



LEO KAHL
American Master Watercolors

"Boardwalk Empire"

Project # 002

September 2020

FREE Tutorial!

"Boardwalk Empire" 14 x 20

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Project Introduction



Hello! Welcome to my watercolor (print version) tutorial series. I will do my best to explain “why” I do what I do for each step of the watercolor process.

Don't get discouraged if your efforts do not match my efforts. Just have fun and experiment, it's the only way to really learn.

Project# 002 “Boardwalk Empire”

The photo on the left is of an infamous art gallery on the Ocean City, Maryland boardwalk and 2nd Street. It has been there for as long as I can remember. It is a fun and eclectic place with all kinds of art and other interesting imagery.

I liked the deep, one point perspective depth facilitated by the boardwalks length and the mid morning light from the east that dramatically illuminated the building facades along the boardwalk.

The boardwalk is also full of interesting people and energy.

I wanted to heighten the drama however by focusing the sunlight onto the art gallery's colorful signage and boardwalk in front of it.



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Image area: 14" x 20"

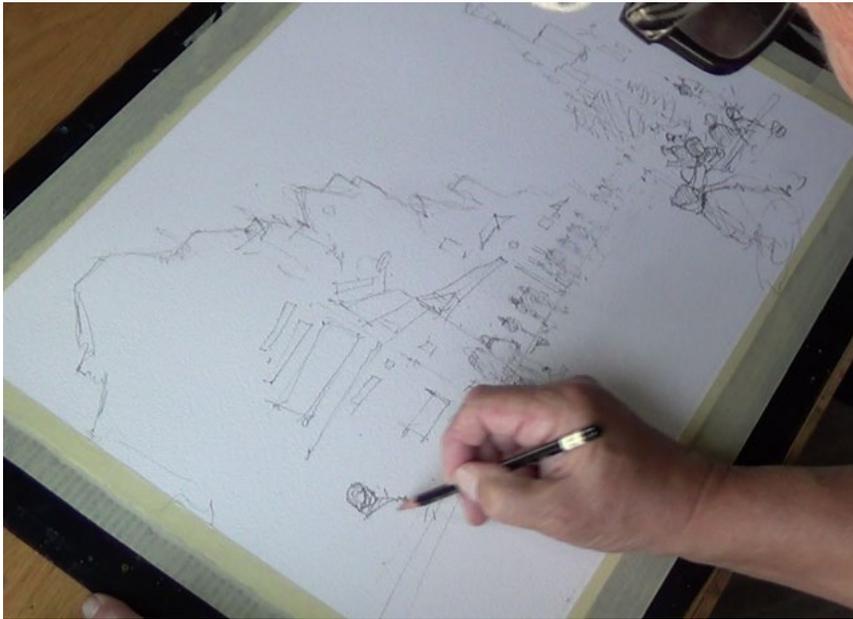
Drawing & Preparation

In this project, I used a sheet of Arches, 140 lb. Rough paper. Rough paper facilitates textural effects by dragging pigment across the tops of the paper's "peaks".

With my paper taped down on all sides with regular masking tape, I begin to sketch out the scene.

I use a soft 6B pencil to do my sketches. Most all of the pencil lines will melt away during the painting process.

As you can see, I basically try to identify the major shapes of the scene. Much of the detail in the photo is ignored.



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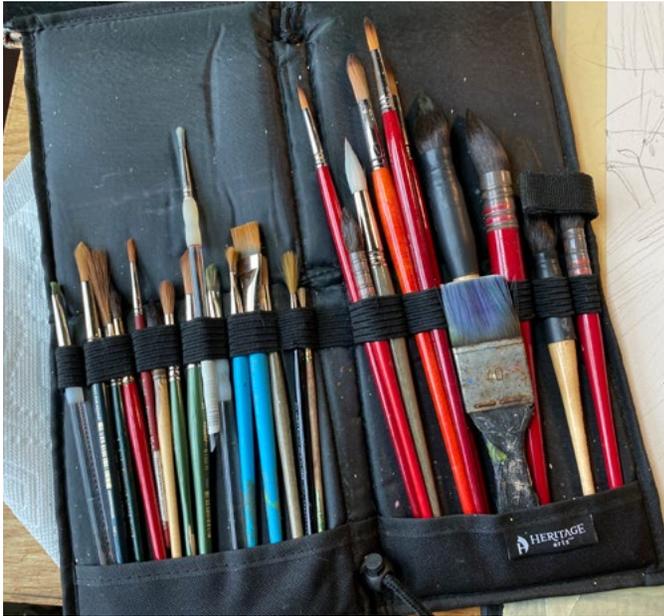
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Materials, Tools & Preparation

Brushes:

This topic is a full tutorial in itself. The photo to the left shows my brushes. Big, squirrel hair mops, medium sized pointed sables, thin, long hair riggers, a big, soft flat synthetic and lots of smaller detail and utility brushes.

Paint:

I use tube watercolor pigments. I use various brands. My palette is fairly limited. You really only need a warm and cool version of each of the primary hues, a few secondary hues that are difficult to create with primaries, some Chinese white, and neutral tint (a rich dark that darkens other hues)



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Step 1: The "Glow" Layer

I create my painting in value layers, 3 - 4 as a rule of thumb. The initial layer is important. This is the layer that will "glow" in the final painting. This is because the light striking the painting will penetrate this watery, translucent layer and bounce back to the viewer.

It is also important that we use mostly "warm" hues in this initial layer. These warm hues will energize the painting. We will be using "cooler" hues in subsequent layers.

It's important to use lots of water in this early phase. This will ensure that we are placing a translucent layer of pigment. Subsequent layers will use less and less water and become more opaque in nature.

Thinking 3 steps ahead like a billiards player, **determine which shapes need to "glow" in the finished painting.**

Liberal apply washes of light blue for the sky then a light wash of magenta and orange across the building facades.

Imagine the warm hues of the buildings reflecting across the boardwalk. Wash across the bottom of painting with some cooler blue as shown. Add some teal green over the awning near the center of painting.

Energetically work these washes with a big soft mop so that they seamlessly merge with one another. Don't baby them.

Once you get a nice smooth gradation of washes, leave it alone to dry. Do not mess with or try to fix anything. This will cause unnatural imperfections in your clean glowing wash.



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Step 2: Middle Values

The initial "glow" layer must be completely dry before beginning this next layer.

Use a medium sized soft mop for this step.

Treat the individual buildings as one big facade. Use a heavier wash (more pigment- less water) of earthy reds, warm oranges to fill in this big "positive" shape. Add some cobalt blue to the roof shapes in the building above the gallery. Allow the blue to drift down into the warm hues previously placed. Your work surface should be tilted at least 30 degrees so that gravity will help move your washes downward so as to intermingle naturally with the washes below.



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Step 2: Middle Values (Continued)

Continue adding middle values as shown, Do your best to join these washes. They should not look disjointed but rather seamlessly intermingled.



Note how I soften the edges of buildings in the far distance using a little extra water. This will help create a greater sense of depth.

This idea is often referred to as "atmospheric perspective".

Water droplets, and even dust in the air, cause things in the distance to look less saturated and blurry.



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Step 2: Middle Values (Continued)

We need to now also begin adding in the details that are still within the middle value range. (Use a watery mixture of ultramarine blue and burnt sienna)

Add some spires to building roofs, some soft dabs for windows, light posts, signage, figures walking on boardwalk. Using a long haired rigger type brush, suggest the actual boards in the boardwalk with some cooler orange hues.

Introduce a small bright green tree on right and also left. Use some splatter to suggest the leaves. See below.



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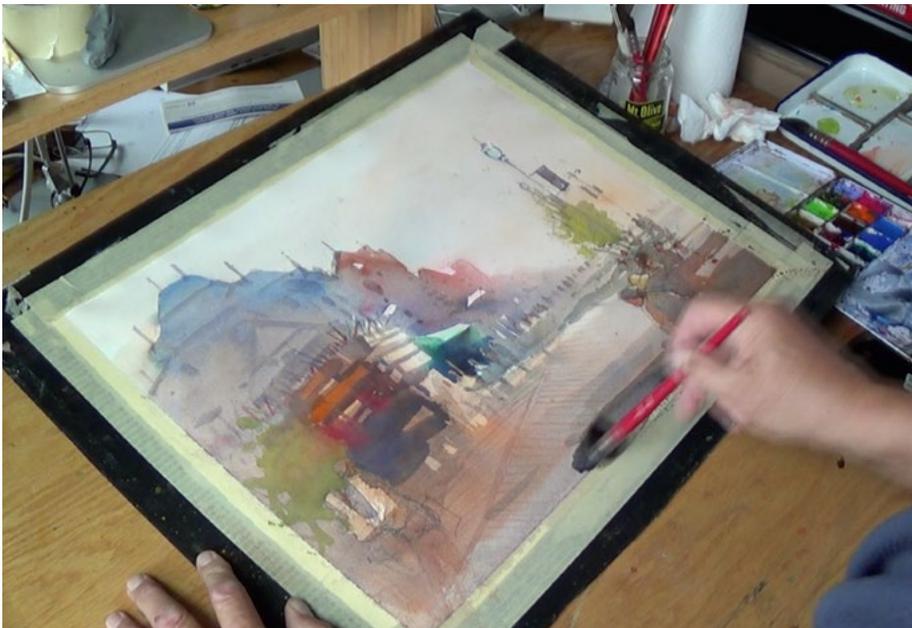
Step 3: Darks

Now its time to introduce the next and final value layer, darks.

Use dark pigment (combine ultramarine blue, alizarin crimson and viridian to create a low water, sticky textured pigment) to heighten the contrast in and around the area of interest or focal area of your scene.

These dark passages will serve as backgrounds for some pure white highlights added as the very last step later on.

I also darken the foreground with some much cooler blue gray translucent shadows. This will help reveal the light on the boardwalk.



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Step 4: Details

Now it's time for some cheesecake!

Using pure gooey pigment, I fake in the lettering on the gallery signage. I use pure cad red light, cad orange, cad yellow etc. Don't try to spell anything, just suggest some letters.

After I had faked in the bright lettering on left side of gallery building, I felt that its sharpness was attracting too much attention. I lightly spritzed over the still damp pigment with a spray bottle.

This caused the pigment to melt a little and become more soft edged and nebulous.



While working on this left side of painting, go ahead and wash in the figures in lower left corner. They should be treated very loosely, wet into wet. We don't want them to command too much attention from our viewers eye.



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Step 4: Details (Continued)

Fill in the remainder of people on the boardwalk now. Figures other than our two main characters can be painted with neutral grays as we want them to recede and not attract unnecessary attention.

I use some bright opera pink for one of the main figures to draw attention to them.

Pull some light warm gray reflections from the figures down to bottom as shown. This will help tie the foreground to the middle-ground.



Let's add some sea gulls by painting light gray triangles. These will appear as the underside of the birds. We'll add some white highlights at the end to suggest sunlight on their upper wings.



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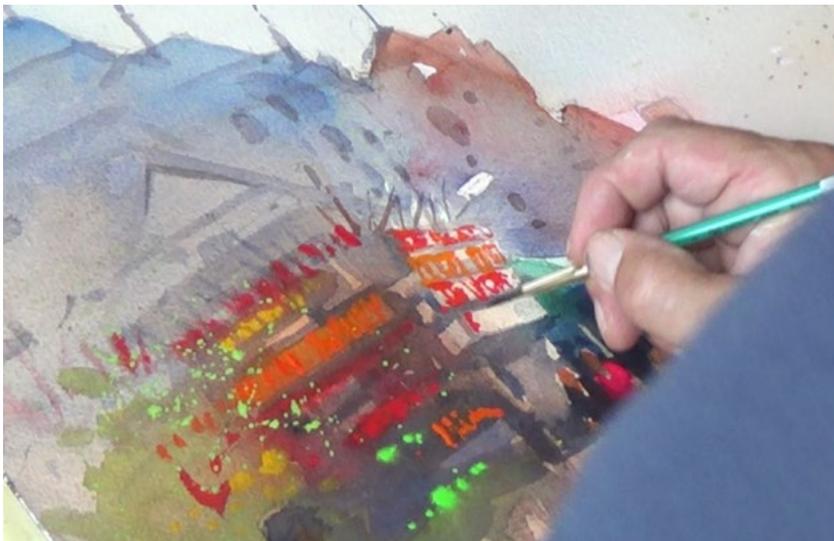
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Step 4: Details (Continued)

I felt the painting needed a little excitement, so I splattered a few more suggested leaves on left side tree with some spring green mixed with chinese white.

It is also time to add in the remaining signage on front of building. Use more of the same intense cadmium hues used on the left side signs. Do not mist this pigment as we want the sharpness to help attract the viewer's attention.



Add some small signage with opaque pigment near our two main figures. This will also help attract attention to this area of painting.

Step 4: Details (Continued)

Using a long haired rigger, pull some electric lines in swooping arcs from buildings on left towards lamp posts on right. This will help tie the two disparate sides of the painting together. Make very thin wispy lines... thick chunky lines will not look correct while also attracting unwanted attention.

I determined that the figures on the lower left were not strong enough in value to create the sense of depth I was after, so I darken them a bit.



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Step 5: Highlights

It is almost impossible to preserve the white of the paper in strategically important areas to serve as highlights, so, it is perfectly OK to use some opaque white pigment, either chinese white or titanium white to recover them.

I place small highlights on the shoulders of our main figures. Note how the composition was designed to place these figures in front of the darkest darks in the painting. This maximum contrast serves to attract the viewer's attention like a magnet.

Don't forget to add a few white wings to a few of the seagulls.



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Finished!

Remove the tape to really see how you have done. Don't be afraid to come back to your painting a few days from now to add some pigment here or there or add another highlight.



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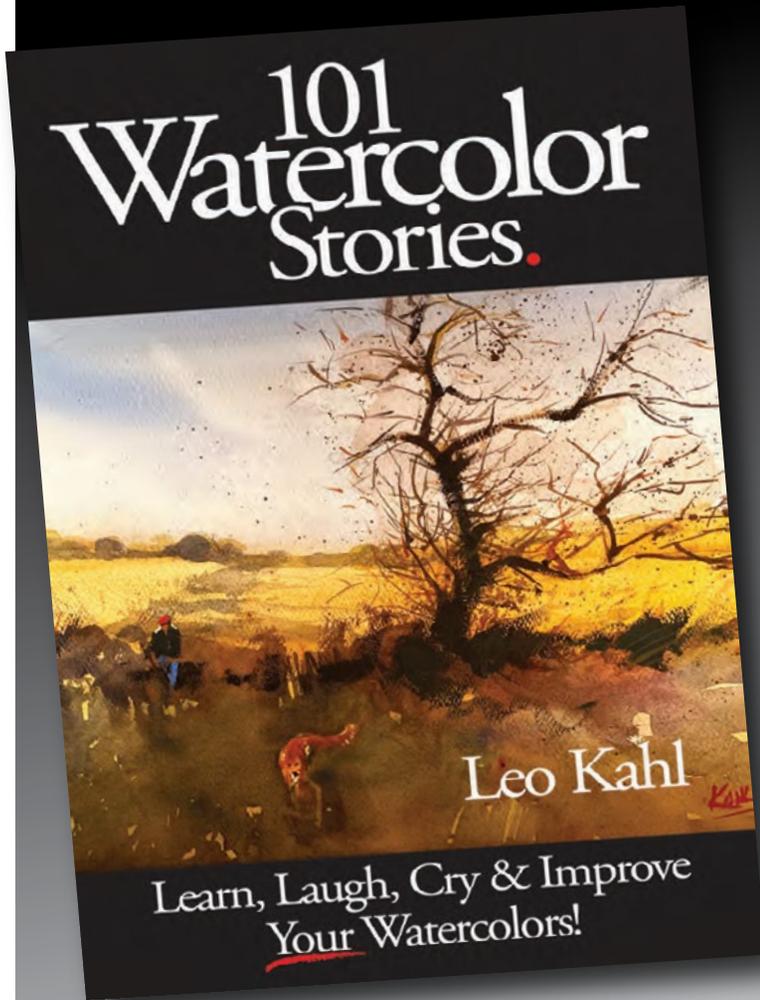


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Check out my new book!



Six years in the making, this book recounts the stories and execution of over 100 paintings. Each story details how the painting was approached and what I learned about the watercolor process.

This is a fun read for both aspiring artists and people who just enjoy art and life stories.



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