

Improve Your Reference Photographs using PhotoShop. by Sheila Hogge Published in *'the Artist'* November 2004

Part 2. Rescuing Shadow Detail and Scaling Up from the Computer Screen.

Shadows in brightly sun lit scenes can often appear very dark in a photographic print. Rescuing the details from these areas makes painting from a photograph much more rewarding and successful.

The example is a cobbled street that is a pedestrian short cut from one main thoroughfare to another in the city of Granada, Spain. It also gives access to the Cathedral. One always experiences a bright and bustling atmosphere here. The shadows on the one side of the street are lightened by the bright sunlight reflected from the opposite buildings. However, none of this was conveyed to me in the print. (Photo 4.)

Thus, I wanted to adjust the scene to more how I remembered it before starting the painting.



Photo 4. The original photograph. The scene appeared much darker and less lively than I remembered

The image was imported into Photoshop and sharpened using the guidelines described in Part 1.

I sharpened this image, too much from a photographic point of view, but this helped recreate the brightness and strong highlights that I remembered. The values were:-
Amount: 125%, Radius: 3.8 and Threshold: 10.

Bring up the Levels histogram using the keys Command and 'L'. [Control and 'L' for PC's.] To rescue shadow detail, the mid tones need to be increased by a higher Input Level. The dark tones need to be lightened by an increased Output Level. Not enough will leave the image too dark, too much will make it too light and lacking in tonal range. On the Levels histogram the Input for the mid tones was increased to 1.24 and Output Level to 20 for the dark tones.

Experimentation, as always, is needed to achieve the desired effect for your photograph.

The camera lens had distorted the verticals slightly, so I adjusted these. (See Part 3. Correcting Perspective.) Then slight cropping improved the composition. (Photo 5.)



Photo 5. The final adjusted photograph showing the grid for scaling directly from the screen onto the stretched watercolour paper

If you wish to sketch and scale up a subject from your on-screen image, without printing a photograph, this can be done by using a grid. I scaled my sketch by this method onto stretched Fabriano Artistico 300 gsm rough paper. To form or remove a grid go to: -
View in the Menu, > Show > Grid.
To alter the size of the grid: -
Edit in the Menu > Preferences > Guides, Grids and Slices where spacing and colour can be specified. (Photo 5.)

The watercolours used were transparent yellow, raw sienna, raw umber, permanent alizarin crimson and Winsor blue (red shade). (All transparent Winsor & Newton Artists' Colours)

Masking fluid was applied to preserve all the highlights. The sky was painted on dry paper with the brush fully loaded with Winsor blue. This is a powerful colour, but mixed to the right strength made a convincing continental clear blue sky for this scene. The board was upside down and at an angle so the paint flowed away from the buildings.

The stonework of the buildings, except that on the far right, was given a variegated wash on damp paper using raw sienna and raw umber. Shaded sides were given a further wash. Both washes were painted with the paper flat so the raw umber

could granulate helping to give texture to the walls. The architectural details were added onto dry paper.

The area of foliage was painted in one go all wet in wet, transparent yellow giving the lighter tone.

The cobbled street was washed in and the closer figures added using warmer (reddish) colours.

Shadows were then painted giving final form to the buildings, cathedral spires and foliage. The darks for the lamps were mixed from Winsor blue, alizarin crimson and raw umber. The closer ones having more alizarin, those further away more Winsor blue, adding to the feeling of distance. Finally, the masking fluid was removed. Some areas of untouched paper were toned down with local colour, thus emphasising the brightness of the remaining highlights. (Photo 6.)



Photo 6. Calle Oficios, Granada. Transparent watercolour on Fabriano Artistico 300gsm rough paper. 47 x 33 cm.