

The story of watercolour has come a long way since those early days when it was used as a medium to put coloured washes over drawings and engravings. The passage of time has proved it well able to hold-its-own with the more traditional mediums and to be capable of producing serious works of art. One of the early appeals of watercolour was its ability to capture fleeting moments in time very quickly and this found favour with landscape artists in England, where it was not unusual to have four seasons in one day. Making quick studies, filling sketch books or travelling abroad to sites of antiquity to fill portfolios with material to be worked up back home in the studio all added to its appeal. The equipment was light and quick drying and if an artist could make three trips to Europe in his or her lifetime to sites of historical interest they could produce enough reference material to live off for the rest of their lives.

There was a double edge to this convenience for in some academic circles it simply convinced people that watercolours were 'slight', a little bit slapdash, not to be taken seriously. It would take people like Turner, John Sell Cotman, Robert Cozens and Peter De Wint, to name but a few, to alter this perception. Today there are many wonderful watercolourists who have moved the genre into another league.

The traditional approach to painting a watercolour was to lay down a series of flat translucent colour washes layered one over the other, gradually building up from light to dark while leaving the detail to the end. My way of working is very different. Some people like to make preparatory sketches or tonal studies, others like to use masking fluid to blank out the white spaces before they begin and while there is nothing wrong with any of these, it is not for me. Once I have found a subject I like I just want to get on with it and enjoy the moment - letting it take me where it wants to lead me.



*Left:
'Hook Head', painted on a cold late October day with a brisk swell on the sea. It is one of those places that never fail to excite. The stark black and white of the light house and splash of red at the top set against big open skies and wild seas. Note: the rise and fall of the water crashing against the rocks is created by the shape of the brush strokes and white spaces between.*

*Above:
Roquebrune-sur-Argens, Provence, France. The aptly named 'Brown Rock' painted early evening as the sun was setting. Provence really is a beautiful place and I can understand why the Impressionists flocked there: the light, the colours the coastline. There is a subject at every turn and it even smells wonderful!*