

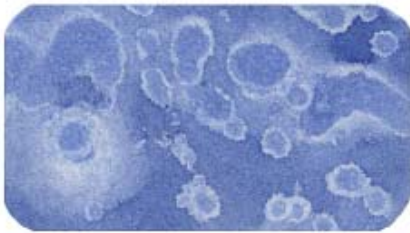
Textural Effects from Additives

While watercolor washes are wet or damp, they will accept additives that create specific effects. These additives can be overused, but when appropriately used and not allowed to become a crutch, they can add to the effectiveness of the painting.

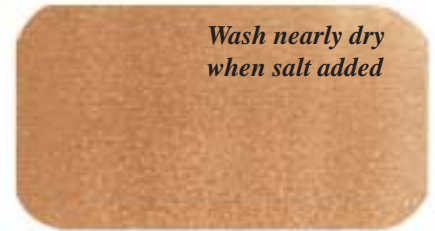
Table, sea or even rock salt may be sprinkled into a wash to create anything from tiny light specs to looser light areas depending on whether the wash is nearly dry or fairly wet. If too wet, the salt crystals just dissolve and no effect will be seen. Some pigments react better with salt than others. When the wash has dried, any remaining salt crystals should be brushed off the paper.

Rubbing alcohol is another additive for watercolor. It evaporates very quickly, and creates a drop or shape with light edges and a slightly darker center.

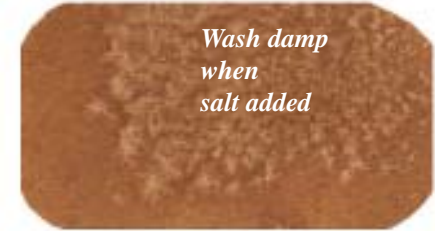
Again, alcohol works better with some pigments than others.



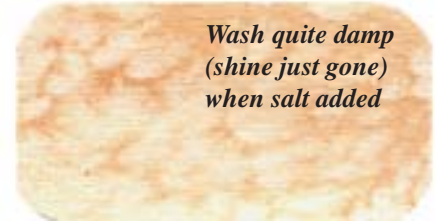
A similar effect, but one that creates a light shape with a dark, ragged edge, can be obtained by dropping **clean water** into a barely damp wash. These water blooms (or balloons) are often accidental, but when deliberately exploited, can create interesting textures appropriate for rocks and other natural objects.



Wash nearly dry when salt added



Wash damp when salt added



Wash quite damp (shine just gone) when salt added

A combination of curved strokes, washes, glazing and salt creates the illusion of "ground".



Exercise: Practice brushwork and texture effects

Choose a subject where you can practice both brushwork (drawing and mark-making) and textural effects. You can set up a still life with a plant, or work from life or a photo you've taken. Remember that your idea (the content) of your painting needs to come first - the techniques should not overpower your idea.

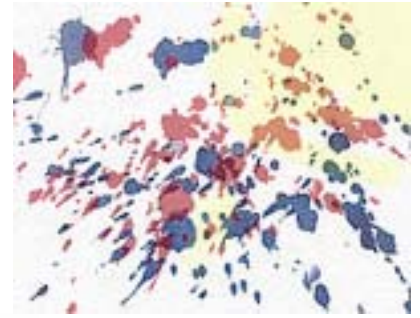
Judy Morris, a nationally known watercolor painter and workshop instructor, uses salt so freely in her work that it has almost become her trademark. In this painting, El Carro Rojo, you can see the salt effect in the walls of the building, the concrete steps and even in the colorful cast shadow from the wagon with the barrel in it.

You might think about using salt in a soft, unfocused background behind a more carefully painted specimen plant or animal.



Textural Effects

Spattering, either with your brush or a toothbrush, can add texture to otherwise flat or wet-in-wet washes. Learn to control the direction of the spatter as well as how large the spatter is by experimenting with how wet your brush or toothbrush is. The wetter (more loaded) the brush is, the larger the spatters (or splats) will be.



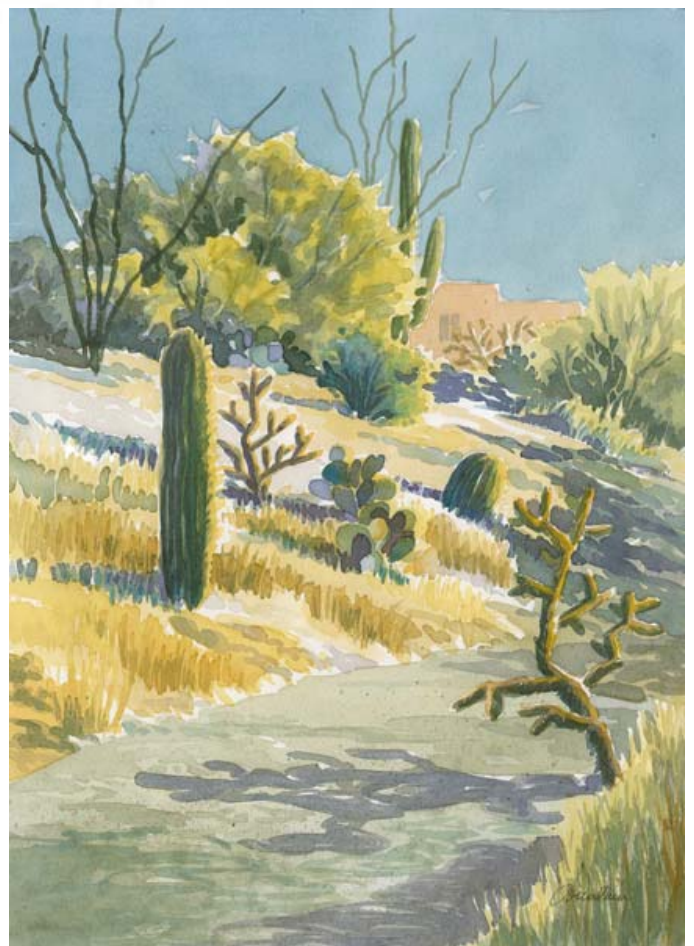
The flip stroke with your round brush, done with a wrist movement and starting at the bottom of the stroke, pushing or flipping the brush away from you and up off the paper, creates a grasslike (or hair/fur like) mark with a fatter bottom and a pointed end.

I used lots of these strokes to glaze the grassy areas in my painting at right.

synthetic sponge



natural sponge



*Red Hills Center, Saguaro National Park West, ©2008
14½ x 10 inches, plein air watercolor by Ellen Fountain*

SPONGES, either synthetic or natural, may be used to dab on paint. This technique can be used to add texture to rocks or ground, to create lacy foliage, etc. If using a synthetic sponge, I recommend ripping it into irregular pieces to avoid the completely straight edge it creates otherwise. A ripped piece of sponge was used with several different colors of green to create the foliage on the tree sample at left.



Far left: Poppies on Silverbell Road, watercolor, 16 x 12 inches, ©Ellen Fountain, with detail, left.

I primarily use washes in my work, often beginning the painting wet-into-wet. I then like to add some brushwork over the wash underpainting to define some areas, and suggest texture and form.

Andy Rush, in many of his watercolor works, uses primarily brush drawn lines

and marks to create his imagery, restricting washes to smaller shapes and background areas, as he does in this painting titled "Oracle" (shown at right). This approach leaves a lot of the paper unpainted.



Brushwork may also include the techniques of scraping and scratching. These two techniques may be done with the plastic angled end of a flat aquarelle brush, but may also be done with a cut up credit card, flat staple remover, or any tool that has a flat edge or a hard rounded point.

A SCRAPE involves pushing damp watercolor pigment aside, leaving a lighter value (or nearly white). Timing is critical and scraping must be done while paint is just damp. Scrape while a wash is very wet, and it will flow back into the scraped area. Wait too long, and the paint will be too dry to scrape.



A SCRATCH is an indentation in the paper surface, made while a wash is very wet. Pigment particles from the wash settle into these indentations in greater concentration and create a darker value of the wash color.



In the detail of the tree trunk and branches at left, I used both scraping and scratching to suggest both the form of the tree and the texture of the bark.

Light scrapes may be painted (glazed) over once dry as I did here.

Brushwork: Drawing and Mark-Making

If washes are the foundation of watercolor painting, then brushwork is the framework.

Brushwork, like your handwriting, is unique to you, as is the way you use it to structure and/or embellish your watercolor paintings. Some watercolor painters use the brush much as they would a pencil or pen, essentially "drawing" their paintings. Other painters begin with washes and then add brushwork either as they go or on top of dried washes. Usually, either brushwork or washes will dominate any given painting.

Brushwork looks different on different paper surfaces. Depending on how loaded the brush is, when pulled across the paper, it can flow smoothly, leaving a solid mark, or skip over the bumps in the paper surface, leaving small white speckles. The paper surface exaggerates this effect.



Exercise: Drawing with the Brush

Use old newspapers or scrap paper. Practice using your brushes by making a variety of marks - some with the point or edge and some with the brush body. Try varying both pressure and the amount of water/pigment in the brush. Stand up and practice using both wrist and whole arm movements. The goal is to get as comfortable with your brushes as you are with a pen or pencil. If you routinely sit down to paint, at least make an effort to keep your forearm up off the table surface so that you don't overly restrict your brush movements.



Above: *Breakfast Al Fresco*, watercolor, 15 x 11" ©Ellen Fountain, with detail at right.

Brushwork alone can add what appears to be texture to a painting. That texture, along with textural effects from additives such as salt, rubbing alcohol, plain water, wax paper, plastic wrap, and so forth, can give a painting the extra boost it needs to go from ordinary to exceptional.



Left: In this detail, you can see how some active brushwork, including some scraping, over the lighter underlying yellow-green wash, acts as a foil to the otherwise primarily flat areas of the walls, columns and patio. This brushwork both describes the palm fronds and helps create a dark pink background for the pink flowers.