

A Few Thoughts about Painting Sunsets in Watercolour

Sunsets, especially ones where the view is across water, are one of the favourite subjects for watercolour artists. On the face of it this traditional subject should be, well, straightforward.

It is not! In fact many sneaky hazards lie in wait for the unsuspecting artist.

Here are a few thoughts to help navigate the potential pitfalls as you approach rendering your sunset.

- A) You will be using considerable amounts of water for your picture. A successful sunset is the product of mixing colours on the paper and enjoying the “happy accidents” arising from the free-flowing pigments. It therefore follows that your choice of paper is key to a successful picture. Therefore use either stretched paper or a paper that is at least 350gm in order to avoid horrible cockling of your paper. Use either **Not** (cold-pressed) or **rough paper**.
- B) Work with a limited palette of colours. There is no need to raid your whole paint box for a happy outcome and by using a limited choice your work will achieve an enhanced harmony.
- C) Do not use black. Blacks have their place in watercolour but this topic isn't it. Blacks dull a work. Blacks give no reflection. Blacks are not transparent and provide “body colour” a deadening out of keeping with our subject. Use warm primary colours.
- D) Mixing your dark colours from the colours in your choice of palette is the order of the day. If you are not sure of the mixes have an experiment on another piece of paper before you start the main picture.
- E) Avoid any colours with a green hue within them, for example lemon yellow. An acidic tinge to the work will make it hard to achieve a warmth to the work. Cadmium hues are ideal. And as you work your painting avoid overlapping colours that make green in your sky. (Not too bad if it's in the sea) If you see that you have accidentally made a greenish hue in your mixing of the colours on the paper, adding some pink or carmine to neutralise it.
- F) Apply your warm colours in a wash first. And work in layers. As alluded to above, the beauty of watercolour is the layering of transparent washes. With each new layer/wash a little of the previous layer remains and shows through. Enjoying this is one of the thrills that watercolour can bring!
- G) Be bold with your dark colours . After all there is no light without dark!
- H) If you are adding people or boats to generate a little more interest in your work. Sketch them out first on another piece of paper. Plan where they will go. This will give you confidence when the time comes to add them to your picture.
- I) Have a foreground in your work. This will create depth to the picture and provide the opportunity to frame the view. Make sure your foreground is dark enough.
- J)

Graham Thew Art