

# Rustic and Weathered Watercolor Paintings

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Masters in Fine Arts Degree  
2-D Studio Art, Emphasis in watercolor

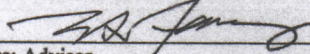
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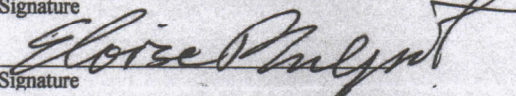
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## **Abstract**

My subject focuses on the theme of rustic and weathered compositions. In my paintings I attempt to capture the true essence of old tattered objects by recreating roughness, softness, and uneven surfaces in fine detail. My paintings are characterized by rusty, rough, and worn realistic detail. My inspiration was derived from the imperfection of textures of old objects (weathered by time and the elements). The more texture and detail the object has, the better. These objects consist of man-made and natural things. The content in my paintings consists of the chaos of uneven surface areas of rust and corroded subject matter. I want the composition to relay a visually exhausted, precarious texture to reflect the sense of being weathered by time.

Watercolor painting is a type of art that is unique in itself due to fluidity and happy accidents that can occur. The colors flow together in a harmonious aspect staining the paper while creating the most interesting effects. The tools that can be used in watercolor painting are unlimited.

It should not be surprising that I want to be different from other artists by having my own original style and methods. Most modern day artists have loose styles in creating art without much fine detail. Meticulous detail and texture are the most important parts of my creative process. My paintings question the imperfection of the disintegration caused by time and elements of the world around us. I portray the emotion of disintegration and the corrosion of man-made objects.

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## **Chapter 1**

I have created watercolor landscape and still life paintings for my MFA show. My thesis work differs from the work I was creating when beginning the program. Initially my watercolor paintings were small and consisted of mundane landscapes. I wanted my watercolor paintings to be more interesting, so I made improvements. My focal point is now more interesting and challenging because I place less emphasis on the background. Previously the entire painting was too detailed; now only the most significant parts are the detailed objects in the foreground. My paintings now have a more distinct context than my earlier works. I have also increased the scale of my paintings: they are now 18x24” or larger; they used to be 12x14” or smaller. I discovered that painting larger is much easier than painting at a small scale. When painting at a larger scale, I can create the most meticulous details. I always enjoyed creating paintings of buildings as an undergraduate but they were paintings that consisted mostly of cities and town buildings. Now my paintings are of more interesting, old weathered structures.

I find my inspiration in weathered and rustic subject matter—for instance, rusty worn tools, barns, mills, old trucks, and farm equipment. The more debilitated the subject, the more inspired I am to want to recreate it in a painting. I want others to see the force of nature through time and elements that transform the subjects that I use in my paintings.

It is important to make my work personal so my paintings will express my artistic style, which is the most important part of my creativity. When creating these paintings, I’m totally in sync with my emotions. My emotions are displayed rhythmically in every brush stroke, detail and technique. My mind is focused on the textures, shapes, contrast and the atmosphere of the composition. The contribution that my paintings will make to the world consists of a different

way for viewers to see it. Even though the world is continually renewing itself, it is also decomposing manmade objects within its atmosphere by time and the elements.

My inspiration to create watercolor paintings of tools stemmed from an artist my watercolor professor, Zheng Feng, showed me in the first semester after graduate school – David Poxon. Poxon creates paintings of abandoned, overlooked machinery.<sup>1</sup> I found that his ideas and artwork are similar to mine but he had a strong focal point. His paintings inspired me to want to choose more interesting compositions. The watercolorist and landscape artist Sterling Edwards also inspired me because of his loose method of painting. I looked at his work to get away from my too detailed backgrounds and to incorporate looser methods into my paintings.<sup>2</sup> As an undergraduate, my backgrounds took the viewer away from my focal point, which made my landscapes seem mundane. I was also inspired by Nita Engle's book *How to Make a Watercolor Paint Itself*. This improved my watercolor techniques and helped me to become brave enough to experiment and try new techniques.<sup>3</sup>

The biggest part of my inspiration came from my watercolor professor Zheng Feng. He told me to have my own style, to be different from other artists, and to look at things differently. My style and ideas changed dramatically after I took his advice, and I was much happier with the creation of my paintings. The composition and the end results were more pleasing to the eye. My inspiration grew stronger, and I felt eager in the creation of my paintings.

The buildings that I use in my paintings are usually old mills or barns. The older and the more run-down they are, the more interesting that I find them; for example, a barn with the rusty metal peeling from the roof with bare rafters due to the caustic contamination of time interests

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<sup>1</sup> "Watercolor International II." : DAVID POXON R.I. , N.W.S. Accessed March 21, 2015. <http://watercolorinternational2.blogspot.com/2014/03/david-poxon-ri-nws.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Sterling Edwards, *Creating Luminous Watercolor Landscapes: A Four-step Process*. Cincinnati, Ohio, OH: North Light Books, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Nita Engle, *How to Make a Watercolor Paint Itself: Experimental Techniques for Achieving Realistic Effects*. New York, NY: Watson-Guption, 1999.

me. The distorted rusty metal reflects the sunlight in an unusual way. The meticulous detail and patterns in the bare rafters undulating in the sunlight create the illusion of movement. When the boards are missing and the foundation is faltering, this causes insurgent drooping of the walls or causes the roof to sag. The absence of perfection gives me the drive to want to recreate it.

I create paintings of old mills because waterwheels fascinate me. One thing that fascinates me about waterwheels is the way the falling water sparkles as it trickles and dances in the sunlight as if it is somehow alive. I am also attracted by the motion and the clattering of the water wheel, the roaring sound of the rushing water combined with the look of the old worn wood texture in its dry/wet state, and the way the movement of the wheel seems to play with light verses shadow. The sloping of the wooden shingled roof creating the undulating shapes in light/shadow is also inspiring.

## Chapter 2

My work is both thematic and technique-focused, since I use many watercolor techniques. These techniques consist of the salt technique, wet on wet, wet on dry, and masking. I use the salt technique to create the look of rust and texture in foliage. I create the salt technique by wetting the paper only in the areas that I want to add the paint and salt to. I then add paint to the wet area, and when the wet paint has a dull shine but is still wet, I add the salt. As the paint dries, the salt draws the pigment to it leaving behind a pattern. The wet on wet technique I used in creating atmosphere, skies, water, and landscape. Wetting the paper with a big paintbrush and then adding watered-down pigment by dripping or brushing on creates the wet on wet technique. The wet on dry technique I used to create uneven surfaces and texture. The wet on dry technique is created by adding wet pigment to a paintbrush and then painting on dry paper. I use the Masking technique to preserve the white areas, as in sunlit areas and objects that are white. I add the masking fluid to areas that I want to remain white before I begin my painting. I let the masking fully dry before I begin painting. When I'm finished with the painting and it is at a dry state I then rub off the masking with a pencil eraser or my fingers.

While I'm creating a painting I think about how the surface of the object is shaped and the feeling of the texture of the surface. It's very important to know the textures and shapes of your subject in order to achieve an optical illusion of three-dimensionality. I create my own references, to research and capture ideas for paintings. I carry a digital camera around with me all the time in case I come across something interesting. Sometimes I will just go for a drive to look for subject matter for my future paintings.

I begin by photographing the objects and the landscape surrounding it at more than one angle to achieve the composition that I want to incorporate into my painting. I look at the shapes,

contrast, values and texture of the subjects that I photograph. These photos are of old things like buildings, farm equipment, rusty vehicles, and tools. Sometimes I will use more than one photo to achieve the composition that I desire; for example, if I'm painting a picture of an old rusty truck and if I don't like my landscape surrounding it, then I will choose a different landscape from a photo of a different location to get the composition that I want. Sometimes I will take an object like a tractor from a separate photograph and add it into a painting of a barn to make the composition more interesting and to avoid the look of isolation.

A potential problem when mixing photographs or references to create my compositions is that the lighting is different in each photo because of the time differences of when the photos were taken and whether the day was sunny or cloudy. That's when my imagination has to come into play to determine where the light source should be, then recreating it in relation to the lighting throughout the composition. There are times when my painting turns out more interesting than the reference by incorporating necessary changes to improve the overall appearance (like making the contrast stronger or leaving out an insignificant part). I Photoshop my photos and tweak them to improve my references' cropping, contrast, value, etc.

Before I begin painting, I sketch out and plan the painting first. I then apply masking fluid to preserve the whites. I then paint the darkest areas first and then the lighter areas. I apply a lot of layers to create depth and dimension. I add as much texture as possible. I try to achieve the most interesting compositions to attract the viewer's eye and to keep myself inspired to complete the painting. I zoom my reference on the computer screen to the size of the sketch in order to achieve the tedious details and texture.

The techniques I use in the creation of wood texture are dry brush (fig. 2) and wet on wet (fig. 1.1), (fig. 1.3), paired with the scraping pattern of a paintbrush handle or some other object

with a point onto the surface while the paint is wet (fig.5). I sometimes use watercolor pencils to create fine detail like small cracks and nail holes.

When creating water falling or trickling down, I use masking fluid (fig.3). Using my mask pen I mask the areas of the water that I want to remain white. To create still water, I use wet on wet by allowing different colors of wet paint to drip, run down at an angle, and mingle with the dampness of the paper. I apply numerous thin layers of pigment, which miraculously creates the look of depth. After the paint dries, I will go back in and remove some of the color to create lighter areas, which creates variations of depth within the body of water therefore creating a look of movement.

Rusty vehicles and farm equipment inspire me because of the shapes that the rust creates on the surface of something that had once shined with a new paint job, but now is weathered and disintegrated by the elements over time. The texture of the rust is not composed of only one color but many colors – purples, blues, reds, yellows and browns. The pattern that the rust creates captures my attention, driving me to want to recreate the texture in my painting. I create this texture by using the salt technique while the paint is still wet (fig.4). I also use the wet on dry technique to create corrosion and rough surfaces.

When creating a still-life painting of old tools my inspiration derives from the shape and the rustic aspects the tools possess. I create the composition that I want by arranging the tools so they will overlap or prop against one another. The tools are always different shapes and sizes. Sometimes I will add an old can or some other object other than just the tools to my composition to make it more interesting.

The light source is very important for achieving the three-dimensional look that I want. Sunlight creates the best contrast. The shadows of the overlapped tools can be very interesting in

their shape and values. The color of the background is very important to make the tools push forward. To model the tools, I create textured shaded areas in variations of values and tones. The rusty texture is created with the wet on wet, dry brush, stippling, and the salt technique.

I use mostly 140-lb. rough-textured watercolor paper, but my favorite paper is the 300-lb. because of the thickness. It is challenging because the thicker the paper, the more layers of paint are needed for contrast and value. When using the 300-lb. paper, I find that the end result is more pleasing to me.

## **Conclusion**

I have 10 paintings displayed in my MFA show. I will arrange them by subject matter and size. For example: paintings of structures in one area and rustic tools in another section. Also my frames will be matching each other. People like my work because of the texture, detail and context. I have won two awards at the Radford University Juried art shows, Graduate Award of Excellence spring 2013, and Award of Merit spring 2015. My paintings were published in two issues of the *Exit 109* Radford Arts magazine years of 2012 and 2014. During the summer of 2014 I created a commissioned painting of a couples' summer retreat.

I feel that I have accomplished a strong body of work during the completion of my MFA and that my work will keep improving in the future. Upon receiving my MFA degree with a concentration in watercolor I'm going to live my dream of teaching art. I plan on having a career as a successful artist by having shows and entering contests to get my art out there. My work differs than other watercolorists in the detail and texture. My work is appealing in two different audiences those who live in my area who like old structures and old tools, those who may be from the city will be drawn to the texture and my color palette. In the future will continue to work with rustic and weathered subject matter, but will emphasize more in creating the essence of the subject and not just the subject itself. I'm also considering selling my work in retail locations in my area. Someday I want to broaden my inspiration and knowledge of watercolor by traveling and researching throughout the world.

## Works Cited

"Watercolor International II.": DAVID POXON R.I. , N.W.S. Accessed March 21, 2015.  
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## Figures



Figure 1, *Grandpa's Toolbox*  
Example: Wet on wet technique, leaves and background  
Scraping while paint is wet technique; background



Figure: 2, *Corrosion*  
Example: dry on dry technique; wood



Figure 3, *Old Mill*

Example: wet on wet; water in pond

Masking; white areas of foliage and water dripping off wheel



Figure: 4, *Rustic*  
Example: salt technique; texture of the old tea pot