Digital Manipulation of a Photograph to an Impressionistic Style to then use as a Reference for Watercolour Painting.
by Sheila Hogge.

I believe understanding the traditional artistic skills is essential, to produce good artwork. However, the more I paint, the more I find my computer and related gizmos invaluable in the creative and learning process. They are also useful to produce high quality, long-lasting prints and greetings card of one's own artwork.

piece, that I had painted. If I started with what I understood as art, then Adobe Photoshop or Elements, could add the 'digital' part. I selected 'Filter' in the menu and 'pixelate' made me smile - I was thinking of *pixilated* and that I probably was crazy entering any competition to do with computers. But after some experimentation, changing the square pixels to crystal-shaped using 'crystallize' produced a pleasing image. I titled it *'El Fenicio in Crystal'*. My first mixed media (watercolour and digital imaging) and impressionistic work! It was exhibited on the group's web site and it won second prize!

'El Fenicio'. Original watercolour 17 x 22 cm (6.75 x 8.75 ins). On Arches Paper (Not) 300gsm.

'El Fenicio in Crystal'. Watercolour after manipulation in Photoshop for entry into 'digital art' competion.

In my experience, computers and watercolours are very similar, absolutely frustrating at times, but brilliant when everything goes well!

When I was a relatively new pure watercolourist and even newer computer user I entered an open 'digital art' competition run by the Local Computer Users Group. But, I had four problems. I did not really know what 'digital art' was, my computer skills were quite basic, there were only 72 hours left to submit an entry and it had to be done by e-mail. However, nothing ventured, nothing gained, - or learned!

I decided to scan in a small watercolour of *'El Fenicio' ('The Phoenician')*, a fountain centre

Many months and paintings later, when reassessing my earlier works, *'El Fenicio'* reminded me how I manipulated the image and the impressionistic result. Immediately the idea came to me - work in reverse. Manipulate a reference photograph first to approximate my intended painting style and then use it to paint from. I have found, unexpectedly, the impressionistic more difficult than the representational in my struggle to be what I call a *'realistic impressionist'*.

I tried the idea with some landscape shots but could not achieve my envisaged result, so I de-

cided to specifically search for a suitable subject.

Part of a building development called *'Abencerrajes'* looked promising with afternoon shadows cast on the expanse of white walls. I liked the perspective and repetition of the gate posts and there were plenty of tonal changes and lost and found edges .

Colour and contrast of the photograph on-screen looked fine so in Photoshop I went straight to 'Filter' then 'Artistic' and 'Dry Brush'. I experimented for a while with the settings;

Shadow tone reduced by light reflected from opposite walls.

Gate post is dark as the vehicle is obstructing the reflected light.
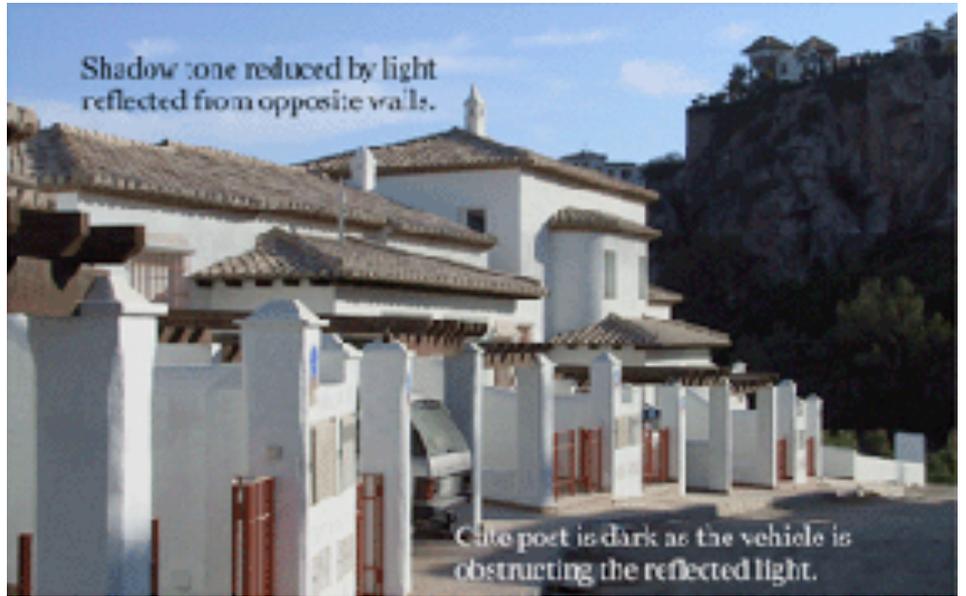
'Abencerrajes'. Original photograph taken late on a Sunday afternoon when the sun was low in the sky and the building site was quiet.

Manipulated image with the unwanted details removed using the Rubber Stamp Tool.
The dark gate post where the reflected light was obstructed by a vehicle has been lightened.

these will vary depending on the subject. Here I settled on 'Brush Size' - 1, 'Brush Detail' - 10, 'Texture' - 1; then repeated it. I liked this amount of manipulation.

I removed unwanted details, so they would not distract me, using the Rubber Stamp Tool cloning colour from adjacent areas. Earlier trials showed manipulation before removing unwanted detail retained more colour within the image. Here, this emphasised the darker tone of the gate post where the vehicle had obstructed the reflected light. I selected this with the Magic

Wand Tool and lightened it using 'Curves' to approximate the next post. Finally, I cropped the photograph to a panoramic format to emphasise the gate posts.

To check and adjust the colours between screen and print, I cropped a small section for a test print. The corrected image was printed out as my reference. The original photograph could be referred to on-screen if required.

I scaled the basic outline onto stretched paper. Originally I intended to exclude the far left hand

pergola, as it was a heavy, centralised feature and so possibly bad compositionally. However, I reconsidered, as it also led the eye back into the painting, but added more foreground as a balance. If either were an error, I could always crop the painting once finished.

Before I start painting I choose my palette, experimenting with mixes to achieve the colours required, keeping the number of colours to a minimum and all transparent, whenever possible. I resist using a colour unmodified by another. Once I started
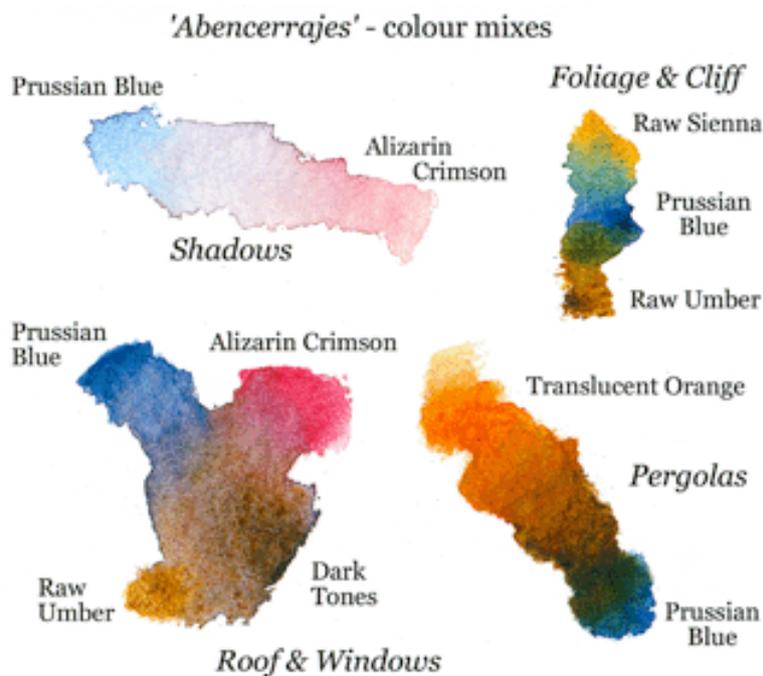
doing this, my paintings rapidly improved, both in colour and tone. I note the colours used and how mixed for future reference.

For this painting I used Raw Sienna, Raw Umber, Alizarin Crimson, Cobalt Blue (in sky and house numbers only), Prussian Blue, (all Winsor & Newton) and Translucent Orange (Schmincke). However, this had not allowed the 'sunniness' I wanted in some areas of roof, pergola or foliage, so breaking my *'rule'* about unmodified colour, I glazed these areas with Quinacridone Gold (W & N).

'Abencerrajes' - colour mixes

Prussian Blue   Alizarin Crimson

Shadows

Foliage & Cliff

Raw Sienna

Prussian Blue

Raw Umber

Prussian Blue   Alizarin Crimson

Translucent Orange

Pergolas

Raw Umber   Dark Tones   Prussian Blue

Roof & Windows

Finished watercolour on Fabriano Artistico 300gsm (140lb) Rough. 58 x 34cm (23 x 13.5in). Masking fluid was applied to the chimneys and the sky was painted in one wash on damp paper. Roofs were loosely washed in, detail and shadow added when dry. Washes on the walls were built up until the darkest shadow made the untouched paper on the sunlit sides look really 'white'. Edges on the nearer gate posts were further defined on the shadow side. Pergolas were added as the gate posts took shape. The foliage covered cliff was washed in to 'find' the right hand walls of the buildings and posts, detail added when dry. The shadow under the eaves was painted a tone darker than the other darkest wall shadow. The darkest tone was reserved for the side window, eaves and pergola shadows.

Finished painting in monochrome, to check the tonal values.

The gates were painted last, green replacing the red primer seen in the photograph. My brushes were both rounds, a No. 12 Red Sable and No. 10 Designer Point Synthetic.

I liked the painting but was unsure whether the foliage and cliff should be darker. So, I scanned the painting in four sections, due to its size, and joined them in Photoshop. This takes time and patience but is worthwhile to see the whole painting on screen and the joined scan can be used for future printing.

Colour was removed leaving the tonal image by selecting 'Image' from the menu, 'Adjust', then 'Channel Mixer' and checking the monochrome box at the bottom.

To compare colour and monochrome images, as many times as one wishes, select 'Window' and 'Show History' and 'click' between the two actions.

Tones looked good so I made no changes. Seeing how vibrant one's **own** painting can look in monochrome - if those tones are right, is an excellent confidence booster to attempt the next challenging subject!

'Abencerrajes' was finished and my idea had worked. A large step towards the impressionistic, as well as more understanding about tone, reflected light and lost and found edges, thanks to the new hi-tech tools in my small studio.