



WATERCOLOR

“The more accurately your work represents life, the better it will be”
— Albrecht Durer

I believe there are three basic aspects that contribute to being an artist

Seeing, Drawing and Mastery of the Craft

1 SEEING You must be able to see things in a fresh way.

You must see things in a way that reveals new ways of seeing to others. Walter Anderson said, “Everything I see is new and strange.” From that he created art that attracts our attention, warrants our attention and astounds us.

The cubist created a new way to view objects on a table in front of an open window. We can never look at those objects the same way again. How you see things determines the story you will tell your audience in your painting.

2 DRAWING The fundamentals of art are all about drawing.

Drawing is the way artists transfer our unique way of seeing into any media. The more you draw the easier it gets and the better you draw. The better you draw, the better you can paint.

B & B, 27 x 20" (70 x 50cm)

Visual Abundance, 20 x 26" (50 x 65cm)



3 MASTERY OF THE CRAFT

You must be able to be facile with the tools of your medium, if you are to successfully transfer how you see to paint and paper. Without mastery of the craft of painting, your audience will not be able to see past your poor painting abilities, to be able to read the message you are trying to communicate about what you saw, drew and painted.

This is especially true of a process driven medium, such as watercolor. It is virtually impossible to be a fine watercolorist if you haven't mastered the basic techniques that have been developed for the medium.

I am a realist watercolorist, and I interpret the real world through the medium of watercolor. While I see things as a photographer, as a painter, I am able to use the medium as a tool to express how I see things. One of my goals is to help people see everyday things in a new light.

My still life paintings are influenced by the Dutch and Flemish still life painters of the 16th and 17th Century, such as Pieter Claesz, Willem Kalf and Jan Davidz de Heem. Like these wonderful artists, I try to explore the world of rich materials and beautiful objects and bring their stories to the viewer.

I especially enjoy painting beautifully crafted objects made of reflective materials; crystal, glass, silver and pewter. One of the joys of painting these objects is to see how the reflections of objects work themselves around the other objects and how the light is reflected and

refracted. The color of one object can be reflected back on the body of another object, from the reflection under a curved handle. For the casual viewer it will remain a mystery as to why that shape and color ended up where it is.

I see myself as a new artist, just setting out to explore the many avenues of watercoloring. I have painted a number of floral and still life paintings and have started to venture into landscapes and seascapes. There is much yet to be explored.

I am always looking for interesting objects from which to set up a new still life. Often these are elegant pieces, often owned by friends and family. Sometimes the objects are more mundane; simple glasses and canning jars. Art can be found in any place. While it is fun to pay homage to the beautifully crafted silver and crystal objects, there is art to be found in the ordinary plate, cup and glass.

As a studio painter who puts a lot of hours into my efforts to render objects as realistically as the medium will allow (and I am always trying to push that envelope), I work from photographs. I have been a photographer for many years and even had a student assistantship at Princeton to teach photography and darkroom techniques to the architecture students. I see things with a photographer's eye and perhaps at a greater degree of detail than is typical. That photographer's eye is now greatly affected by the consideration of "will that photograph make a good watercolor." I have learned that not every great photograph

Yellow Pears in Foil, 13 x 19" (32 x 48cm)



Magnolia with Silver & Crystal, 20 x 20" (50 x 50cm)

will make a great watercolor.

The world is rich in source material for painters who keep their eyes open. I have done a few cloudscape. They are the result of traveling both by car and airplane and observing the spectacular cloud formations, especially the grand cumulous clouds associated with thunderstorms. I have a huge backlog of images; clouds, flowers,

landscapes, still lifes, etc., that I want to paint and I am constantly adding to that backlog.

From time to time I teach workshops. It is a great joy to share the many things I have learned from others and from my studies. I find that most painters come to my classes with great enthusiasm and a willingness to learn and enjoy the experience. One participant asked where I got my angst. When I asked her

to explain her question, she stated that she had heard that all painters needed to be angry to fuel their desire to paint. My reply was that if painting wasn't fun, I wouldn't do it. Painting brings me great joy and peace of mind. I paint for myself and if others find value in it, that adds significantly to the joy that painting brings.

my art in the making

What the Artist Used

Support

300 # Fabriano Artistic Extra White Soft Press

Brushes

No. 0 - 6 Winsor Newton Series 7

¼", ½" synthetic flats for blending and lifting.

Other Materials

Drafting Tape 1" and 3"

Lightweight Tracing Paper

Masking Fluid

Paper towels

Large Scale Photos, image in 35mm slide

Artists' Quality Watercolor

Cerulean Blue	Winsor Yellow
Winsor Blue (red Shade)	Quinacridone Gold
Prussian Blue	Yellow Ochre
Permanent Rose	Burnt Umber
Permanent Alizarin Crimson	Burnt Sienna
Winsor Red	Light Red
Cadmium Red	Mineral Violet
Cadmium Yellow	



STAGE 1 Setting up the objects

I started by arranging objects that appeal to me into a still life. I photographed some historic pewter pieces owned by a friend. I typically arrange my still lifes in the manner of the Dutch and Flemish still life painters; objects on a table, with the primary light coming from the left. In this case, I had the benefit of a second window to the right rear that illuminated the dark edges on the right of the objects.



STAGE 4 Masking and fruitful painting

I do a lot of masking of many types. I masked the outline of the Clementines with drafting tape and the highlights with liquid frisket. I painted the fruit using rich pigments, wet-into-wet. Starting with Cadmium Yellow, I then added Cadmium Orange and Alizarin Crimson.



STAGE 5 Objects that define the painting

I usually paint light to dark, but in a complex still life I start with the objects that define the painting. In this case it was the Clementines.



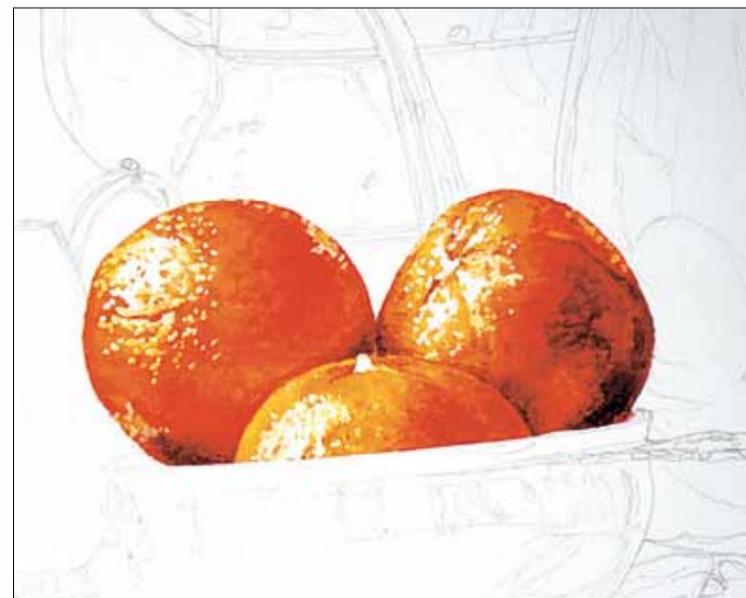
STAGE 2 Tracing and drawing

From 50+ images, I selected three for potential paintings. I had 35mm slides made from those digital images. I projected this image and traced the major shapes to be sure they were accurate and the perspective was true. Then I drew the details, including marking all the highlights and shadow detail.



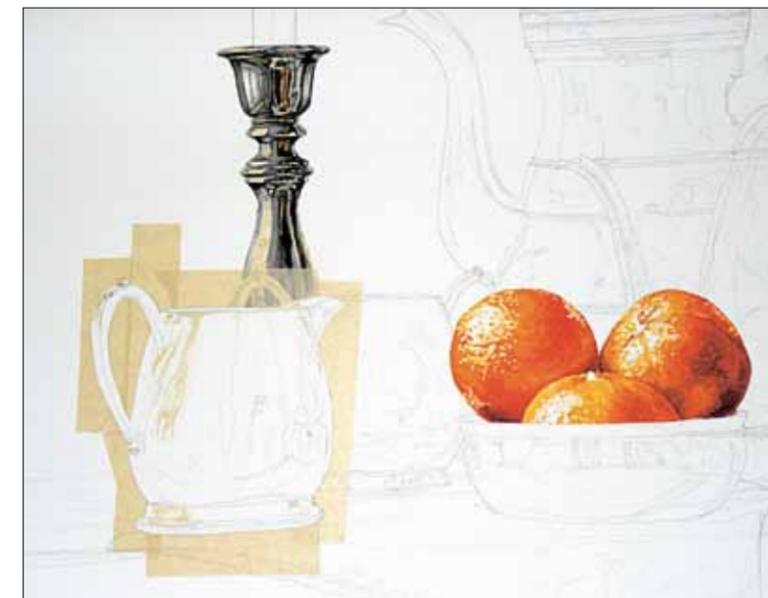
STAGE 3 Cut outs

I paint from large photographs, 13" x 19", which I make on my Epson 1400 printer. I cover the entire painting surface with lightweight tracing paper to protect it from splatter. I cut out openings where I will be painting, much as a surgeon drapes a patient for an operation.



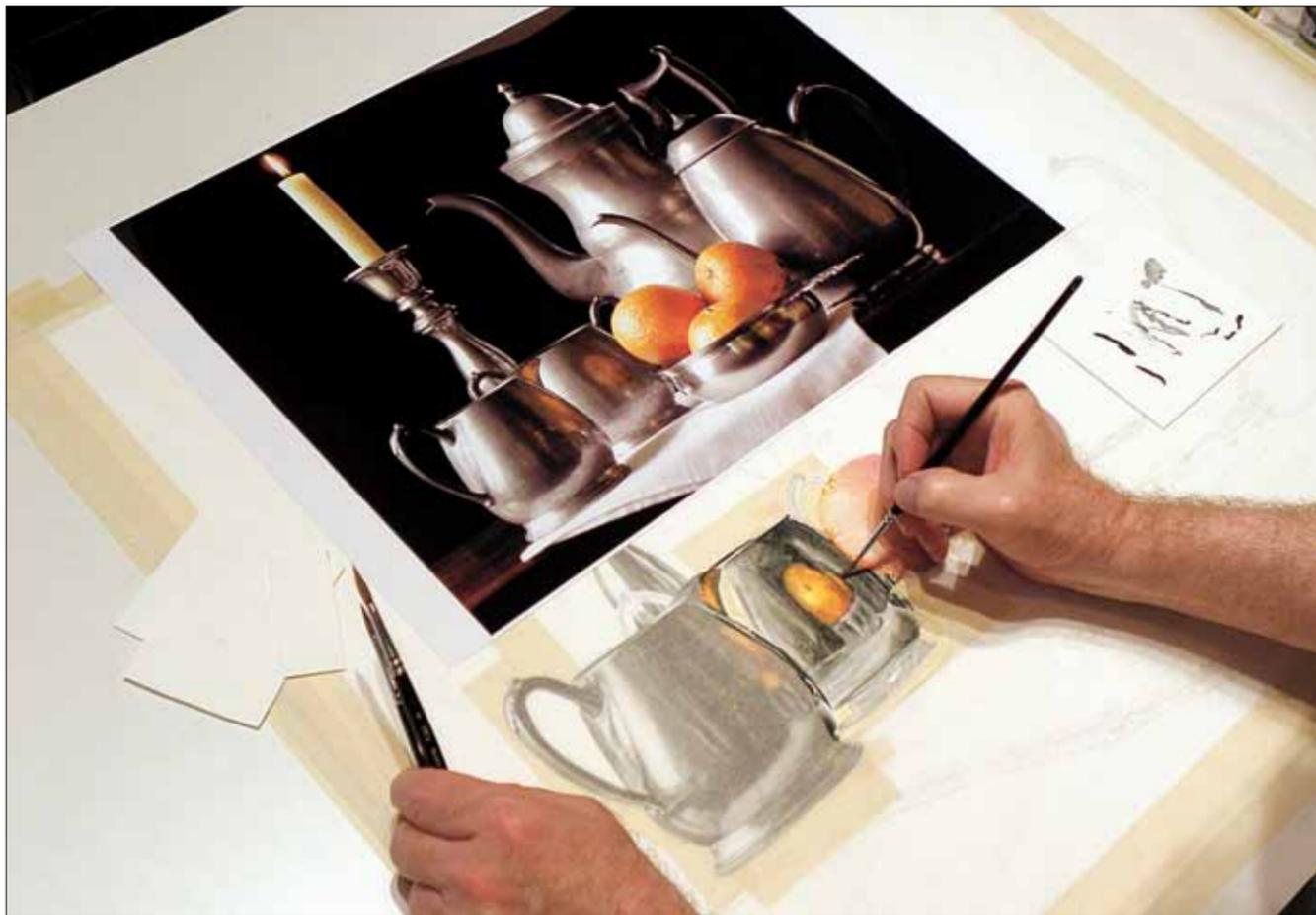
STAGE 6 Deep shadows

After they dried, I added a mixture of Alizarin Crimson and Mineral Violet for the deep shadows.



STAGE 7 Range of grays

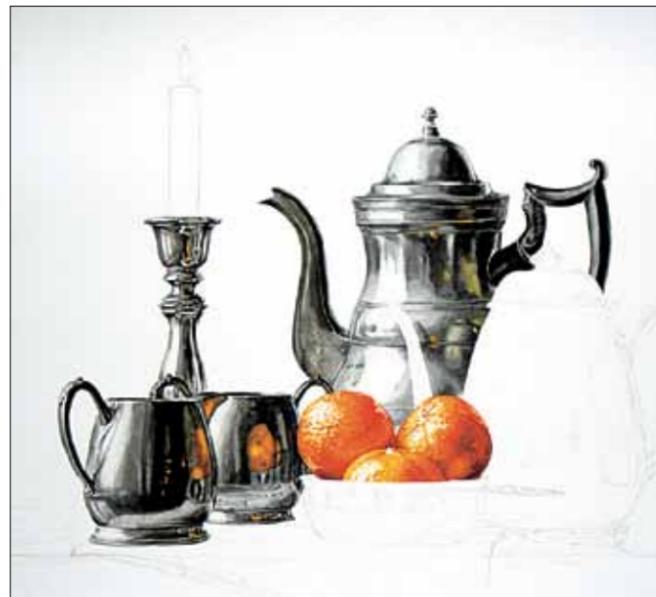
I started with the candle stick to confirm that I mixed the right range of grays. I created the grays with a mixture of Cerulean Blue and Light Red and diluted that for light grays. I added Prussian Blue and Mineral Violet for a darker range of grays. The first major pewter element was the creamer. I masked the edges with drafting tape, carefully cutting out the shape with an Xacto knife. The highlights on the pewter were masked with liquid frisket.



STAGE 8 Going 3D I used a classic “two-brush” British watercolor technique to blend the various shades of gray, creating the illusion of a curved, three-dimensional object on the two dimensional surface.



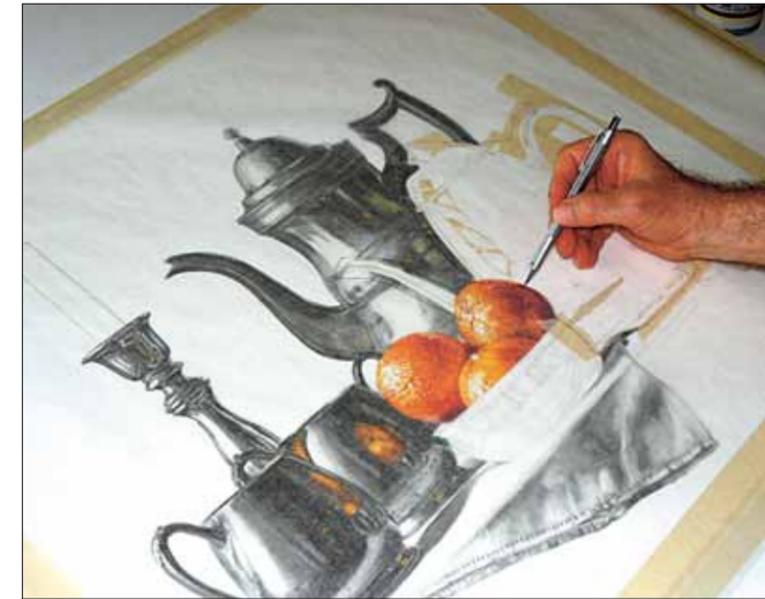
STAGE 9 Reflections
I cut the large photo into two pieces to get the right part of the detail as close to what I was painting as possible. Discovering all the many reflections in the pewter was part of the delight of this painting. The Clementines appear again and again. Notice how the small pot is reflected in the belly of the large pot.



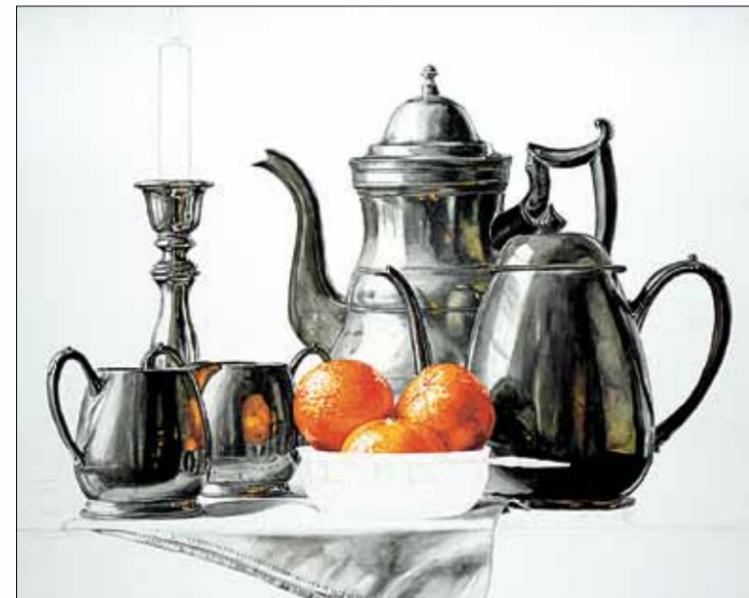
STAGE 10 Consistency
I paused between major elements of the painting to ensure that my colors, the painting technique and the level of detail, were consistent across the painting.



STAGE 11 Adding details
Typically, I would have painted the linen earlier, but the pewter objects were not as involved in the folds and the major draped area was separated from the rest of the objects. I used a series of layers of gray in increasing density. The last task was to add the details such as the stitching.



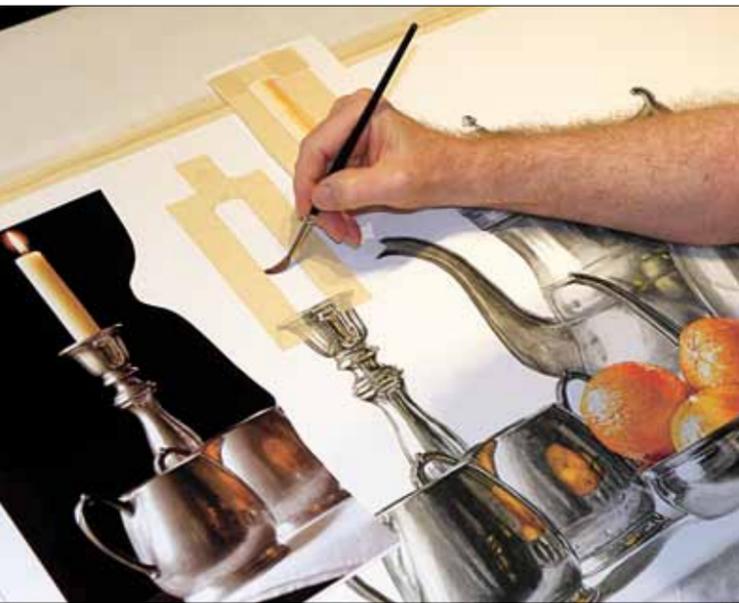
STAGE 12 Pencil work
I used a 2H lead in a mechanical pencil to draw the painting because it is dark enough to read, but does not leave too much graphite on the paper to muddy the bright and light colors. I used a 2B lead to draw the outline where I will cut out the draping. The 2B is soft enough, so that it does not mark the painting surface.



STAGE 13 Taking care with edges
Now the porridge cup was all that remained of the major objects. It had to be painted with care, since most of its edges touch objects that had already been painted, therefore creating areas that could not be masked, since the paint would have flowed underneath the tape, between the granules of paint.



STAGE 14 Pewter and silver edges
The primary difference in painting pewter and silver, is that silver has a lot of hard edges in the reflections. In pewter, all the edges are much softer and therefore require a great deal of blending.



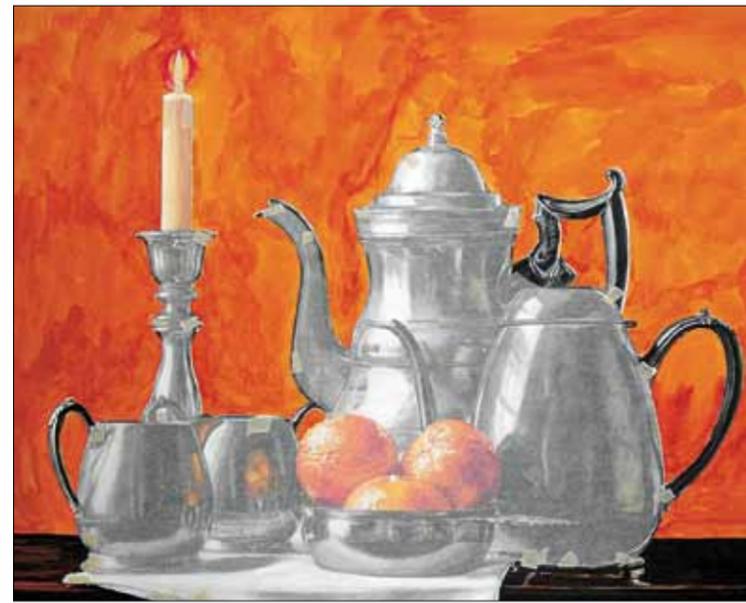
STAGE 15 Painting the candle

The candle was painted wet-into-wet, starting with a wash of clear water along the edge, toward the light. I applied several layers of a mixture of Cadmium Yellow, Burnt Sienna and Quinacridone Gold, leaving a small line of lighter color on the right edge. I masked the flame with drafting tape.



STAGE 16 Tracing paper mask

Before I began the background, I created a tracing paper mask over the major elements and taped it into place with small pieces of drafting tape.



STAGE 19 Underpainting quality

The underpainting does not have to be very even. It is sometimes a shock to step back and look at the painting at this point in the process.



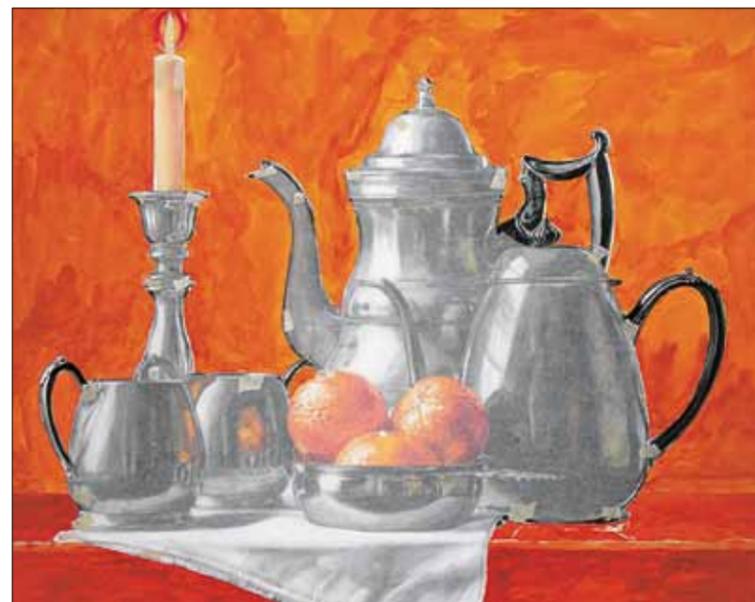
STAGE 20 Customized black

The black is a mixture of a lot of Prussian Blue with the other deepest colors from my palette; Alizarin Crimson and Mineral Violet and some of the earth tones for opacity, Burnt Sienna and Burnt Umber. Then I adjusted the mixture for this painting by adding Quinacridone Gold.



STAGE 17 Background colors

I underpainted the two areas of the background for two reasons: one, to seal the paper to allow for an easier application of the finish paint and to prevent "holidays"; two, to enhance the mood of the painting. The underpainting of the table area is Burnt Sienna with Quinacridone Gold and the background is Quinacridone Gold with Cadmium Orange.



STAGE 18 Warmth in the underpainting

The underpainting in this painting is warm, to re-enforce the warmth created by the presence of the Clementines and their many reflections. If I wanted to emphasize the coolness of the metal, I might have used an underpainting of a range of blues.



STAGE 21 Background wash

The black background needs to be applied in a continuous wash. This takes a high degree of control and patience, especially since you are painting right up to the edges of the objects in the painting.



STAGE 22 Softening and highlighting

The various small details such as the stems of the Clementines were added. The sharp edges of highlights that were left by the liquid frisket, were softened using 1/4" and 1/2" synthetic flat brushes. Small highlights that had been painted over were regained by cutting them out with an Xacto knife.



STAGE 23 Living with it

I lived with the painting for a couple of weeks, discovering details I had missed or small adjustments that could be made to enhance the viewer's understanding of the complex shapes. For example, darkening the area behind the top of the lid of the small pot helped to better define its turban shape.

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Silver and Crystal with Grapper and Magnolia, 20 x 28" (50 x 71cm)

About the Artist

Laurin McCracken AWS NWS is a graduate of Rice University with degrees in Art and Architecture and from Princeton University with a Masters in Architecture and Urban Planning. Having spent most of his professional career as the head of marketing for architectural and engineering firms, he took advantage of the opportunity to travel around the world to see great art in the museums of the world. Although he discovered late in his career that he could paint watercolor, he has always had a sketchbook handy.

Laurin recently retired and has relocated to his native Mississippi to paint and travel. He says he still has a lot to learn about the art of watercolor painting. He is an award-winning artist whose paintings have been exhibited in juried shows coast to coast, including the Philadelphia Watercolor Society, Niagara Frontier Watercolor Society, Pittsburgh Watercolor Society and the Adirondacks National Exhibition of American Watercolors, California Watercolor Society, Watercolor West, Southern Watercolor Society, the American Watercolor Society, the Allied Artist of America and the Shanghai Zhoujiajiao International Watercolor Biennial Exhibition and The 2010 Beijing International Art Biennale.

He is a signature member of more than a dozen watercolor societies, including the American Watercolor Society, National Watercolor Society, Transparent Watercolor Society of America, Southern Watercolor Society, Watercolor Society of Alabama, Texas Watercolor Society, Philadelphia Watercolor Society, Mississippi Watercolor Society, Watercolor Art Society – Houston, and the Louisiana Watercolor Society. He is also a member of the International Guild of Realism.

His work has been published in leading art magazines such as American Artist, Watercolor, Watercolor Artist, Artists Magazine, Drawing and International Artist. His work has also been included in the books Splash 9, 10, 11 and 12, The Artist Touch #4, Strokes of Genius, the Best of Drawing #1 and #3 and A Celebration of Light.

