

THE WAYS OF **WATER**



Carol Evans captures the beauty of water in all its natural states, from the reflections on a still surface to the white caps of crashing waves.

BY MICHELLE TAUTE

All the sparkling white areas on the water in **Warm Summer Evening** (watercolor on paper, 22x42½) are sections of watercolor paper that Evans preserved with masking fluid.



Carol Evans paints the sort of idyllic scenes you'd expect to see in a tourism brochure or dream vacation photos. But in reality, she just taps into the inspiration that surrounds her every day. As a 30-year resident of Salt Spring Island off the west coast of British Columbia, Canada, she has lived much of her life surrounded by water. All those crashing waves, gorgeous sunsets, gentle water ripples and charming fishing boats beckon to be painted.

It's nearly always the water, though, that becomes the star of Evans' watercolor paintings. "It's just endlessly fascinating to me," she says. "It's never the same, it's constantly moving and it refracts the sunlight. I like its transparency and how it magnifies objects underneath. I love the actual color of the water, the blues and greens. There's something about it that just draws me." And Evans has used this fascination with water to teach herself to capture it in nearly all its iterations in the wild.

To the Islands

Evans was fortunate to have a mother who taught art and often brought home different art supplies, from crayons and oil pastels to

oil paints. At the age of 12, Evans discovered watercolor at a summer art camp under the instruction of an enthusiastic Japanese teacher. "He made me realize how beautiful it was to watch the paint flowing in the water," she says. "From that day on, I've been interested in the fact that the water is part of the work. It's like a silent partner that does all these magical things."

Over her formative years, no other medium stood up to the wild, organic qualities Evans loved about watercolor. Eventually, she headed to art school to pursue her passion, but dropped out after one year because the representational art she loved wasn't in vogue during the mid-1970s. Rather than return to school, Evans spent the next few years living on small Canadian islands, dividing her time between waitressing and exploring art. She did everything from illustrating children's books to designing menus and painting names on fishing boats.

Eventually, though, she turned to the scenery around her—and its endless attractions. "There are so many things that I want to paint," she says. "I think if I lived about 500 years, I might be able to paint all the ideas I have." Today, she paints in a studio located near the home she shares with her husband. In the summer, they often take their sailboat north to explore the smaller fishing communities that frequently serve as reference material.

Dive into more of Carol Evans' water landscapes at www.artistsnetwork.com/medium/watercolor/carol-evans-painting-water.



“Certain scenes are so exciting and beautiful that I can imagine exactly how they’d look in paintings. That’s how I choose what I want to paint next. It’s kind of like falling in love.”

Painting Rituals

You’ll find Evans in her studio about six hours every weekday working at a flat drafting table. She paints on Arches 300-lb. cold-pressed extra-white paper that’s been soaked for about 30 minutes in water and then placed on a stretcher. “Stretching makes it so the paper won’t ripple no matter how wet I get it,” she says. As for paint, the artist prefers Winsor & Newton, which she applies with the company’s Gold Series half-synthetic, half-sable brushes.

She chooses her subject matter based on her own eagerness to render it. “I don’t know how to describe it, but certain scenes are so exciting and

beautiful that I can imagine exactly how they’d look in paintings,” she says. “That’s how I choose what I want to paint next. It’s kind of like falling

Clockwise from opposite:

To capture the white-capped waves in **Mystic Beach** (watercolor on paper, 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 42 $\frac{3}{4}$), Evans used masking fluid to preserve the white of the paper. After removing the masking fluid, she used a dry brush to add small bits of color.

In **Jervis Chief** (watercolor on paper, 8 x 24 $\frac{1}{4}$), the wave behind the boat curls up and reflects the turquoise blue from the evening sky. “At that time of night, the water reflects either the orange or the blue,” Evans says. “It’s all about either really, really warm or really, really cool.”

In **Fishboat Off Kuper** (watercolor on paper, 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 42), Evans used masking fluid to preserve the white portions of the boat’s wake and the reflections on the water behind the boat.



4 elements of painting still water

If you're painting a landscape featuring still water, Evans suggests that you focus your observational skills on four different areas:

1. **The depth of the water:** Shallow water at the shore tends to be lighter than the deeper water you'll see farther from land.
2. **The bottom of the water:** What's underneath that river, lake or shallow seashore? Look for sand, shells, pebbles or other objects you'll need to capture.
3. **The surface of the water:** Pay close attention to the reflections on the surface of the water, which might be created by anything from trees to a boat.
4. **Any items floating on the water or breaking the surface:** Look for sticks that might be floating on the water or rocks or logs breaking through the surface.

Once you've identified these elements, how do you capture them? "It takes lots of observation to see how those things work together," Evans says. Instead of quick washes, focus on thought and planning.

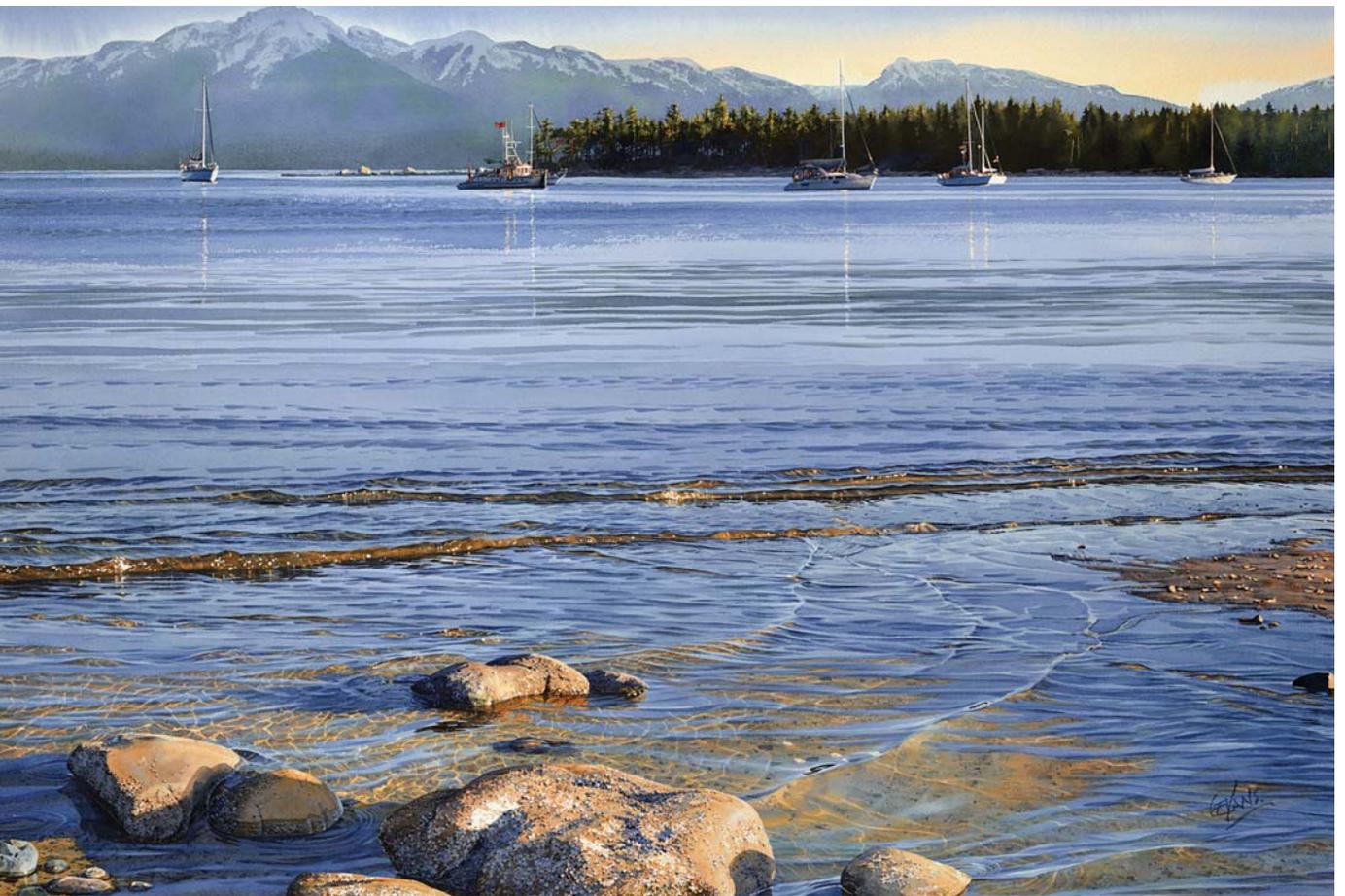
in love." She pulls photos up on her computer for reference and then creates a light pencil sketch on her painting surface. Next, she checks the composition by looking at the drawing in reverse

"The whole reason for the painting was the orange evening light," Evans says about **Evenglow** (above; watercolor on paper, 11x37½). "I emphasized the color, making it more warm than it really was and amplifying it a little bit to show the light."

The gently moving water in **Rocks in the Ripples** (watercolor on paper, 28x42) bends reflections that would otherwise be straight. Careful observation is required to capture those water effects.

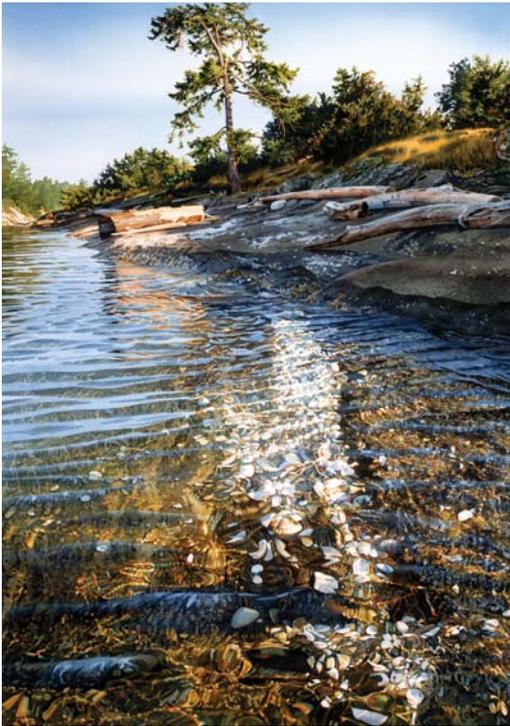
via a small hand mirror. She typically changes very little from the reference photos, because the scene is often a locale people will recognize.

When it's time to paint, Evans usually works light to dark and top to bottom. She almost always places the sky in first as one big wash, and then she'll add masking fluid to any areas that need to remain white. These might include sparkling sunshine on the surface of the water, white-capped waves or parts of the center of





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In **Shells in the Sunshine** (above; watercolor on paper, 28x20), the rippling water stretches the appearance of the clams and other underwater objects. This makes it challenging to capture the objects at the bottom of the body of water and the surface's light patterns accurately.

To create the illusion of moving water around the rock in **Trees on the Point** (watercolor on paper, 28x20), Evans focused on creating perfect circles for the ripples. She'll often check those shapes with a hand mirror, which allows her to instantly determine if the circles are off.

interest. "Right now I'm doing sort of a quiet, misty gray beach," she says. "At the edge of the sea is a big boulder on which two eagles are perched. I've masked them out and will base the entire painting around them."

She works wet-into-wet, often keeping the paper very wet, adding color and tilting the paper slightly for lovely running color. Because she couldn't afford many colors when she first started painting, Evans became accustomed to working with a limited palette. Typically, she uses cadmium yellow, cadmium red, Winsor blue and French ultramarine blue, and occasionally she'll add an aqua green and a pink. She mixes colors on her plastic palette, tests the mixture on a scrap of watercolor paper and then adds it to her washes.

The artist lets each wash dry completely before applying the next transparent layer. A sky, for instance, is typically one wash, but an area of water might need 10 layers as she considers all the different factors that come into play (see "4 Elements of Painting Still Water," on page 46). "I'll paint the lightest color as the first layer, which may be the sand or the



capturing ripples

In **Fishing Friends** (watercolor on paper, 8¼x8¼), the drops falling from the boy's fishing pole land in a single spot and cause a rippling effect in the water. How did Evans re-create that movement with watercolor? She focused on making the rippling lines around the drops perfect circular shapes. From a straight overhead view, they'd look like round circles, but in this case, they're being viewed from the side, so they look like ovals or slightly elongated circles.

"It's really critical that the lines of the ripples are in an exact circle," Evans says. "If they go off, then it doesn't quite trick the eye and create the illusion that it's water."

shells at the bottom of the water," she says, "and then a darker layer. That's tricky, because I always have to keep in mind that there's usually a reflection on the surface of the water." Still water and moving water (see "Capturing Ripples," above) require slightly different techniques. Toward the end of the painting process, she'll remove the masking fluid and use a small, often dry, brush to add final details. A typical painting might take three weeks to complete.

For those just starting to explore water scenes, Evans recommends painting still water first and then focusing on moving water, from ripples to waves. As she knows firsthand, there's enough subject matter to last a lifetime. ▮

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