

# Painting Reflective Surfaces

## Week 2: Glass

### Observe carefully

Like metal, a glass object will capture and distort the shapes and colors of the objects around it. These reflected shapes will be hard-edged or diffused, depending on the shape of the object and whether the glass is frosted, clear, faceted or colored, or whether or not it contains a clear or colored liquid. In addition to the reflections we see on the surface of our glass objects, we also have to deal with what we see *through* the glass.

There is no substitute for careful observation, even if you are using photos for reference. The best camera cannot capture what the eye sees. The camera will lose details at both ends of the value scale – in the extreme darks and the lightest lights. Use your sketchbook to make notes about these details that you lose in your photograph. Choose your background carefully when setting up a still life using glass. Most of the time, a dark background will set off the glass more clearly.

### Note color and shape of reflections; consider local color

If your glass object is clear, the colors you use to paint it are dictated by the color of objects reflecting into it and objects seen through it. You will definitely need to use the white of your paper for the brightest white highlights (or use opaque white watercolor for these if you aren't a purist). If your glass is colored, then its local color will influence the colored reflections, and depending on the depth of the glass color, what you see through the glass may be starkly reduced. As with metals, some color values and intensities may need to be exaggerated or subdued in order to maintain the overall clarity of your particular forms.



*Top: Note the reflections in the wine glass, and how what we see through the wine is much more obscured than what we see through the clear glass. The purple frosted glass allows just a hint on what's behind it, and only the reflections on the top and bottom are hard edged. Middle: Note the distortions of the edge of the fabric and background, seen through the glass. Also note how the cuts on the glass refract light and color. Left: same clear water glass with water in it, but note how the glass "color" changed with a change of background. For clear glass, you will always need a variety of grays in addition to the colors in the reflections.*



This demo is from the book, *Painting Beautiful Watercolors from Photographs* by Jan Kunz.

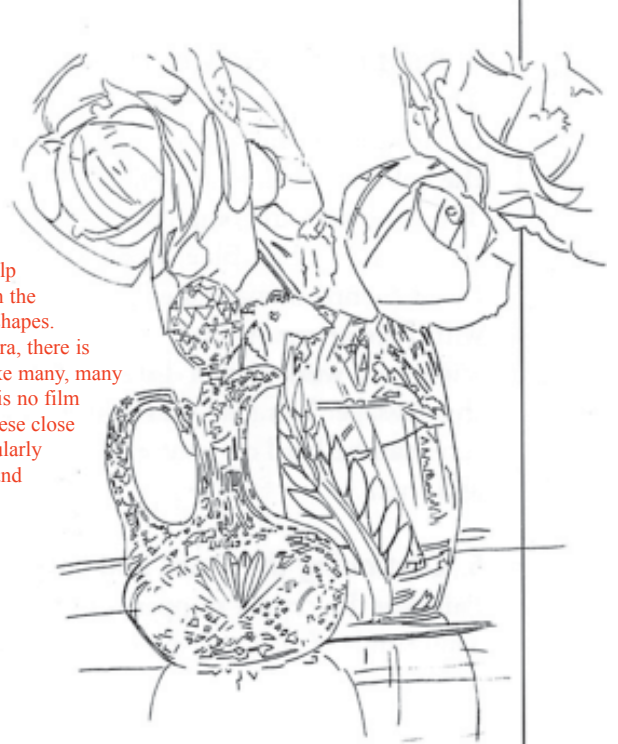


Jan says that taking the time to set up your photo is very important. Use light (natural or artificial) to show off your glass to its best advantage. Get in close so that extraneous objects or surroundings are minimized. Jan uses an opaque projector to project the photo image onto her watercolor paper. She traces every major shape she needs. In the drawing below, the contrast has been deliberately increased so you can see her drawing clearly.

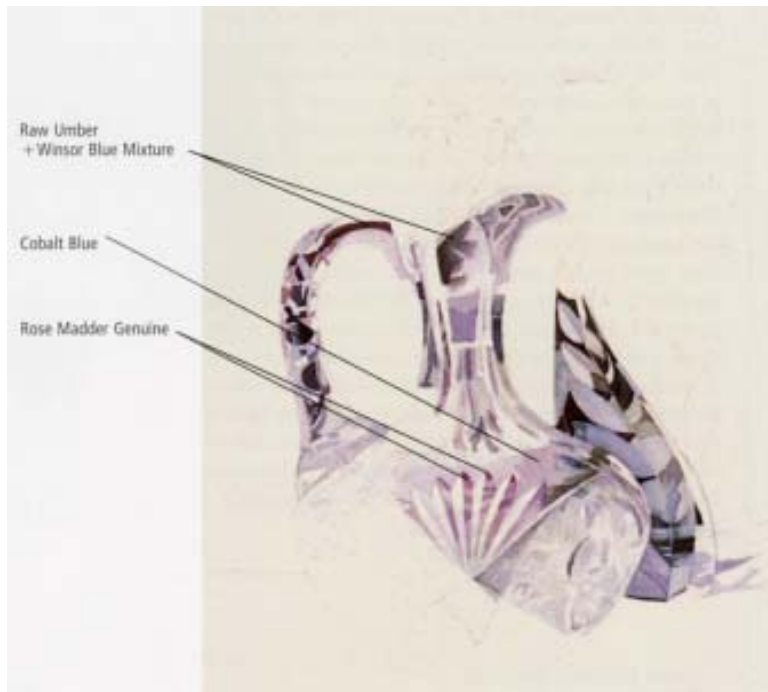
Jan uses tracing paper to cover the parts of her painting that she is not working on. She adds

“The most difficult part of painting crystal is having the patience to see it through. It is tedious work, but rewarding.”

I suggest taking close up photos of each object to help later in dealing with the individual faceted shapes. With a digital camera, there is no excuse not to take many, many photos, since there is no film cost to consider. These close shots can be particularly helpful in shadow and highlight areas.



Jan's palette for this demo:		
Burnt Sienna	Burnt Umber	Cadmium Orange
Cobalt Blue	New Gamboge	Permanent Alizarin Crimson
Permanent Rose	Raw Sienna	Raw Umber
Winsor Blue	Winsor Green	Rose Madder Genuine*



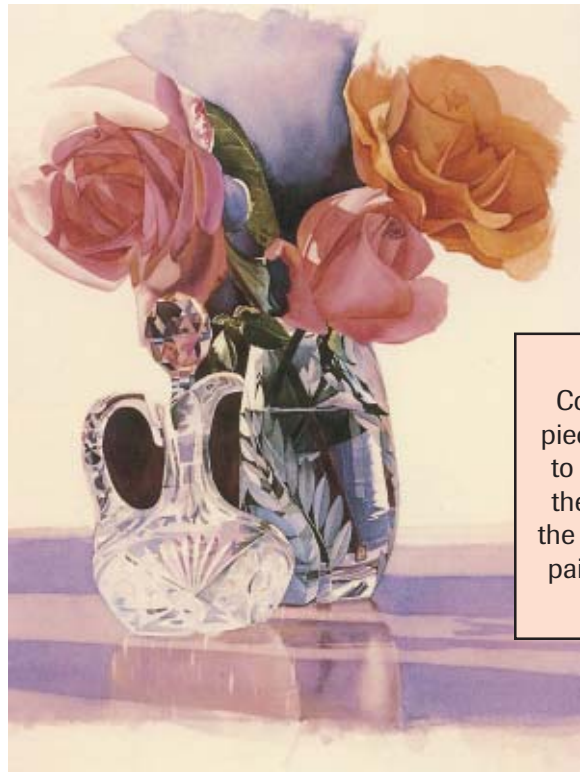
Step 1 (left): She begins painting individual shapes on the cruet handle and vase, painting each shape correctly in terms of its color and value, and making sure the edges are clean and hard.

Step 2 (below): The body of the vase goes a little more quickly, as the shapes are somewhat larger, but it's important to work each shape. View your work from a distance now and then, both to check values and colors and to give your eyes a rest.



\* remember this is a fugitive pigment. I suggest using permanent rose or quinacridone rose instead.





**TIP**  
 Consider using a scrap piece of watercolor paper to make a trial match of the colors and values in the photo before you start painting. Make notes on the color mixtures.

*Step 3: (above left) She continues working the glass objects, and paints the first rose. Note that she painted in the first patches of what will be the darkest darks (in the background). She uses a mixture of Permanent Alizarin Crimson and Burnt Umber with a few touches of Winsor Blue charged in for the dark background color, saturating the mix to get a rich dark.*

*Step 4: (above right). Jan paints in the orange rose, beginning with New Gamboge for the lightest values, and then mixing darker values by adding Permanent Alizarin Crimson, Cadmium Orange and Burnt Sienna to the New Gamboge. She then paints the foreground in this order, letting the painting dry completely inbetween steps:*

- She paints the shape of the cruet reflection first in its entirety
- She paints the shape of the vase in its entirety
- She paints the light value of the table surface, avoiding the reflection shapes of the cruet and vase.
- She paints the cast shadows with a medium wash of cobalt blue.
- She paints the entire foreground with a light wash of cobalt blue. This softens the edges of the reflections and unifies the shapes.
- She lifts out highlights in the foreground by using a stiff brush dampened with clean water, scrubbing the area she wishes to lift and then blotting with paper towel or tissue.

*Finishing Up:*  
 She completes the dark background, softens some rounded edges on the rose petals and generally tweaks anything that seems wrong to her eye. Turn the painting upside down at least once during this stage - it's easier to see parts that don't work when they are "divorced" from the object.



Crystal Vase and Roses, watercolor by Jan Kunz

### **In class:**

Use the glass object you brought or select one from the still life collection. Place the text sheet(s) with the word GLASS under, in or to the side of your object so that it creates some reflected shapes in the glass. Place something dark behind your glass so that you can see its contours more clearly.

Protect your “pure white” highlights with masking fluid (or remember to paint around them). These will be the white of your paper, and left unpainted. All other values will key off of this “white”.

Paint your object, working from light to dark. Include the background and foreground. You may treat the background wet-into-wet if you wish. The foreground should include some cast shadow to anchor the object to the surface it sits on.

### **Out of class:**

Set up a still life that includes one or more glass objects of your choosing. Work with the arrangement and lighting until you get something that pleases you. The glass should take “center stage” and any other objects should have supporting roles. Include just as much background as you feel is needed compositionally.



*Above: Hibiscus and Glass, 22 x 15 inches, by Ellen Fountain captures the feel of the wine glass without being photo-realistic. This piece incorporates transparent watercolor, opaque and semi-opaque acrylic colors and collage.*

*Left: Jim's Daisies with Model #2, transparent watercolor, 7.5 x 5 inches by Ellen Fountain. This was a relatively quick “study” using the frosted glass vase shown in the photo on page 1. It's painted fairly directly, with just a little layering in the daisies, the glass pebbles in the vase bottom, the wood grain on the table, and a second layer to give more form to the cat.*