

December 2020

Unfortunately, there weren't any group meetings during December due to Government restrictions. However, the group had a 'Christmas Creations' competition in December with online voting and Bron produced the most popular painting. We had a virtual Christmas party on zoom where there was some general art chat, quizzes and the results of the vote were announced. Well done to Bron and the runners up, Chris and Heather.

In addition, Elaine completed and circulated by email two more step-by-step painting demonstrations (lessons 3 and 4). I believe that some members are doing their own versions of these exercises, but I haven't received many images – those that I have received are shown after Elaine's demo images.

Step-by-step lessons

Lesson 3 – snowy scene plus animal

1 I was looking through Pinterest the other day and came across some photos and paintings of snow scenes, often with animal or birds in them. The colours always appeal to me, soft whites and greys contrasted against stark black and dark greys. Then I thought about Christmas card designs, given the subject, and thought about a good step on from project 2 last week. This will also be a nice substitute for our annual Christmas card competition.

What I thought we could do was to use last week's ref. photo of the woodland, draw it out more fully and paint it again. We are going to use exactly the same techniques but only use mixed greys for the colours. You could of course use your own ref. picture but stick to the techniques and the grey colours. I also want to add an animal to my painting. I've chosen to do a red fox.

To make grey in paints you mix complementary colours together. With opaque paints you then also add white until you have the tone of grey you need. With watercolours the mixed grey simply needs water added until it is a pale, luminous, 'lively' grey. I try never to use black straight from the paint box because it is so harsh. In my opinion the best greys come from mixing any blue with any brown.

I've used my White Knights watercolour paintbox, and NOT paper.

This first photo shows a chart of mixed greys using blues with browns mostly mixed as dark as possible. Remember that each resulting grey can then have different amounts of water (or white if using opaque media) added to make the tone of grey you want.



2 Next to the chart is my painting. It has been drawn out, fox included, and masked. The first pale wet in wet background washes are done, I've added a minute amount of Raw Sienna to the pale greys for a gold glow and

when they were dry I've painted the tree trunks in a mix of greys using the same technique as last week - Brush on the colour and then add clean water to push the pigment outwards to give those crisp edges which help define the trees' shapes.

The mixed greys I've used are: Background - Cobalt blue/English red (substitute Light red) and Cerulean blue/Burnt umber
and the Trees are - Ultramarine blue/Burnt umber and Azure (substitute Phthalo or Prussian blue)/Mars brown or Burnt umber.
Allow to dry.

Here comes the fiddly bit. You need to paint some dark tree shapes behind the trunks and branches. I've used 3 greys mixed at full strength so that the colour is dark enough to make the trees and branches stand out pale against dark. The other reason for the very dark tones is that, at the end of painting, you might want to add snow in an opaque white such as Gouache, Acrylic or White Acrylic ink. It won't stand out if the background colours are too pale.



3 It is fiddly but if you use a small brush with a good point and take your time it should work. I had to paint around my fox too as I need to paint him a rusty red which wouldn't sit over a dark background colour. The greys I mixed were Ultramarine/Sepia for a very dark, cool grey, Azure/Mars brown for a very dark, warm greenish grey and Cerulean/Mars brown for a mid tone greenish grey. If you don't have Mars brown use Burnt Umber.

When that was all dry I removed the masking, painted in the markings on the Silver Birch trunks, removed paint in a tiny Robin shape above a branch (top right) and then painted a Robin in. Finally I removed paint along twigs where they'd filled in after I had sprayed water to soften some edges around the dark background tree shapes.



4 Next I painted my fox. I did try to mute the redness a little so that it wouldn't be too much of a contrast with the surrounding greys. The reason for including the Robin was so that there was a tiny bit of the red/Sienna colour in another part of the picture. Then I added very pale greys to the white twigs and Ivy and cleaned up a lot of branches' edges in the canopy as they were too rough around the edges. At this stage the painting could be finished. Even without snow it looks wintery and I like it like this.



6 I thought long and hard about introducing snow but it is a Christmas card design so I went ahead and dotted on snow using white acrylic gouache with 2 different sized brushes. It's good to vary the sizes of the white dots. I may have overdone it! And am regretting it slightly but here it is.



What I like about this exercise is that it takes last week's painting and, while using a different colour set and adding an animal (if wanted), it uses the same reference and painting techniques to make a brand new image. This is something you can do with any of your own older paintings.

Finally on that same subject I promised I'd show you the various versions I did of the first lockdown project, the Meon canal path scene.

Here are all 4 together: 2 Watercolours using different limited colour palettes, a version in chalk Pastel and a version in Acrylics. I'm always surprised at how different paintings can be when the same one is done by lots of people but it turns out it's the the same when one person does the same picture in different media.



Lesson 4 – snowy woodland scene

The idea for this week's painting comes from an image Ros did last week in inks. I hope you all saw it when she emailed it to the group. Some of the background in hers reminded me of how we can use cling film resist to give a 'tangled' branches texture on a watercolour wash. You can get the same texture with it in Acrylics too. The artist, Gill Bowditch, uses it all the time in her paintings. But all you Acrylics painters would need to experiment with the wetness of ink or paint needed and how long to leave the film on before it gets completely stuck down as the Acrylic ink or paint dries.

I'm doing another snowy forest scene, I'm doing Silver Birch trees again and I'm using mixed greys again, (Christmas card Mk II).

1

Here I've used Masking Tape for the tree shapes instead of masking fluid. You can only do VERY simple trunks and branches this way. You have to take care with how thin you manage to tear the pieces and where you place them but it should look very effective if done with care.



The next step you have to prepare well for because you need to work fast.

First, mix a big puddle of your grey. I've used a full strength mix of Phthalo blue (you can substitute Prussian or Azure blue) mixed with Sepia brown. If you don't have Sepia use Burnt Umber and a little black or Payne's grey. This will give a dark, greenish grey. Also tear off the amount of cling film pieces you need to cover the area behind the masked trees.

First, wet the area over and behind the trees with clean water, then brush on your grey as quickly as possible. While it's all wet lay the cling film, one piece at a time, onto the wet paint. If you pull it to stretch it, it pleats. I did this and laid it on so that the pleats were roughly vertical on the paper. Or you could scrunch it up and get a random, tangled texture. The paint MUST still be wet when you do this. Once the film is down you can't move it, then you have to wait for it to dry completely. This takes a while depending on the room temperature. The film lengthens drying time.



2 Here's the cling film on the wet wash.



3 When it is completely dry, remove it. You are left with the pattern of the creases it created as it dried. The pattern can be either faint or well defined. It can be left

alone if you've been lucky and the marks can be seen easily. Mine was a bit too faint so I've painted over the crease lines with a darker tone of my mixed grey.



4



5

I've also used touches of Burnt umber and dark red. All the 'twigs' and 'branches' you can see were done this way. You could also lift off lines and shapes left in the paint layer. You can see I've done this in the final step below. When all this paint is dry, tear off the masking tape carefully.

In the 5th step I've added a rough wash of my grey in the foreground. This was to 'weight' the bottom of the painting. It's a little bluer than behind my trees. I put some Gum Arabic into this wash because I knew I might want to lift twigs or grasses shapes out of it to soften it. Gum Arabic allows you to do this easily. I also sprinkled some salt into the wet paint to get a frosty look.

The last step is described below.

First I cleaned up the edges and shapes of the trunks and branches. They were a bit clunky in places and didn't always look right. After that I washed pale grey, same mix again, around the sides of the trunks and branches to give them some roundness.

Next I put the markings onto my Silver Birches. I used Lunar black (Daniel Smith colour) for this because I love the way it granulates so much when you blob clean water on and around the resulting paint marks.

The final steps were to lift some Hogweed shapes out of the foreground wash. Actually they are a mix of lifted off lines and painted brown lines and dried Hogweed heads. I then drew some more Hogweed shapes into the dark around the trees using a white gel pen.



At this point the painting is finished but as a fox appeared in the 3rd project I may paint one in here and maybe some falling snow too. Watch this space.

I hope you've enjoyed these projects. It's been great to get some of your feedback and see the resulting paintings.

Contributions from members



Ian Pile



Steve McIntyre



Tania Wilkie



Ros Clark



Barbara BJ



Paul Bunyan (re last months' step by step of Meon River)