I’m taking advantage of a wonderful opportunity to paint atmospherically, using a reference photo of a 15th century church. I want to produce a simplified rendition that accentuates the beautiful natural shadows, using a traditional watercolour layering approach and a limited palette of just 4 colours.

Reference photo - St Mary’s Church Manchester
Materials

Here’s a list of materials I’ve used for this painting, please note that all the paints are Winsor and Newton student quality. I prefer using round brushes and I’ve decided to use a slightly thicker Bockingford paper (465 gms).

- 15 x22 inch Bockingford 425gms watercolour paper fixed onto a drawing board
- Cadmium red
- Cadmium yellow
- Cobalt Blue
- Burnt Umber
- A large Number 12 round and a number 12 rigger brush
- A 5B pencil and Putty eraser and masking tape
The Initial Sketch

I’ve decided on a simplified composition that will bring out the natural light from my reference photo, and I begin sketching starting with the porch as my centre of interest.

I begin with the tiny well of light just under the doorway and place it just below the middle of my paper; I then carefully sketch the posts and remainder of the porch.

I try to apply a sensitive pressure to the pencil and use a spare piece of A4 paper to rest my drawing hand on, moving this around the paper as I draw to protect my work. I gently touch on the paper with the point of the pencil, begin my line and then slightly lift off the paper, so that the line isn’t too bold.
Step 1: The First Washes

I take my drawing board and support it at an angle of around 20 to 30 degrees to encourage some of the watery effects that you can only achieve in watercolour, such as granulation.

Colour mixes for this stage:

- cobalt blue
- dilute cad yellow
- dilute cad red
- A 3rd wash from the cad red and yellow to make a hue similar to burnt sienna

Wetting the sky area, I apply a relatively flat wash of cobalt blue. As the sky wash is beginning to dry I begin to wet the area below the line of the detailed fascia on the building using my number 12 round brush as well as the path areas.

I being to “drop in” a variegated wash of cad yellow, cad red and the burnt sienna mixture randomly to both the wall and path areas; I even drop some cobalt in small amounts here and there. I also “reserve” some white areas for later in the painting process by brushing around them and then leave the painting to dry.
Step 2: Painting the Wooden Beams and Fascia

Colour mixes for this stage:
- A mixture of dilute burnt umber,

Making sure I have plenty of the burnt umber on my number 12 round brush, I apply it to the wooden areas of the porch, the fascia and the wooden beams; I also paint flower tubs to give them a terracotta feel.
Step 3: Painting the Windows and Porch

Colour mixes for this stage:
- A mix of cad red and cobalt blue for my shadows and windowpanes
- A creamy mixture of burnt umber with a touch of cad red for the wooden areas of the porch
- A warm mixture of cad red and cad yellow to give me a hue similar to burnt sienna

I take my number 12 round brush and apply the shadow mixture to the upper and lower window and the shaded areas of the inner porch door and roof space. I clean out the shadow colour and charge the brush with the cad yellow and cad red mix. I apply it to the brickwork on the porch to create warm tones that will add a feeling of warmth.

I then paint the arched window using the same mix. I’m being careful to leave small areas of white on the rounded edges of the moulded window as this is where the sunlight is leaving highlights. I paint the shape of the arch and the inner sections of the window as well as the outer brick and windowsill using the same warm mix, and begin to form one or two bricks here and there on the walls.
Step 4: Painting the Fascia and Wooden Beams

Colour mixes for this stage:
- A dilute mixture of burnt umber
- A mixture of cad red and cobalt to make a shadow wash

Taking the number 12 round I begin to paint the fascia and moulding located above the arched window and porch with the burnt umber wash. I use the rigger just to pick out some of the circular detail to indicate it’s there. I then loosely paint the moulding that begins above the porch with the same mix.

I revisit the areas of line that are in shadow with the mixture of cad red and cobalt blue and soften this off with a wet brush as I want it to blend. I use the same approach with the flower containers and the posts, just adding a shadow and then softening the edge. The wooden beams are just a flat wash of the burnt umber mixture.
Step 5: Putting in the Greens

Colour mixes for this stage:

- A dilute mix of pure cad yellow
- A mixture of cad yellow and cobalt blue which creates a light green
- A darker green which can be achieved by adding slightly more cobalt blue

I make random patterns using the pure cad yellow and indicate the leaves of the shrub with the tip of my number 12 brush. I work wet into wet by adding the light green mixture, letting the two colours mingle. Once dry I add the darker green to the areas that are in shadow and the leaves that meet the floor.

I paint the foliage in the plant container using the same method but I make sure that the leaves break or “spill” over the lip of the container. Using the same washes, I paint the outline of the conifer in cad yellow then add lighter and darker greens in a slightly broader fashion.

This is the same for the horizon: I drop in cad yellow first, then the two greens using the broad “flat” of the brush to show trees in the distance - I just indicate this with no detail.
Step 6: Painting the Diagonal Shadows

Colour mixes for this stage:

- A mixture of dilute cad red and cobalt blue to create a lighter shadow
- A creamier darker mixture of the same colours to add depth to the shadow area.

The basic technique I’ve used here is to gently apply the tip and then the broad part of my number 12 round brush, painting in almost a sweeping diagonal motion across the wall. I use the more diluted mixture first, and then drop in areas of the creamier mix to show areas that are in deeper shadow.

I add the diagonal shadows across the arched window, painting gently to ensure that the shape of the window underneath isn’t disturbed. I also paint the shadows created by the window, and shadows cast by the building onto the rear brickwork.
Step 7: Painting the Horizontal Shadows

Next I want to paint the horizontal shadows using the creamier, darker shadow mixture: in a sense it’s a continuation of the diagonal shadows. Taking an ample amount of the paint into my number 12 round brush and starting from the upper right section of the ground area, I use the same technique of broad and slender brush strokes, working gradually across the paper from right to left.

This time I using my brush at around a 45 degree angle and I make the pattern more irregular as it travels across the ground surface by not softening off. I leave areas of the under painting visible to indicate light falling through gaps in the unseen leaves.
Step 8: Painting the Leaves and Branches

Colour mixes for this stage:
- A dilute mix of pure cad yellow
- A mixture of cad yellow and cobalt blue which creates a light green
- A darker green by adding slightly more cobalt blue
- A shadow mix of cad red and cobalt blue
- A creamy mix of burnt umber and cobalt blue to paint the twigs

I start by wetting the area of sky with fresh clean water and begin working from light to dark dropping in an area of cad yellow, which will just give an impression of sunlight reflecting on the leaves. I follow this with the light green mix and then the darker green. Last but not least I drop in the shadow mixture and allow the pigments to blend; I then take the rigger and begin to paint in the branches using the mixture of burnt umber and cobalt blue.

Protecting my painting with some scrap A4, I also take the number 12 round and use a brush dipped in the same pigment and tap it against a finger to release the pigment onto the paper. The spatter will be appear as rather bold dark spots and is an effective way of giving an impression of one or two leaves in the shade.
The Finished Painting

I feel really pleased with the atmospheric “feel” of the finished work and the transparent look the traditional layering has produced.

About Karl Fletcher

Karl is passionate about watercolours and paints regularly to commission and for private exhibitions. His vibrant style and bold use of colour allows him to capture the essence and beauty of an image, bringing his subjects to life on the page.

See Karl’s full profile at: www.ArtTutor.com/artists/Karl-Fletcher

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