

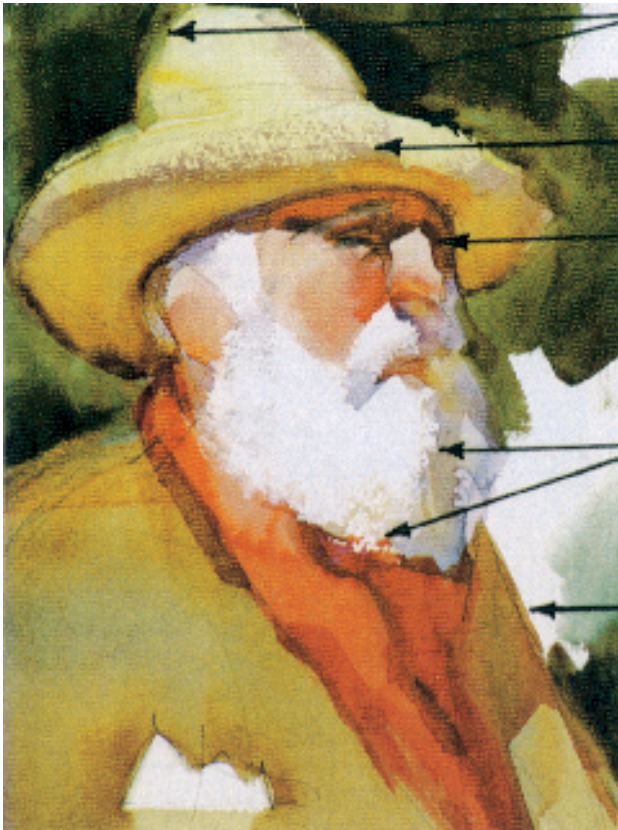
EDGES

by Christopher Schink

“...forget about the middle, work on the edges”

When you are first learning to paint in watercolor, you don't think much about edges. You're mostly concerned with control. You consider the painting a technical triumph when the dark green leaves you're painting don't run into your roses or your trees bleed into your barn. To avoid these disasters, you may even leave thin, white borders around every

object or allow each area to dry before you paint an adjoining area. Although you didn't make any mistakes, the resulting painting had a hard-edged, “itchy” quality to it. The edges throughout were monotonously similar. You were probably unaware of how variation in edge can serve both as a descriptive device and as an effective design element in your painting.



Soft Edges—Soft edges are created by working into moist areas with dryer paint or rewetting dry edges. Softening the outside edges of a round form will make it appear more three-dimensional.

Drybrush—A “drybrush” effect is created by rapidly dragging the heel of the brush (rather than its tip) across dry paper.

Hard edge—Sharp edges are created with a “loaded” brush held perpendicular to the dry paper. Cast shadows take a hard edge and help define a form.

Texture—The texture of an object is most apparent at the outside edge of the object and on the edge of the shadow on it. We see very little texture in the middle of the illuminated or shaded area of an object.

Variation—A less static relationship between figure and ground is achieved when some edges are soft and some are hard, some “lost” and some “found.”

I did this portrait (it is supposed to look a little like Monet) to illustrate the variety of edge you can use in a painting. On the following page, I discuss how edges serve as descriptive and design devices and demonstrate the techniques for achieving qualities of edge.

Descriptive Edges

We can most clearly detect the texture and form of an object—whether it's rough or smooth, round or square—at its outside edge or at the edge of the shadow on it. You don't have to spend the entire afternoon painting every leaf on a tree with a #6 brush to show it's bushy. Nor do you have to get

Edge As A Design Device

Our eyes and brains are very selective: we focus on the things that interest us and everything else becomes soft and vague. Unlike a camera, our eyes can't bring the foreground, middle ground, and background into sharp focus at the same time. We can only focus on one selected area at a time. As painters, we select the area (or areas)

the Saran-wrap or a credit card out every time you paint a rock. You can quickly and effectively suggest the texture and form of an object by making its edges descriptive.

we want viewers to see by employing hard and soft edges in our composition to create focus. By softening (or "losing") edges between objects or areas (for example, the foreground and background), we create passages that allow the viewer's eye to move through the design. By sharpening (or "finding") edges we attract and hold the viewer's attention on areas of importance.

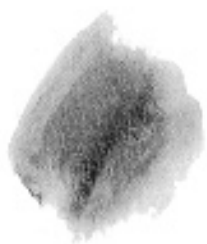
The Technique—How to Paint Varied Edges

Four elements control the quality of edge you create in a painting:
the *texture* and *moistness* of the *paper* you're working on;
the *moistness* of the *paint* you're applying;
the *softness* or *stiffness* of the *brush* you're using;
and the *angle* you hold the brush.



HARD EDGES

Paper—Smooth, Dry (C.P. or H.P.)
Paint—Liquid
Brush—Soft wash or pointed
Angle—Brush tip perpendicular to paper to allow paint to flow freely.



SOFT EDGES

Paper—Smooth, Wet, or Moist
Paint—Moist
Brush—Soft wash or pointed
Angle—Brush tip perpendicular to paper to apply moist paint



BROKEN EDGES (DRY BRUSH)

Paper—Rough, Dry
Paint—Slightly Moist
Brush—Stiff (bristle)
Angle—Brush held almost horizontally so only heel touches the paper

