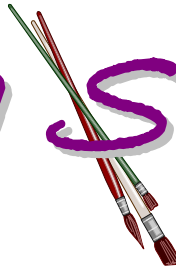




Brush Strokes



By Mary Baumgartner

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WHAT COLOR IS WHITE?

Is white a color? Watercolor management is as complicated as digital color management or printer color management but gets much less publicity.

In the painting world, however, the lack of color is extremely important and has no official management guidance except the hand that paints around it.

Tim Grey says in his book “Color Confidence” that light from the sun travels more than 93 million miles in about 8 minutes to meet the earth. It provides the heat that makes life possible and also allows us to enjoy the golden rays of a sunset, the cool blue of deep shade, the vibrant green of a lush hillside, the dramatic yellows, oranges and reds of a sunset and the pink haze of twilight. What part does an artist play in reproducing this color successfully in his or her paintings? White is what is left after the space around it is painted.



To begin a watercolor painting, first select transparent watercolors. What is transparent watercolor? It is color that can be applied over color. If it is transparent, the colors underneath will show through, and the white of the paper will illuminate the colors. This creates a dimension that glows as though looking through stained glass. It's like light shining through the painting.

If I told you the painting seen above had no white paint, would you believe me? I don't own a tube of white paint or black paint. All the colors of the spectrum are included in the negative paint used to define the white of the paper. What you see is white watercolor paper with snow that has most of the colors of the spectrum scattered through to make shapes and keep them interesting.

The eye travels through a painting going first to the white. Then if the painting has been well planned, the eye will continue going around and around counter-clockwise inside the painting. In this case we have lots of things to look at. The frozen lake stops the eye at the lower left corner, but the eye first hits the white that outlines the skaters painted in deep dark colors. The eye continues counter-clockwise lingering on the little village covered in snow; then to the two snow covered evergreen trees; next to the group of boulders with snow on top, and finally down to the fence posts buried in snow with the little rabbits trying to keep warm; and finally back to the outcropping of hillside covered with snow laden trees. The painting, titled “On Mill Pond,” was featured in a newspaper article and shown in a solo show of Mary's work at the Fountain City Art Center in Knoxville, Tennessee. It also was the front cover of one of her Christmas cards which each Christmas features a special painting.