

Have you ever considered coffee as a painting medium? Coffee has a color that people are comfortable with. While we all have favorite colors, some of them may be very pure color. People overwhelmingly prefer a balanced hue when they look at a picture. I like to say that if you were to rinse all the paint off a picture into a cup it should appear neutral. There's also an attraction to warm colors. So while we have our colors mixed together in a cup, we can really say it should appear brown.

Sepia has long been used for making pictures which look like old photos. And old photos are comforting to many people. But I think it's more than just an old photo that people are attracted to. I think it's also the warm neutral color which is comforting.

As a coffee artist I seem to get more interest in my coffee pictures than in my full color watercolors. It could be that I'm not as good with full color. It could also be the entertaining idea that the pictures are made with a drinkable beverage.

As a medium, coffee is most similar to watercolor. Its components are even close. Watercolor has historically been a powdered pigment bound by gum Arabic. Essentially it's colored bean juice. And that's what coffee is, colored bean juice. The darkness of coffee comes from the roasting of the beans, so it's similar to many of our dark pigments with added carbon in them.

A few differences between coffee and watercolor is the coarser grind, speed of separation, and quantity of binder. The powder component of coffee is very coarse compared to watercolors. And it settles (separates) relatively fast. There's also an overabundance of binder (oil) in coffee.

In order to achieve rich darks in a coffee painting, I have to first remove much of the oil and unfortunately throw it away. Oil is where much of the flavor of coffee is, as well as the caffeine. As a coffee drinker myself, I understand this is a sin. But I make this sacrifice for my art with hope that viewers find my work to be worth this cost.

Once much of the oil is removed, the solids begin to settle quickly. So I have to gently shake the coffee I'm working with. If I don't, I will end up painting with mostly oil at first. That gives a high gloss and thick, translucent buildup of wax. And it doesn't get as dark as I want it to. Once the oil is spent, all that's left is the solids which sit on the paper like dry dust. That will appear dull, light in color, and fall off the paper. This is why constant agitation of the coffee is important while I'm working.

Aside from color, another benefit to painting with coffee is its texture. Coffee doesn't like to be smooth. The hardest thing to do when painting with coffee is creating a clear area. Working with coffee is like spreading mud. And every drop you apply has a different mix of oil, solids, and water. Additionally, since coffee is very soluble, more so than watercolor, its

watercolor effects are more dramatic. It forms hard edges easily. Coffee will try to push much of its oil to the edge of your stroke area as it dries, while wanting to deposit dry solids in the center. An artist has to find ways to use that.

So, whenever I'm looking for strong texture and not in need of color, I find coffee is a good way to go.

CONCLUSION - Working with coffee is like training a cat. You learn what it wants to do, let it do it, then build your picture around it.