



# Watercolor Pencil Magic

Addition to A Workshop with Cathy Johnson

author of the popular North Light book,  
*Watercolor Pencil Magic*

## Sketching vs. Painting with Watercolor Pencils



*This painting took rather a number of layers and a fair amount of planning.*

I have used watercolor pencils most happily over the years for sketching—they are lightweight, portable, clean, versatile and expressive. You can use a single pencil in a sketch, simply wetting the line here and there to suggest volume or form, or combine several to get the effect you're after.

When I paint with watercolor pencils, I use a much more controlled approach, layering a color or two, wetting and blending, allowing the result to dry before adding more. There may be as many as 10 layers on a painting—and as few as a single one in a sketch.



*This was a quick sketch with just a touch of color.*

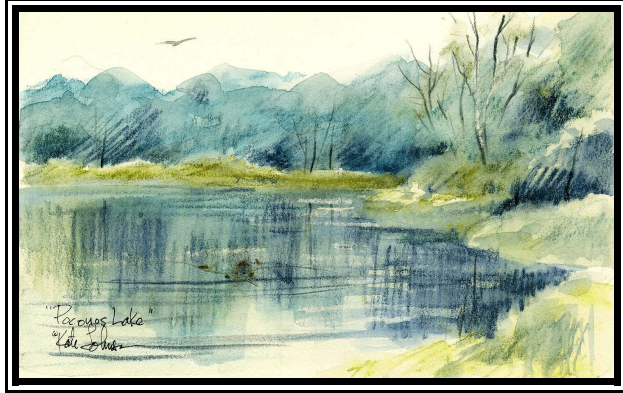


This little sketch is called "Closed at Sunset" because the park where I was working does just that—it was necessary to get it down on paper and blended in the 10 minutes I had left before the rangers locked the gates! Watercolor pencils are wonderful for such fast work...this catches something of the scene in a way a more formal treatment might not.



This one required quite a bit more planning, with the blended colors of the setting sun reflected in the water, and the clouds building in semi-transparent layers in the evening sky. I researched the shape of the ship carefully as well...the effect is very different from "Closed at Sunset," but equally valid. It just took longer!





Simple, repeated strokes can suggest trees, weeds, water and more, as in this little sketch...here, I used vertical strokes to suggest the reflections of the far trees, wet all to blend and allowed it to dry. Finally, I added lines to suggest the tree limbs as well as the slightly curved horizontal lines in the water to give it a limpid quality. This was done in only a few minutes...

You can see a similar approach at right, in this very sketchy landscape. The details of trunks and limbs were added after everything was dry.



Here, Lyra Aquacolor crayons were used for the sky and distant hills, wetting quickly and thoroughly with a large 1" watercolor brush. They blend well, more like watercolors than some of the water-soluble drawing media. I used a sprinkle of salt to suggest rather too many stars! After the sky area was dry, I added the more controlled trees with pigment pulled from the tip of the crayon with a round watercolor brush.



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A much more controlled technique is used for this larger painting (9" x 12" on Strathmore 400 cold-pressed paper), done for the North Light Book, *Watercolor Pencil Magic*. Much more like traditional watercolor painting, each layer was added and moistened separately, and details added as I went along. I worked basically from background to foreground and light to dark.



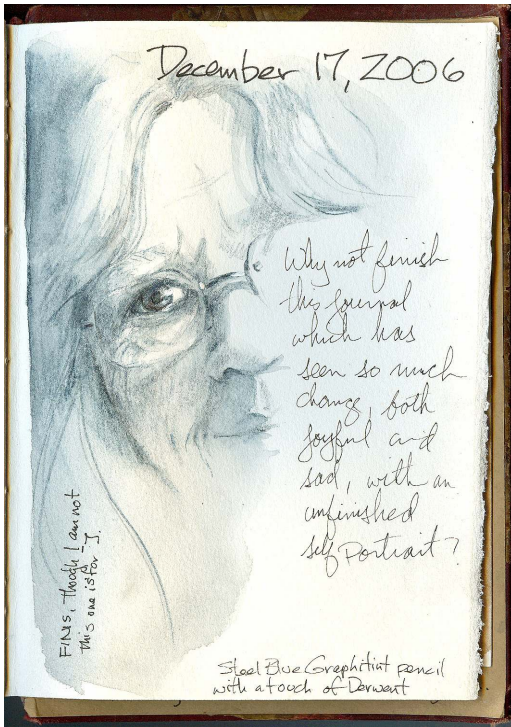


I love watercolor pencils for quick, scribbly little sketches like this...their calligraphic lines complement the shapes of leaves and vines. Wet them as little or as much as you like to get the effect you want.



They're lovely for more controlled blending techniques, as in this careful depiction of a cactus flower.





Use a single pencil, as in this journal vignette...this was a Steel Blue Graphitint pencil...



Or combine a couple of pencils to capture varied color and a bit of blush to the lips...this was also a journal sketch, and also using Graphitints with a linear approach.



Or you may prefer to work more in the manner of a traditional painting—as before, a layer at a time, allowing each to dry before adding more color.

*These versatile, portable tools are wonderful for any number of approaches and techniques!*