

10 Techniques for Trees

Nearly every landscape contains at least some trees—even the desert has Joshua trees. And there are almost as many ways to paint trees as there are artists to paint them. Graceful, verdant and varied, trees are endlessly challenging to paint. Here are some approaches you might try to give variety to your work.



1. Spatter color to suggest a tree in full flower. A stencil brush or other bristle brush works well; just be sure to protect the areas where you don't want the droplets to go. Use delicate greens and this same technique will appear to be a tree just budding with new leaves.



2. A natural sponge makes a nice, lacy tree. Pay attention to where the lights and shadows are for the best effect. Leave some areas open rather than making a solid mass.



3. A round bristle brush works well for a variety of trees. By rubbing it sideways or jabbing the paper with it, you'll get an open, ragged effect. Connect the masses with branches that get smaller as they get farther from the trunk.



4. The same bristle brush will let you mimic an evergreen tree, just by changing the direction and length of your strokes.



5. Lay in irregular splotches with a large flat brush to suggest foliage. When that's dry, add a few dots to suggest individual leaves or leaf masses.



6. Quick linear strokes with a round brush make great palm fronds, a la Winslow Homer. When that's dry, add some smaller, darker strokes for texture.



7. Drybrush is effective for painting foliage, especially if your paper is cold-pressed or rough.



8. Let your brush tip dance, barely touching the paper, to make open, lacy foliage. You can see the variety of strokes where they escape the tree on the right.



9. Draw a tree with ink then lay washes loosely on top. (You can use pencil or colored pencil for this technique, as well.)



10. Use a rough natural sponge to suggest pine trees. If it's too big, tear or cut off a piece of the sponge so that it's easier to handle. Wet the sponge, wring it out, then dip it in a strong mix of color and apply it to the paper. In this detail, phthalo blue and burnt sienna made an intense, dark pine color.