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Oil Wash Technique

by Henry Pernell Johnson

I have used Strathmore® 500 Series Illustration Board - Heavyweight Vellum for over ten years. After trying all sorts of boards without success, I was introduced to Strathmore in graduate school by one of my professors. As an illustrator, I find that a good board is essential because of the wide variety of materials that I use to facilitate my techniques. In the "Oil Wash Technique," I use acrylic and water-soluble oil paint thinned by water and applied to Strathmore Illustration Board. Using both acrylic and oils is a bit tricky. Not to confuse mixing the two together, but after applying the acrylic and facilitating the drying with a hair dryer, I apply the water-soluble oil paint. When I'm teaching or doing a workshop with this technique, I mention that it is a good way to lay down an under painting using a minimal palette.



Annie Christmas: Children's Book

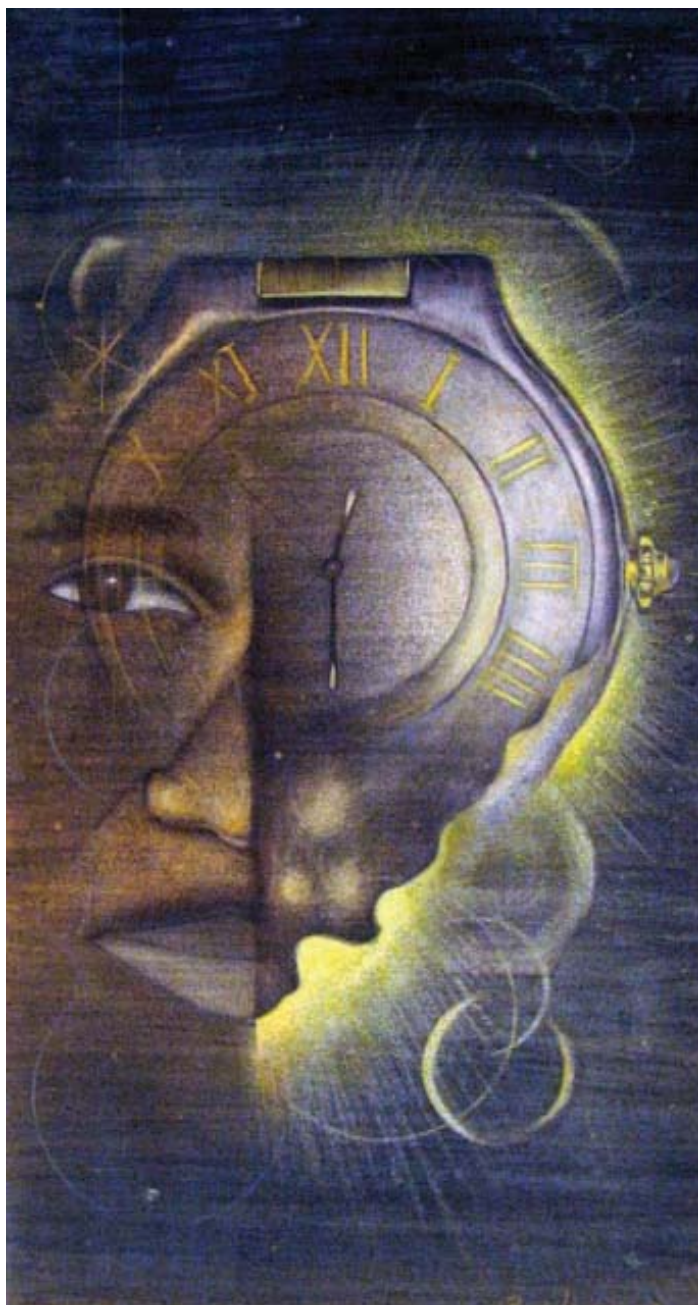
Oil wash on Strathmore Illustration Board - Heavyweight Vellum Surface, 8" x 8"



Saudi

Oil wash on Strathmore Illustration Board - Heavyweight Vellum Surface, 16" x 20"

I begin the process by laying down a layer of acrylics (in a warm color), which also seals the board so the oil paint will not soak into the surface. Next, I apply cool dark colors with oil washes and let it dry, or facilitate the drying with a hair dryer. I then pull out highlights using a kneaded and a magic rub eraser revealing the warm



Dream Time

Oil wash on Strathmore Illustration Board - Heavyweight Vellum Surface, 10" x 20"

acrylic colors underneath. This step is similar to the subtractive process of erasing away layers of charcoal or graphite to reveal various highlights. To build darker values the oil wash is repeated several times.

One reason why I like using the Strathmore® Illustration Board is that it holds up well after several washes on the surface. I use about nine to ten washes before completing my illustrations. As I apply these washes, the entire composition becomes darker, developing a push and pull. After each wash, I pull out highlights in the same area each time. Some of my drawing students at the Savannah College of Art and Design find this a bit redundant. However, I find this to be very therapeutic because my eraser becomes a drawing tool at this point. This brings me to the second reason why I like the board, durability.

I like how durable the board is, standing up to erasing after each wash. Pulling out highlights is a very strategic process. I use a "Magic Rub" eraser for harder erasing with brighter highlights and a kneaded eraser for gentle erasing and softer highlights, leaving the darks untouched, allowing them to get darker with each wash. The wide variation of highlights and shadows is very important to the technique, which adds much depth to the illustration. I normally work from photographs or take my own photos, in order to control the level of light or darks that I use in each illustration.

"I like how durable the board is, standing up to erasing after each wash."

Henry Pernell Johnson

About the Artist

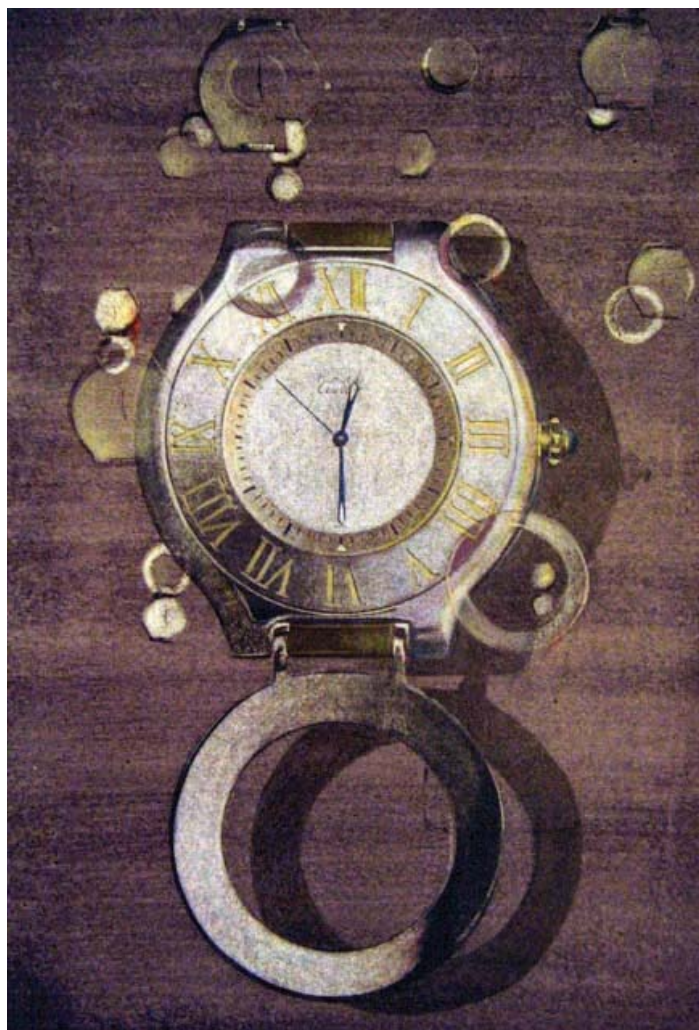


Henry Pernell Johnson was born and raised in Cordele, Georgia, 1967. His goal is to nurture and cultivate the unique qualities of each person through his art work. As a professor at the Savannah College of Art and Design, he says teaching keeps the roots of his artistic skills watered. His life was shaped by his mother

and father, Diane Flood and Henry Johnson. It is the upbringing which inspires his remarkable work. Although Pernell has termed himself "ordinary," his ability to make the ordinary special through his art is extraordinary.

Pernell is a graduate of Crisp High, Cordele, GA. After high school he pursued a career in Art at The Art Institute of Atlanta where he earned an AA, Florida State University, BS and The Savannah College of Art and Design where he earned his Master of Fine Arts. He concentrated in illustration and graphic design. Although many of his pieces are graphic and illustration, he does not limit himself with subject matter. Pernell chooses subject matter that moves him personally. He dwells in the emotional bonds between an illustrator and his subjects, while leaving the image open to interpretation by those who view it.

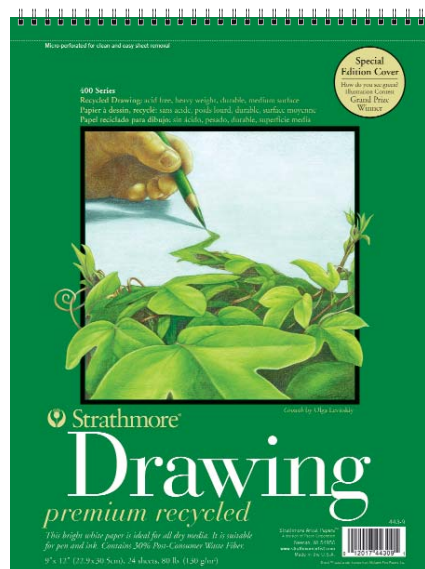
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phjohnso@scad.edu



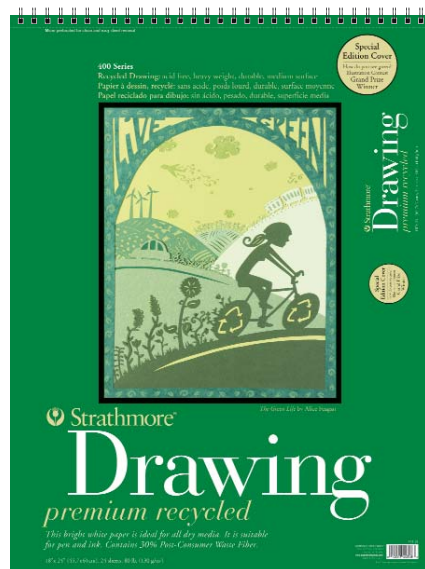
Time Slip

Strathmore® Illustration Board - Heavyweight Vellum Surface, 10" x 15"

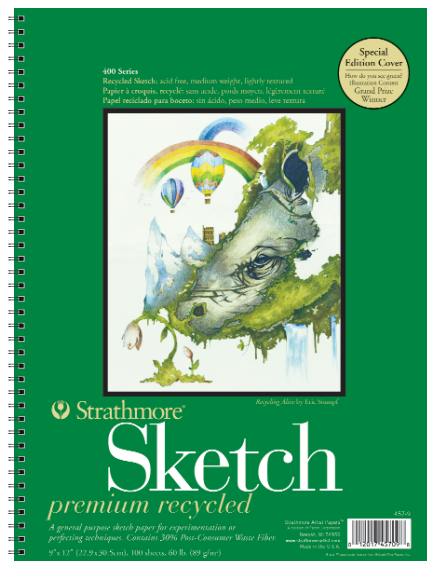
Featured Product



Artwork by Olga Levitskiy
Randolph, NJ



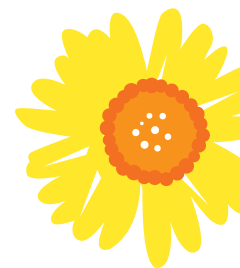
Artwork by Alice Feagan
Eugene, OR



Artwork by Eric Stumpf
Columbus, OH



Artwork by Katherine Cantrell
Wooster, OH



How artists see green...

Strathmore® invited artists to create their own vision of a green environment as part of our "How Do You See Green" Illustration Contest. We are proud to announce the four grand prize winners! Their artwork will be featured on special edition Strathmore Premium Recycled pads.

Look for these special edition pads, coming this fall to fine art stores.

winners!
how do you see green?
illustration contest

Congratulations to the winners!

Questions From Our Artists

Part 1. How to Evaluate Quality Drawing Surfaces

From time to time, artists ask us for ways to evaluate the quality of drawing and painting papers. We will share some techniques in a two part series. We will cover drawing surfaces in this issue and painting surfaces in our Autumn 2010 issue.

Following are some techniques you can use to evaluate the quality of drawing surfaces.

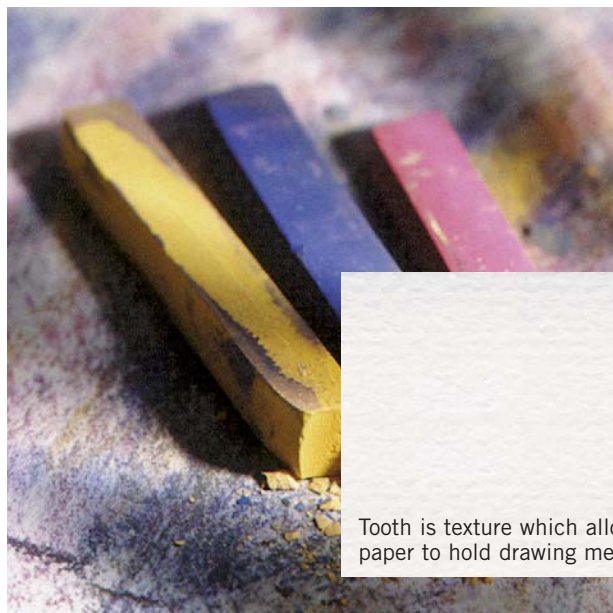
Visual Appearance

Examine the paper for dirt particles. There should be none or very minimal dirt particles present, especially if the sheet does not contain recycled fibers. If the sheet contains recycled materials, it may have a few dirt particles but not so many that it affects the performance or the aesthetics of the paper.

Paper color should be an eye-pleasing natural white or cream color. A very bright white paper often signifies the presence of optical brighteners. Optical brighteners can have an effect on the longevity of your paper and the trueness of the colors when scanning or reproducing the original artwork.

Surface Texture

Your selection depends upon the media, tools and techniques along with your personal preference. Toothier textures are better for bold work where tone and shading is required. Tooth is simply texture which allows the paper to bite and hold drawing media. Smoother surfaces allow for finer detail and crisper lines. Regardless of your selection, the surface should be consistent throughout the sheet.



Tooth is texture which allows paper to hold drawing media.

Surface Strength

Drawing and painting papers need to have excellent surface strength. That is what distinguishes fine art papers from other papers. For drawing surfaces, the surface needs to have enough strength so that the paper fibers do not break down during erasing, layering, blending, etc.

There is a simple test that you can use to compare the surface strength of papers. We call it a “tape pick test.” You will need standard household transparent tape such as Scotch Magic Transparent tape and a dark paper or surface.

1. Apply two 6-inch strips of tape on the front side of the paper surface, one in a vertical direction and one in a horizontal direction on the page. Fold over the last ½" of the tape, creating a tab for removing the tape.

2. Rub the tape several times using a fair amount of pressure to the entire area.
3. Outline the tape area with a soft pencil (but avoid marking the tape since that will produce extra pressure in the “test area”).
4. Allow the tape to sit for 5 minutes.
5. Hold the paper flat against the table and remove the tape slowly by peeling the tab back parallel to the surface.
6. Place the tape on a dark paper or surface. Examine it to see if fibers lifted onto the tape. Examine the area you outlined on the sheet looking for surface damage.
7. For highest quality of surfaces, the tape should lift no fibers and the paper surfaces should not be disrupted by the tape.

Pencil Acceptance

If you are using graphite, your paper should possess excellent properties for pencil receptivity. For this test, you will need a 2B pencil and a ruler.

1. Sharpen pencil to a fine point.
2. Using medium pressure, draw a line approximately 4 inches long.
3. Underneath the 1 stroke line, draw another set of 4 inch lines but this time, use two strokes.
4. Holding the pencil at about a 10 degree angle, shade in an area approximately 2 inches by 2 inches.

Examine the paper. Excellent drawing surfaces will produce even lines with consistent tones and no breaks. You should see even acceptance of pencil with grain and not excess carbon build up in the shaded area. Poor quality paper will generate lines with “skips” and breaks. It will also accept graphite unevenly, and may even “float” on top of the surface.

