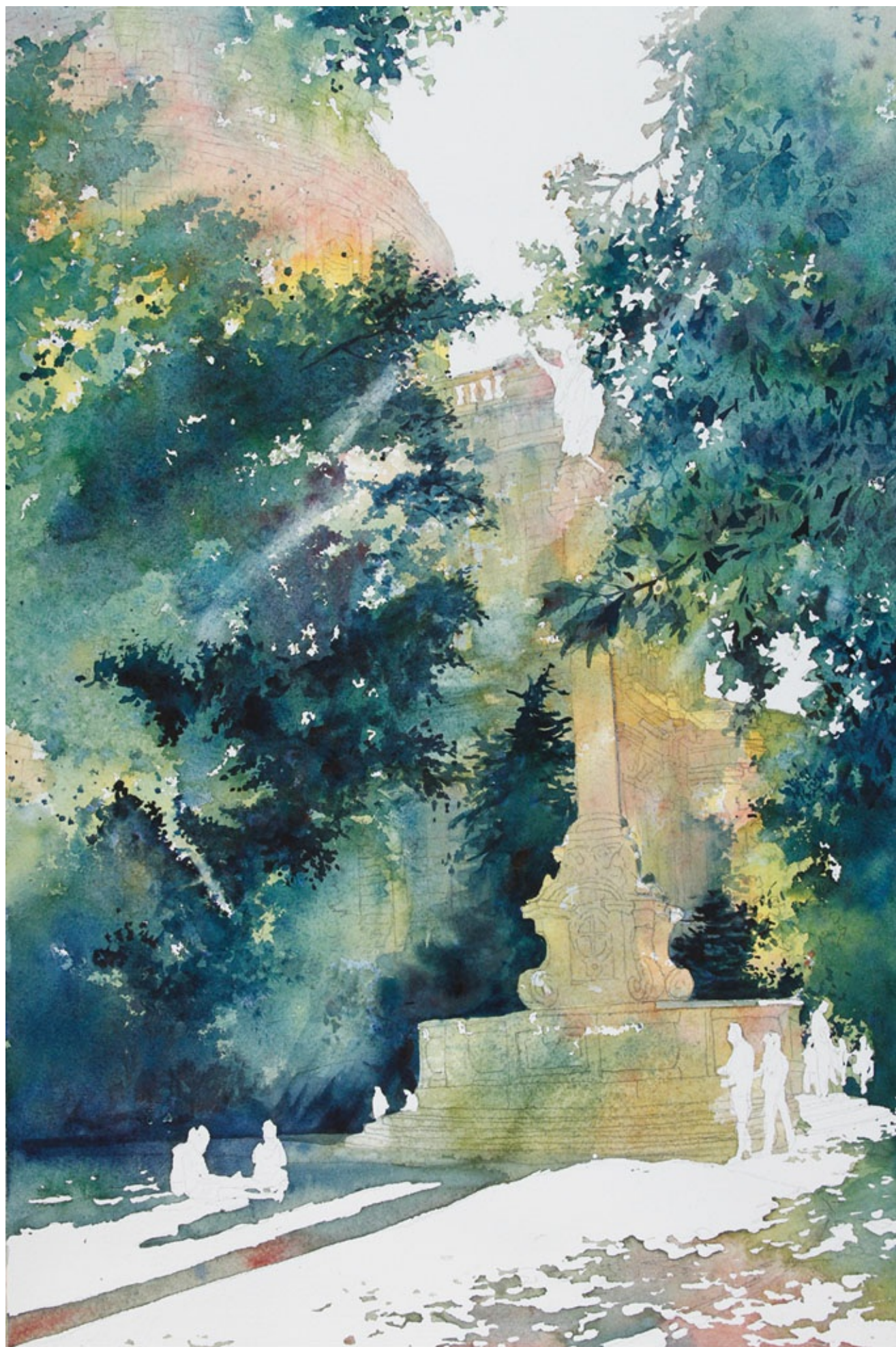
7 Continue painting the trees on the right using the methods from step 6. Lightly wet a ½-inch (13mm) flat and lift some of the paint on foliage to create glowing beams of light. Allow this to dry, then use a no. 6 round to create a thick, fresh mixture of blue and red. Paint the trees behind the pillar's base and podium using the paint-around method. Likewise, at the middle and left use a no. 6 round and the same mixture to carve out the foreground foliage. On the lower right add a bit of blue to the yellow foliage in the foreground. After it dries, completely remove all of the masking.

8 Define the details on the foreground trees. Use a no. 4 round to suggest leaves with a mixture of midtone to dark blue and red. Suggest fewer details on the upper right of the tree to indicate morning light.
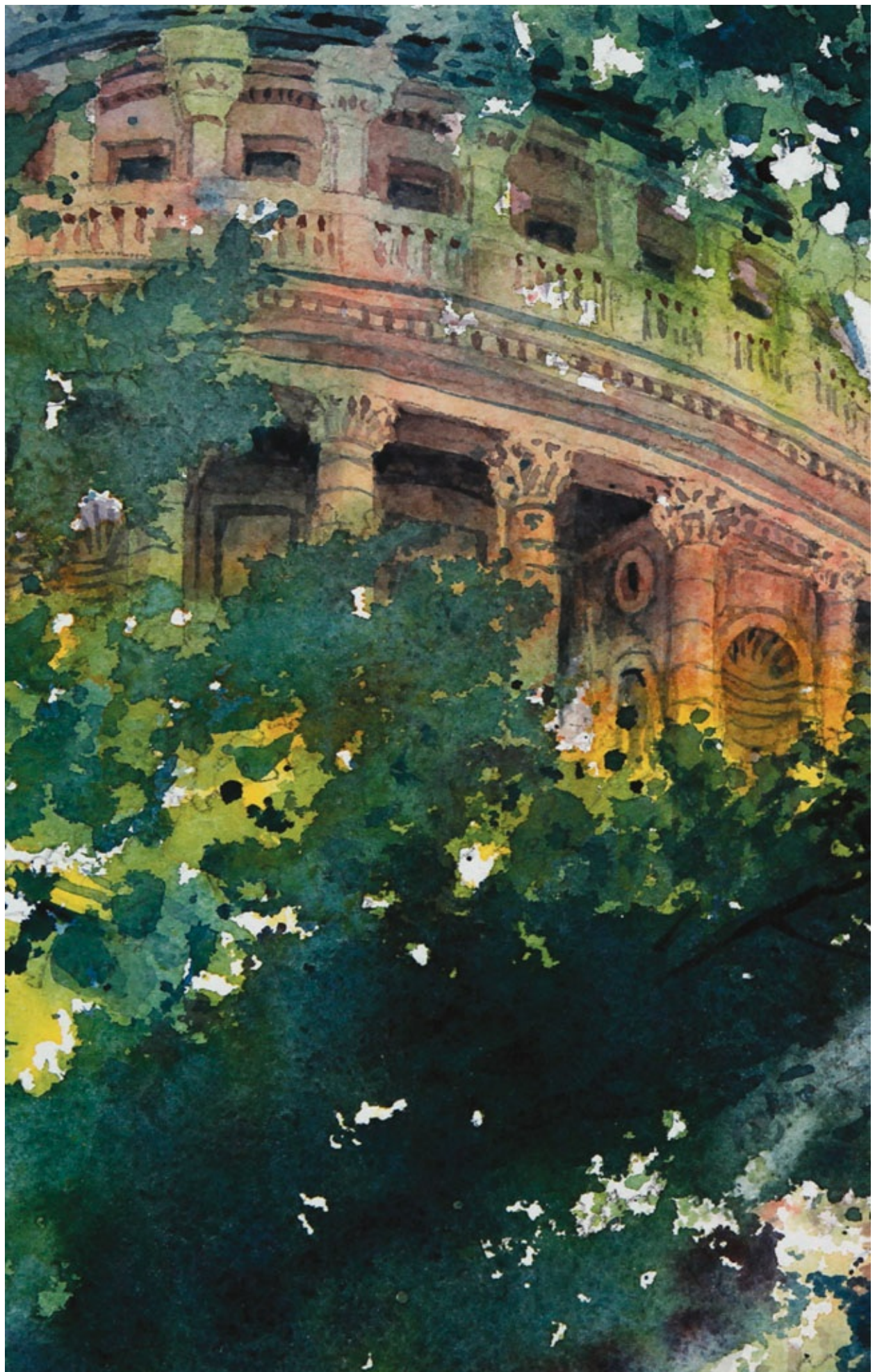
9 Call out the columns and lintels with a diluted mixture of red and blue. To separate the wings at the pillar's base, use a no. 4 round and the same color mixture. When this dries, use the no. 4 round to identify more details on the buildings with mixtures of midtone to dark blues and reds. Paint the dome darker than the foliage since it is further in the background.
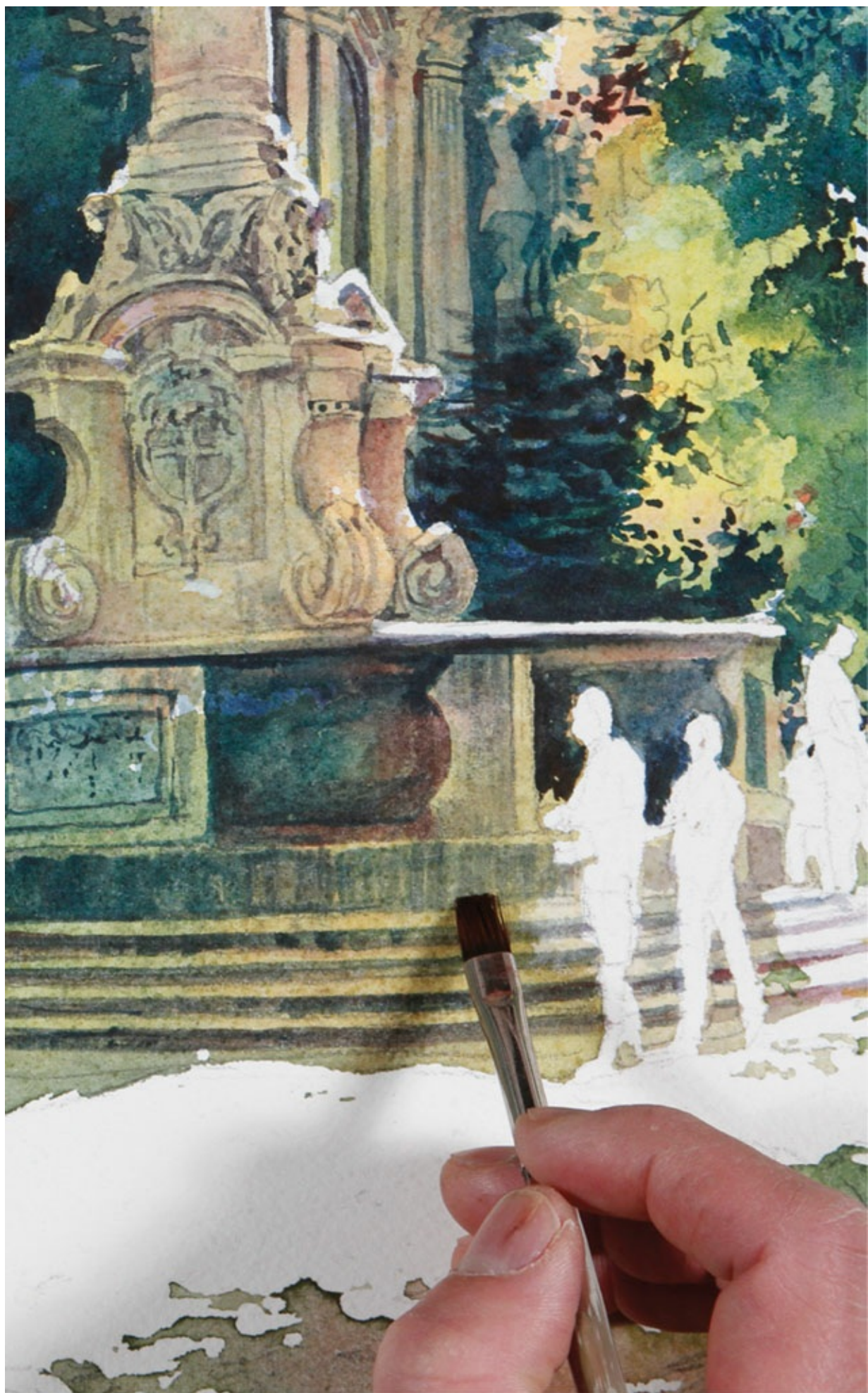
10 Touch up the details on the pillar's base with a ¼-inch (6mm) flat and light mixture of blue and red. Paint vertical strokes to suggest the rock's textures.

11 Begin painting the figures with a mixture of midtone yellow and a touch of red on their faces, hands and legs. Add a little blue to the mixture to paint their hair, and red and blue to paint their clothes. Leave plenty of white space for highlights.

CHURCH IN MORNING LIGHT

Watercolor on 140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed Arches, 22" × 15" (56cm × 38cm)

12 Lightly wet a ¾-inch (19mm) flat brush and add local colors (the actual color of a subject as it appears in certain areas of the painting) in the lower left and lower middle foreground. Pull the local color diagonally toward the middle right as well. Finally, use a no. 4 round to mix light blue with a little yellow and paint small vertical strokes in the lawn to indicate grass.

Sunset

Lake Tahoe is a very beautiful large freshwater lake in the Sierra Nevada Mountains that sits at an elevation of 6,225 feet (1,900m). I snapped photos of this sunset while teaching a workshop on the lake's south side. When I composed the painting, I raised the water level and added two birds on the big rock at the upper middle to add action to the scene. In this watercolor demonstration, we will practice applying masking, working with light colors, and painting rocks above and below water.

Reference Photo: Lake Tahoe at Sunset

1 Using the tracing technique of the previous exercise, sketch the details onto watercolor paper using a pen and a light box. Use a hatching technique on the sky areas and around the sunlit foliage to help indicate where you will apply masking fluid.

2 Use the wedge-shaped end of the ¼-inch (6mm) brush's handle to apply masking on the sky and foliage. Also block the leaves that catch sunlight, a few branches, roots and the 2 birds.

3 Spray water on the upper middle of the paper about 4 or 5 times. Use 3 round brushes dipped separately in liquid red, blue and yellow and drop the colors onto the paper. Drop more yellow on the yellowish tree at right and keep it from mixing with the blue and red.

4 Lightly mix and blend color liquids with your fingers or the end of a ¾-inch (19mm) brush handle. Leave some white space in between. Do not define any shapes yet or overbrush a single spot more than 3 times.

5 On other middle and upper areas, continue to spray water, pour more color liquids, and guide and mix them in the same way. Avoid overspraying the water or your painting will end up too light.

6 Tilt the upper left of the painting about 4 inches (10cm) off of your painting surface and allow the colors to flow diagonally from left to right. Spray water a few more times on the middle of the page to wash out colors and create beams of light. Keep the colors in the lower right lighter by lifting them with paper towels or spraying more water and allowing it to blend.

7 Use the ¾-inch (19mm) flat to create a thick mixture of blue and red with a little water. Splash it randomly on the trees while the painting is still wet. Mix an even darker purple mixture and splash it on rocks in the lower left. When the painting is completely dry, lift up the masking in the sky area.

8 Define the big rock using a midtone mixture of blue and red, and paint its shadowed sides with a no. 4 round. Make sure to leave some white shapes for the trunks, branches and foliage in the foreground. After this is dry, use the same brush to add more dark shadows and gaps with a fresh and thick mixture of blue and red.

9 Use a no. 2 round and the paint-around method to outline the yellow tree with medium to dark blue, then dip a no. 6 round into a little water to smooth the blue away from the tree edges, gradually fading into the surrounding local colors. Define the lower portion of the trees against the slope of the upper right in the same way. Use a ½-inch (13mm) flat to mix a light red with a little blue to paint the shadows of the other rocks. The closer the rocks, the darker their shadows should be. Allow the local colors from earlier pouring and blending to remain light.

10 Define the details of the rocks with the same brush and an even darker purple mixture. Use a no. 2 round to finish them up, painting between the rock gaps with the same dark purple mixture. Define the foliage in the middle left with a fresh, thick mixture of red and blue. Immediately use a no. 6 round and a little water to gradually blend into the rocks below. Allow the entire painting to dry, then lift the masking on the roots and trees at left.

11 Use a no. 4 round to fill in medium yellow on the masked leaves and branches, and medium red on the roots. At the upper left, define the rock and foliage by painting dark blue behind them. From the upper middle to the right, use a no. 2 round to mix a medium to intense bluish red to define more rocks by painting their shaded sides while popping out the yellowish tree. Next, mix a fresh thick blue and red to paint gaps between some of those rocks.
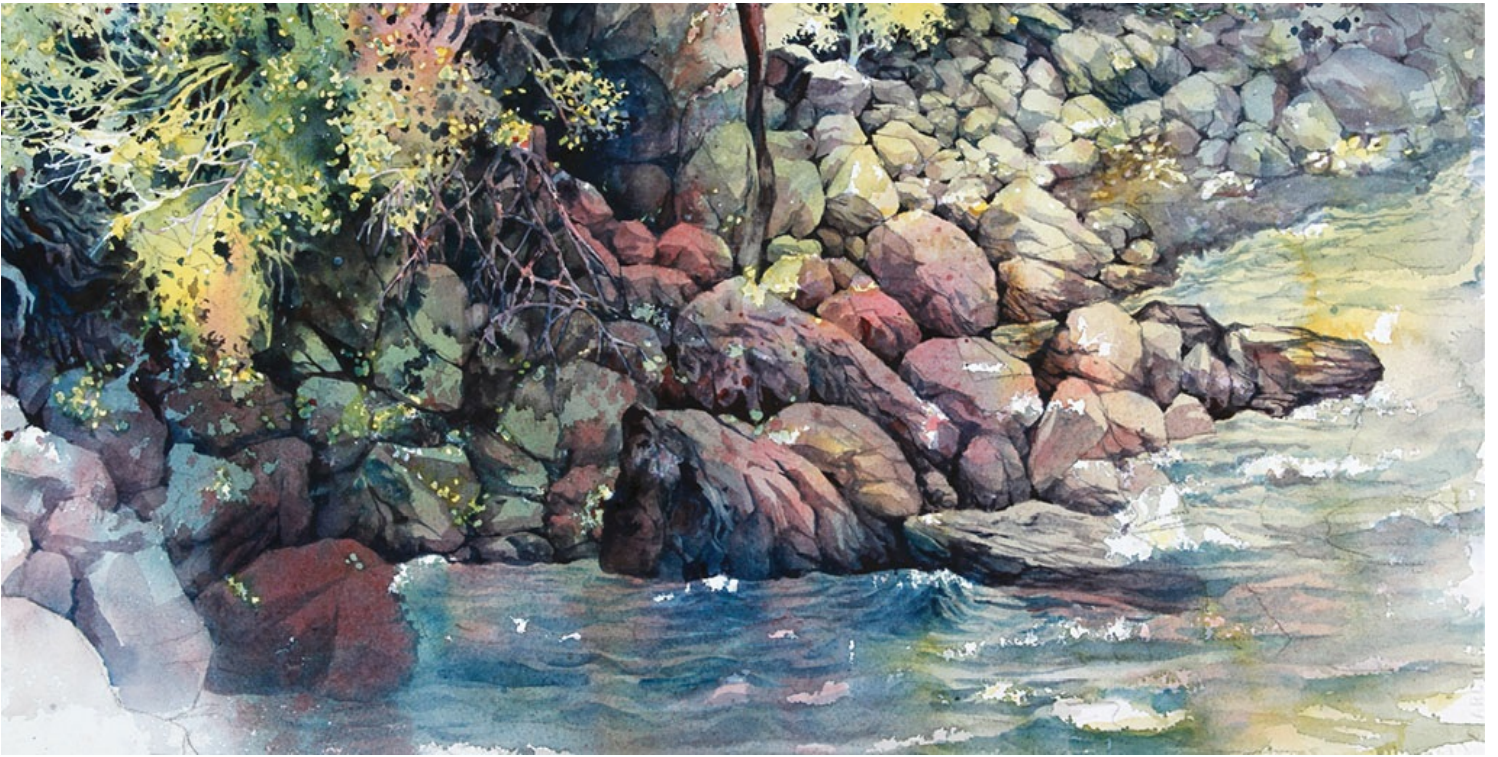
12 At the water's edge, use a no. 4 round to paint waves with light blue. Save plenty of white to indicate the waves' tips. Immediately use a no. 6 round and a little water to smooth the beginnings and ends of each stroke, so that the bluish tones gradually blend into the water. Do a few waves at a time or you will have a hard time blending because the colors dry quickly.

TAHOE SUNSET

Watercolor on 140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed Arches, 16" × 20" (41cm × 51cm)

13 After defining the waves, use a no. 2 round to carve out the rocks beneath the water with medium to dark blue. Paint around them but stop at the waves. They should have fewer details than those above water. This is the secret for painting underwater rocks!

Load a small amount of water onto a ¾-inch (19mm) flat, then drag the brush from the upper-left foliage down diagonally toward the lower middle. This will carry the trees' colors onto sky areas we masked and create beams of light. Repeat this technique from the upper middle down to the right to obtain more beams of light.

Night Scene

Unlike bright sunlit landscapes, nightscapes tend to have more than one light source, helping create a defused and illuminated atmosphere. Chinatown in San Francisco is one of my favorite places to enjoy night scenery. It is often filled with vivid yellows, oranges and reds, meaningful colors in Chinese culture. Yellow represents kingship and power, while red represents happiness and luck. When painting a night scene, it helps to simplify your subject matter and to capture an impression of the night lights and colors.

Reference Photo: Chinatown, San Francisco, California

1 Use the tracing method of the previous demonstrations to sketch your line drawing using your reference photo and pen. Drop a streetlight with a large lantern on the left and add a few shoppers. This improves the lighting of the scene and shows a bit of activity at night.

2 Enlarge your line drawing and transfer it to a 16" × 20" (41cm × 51cm) piece of watercolor paper using a light box and a no. 2 pencil. Next, use the wedge-shaped end of a ¼-inch (6mm) flat to apply masking over the light, flags, lanterns, signs, cars and people's faces.

3 Spray the upper middle of the page 4 or 5 times with water, then pour blue, red and yellow next to each other but not directly on top of each other.

4 Use your fingers or a ¾-inch (19mm) flat to guide the colors to blend and mix. Do not brush more than a few times over the same spot or you risk muddying the colors.

5 Continue spraying water, pouring colors, and guiding and mixing them on the middle and right areas. Remove any excessive color liquids with paper towels.

6 Paint the left side in the same method as in the previous steps. Keep the lower right area light and leave plenty of whites by spraying more water or lifting the colors with paper towels. After you've poured the colors, immediately load the ¾-inch (19mm) flat with dark blue and a little red to paint the sky. Let the dark mixture blend freely with the area.

7 When the painting is nearly dry, load a ¾-inch (19mm) flat with a fresh, thick mixture of blue and red to darken the sky, define the streetlight and carve out the building tops using the paint-around method. Next, use a ½-inch (13mm) flat to create a midtone blue and red mixture to roughly paint the shadows and cars on the street. For the figures, suggest their shapes with a no. 4 round and a light to midtone mixture of blue and red.

8 Use your round brushes and ½-inch (13mm) flat to define the details on the buildings and cars at right with a variety of red and blue mixtures. Use a smaller brush for the smaller details, and vice versa. Do not paint all the details as you see them; simplify them as much as you can.

9 Wait for the painting to completely dry, then lift up all the masking except on the cars. Leave the upper left area and distant buildings undefined with fewer details.

10 Use no. 2 and no. 4 rounds to paint the previously masked objects. Use yellow and red for the flags, and blue and red for the lanterns. Use the same brushes and mixtures to paint letters on the signs. To create illuminating effects on the lanterns of the streetlights, dip a ½-inch (13mm) flat in a little water and lift up the colors around them.

11 Call out the details of the cars using no. 2 and no. 4 rounds and a variety of blue and red mixtures. Paint more details on the closer cars than the distant ones. Allow it to completely dry, then remove the masking on cars.

Scratch out more reflections on car hoods and trim using a craft knife. Be gentle so you don't rip the paper. Use no. 2 and no. 4 rounds to paint the figures in a variety of colors and values. For instance, the child's red balloon is darker than his father's shirt; his mother's color is darker than the father. Both the mother and child are lighter than the man behind them. Varying your tones will help create interesting contrast and depth.

12 Use the same brushes as in step 11 and continue painting the other figures. The figures in the foreground should have the most detail because they are closer.

CHINATOWN AT NIGHT

Watercolor on 140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed Arches 15" × 22" (38cm × 56cm)

13 Complete the painting's details, including the faces of the foreground people. Use a no. 2 round to first apply light yellow, and when dry add a little light red. For the shaded areas, paint with a midtone mixture of red and blue. Finally, suggest the car coming forward out of the streetlight with light to midtone mixtures of red and blue.

Fog

Among Alaskan cities, Sitka is my favorite to visit and teach workshops. Rockwell Lighthouse, one of its landmarks, is surrounded by beautiful trees and a gorgeous mountainous backdrop. Fog comes and goes in the area, creating mysterious, poetic and romantic scenes for painting. In this demonstration, we learn to use masking fluid for preserving snowy areas on mountains and how to capture a foggy landscape in watercolor.

Reference Photos: Sitka Lighthouse in Fog
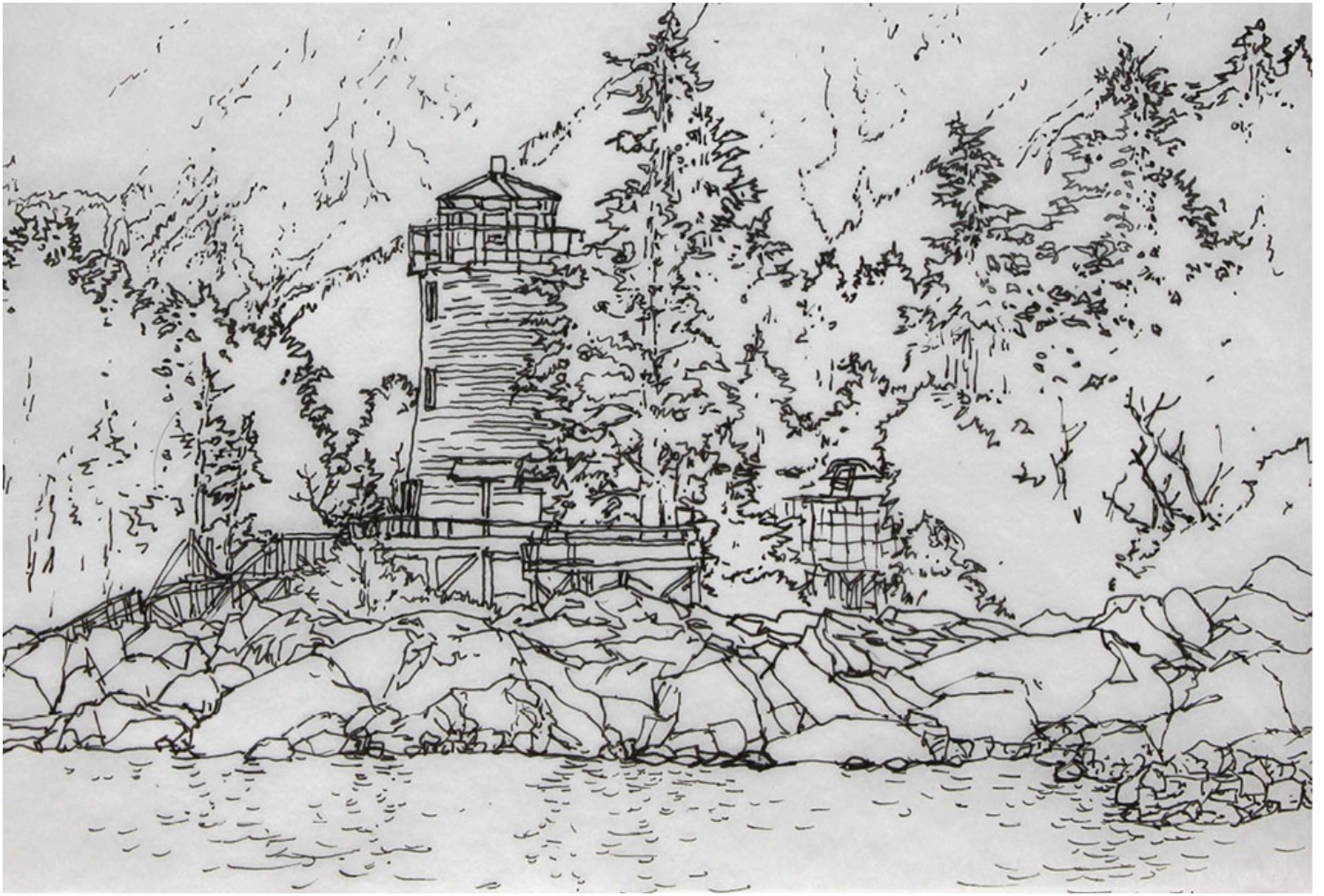
1 Combine 2 reference photos into a pleasing composition. Here, we use the top reference as our main composition, adding in the details of the dock from the second.

2 Using the tracing technique of the previous demonstrations, sketch the details onto watercolor paper using a no. 2 pencil and a light box. Next, use the wedged-end of a ¼-inch (6mm) flat to apply masking to the snow, the whites of the lighthouse, and the tree trunks and branches on the right. Carefully block the left side of the lighthouse to depict the edge of the tree shapes.

3 Spray water on the large trees in front of the lighthouse 3 or 4 times. Using the pour and blending techniques, pour diluted red, yellow and blue on the trees. If you feel you don't have enough control while pouring, it's okay to drop in the paint with a brush. Just be sure to use 1 brush for dropping each color.

4 Use your fingers or a no. 4 round to lightly mix the colors and guide them to form the treetop. At the middle of the tree, blend the color liquids a little but do not define the shapes. Lift up any unwanted liquid with paper towels.

5 To paint the trees at the right, spray water, pour color liquids, then mix and blend them using the same techniques as steps 3 and 4. Using a no. 4 round drop in some diluted yellow around the dock, and use a no. 6 round to add a bit of red.

6 Continue to drop red and yellow on the rocks at the bottom. Use a dry ¾-inch (19mm) flat to remove some of the bluish green liquids from the trees and drop the color at the base of the rocks.

7 Hold the spray bottle perpendicular to the page and spray water a few times at the shoreline toward the bottom of the painting; allowing color liquids to flow into the water area.

8 To form the water's surface, lift the upper-right corner of the painting about 4 inches (10cm) off of your painting surface, allowing the colors to flow down and create waves. Use your fingers or the end of a ¾-inch (19mm) flat to suggest waves. Keep it at this tilted angle for a minute to allow more color liquids to flow down, creating foggy effects.

9 When this is dry, use a no. 4 round to paint the background trees with a thick mixture of blue and a little red while carving out the foliage in the foreground. Define the trees at the right with fewer details to suggest fog.

10 To paint the trees on the left side of the painting, spray water, pour color liquids, and lightly mix and blend them as we did with the trees at right. When they are mostly dry, use no. 2 and no. 4 rounds to drop in yellow and red liquids to create backruns that suggest foliage.

11 Spray water on the mountains 4 or 5 times, allowing the colors to blend to suggest fog. Use no. 2 and no. 4 rounds to drop blue and a little red on the wetted area. Immediately use a ¾-inch (19mm) flat to gradually blend from light to white.

12 Continue dropping diluted blue and a little red on the mountains at left, and blend them as done in previous steps. Use a ¾-inch (19mm) flat to add light blue on the ridge behind the lighthouse.

13 Call out the trees on the top edge of the dock at the left side of the lighthouse using a no. 6 round and a dark mixture of blue and red. Then, use a no. 4 round and a light mixture of yellow and red to paint the deck and distinguish it from the rocks below. Use a no. 2 round to call out the deck's support frames with dark blue, using the paint-around method to call out the beams. Split up the large groups of rocks using a ½-inch (13mm) flat and a mixture of light blue and red to paint their shadows.

14 To define the trees on the left, use a no. 2 round and the paint-around method to define their trunks and foliage with a dark mixture of blue and red. Immediately use a no. 4 round and a little water to blend the colors away from the trunks and foliage into local colors. After the painting dries, remove all of the masking.

15 Use a no. 2 round to paint the details of the lighthouse with a variety of red tones. Create a fresh, thick mixture of red and blue to paint around the support beams beneath the deck. Define a few more beams and support frames below the lighthouse in the same way.

16 Load water and a little diluted red on a ½-inch (13mm) flat. Hold the brush vertical and align its narrow edge with the left wall of the lighthouse and paint several strokes from right to left. Then use a no. 2 round to call out details on the siding, roof and water tank on the right with a variety of blue tones. Apply dark red and blue on the window panes of the lighthouse and the underside of the roof and porch.

17 Define the individual rocks on the shore with a ½-inch (13mm) flat and a midtone mixture of blue and red. Paint the shadows on the sides of each rock. Call out more rocks at left and center but gradually fade out toward the right side. This helps to further emphasize the moving fog.

18 Load midtone to dark blue on a no. 4 round to paint the rock textures. Take a no. 2 round and a fresh, thick mixture of red and blue to paint the gaps between the rocks with a variety of strokes.

SITKA FOG

Watercolor on 140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed Arches 16" × 20" (41cm × 51cm)

19 Define the waves in the water using a no. 4 round and a variety of mixtures of red and blue, and short, horizontal strokes. Immediately use a no. 6 round and a little water to blend the beginnings and ends of each stroke. Finally, paint some waves in the same way below the lighthouse to designate its reflection.

CHAPTER 6
Plein Air Painting

Plein air can be a unique and wonderful painting experience for all landscape artists. It enables us to be inspired directly by nature and observe the scenery more closely. It can also help train our eyes to see things from different perspectives compared to painting from photos in the studio. However, there are a few challenges with plein air such as unpredictable weather and constantly changing light. But don't be scared if you are a beginner. Feel free to remove, add and relocate objects as you like and to experiment with colors. A successful plein air painting captures the spirit of the landscape with artistic expression, rather than the preciseness of a photograph.

In this chapter we discuss basic painting materials and techniques for painting outdoors in watercolor, including how to paint an accordion book in Chinese style. When gathering your materials, only take what you need since whatever you pack in, you have to pack out. The facing page shows my plein air set up at China Beach in San Francisco. My easel perfectly holds a quarter sheet of paper, though you can bring Gator board and binder clips to fasten smaller sheets. Below the watercolor paper is a brush washer that came with my easel set, a palette and artist's box containing brushes, paint and other supplies. All these materials together weigh less than ten pounds and fit into my backpack. Remember to protect yourself from the sun as best you can while painting outdoors! I encourage you to give plein air painting a try; you will be encouraged by what you learn.

Materials for PLEIN AIR Demonstrations

Surface
300-lb. (640gsm) watercolor paper (less likely to warp)
accordion book

Pigments
Prussian Blue or Antwerp Blue; Naphthol Red, Pyrrol Red or Quinacridone Rose; Hansa Yellow Deep or Arylide Yellow (choose one each of blue, red and yellow)
Chinese inks (for accordion book only)

Brushes
variety of synthetic rounds and flats
3 Chinese brushes (for accordion book only)

CHINA BEACH, SAN FRANCISCO

Watercolor on 300-lb. (640gsm) cold-pressed paper, 11" × 15" (28m × 38cm)

Hazy Scene

This portion of the Great Wall of China has been repaired for tourists. It is located about an hour and a half bus ride away from Beijing and is one of my favorite sights in China to sketch from life. I sketched and painted this demonstration in 2011 while teaching a group of students how to paint outside. Fog and pollution are common in the area, so we were lucky to view the scene's colorful trees and mountains in relatively clear air. In a way, this is more helpful because the hazy atmosphere helps us to see and paint fewer details, while imagining a brighter, more vivid scene in the sunshine. Our painting time was just one and a half hours because we had to keep up with our sightseeing schedules.

Reference Photo: Great Wall of China

1 Using a no. 2 pencil, sketch the large shapes of the composition on a quarter sheet of 300-lb. (640gsm) cold-pressed watercolor paper, including the towers and walls. Briefly indicate the mountains. Draw no trees because they are minor objects, and we will roughly paint them with colors later.

2 Paint the foreground with a ¾-inch (19mm) flat and a light mixture of yellow and blue,

and a light mixture of yellow and red. Leave the wall and between the towers the white of the paper.

3 Using the same brush as in step 2, add more red on the trees. Mix light yellow and red, and paint the walls in a few strokes, then apply light blue on top of the front tower and paint the distant mountain in the upper right with light yellow, red and blue.

4 On the right side of the mountain, use a ½-inch (13mm) flat to create a dark mixture of blue and red to paint the trees next to the wall and at the lower portions of the red foliage.

5 Use a no. 8 round to paint the trees behind the wall and between the tower with a thick mixture of red and blue, while carving out the yellowish green tree in front. Use a no. 2 round to paint the trunks of the red trees and branches briefly with a mixture of dark red and blue.

6 Use a no. 4 round to create a midtone mixture of red and a little yellow, then add

more trees on the left side of the mountain. In the lower left of the paper, paint trunks and branches with the same color mixture.

7 Use a ½-inch (13mm) flat to create a dark mixture of blue with a little yellow and red, then paint the foliage on the large tree at the bottom left. Start defining the wall using a ¼-inch (6mm) flat and painting the wall's rocks with midtone red at the bottom right. Paint between the wall's towers and trim with light blue.

8 Use a ¼-inch (6mm) flat to paint the stones in the tower with light red and blue—one dab should suggest one stone. Use a no. 2 round to paint the people with a variety of mixtures of all 3 colors. The people should be larger and more detailed the closer they are to the foreground.

9 Use a ¼-inch (6mm) flat to define the wall's edges from the middle up to the top with

midtone red and blue. Call out some brick and stone details at the base of the wall and in the large tower. Use a no. 2 round to paint their gaps with a mixture of midtone to dark blue and red.

GREAT WALL

Watercolor on 300-lb. (640gsm) cold-pressed watercolor paper 15" × 11" (38cm × 28cm)

10 Further define the shapes between the towers at the top of the wall using a no. 2 round. Paint the windows and arches with medium blue and red. Add a few steps on the middle portion of the wall with the same colors. Finally, use a no. 4 round to add midtone red and light blue on the mountains at the upper right to suggest trees.

Beach Scene

This is an unusual angle for a beach painting. I liked the roots of this large tree and the gorgeous variety of rocks and textures contrasting against the water. It was a hot, sunny day and my students painted outside in the shade for about three hours.

Reference Photos: Hawaii Beach

1 Use a no. 2 pencil to sketch the composition on 300-lb. (640gsm) cold-pressed watercolor paper. Draw more details on the large tree roots and rocks near the middle right because we will define those areas the most.

2 Use a 1-inch (25mm) flat to roughly apply colors on the large tree and foreground objects. First, paint light to medium yellow, then red and finally blue. Allow them to blend into each other on the paper.

3 Using the same brush from step 2, apply yellow, blue and a little red on the foliage and distant trees. Still no details up to this point.

4 Paint the sky with a ½-inch (13mm) flat. First, lightly wet it with the same brush, leaving the whites of the clouds dry. Then, apply light to midtone blue on the upper sky area and very light blue toward the bottom. Mix light blue with a little red to paint the bottom of the clouds. Finally, use a no. 4 round to paint the water with blue and yellow, leaving plenty of white for waves and splashes. Paint the small rocks in a similar fashion with red and blue leaving whites between them to indicate flowing water.

5 Add a little blue and red on the shaded side of the rocks. Use a no. 4 round to mix dark blue with a little red, and paint the shadows and the dark rocks next to the splashing waves. Use a no. 2 round to mix a thick, soft blue and red mixture (near black), and paint the lower portions of the rocks, carving out shapes for the small splashes.

6 Paint the large tree and its shadows using a 1-inch (25mm) brush and a dark mixture of red and a little blue to paint the shaded sides of the trunk and roots. Add more blue to the shadows on the sand, leaving some whites for the sunny spots.

7 Below the root on the right, paint a few more rocks using a no. 4 round and a variety of mixtures of red and blue. Use a no. 2 round to paint the gaps and shadows with a soft, thick mixture of blue and red.

8 Define the branches and distant trees in the upper middle using a no. 8 round and dark blue mixed with a little red. Carve out the foliage and outer branches of the large tree and 2 palms using the paint-around method. Next, paint the shadows under the distant trees and define the ridge in the middle with blue and red.

9 Continue to define the distant trees and palms on the left in the same way. On the trunk, use a no. 2 round to paint the cracks with a dark mixture of blue and red. Use a no. 4 round to define more roots underneath the tree by painting around them with a thick, fresh mixture of blue and red.

ROCK THE OCEAN

Watercolor on 300-lb. (640gsm) cold-pressed Fabriano paper 11" × 15" (28cm × 38cm)

10 Use a no. 4 round to extend the large tree branches toward the sky and ocean with a dark mixture of blue and red. Apply dark blue and a little yellow on top of the waves and gently blend them with a little water. Lastly, use a no. 2 round to paint the surfer behind the tree. Use yellow and red for his body and blue on his shorts.

Sailboats

Sometimes undesirable weather does not allow us to stay on a location comfortably for a long time and we have to paint fast. I painted these three boats en plein air with my students in Lahaina, Maui, on a hot, sunny day. Therefore, we painted quickly in about an hour and a half, ignoring many details.

Reference Photo: Boats in Lahaina, Maui, Hawaii
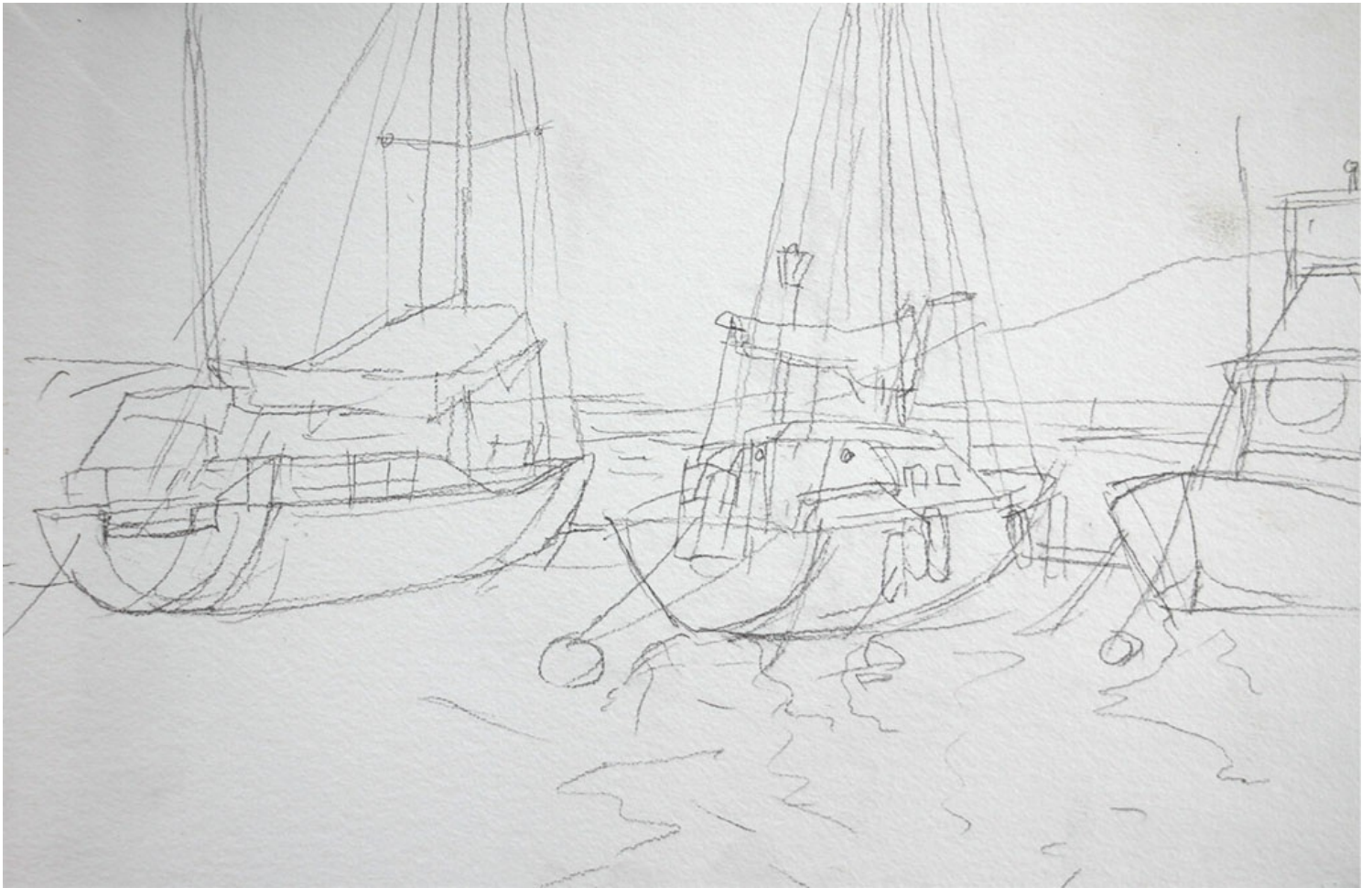
1 Sketch the composition with a no. 2 pencil. Ignore the details of the railings and riggings and remove the small boat between the white and red boats to improve the composition.

2 Use a ½-inch (13mm) flat to lightly wet the shadow sides of each boat, leaving the fenders dry. Using the same brush, immediately apply light yellow, blue and a little red on the white boat; then, light to midtone red on the red boat; and finally, light to dark blue on the blue boat. Use a no. 8 round and a mix of fresh blue pigment and a little fresh red with very little water to paint the shadow side of the red boat. Also apply dark blue on the shadow side of the blue boat. Paint the sails with just a few strokes: yellow and blue on the white boat, and red and blue on the red boat.

3 Use a ½-inch (13mm) flat to paint the water reflections using light to medium blue mixed with very little red below the white boat. Under the red boat, use a midtone red, dark blue and a little yellow. Finally, under the blue boat, paint light blue witha a little red. Use a no. 4 round to paint the dock first with yellow, then red and blue. Use a craft knife to gently scratch out 2 ropes on the shaded side of the red boat.

4 Use a 1-inch (25mm) flat to paint the sky with a light blue and little red in very few strokes. Use a no. 8 round to paint the distant mountains with light blue and red, painting a sail below the red boat with light blue and a little yellow.

5 On the red boat, use a no. 4 round to paint the windows with dark blue and red. Paint the shadows with a light to midtone mixture of blue and red. Next, take a credit card and dip its edge in blue and red liquid. Use its edge to stamp in the lines of the riggings. Continue to paint details with a no. 4 round such as the rocks on the dock, the pole behind the red boat and the upper decks of the blue boat.

SAILBOATS

Watercolor on 300-lb. (640gsm) cold-pressed Fabriano paper, 1" × 15" (28cm × 38cm)

6 Lastly, paint the details of the white boat ignoring the details of the boat behind it. Here the main focus and details are on the red boat.

Paint an Accordion Book

Accordion books for Chinese paintings are made of several layers of thick raw Shuan paper. They fold up into book form and come in different sizes, typically about 6 to 10 inches (15cm to 25cm) high by approximately 60 to 150 inches (152cm to 381cm) long. The size I used for this demo is 9 ½ × 156 inches (24cm × 396cm). Accordion book paper is not as absorbent or as easy to blend on as single- or double-layered raw Shuan paper. It is stronger than both single- and double-layered raw Shuan paper.

You may paint on accordion books with Chinese ink only, like I did in this southeastern Alaskan coastal scene, or use ink plus Chinese colors. We tend to compare paintings done in color more directly against the true colors of nature. But depicting the scene in black and white helps the scene take on a more imaginative quality.

I painted the scenes from observations of hundreds of miles of coastal lines, cities and mountains. This work is my impression and interpretation of nature, and does not represent any particular location. The result is a mix of reality and my imagination.

This painting has moving, or free, perspectives, which is typical of Chinese landscape painting. When following along the demonstration, free yourself from one-, two- or three-point perspective and imagine you are observing the landscape from a boat or plane. To start, we will roughly sketch the entire accordion painting with light-colored ink, then work on the details from right to left. Right to left is the traditional way of Chinese reading and writing as well as painting. I have broken up the painting into six sections so that you can easily see how the work came together.

Accordion Book Set Up

Early one morning, I drove up to the top of a mountain overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco and set up my plein air gear and an accordion book on a long bench. The sun was rising, birds were singing and I sketched the landscape on the accordion book with a small brush and light ink. However, it was not practical for me to finish the whole painting on location, so I snapped some pictures and aimed to complete it in my studio.

Where to Purchase Accordion Books

Accordion books can be purchased in a few places. You can try ordering online at websites such as orientalartsupply.com. Or email me directly at lianzhen@yahoo.com and purchase through my website. You may also be able to find them in bookstores or art galleries in Chinatowns in large cities such as San Francisco or Chicago. I have taught many students to paint on accordion books during various workshops in China and Hawaii, and most of them have loved it. Some great subjects for accordion books are long coastlines, national parks such as Yosemite or the Grand Canyon, as well as cityscapes—anywhere you can set up your easel and supplies with a large sweeping view. I encourage you to try painting an accordion book en plein air. I am positive you will have fun and enjoy it!

1 Start sketching the scene on your accordion book with a small brush and ink diluted

with water into a light tone similar to pencil tone. Hold the brush straight (center brush method); sketch the whole landscape on the accordion book without too much detail. Here are 4 of the 6 sections of the accordion book to give you an idea of the finished sketch.


2 I began the right side of the accordion book with scenes of Juneau, Alaska, viewed from both land and ferry boats. Here, we depict a glacier, boat dock, mountains and islands near the city.

Start by inking the sky and mountains. Load a large brush fully with water, but with no excess water dripping out. Load the wet brush with medium ink from its tip to upper middle, and dark ink at the tip. Holding it sideways with the tip pointing to the tops of the mountains, press down the whole brush, painting several strokes of the sky while carving out shapes of mountain tops. Load a fresh medium brush with water and ink in the same way, and holding it sideways, paint the shadow areas of the mountains leaving some white space to indicate snow.

3 Reload water and ink on a medium brush as done in step 2 and paint a few strokes from left to right, carving out the top edge of the middle glacier. Use a small brush and light ink to suggest other details by using a side-stroke and painting from top to bottom. On the hilltops in the foreground, use a large brush and a midtone to dark ink to suggest groups of trees.
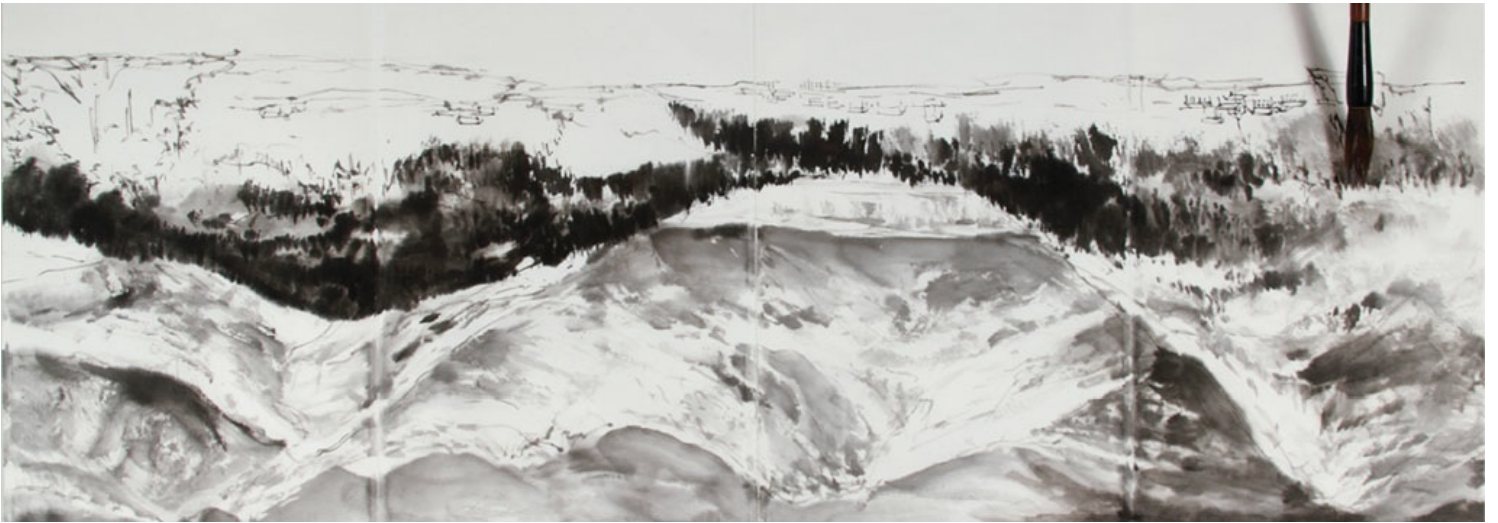
4 To add the most detailed trees, use your fingers to split a medium brush's bristles, then load it with a small amount of dark ink to stamp in the treetops by holding the brush on its side.

   Notice the 3 vertical lines that are lighter than other areas of the paper. These are the folded edges of the accordion book. Light and midtone inks are not sufficient enough to hide them, but dark inks on darker portions of the paintings will help them disappear.
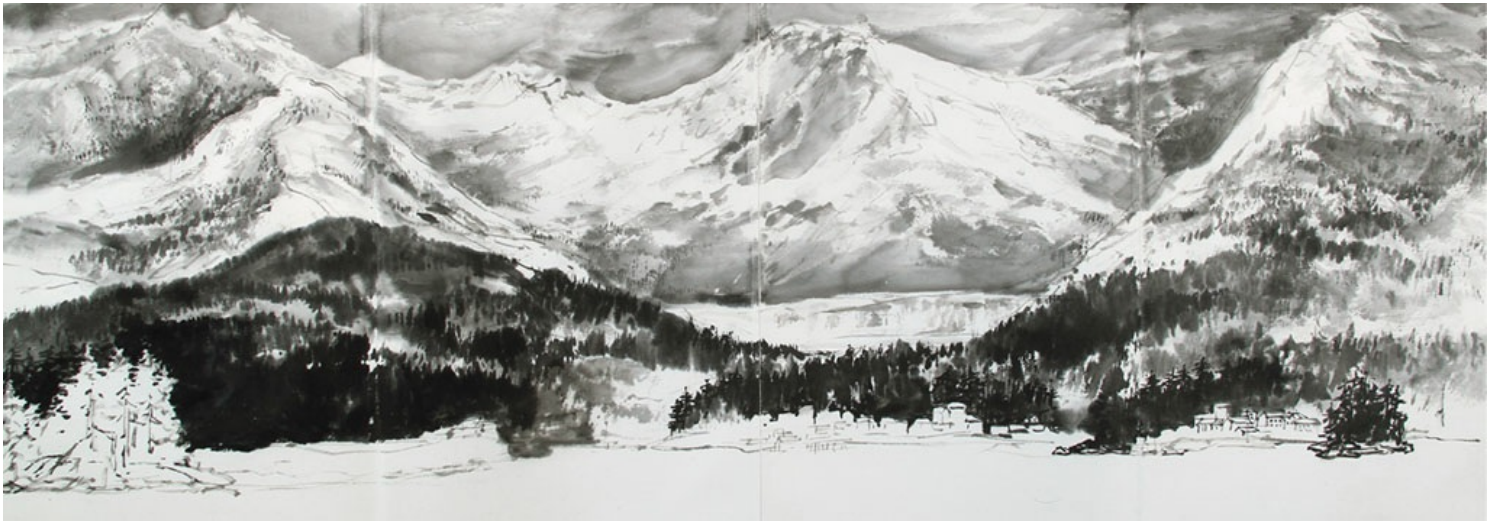
5 At the bottom of the hills use the small brush to paint trees with intense ink while defining building and housetop edges, and carving out trees on the island at lower left. Split the medium brush tip and load a small amount of ink to paint trees on the mountains like we did on the hills, but in smaller strokes. Depict the smallest trees in the distance, with lighter ink and fewer strokes.

6 Load a bit of light ink on a small brush to paint the foreground's island trees. Hold the brush sideways and paint from bottom to top, leaving whites around the edges and treetops. Load dark ink on the same brush to carve out the building shapes in the lower left using the paint-around method. On the mountain in the upper left, add a little dark ink to contrast it against the glacier.

7 Load a bit of light ink on a small brush and paint the waves in the sea, more so below the islands than the other areas. Paint a few seagulls with a variety of ink tones; each should take just a few strokes with some strokes overlapping each other. Load a small amount of midtone to dark ink on a medium brush to paint the boat.

Having completed the first section of an accordion book, you have learned the techniques needed to finish the rest. Follow along as we complete the next 5 sections.

SECTION 2

8 For this section, I took many reference photos on a ferry from Juneau to Tenakee Springs with my students. The second section of the accordion book has a great deal of white space and fewer details on the mountains. This was intentionally done to contrast the first section. It provides a nice rest to the viewer's eye after taking in so many details in the first section.

SECTION 3

9 The third section is a detailed close-up of Tenakee Springs, Alaska, a small and beautiful fishing village. I used a variety of reference photos to depict a snow-covered mountain, waterfalls, trees and creek flowing to the ocean. On the right side's details, use darker inks to contrast and delineate the details. On the left side, gently suggest the mountains and hills with light to midtone ink. From Tenakee Springs, we boarded a floatplane to Sitka, Alaska.

SECTION 4

10 Next we flew into Sitka enjoying the magnificent landscape from a bird's-eye view. Mountains appear and disappear between the moving clouds and mist, snow is piled up on the mountaintops, trees and rocks reveal their shapes at lower elevations, waterfalls flow from the melting snow and rain, and calm water on the bays reflects on the small islands.

To capture the exquisiteness of this section, it is essential to accurately depict the mood. One way to do this is to paint fewer details and more whites to show mist, rain and clouds. On the other hand, add more details on the bay at the lower middle and on magnificent spots like the waterfall and the islands.

By now you may have noticed how I intentionally have altered the level of detail from the first section all the way to the fourth section. Varying detail adds great interest to the painting and helps keep the viewer's attention, especially for the entirety of a long accordion book.

SECTION 5

II

11 We continue onto the next section still using aerials from our floatplane trip over Sitka. Depict a detailed mountain in the foreground with light and dark ink, and lightly suggest the distant islands, mountains and city.

SECTION 6

12 This final section of the accordion book depicts Sitka as if you were viewing it upon landing. I painted the city and the slope directly behind it with great detail to draw the viewer's eye to this point of interest.

When I completed the accordion book, I titled it, indicated the date, signed my name, added my last name chop as well as a rooster chop to indicate my Chinese birth year.

In your plein air painting travels, I encourage you to try a Chinese accordion book. They are a wonderful way to practice Chinese spontaneous-style painting and inks. As artists we have the freedom to paint what we want to see, not just what we actually see! By combining my reference, real-life observation and imagination, I was able to create an accordion book depicting my journey over hundreds of miles of beautiful Alaskan coastline.

HUNDREDS OF MILES OF ALASKA IN MIST, RAIN, CLOUDS AGAINST SNOW MOUNTAINS
Chinese ink on accordion book, 9 ½" × 156" (24cm × 396cm)

Conclusion

BOAT HOUSES, SAUSILITO, CALIFORNIA
Watercolor on 140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed Arches 11" × 15" (28cm × 38cm)

Chinese and watercolor landscape paintings have much in common and are both fun to do once you learn a few basic techniques. In both media, we use water-soluble pigments on paper and manipulate our strokes to suggest objects' shape and texture. In both styles of painting, we also leave the whites to capture the essence of landscapes in an imaginative way.

Often I advise my students to learn Chinese painting and sumi-e to enhance their watercolor painting techniques. Once you learn to control color, water mixing and blending on raw Shuan paper, or to manipulate color and water directly on watercolor papers, you'll find traditional watercolor to be a piece of cake.

One great thing you can learn from Chinese painting and sumi-e is to let go of the pressure you feel to paint a masterpiece each time you begin a painting. Chinese

painting and sumi-e artists are taught to treasure the practice and traditions of painting. I have painted more than forty years, and though I am not always satisfied with my Chinese paintings, most of my watercolor paintings satisfy my goals because I have applied Chinese painting style to them.

As an artist you must be willing to adapt and change your painting techniques in order to improve. Try changing colors every inch or so in your painting. Change an object's edges from defined to loose, or its height from small to tall. Change something detailed to something less identifiable, or change its color value or brightness.

Painting is not the direct copying of nature. Aim to evaluate your paintings by how well they are composed and organized, how skillfully you've used the medium, how well you've captured an object's essence, or how you've innovated it with personal touches. Paint what you want to see but not what you see. Paint happy, eat healthy and do many good deeds, and you will have a long and joyful life.

—Lian Quan Zhen

About the Author

Lian Quan Zhen is an award-winning artist and teacher of watercolor and Chinese painting both nationally and abroad. He started sketching and painting during his childhood and continued his hobby while practicing as a family physician in Canton Province, China. In 1985, Lian immigrated to the U.S. where he received a bachelor of arts degree from the University of California at Berkeley in 1992, and a master of architecture degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1996.

Lian has had many one-man shows in the U.S., Hong Kong and China and has developed an international following. His paintings hang in numerous institutional and private collections, including the MIT Museum. In addition to conducting many national and international workshops, he has taught summer painting classes for the University of California at Berkeley.

Lian has authored three books for North Light: Chinese Watercolor Techniques for

Exquisite Flowers (2009), Chinese Watercolor Techniques: Painting Animals (2005) and Chinese Painting Techniques for Exquisite Watercolors (2000). He was also a featured artist in several of North Light's Painter's Quick Reference series books, and has self-produced more than a dozen step-by-step DVDs on both Western watercolor techniques and Chinese brush painting techniques. Visit his website at lianspainting.com.

FISHING BOAT
Chinese ink and color on Masa paper, 16" × 20" (41cm × 51cm)

Dedication

To Yiling Zhen, my wife, friend and spiritual companion. To my parents, who gave me all the best they had. To my spiritual teacher, Master Chin Kung, who helps me on my way

of awakening to enlightenment with compassion to all.

Acknowledgments

BONUS

Visit artistsnetwork.com/chineselandscapes to download free bonus watercolor demonstrations by Lian Quan Zhen!

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