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Art Tip: Reflections, a Demonstration

Following my look back at water reflections, I started this river scene with a wet in wet wash of Aureolin, Indian Yellow, Quinacridone Rose and Phthalocyanine Green. This will help me to create a warm autumn atmosphere.

The entire surface was moistened and the two yellows, rose, and green were applied in an uneven wash (variegated). The lighter area in the center will be where the sunlit trees are. By starting with this all over wash, I am assuring that the color of the light will be part of the reflective surface of the water as well as the light that appears behind the trees.

After the surface was thoroughly dry, I applied masking fluid to the water's surface with a palette knife. There was a light rippling on the water and the palette knife is a good tool to make the fine lines that were needed to show this effect. From this point forward, the brush movement on the water would be parallel to the bottom edge of the paper.

The color of the light has been established and every color that follows will be affected by this first wash. Here, I have turned the paper sideways to paint the tall trees that are in the shade. By painting the trees first, I will have an idea about the colors that I should use in their reflection. I lightly moistened this area before applying all of the colors that would melt together in the wet shape.

I have moistened the area where I will lay in the dark tree reflection. This area will be painted with a brush stroke that runs parallel to the bottom of the paper. Phthalocyanine Blue has been added to the color selection of the two yellows, rose, and green.

After painting in the first wash in the background trees, I proceeded to paint these same colors into the water with the same brush movement as in the previous image. This first application was painted into a moist surface and the colors were placed to follow the color pattern on the land.
I continued adding color to the trees in the sunlight and landforms on the right side of the work. The brush strokes within the trees had a random movement, but the water continued to have that same parallel to the bottom edge movement.

At this point, I left the painting to dry thoroughly for a couple of days. The color would change during that time becoming a little lighter.

When it had dried completely, I decided to give the entire painting a “spa” treatment. I placed the dry painting into a few inches of cool water in the bathtub. After it was totally saturated, I used a natural sponge to gently remove some of the heavier pigment. I do this while the painting is under water. I was able to soften both edges and colors and NO, the whole painting does not disappear.

After I lightened the color and softened some of the edges with the sponge, you can see that the atmosphere of light is stronger. I returned into the reflections with pure color because there was mixed color on the water reflections after I had washed them out. The pure color would be altered by the color that remained on the paper’s surface.

The following three examples show segments of the water’s reflective surface. The gentle washing with the natural sponge has created some of the soft edges. The light value lines were made with the application of masking fluid with the palette knife.

The original wash of the light of the sky can be seen here. I have alternated the value of the water movement lines here by painting them in with a fine brush in a mid-value color.

The soft light colors of the trees on the right can be seen reflected here. They were painted with a wet in wet application.

When painting reflections, paint what you see not what you think you know.