

JOHN WILSON'S LOVE OF TREES IS EVIDENT IN THESE BEAUTIFUL PAINTINGS — AND YOU CAN DO IT TOO IF YOU LEARN ALL THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR SUBJECT.

BY JOHN WILSON

Capturing the Elus



"High Country Gums"

This picture was painted at Shooters Hill on the top of the Great Dividing Range west of Katoomba. These peppermint gums are typical of the area as is the early morning ground fog during autumn.



"Morning Light Riverbend"

I included this painting to show the differences between the young river oaks (shaped like Christmas trees), the young adult river oaks (like bigger Christmas trees) and the mature river oaks which have begun to twist and turn, taking on a gnarled appearance. We must have sufficient understanding of what we are painting if we want a good result.

There is no doubt, we have the most fantastic country in the world, and for the landscape painter, almost every subject imaginable.

Some of my most enjoyable painting trips have been along our beautiful Murrumbidgee River, painting its moods and the majestic river gums that line its banks and billabongs. The Flinders Ranges offers a different landscape with

its subtle pinks, purples and vibrant earth colours. Here again, the great gums are usually found along dry creek beds and eroded water courses.

To me there is something majestic about these giants. Each has its own unique personality and character. To me they are conscious, living things, with joys, tribulations and desires not wholly disassociated from my own.

Trying to capture the character of each tree, the essence of its existence, and a sense of time and place is difficult.

So how do you paint a gum tree?

In the beginning one always imagines that by some trick of the wrist, the use of certain colours or techniques that a tree can be painted. The truthful answer is, you must understand them first. It may seem enigmatic, but this is the answer.

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ive Quality of Trees



"Meryvale Gums"

These gums were really tall so I chose a vertical format in an attempt to convey their height. Because this was a direct light study, accurate tone and temperature control was important.



"Sofala Gum"

I found this old warrior in the hills east of Sofala. The light and atmosphere were just perfect. The inquisitive cattle wandered into the picture. The best paintings always seem to come from the best subjects and being in the right place at the right time is essential.

Step 1

With this picture I painted in the sky first and allowed it to dry. I then roughly sketched in the composition. I repositioned the trees and radically simplified them, leaving in only the main branches. The aim was to capture the character of the trees and the feel of the place, not all the superfluous detail.



Step 2

I follow the principles of traditional oil painting, that is, dark to light, thin to thick, so when blocking in I usually put the darkest dark in first, followed by the next darkest and so on. I keep the paint thin by mixing with distilled gum turps and applying transparent washes just as we do with watercolour.

By doing this it allows me to establish the composition early and to check the tonal extension. Because the paint is so thin any alterations and adjustments can be made with ease. Colours used in these washes were Alizarin Crimson, French Ultramarine Blue, Cadmium Scarlet and Cadmium Yellow Deep.



Step 3

I worked on the trees and bank, refining shapes, putting in highlights and worked the reflected lights into the trunks and branches. I was trying to get the feel of the gums, the eroded river bank with its myriad exposed roots.





Step 4

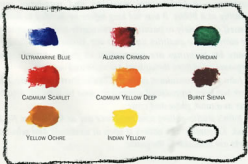
I added more detail to the trees and added reflections in the water. The Murrumbidgee was flowing slowly at this point so the reflections were only slightly out of focus. I deliberately didn't refine them too much or they would detract from the main subject area.



Detail

I believe oil paint is the most versatile medium of all. It can be manipulated to create almost any texture and the "thin to thick" principle can be seen in the build up of textured paint on and around the base of the main tree.

WHAT THE ARTIST USED



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You must know your trees, their nature, their growth, their movement. Every gum possesses a tremendous latitude of expression. It will take time and study to paint a good gum tree, or anything else, for that matter.

You almost have to learn to make a thing before you can paint it with understanding.

- Study what the different trees do, as well as how one species of gum differs

from another. Try to find the main differences between say, a river red gum, a box gum or an apple gum. Having noted these differences in character you will see many other qualities in these trees and in many other things as well.

- Study the way light falls onto a gum, its trunk, branches and foliage.
- Study the effects of reflected light on the trunk and shadow sides of branches. Add to this the effect of reflected light from the sky usually on the tops of branches.

- Study the effects of diffraction — the bending of light around the trunk, branches, foliage and through the sky holes in the foliage.

Most years I do several painting trips and at the end of summer I revisited the Wagga area, the Murrumbidgee and the big gums. I chose late summer because the landscape is usually browned off and is typically Australian. The subject for the demonstration was a stand of river gums from this area.



"Luminous Gum Flinders Ranges"

This old giant has survived on the roadside for many years where its almost white trunk and branches receive reflected lights from the surrounding landscape. The gnarled and bulbous base provided a good exercise in moulding.



"Lacmalac Gums"

For the last three years I have painted the autumn colours in the Tumut area. These two old giants kept catching my eye. The late autumn ground fog is often present till late morning.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

John Wilson was born in 1945 and lives at Katoomba in the beautiful Blue Mountains of New South Wales.

While always fascinated by painting and artists, John did not pursue his interest in art until his mid-twenties. He was working as a professional musician and wandered into painting as a hobby. It was not long before he decided to devote himself completely to painting, particularly trying to capture the more elusive qualities unique to our Australian landscape. Today his paintings are represented in public, private and corporate collections throughout Australia and overseas.

John was a consultant tutor at Charles Sturt University. His work has been reproduced extensively, and he is keenly sought after as a tutor, judge and critic.

John's studio-gallery and residence are at 46 Narrow Neck Road, Katoomba. The gallery is open at weekends and selected works are available to the public.



"Katoomba Snow Gums"

This little picture was painted on location one July after an evening snowfall. The gums are a variety of mountain ash and had almost finished losing their old bark. I was taken more with the patterns of light, dark and reflected light in and on the snow covered debris of old branches and bark. Gums are untidy trees, continually losing leaves, bark as well as the occasional branch.