

A Painting in the Life of Rene Thibault



Inspiration

Viewing the landscape from an aerial viewpoint has increasingly influenced my work. I've always been inspired by the landscape genre, in particular by the grandness of our Canadian Rockies. These dynamic natural forms always suggest to me a powerful serenity.

In the past, hiking or canoeing in the mountains gave me the material on which I based my work. More recently, I've chartered small aircraft to fly over areas of interest. Having the pilot to myself makes the aircraft an extension of my camera. I find that taking multiple photos of promising compositional elements does provide me with a three-dimensional understanding. Reference photos acquired in such sessions have given me much inspirational material, such as that used as a basis for this demonstration.

My primary intent is not so much to produce an impression of a scene, as it is to use this scene as a point of inspiration from which to create. My paintings are essentially 'designed compositions'. I utilize a simplicity of major elements, realizing them through a 'complexity' of fine and subtle patterns. I like to maintain a link to the representational tradition, combining this with design discipline.

Medium

The materials I used are a rough 300 pound watercolour paper, various watercolours, a 3H pencil, brushes (#'s 6, 10 and 14 rounds) and a scrap piece of the same paper for testing the brushes and colours.

To ensure myself a flat surface, I first stretched my watercolour paper, stapling it to gatorboard. Since I essentially work on a dry surface, I let the paper dry totally for at least a day. When I do require a wet in wet effect, I simply brush on water in that area and apply paint to it.

Process

To zero in on my composition, format proportions and to analyze the tonal aspects of the scene, I did a few comparative thumbnail studies. I felt this was sufficient since I liked the feel of my reference photos.

Image 1

Due to the transparent nature of watercolours, considerations to retaining any white or light areas of the painting are critical. I find the meticulous process of lightly drawing in the major shapes allows me to think out the placement and form of design elements, and to initially contemplate how I may approach certain areas.

My first washes of Quinacridone Gold, influenced slightly with Winsor Red and Winsor Blue, started to define the various tonal areas. This clearly identified those shapes that I wished to keep as white or as variations of snow. I also started to hint at some definitions within the rock surfaces.

Image 2

At this stage, combinations of the Winsor Blue and Winsor Green were broadly glazed on to indicate shadow areas encompassing both rock and snow. Specifically, these shadows introduced a cool contrast to the sunlit earth tones of the rock surfaces, while emphasizing a relationship between both of these major elements.

Image 3

At this point, by applying similar colours to those previously used, I created some refined design shapes suggesting a sense of fine detail to the rock surfaces. In addition, I gradually introduced an element of Permanent Rose to infuse added interest to the surfaces. Background mountains also evolved a bit further.

Image 4

In the shadow aspects of the rock areas, a buildup of patterns was achieved through separate applications of Payne's Grey and Indigo. This crystallized the darker value of the painting, providing the contrasts vital to the drama of this scene. Fine touches of Ultramarine Blue were applied to enhance definition in the rocks. The tonal value of some snow areas was also augmented with a light influence of Indigo. Distant mountains progressed to a finer feel, but softer contrasts ensured they would not compete with the main subject.

I hope what was accomplished was a painting that the viewer can gaze upon in appreciation of the drama and tranquility that inspired it, enjoying the manner by which it was interpreted.