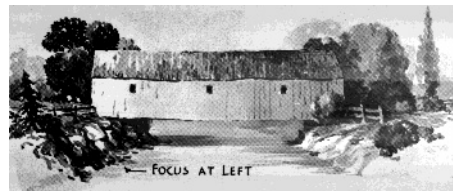
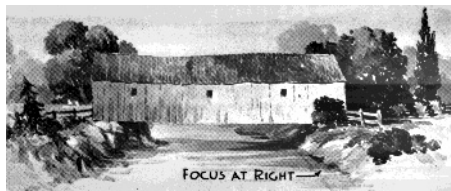


Explore Stronger Contrasts

It's all about contrast in watercolor - contrast of color intensity, color value, hue. Contrasts in detail and in textural effects. Exploiting contrasts can help you make stronger paintings. Changing the contrasts from painting to painting of the same subject can help you create a series of works that are related but not the same.

Note how the focus shifts in each of the sketches below. This shift is due to changing the position of the STRONGEST light/dark contrasts.



The small thumbnail sketches you do before committing to a final idea are the place to explore where the strongest light/dark contrasts might be placed. Ignoring value contrasts can often result in a “weak” painting:



Artist Tom Lynch took a “weak” student painting and added stronger value and color to it (shown at right). He also varied the tree foliage by clumping/grouping together various masses of leaves. Small details on the arched gate (cast shadows from the gate and tree) also help create a stronger focal point in the painting.

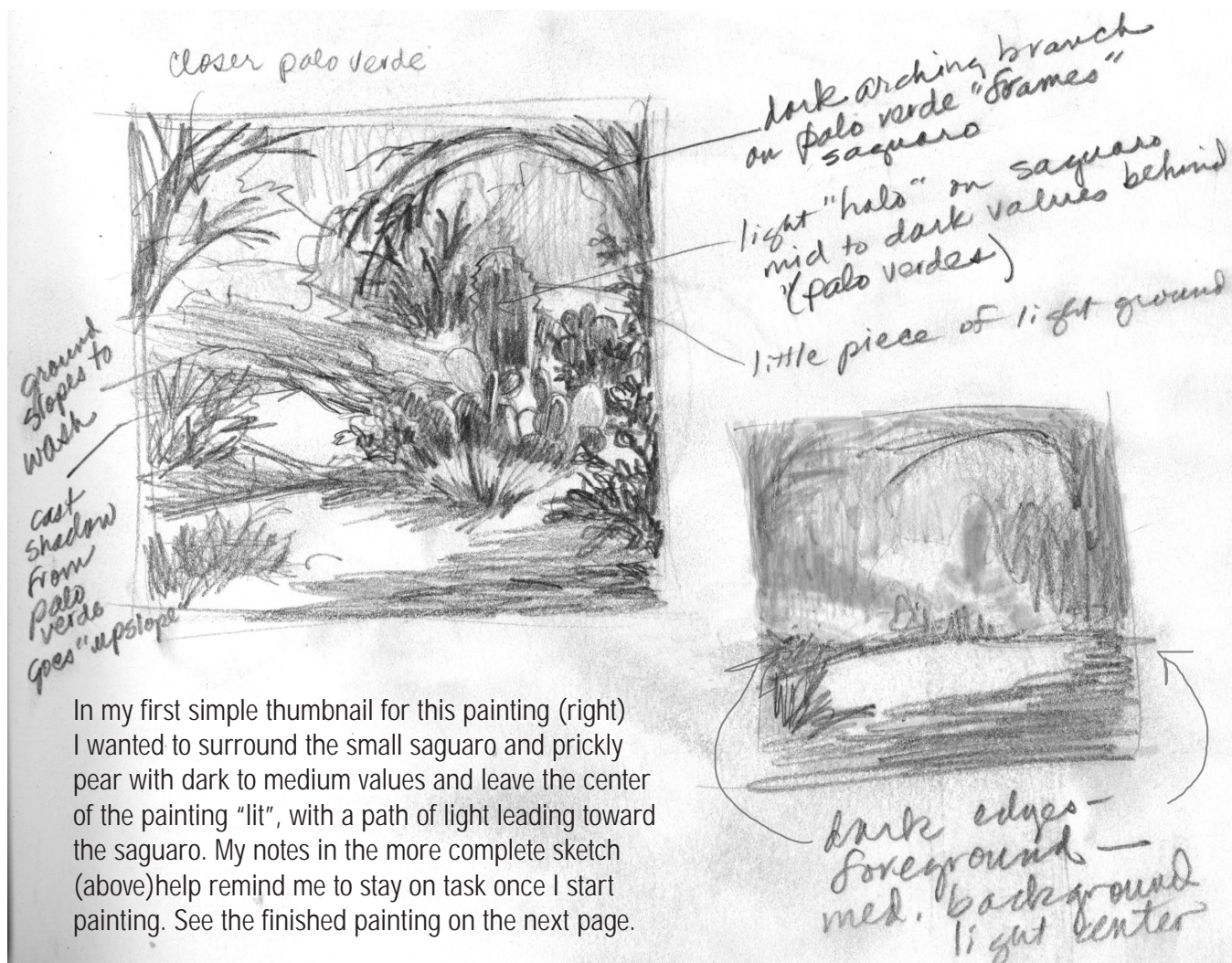


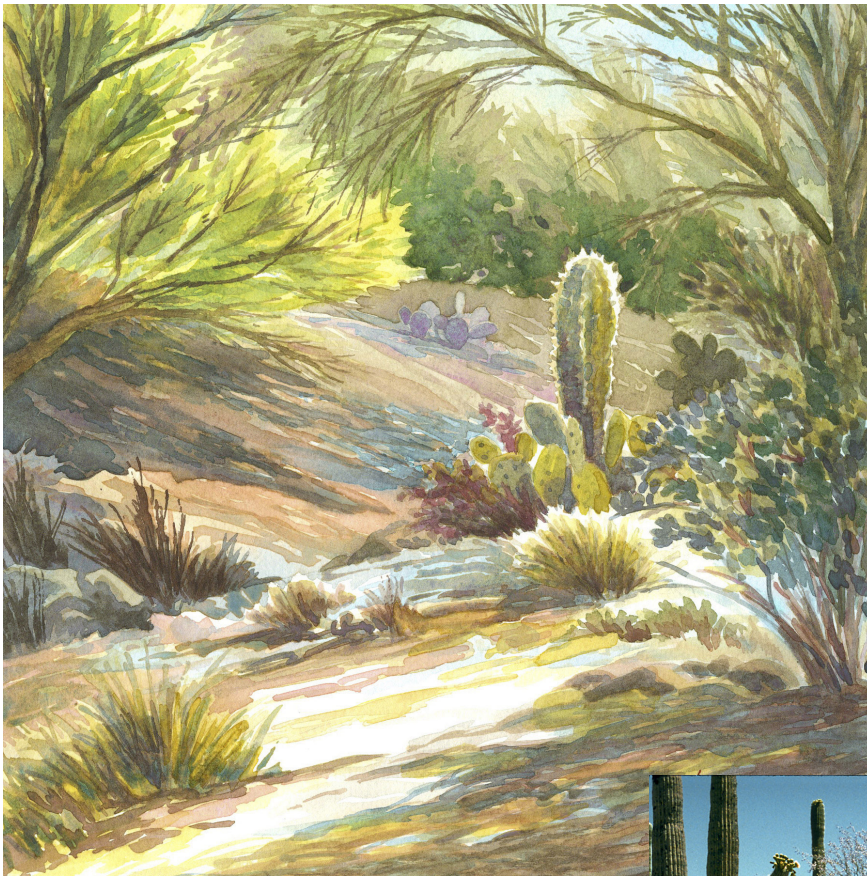
Value Contrasts can “make” or “break” a painting



Michael Schlichting - "Easter" before and after he re-worked it by adding a strong shadow

Sometimes painting a final wash of color over selected parts of your painting can pull the whole thing together. Look at the example at the left. Schlichting turned a rather ordinary painting of a church into a dramatic statement by adding the blue gray wash to create the illusion of strong light from the above right.





This painting was done mostly on site at Feliz Paseos Park on Tucson's near west side (Anklam Road and Camino de Oeste area). Since I've been plein air painting, I've been working on developing a vocabulary of marks that will represent the desert foliage without getting overly "picky".

Those small thumbnail sketches are just as important when working from a photo. Below is the photo of a blooming ironwood tree I took on the west side of the Tucson Mountains near the Desert Museum. These trees, with their delicate violet flowers, are very hard to capture in a photo.

Below is my sketch for the painting. I wanted dark and medium values to form a "u" shape at the bottom and left and right edges of the painting, and knew I would have to exaggerate the color of the ironwood tree for it to have any impact.

My notes help remind me what to do with the painting once I start putting paint on paper.





At left is the painting as it was last Saturday at the end of our class time. It is mostly light and medium values, but is a fairly complete statement at this point.

Below is the finished painting. What I added were the stronger darks in the foreground and the saguaros, and some spattering in the ironwood tree to suggest the fine, small flowers as well as adding the branches. The crayon wax resist I added first remains in place.

