Tip #120

Working on Toned Paper

This is a very old technique employed by the Old Masters right down to the present day. It can be as detailed as you like, and rival a photograph for realism, or loose and sketchy. "Pushing and pulling" with light and dark on a mid-toned paper creates an effect that’s almost three-dimensional ... it’s like sculpting on the flat plane of your paper.

You can work on tan, gray, blue-gray or even black paper for some amazing results. Use a black and a white pen or colored pencil, or go all-out with full color. Use gouache, if you like!

But DO take advantage of that paper to make your drawings and sketches pop.

120-1

I often start out with an ink or pencil sketch, then give it a punch with a bit of white, as you see on the right side, here. Prismacolor white colored pencil did the trick, here. Try it ... use dark on a midtone background – ink pen, brush and ink, dark colored pencil ... and then add a bit of white to suggest form or dimension.
120-2

Just two values, black and white, make this sketch pop on brown paper!

120-3

You can use this trick to suggest volume, form, and the direction of light, as I did on this location sketch of a limestone bluff...
Add a little color if you like! Here, I used brown ink, watercolor, and a touch of white to enhance a sketch of the little English-themed village of Hollister, MO.

Go wild with color on a black background ... it’s fun! Colored pencils were my choice here, but I’ve also used gouache or opaque watercolor with good effect.
You can work more delicately too, if you like, as I did in this partial self-portrait. Again, I used Prismacolor colored pencils.

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