Northwest Watercolor Society
October 22, 2024
Zoom Demonstration
Artist: Geoff Allen

Subject: Monterey Harbor Scene

Thank you to the NWWS for having me as a guest. I feel honored to share my watercolor painting practice with your members.

My inspiration came from sneaking out into the private docks just south of the Old Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey. The photo painted for the demonstration I had painted before in plein air. That brief overhead blue sky reflected on the water gave an otherwise gray scene the punch of color that I wanted to inject into this painting.

Usually my plein air process begins by making a quick three value study. Plans are meant to be broken and I intuitively soften edges (break) and connect shapes throughout to create pathways for the viewer.

In looking back there were three crucial moments in this watercolor:

Firstly, I placed a reservoir of water above the left boat and I creeped up below it with a thick mixture representing the docks. As I touched it with fingers crossed, it was released into the area below to do some watercolor magic. I wanted the water to create a burst of light and atmosphere flowing on to the dock from above.

Secondly, the above wasn't as dramatic as I had envisioned. Instead of trying to "fix it" I spotted another opportunity.

That opportunity arose as I was filling the building shape in the center of the background, my stroke left a broken edge at the top. I added water in that location and tilted my board so the it would run at an angle. This became my new light spill that created the feeling of atmosphere and glare I witnessed that day.

I worked briefly in the studio adding a few more dark values and color accents. I gave the left boat what it needed to become a focal area, namely another red-orange flag and a few figures nearby. In a few locations (rigging and tops of pilings) I added some opaque white watercolor but most of my intense white values are white paper.

Thank you again for having me and having patience with the technical difficulties.

Geoff Allen