

Snow Scenes



Painting snowy landscapes presents a number of challenges to plein air painters, beginning with the fact that the outdoor temperatures are low and can make it difficult for cold fingers to manipulate stiff or frozen paint. Then there is an issue of mixing a range of whites or reserving sections of watercolor paper in ways that convey the depth of the scene, the warmth or coolness of the colors, and the stark contrast in values.

“We naturally tend to think of snow as being only white because the local color or value of snow is white,” says Utah artist George W. Handrahan. “However, it takes on many other colors as influenced by reflected light or shadows, with only the highlights actually being a warm or cool white. Pushing or exaggerating these colors can make a winter painting more interesting.”

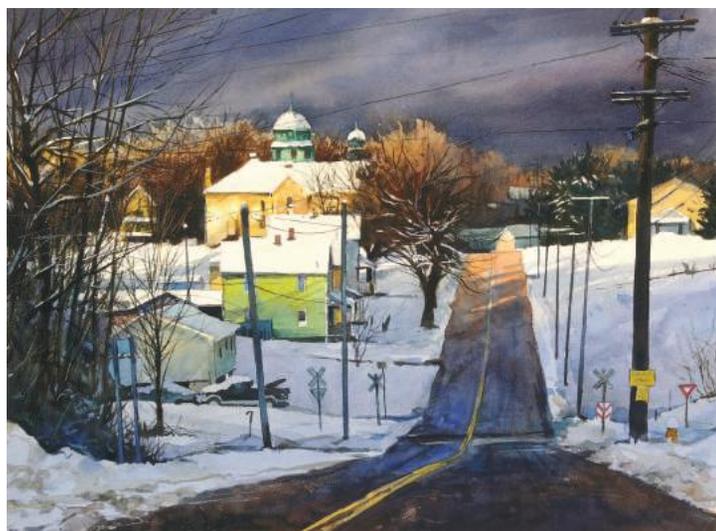
Cold Morning — Warm Light
 George W. Handrahan
 2008, oil on linen, 12 x 16 in.
 Collection Cam & Cindy Eggerts
 Plein air

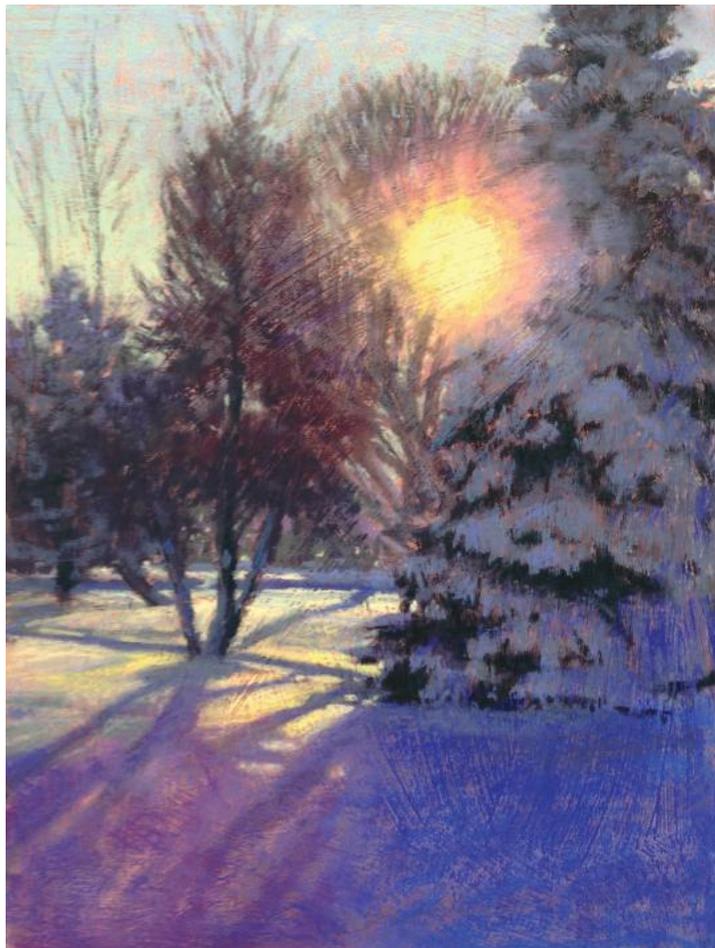


Cold in New Hampshire (above)
 Stephen Gary Frisk
 2015, oil on linen panel, 16 x 20 in.
 Private collection
 Plein air

Winter Vista
 Christopher Leeper
 2017, watercolor, 21 x 29 in.
 Collection the artist
 Studio

Miners Creek
 Susan McCullough
 2017, oil, 14 x 18 in.
 Collection the artist
 Plein air





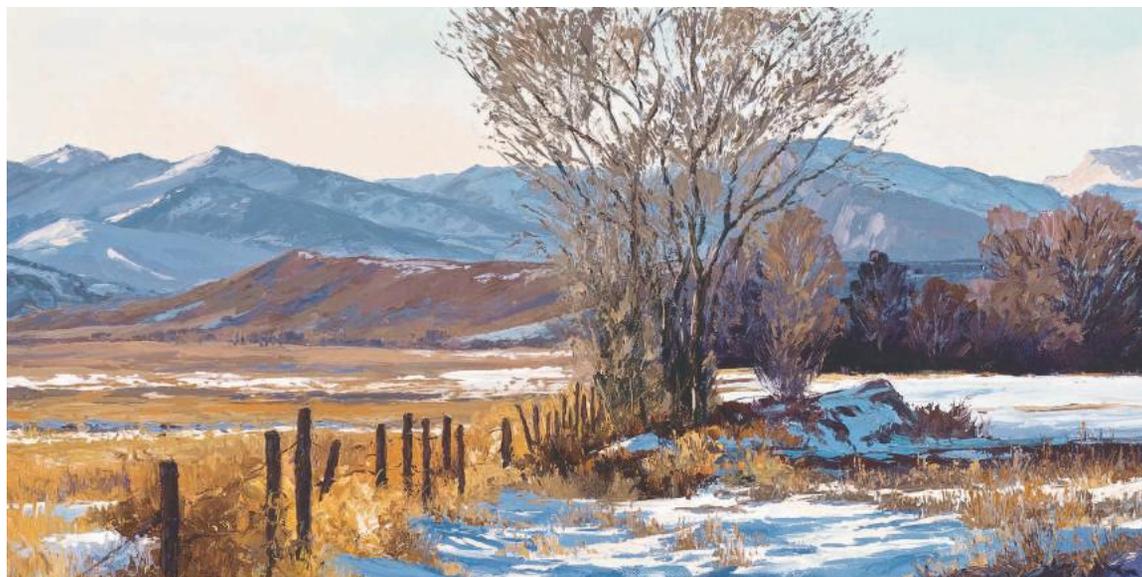
Wintering
Jill Stefani Wagner
2016, pastel, 16 x 12 in.
Collection the artist
Studio

Stillness of Winter
Brienne Brown
2016, watercolor on paper, 10 x 14 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air

"Some people ask me why I even try to paint watercolors in the winter and deal with the cold, freezing paint, and less-than-ideal drying conditions," says Brienne Brown. "I do it because the best experiences — and the worst — were in the winter. I have to dress warmly and add vodka to my water to prevent it from freezing."



Wyoming Winter
Carol Swinney
2017, oil on canvas, 12 x 24 in.
Private collection
Studio





A Winter Tale

Suzanne Morris
2017, oil on linen panel, 9 x 12 in.
Private collection
Plein air

"I was interested in the warmth of the reeds and small tree in the mid-ground contrasted against the cold snow and background evergreen trees," says Suzanne Morris.



Winter Creek

Peter Campbell
2017, oil on canvas, 18 x 24 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air & studio



Last of the Snow

Ed Cooper
2017, oil, 24 x 36 in.
Collection the artist
Studio



20 Below

Steven Gerhartz
2017, oil on canvas, 30 x 48 in.
Courtesy the Gallery of
Wisconsin Art, West Bend, WI
Plein air



Night Lights

George W. Handrahan
2015, oil on panel, 16 x 20 in.
Private collection
Plein air

"When painting a snow scene," Handrahan says, "I like to gray the snow a bit and tint it with color so when I place the highlights they pop. Also, I think it's important to contrast the cool of the snow with warm light or objects. The ambient temperature can also affect how the snow receives and reflects light. Cold snow is generally 'dry' and powdery smaller flakes, with a more even, soft surface that diffuses reflected light. Warm snow has a larger, icy 'snow cone' texture that is uneven and absorbs more light. As the surface of snow is generally soft with rounded forms, I paint it with soft transitions and avoid hard edges, cast shadows and solid objects being the exception."