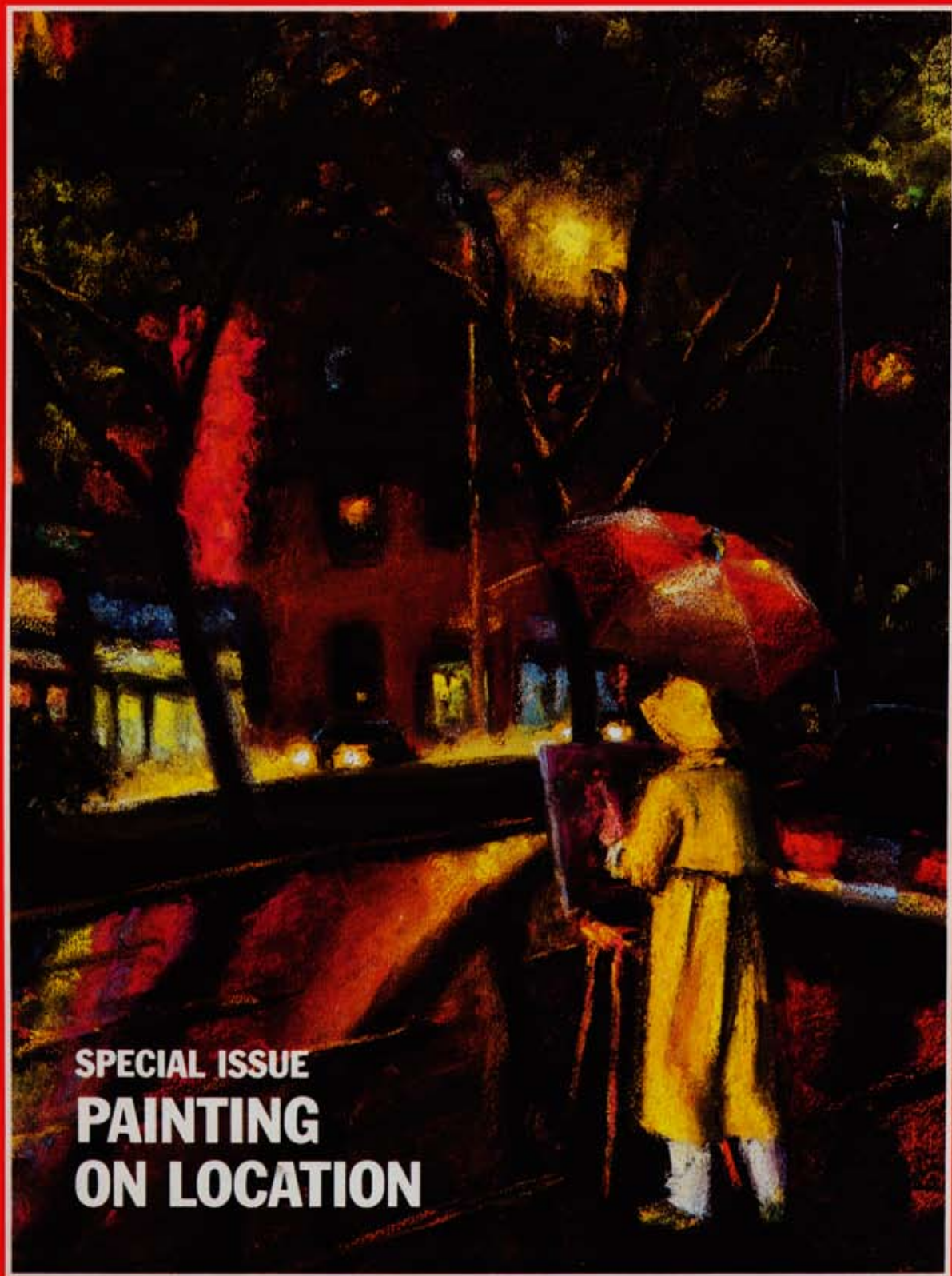


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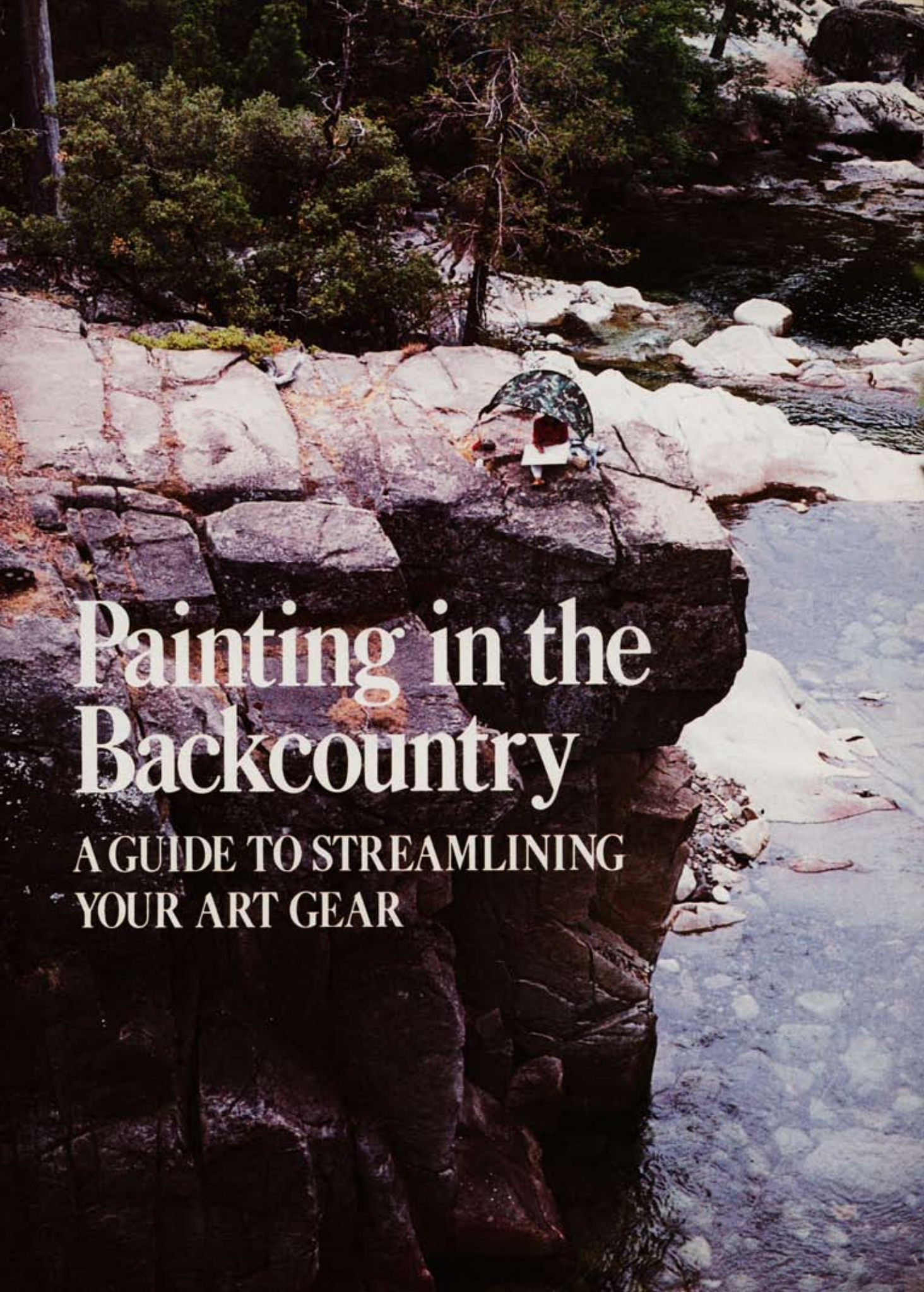


**SPECIAL ISSUE  
PAINTING  
ON LOCATION**

**ARTICLES ON SOLVING THE PROBLEMS  
AND ENJOYING THE BENEFITS  
OF OUTDOOR PAINTING**



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# Painting in the Backcountry

A GUIDE TO STREAMLINING  
YOUR ART GEAR

WHEN THE WEATHER is fair and nature beckons us to be outdoors, many artists no doubt wish they were painting on location at some solitary, favored spot, smelling the dirt, feeling the wind upon their faces, and absorbing the colors and textures of the earth and sky.

However, although the rewards of painting on location may be enjoyable and alluring, the reality that one must brave the inconvenience of hauling unwieldy art boards, heavy easels, and bulky art bins is discouraging enough to squelch even the best intentions. Although this may seem to be an undesirable circumstance to many artists, there is some very encouraging news, for there are a number of remedies to solve the problem of hauling around cumbersome art supplies.

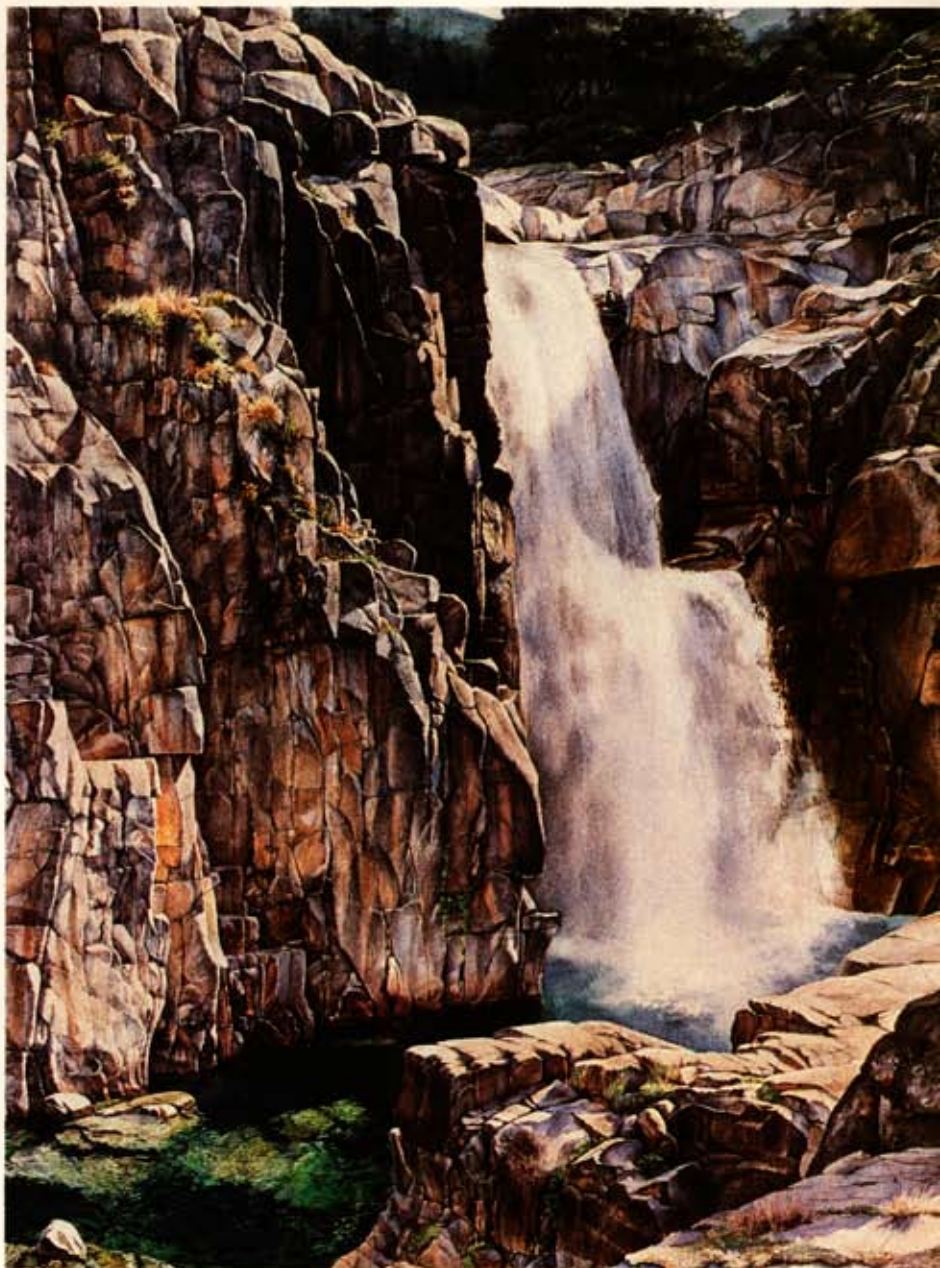
After spending several years painting on location, often in places accessible only by foot, I have sought and experimented with a number of products I felt would be best suited to backcountry painting. At times I've had to improvise on available products and utilize them in new ways. In some cases I've redesigned items so that they better suit my specific needs. I've compiled a resource of tips and suggestions on how artists can streamline their art gear, and on what kinds of products they should look for that are lightweight and well-suited to painting in the backcountry—or, for that matter, to any on-location painting. Most of the products discussed are available through art suppliers or outdoor-recreation suppliers, but I've also included a few simple instructions for some of the easier-to-construct items.

#### PAPER, BOARD, CANVAS, WATERCOLOR BLOCKS

When I first began painting in the backcountry, I simply carried my watercolor block under my arm. I hiked, sweated, and often soiled my paper. I now carry my blocks in a simple satchel with a shoulder strap, which I consider one of the most convenient assets to backcountry painting; it not only protects my artwork from sweat and water, but it also protects it from dirt and abrasion. Since it hangs from my shoulder much like a purse, a satchel offers the added advantage of freeing my hands.

Whether you want to buy a satchel or construct one, the few basic features a satchel should have are durable, lightweight, waterproof material such as packcloth or Cordura, commonly used

*Janet Tarjan Erl is an artist and free-lance writer living in northern California.*



Above: *Royal Gorge # 1*, 1986, watercolor, 28 x 22. Collection the artist.

Opposite page: The author painting at Royal Gorge.



The author and a friend backpacking.



#### Moss Parawing Canopy

(above). Made of 1.9-oz. ripstop nylon. 12-foot parawing, rolled size 15" x 14", average weight 1 lb. 12 oz. 19-foot parawing, rolled size 50" x 5", average weight 8 lbs. 6 oz. Available from Recreational Equipment, Inc., P.O. Box 88125, Seattle, WA 98138-0125; call (800) 426-4840.



**Flip Seat.** Plastic-seated, hollow-metal-stemmed model. 30" tall with 9"-x-8" seat, weighs 1 lb. Push a button and the seat flips open. Available only from The Nature Company, P.O. Box 2310, Berkeley, CA 94701; call (800) 227-1114.

for packs; the ability to completely enclose the artwork, much as a letter is enclosed in an envelope; and an adjustable shoulder strap, preferably padded. Some nice additional features might be compression straps to adjust to any size artwork and outside pockets for storage of miscellaneous goods.

A satchel can work equally well with watercolor blocks, pads, boards, and even stretched canvas or paper. Watercolor blocks and pads are very convenient to use, but the lightest combination of paper and a support that I've found is to use foam board and paper. Two pieces of equal-size board are needed—one for the base to support the artwork and one for the top to protect it during transportation. A third board can be included if several paintings are to be worked on throughout the day. There are few satchels currently on the market. Since a satchel is simple and easy to construct, you might want to make your own based on the simple instructions on page 50.

Although my satchel has been very useful, it does have its limitations. It is not suitable for carrying large formats, and it is inconvenient for me to carry the satchel long distances when I am carrying a heavy backpack. The solution I've found is to strap unassembled stretcher bars and paper rolled in a plastic tube to the sides of my pack. After I arrive at my destination, I assemble the bars and stretch the paper.

Stretching watercolor paper is a bit tricky. However, the main advantage of carrying artwork in this way is that larger sizes can be carried without the hassle of bulk. Fairly large stretcher bars and tubes can be conveniently carried on the side of a pack and barely be noticed, yet the same board or block carried in a satchel would be quite awkward. The stretchers and tube have the added advantage of being lightweight, which can be very helpful when you are backpacking long distances and hauling a hefty load of other goods on your back.

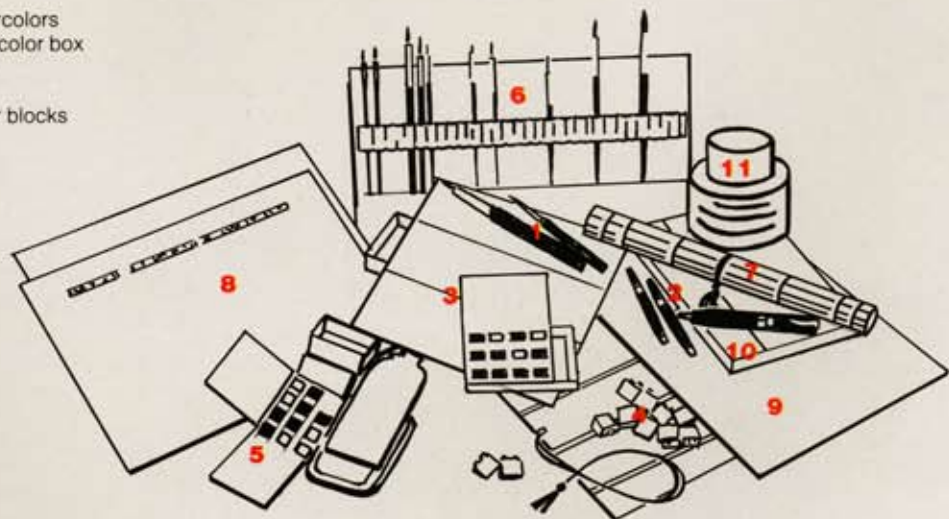
When looking for stretchers, choose stretchers of soft woods, such as ponderosa pine, that have tongue and groove ends. The stretchers can be bundled together and strapped to the side of the pack, or they can be slipped into a narrow tent-pole stuff sack and likewise strapped to the side of the pack. The paper, or canvas if you prefer, should be rolled inside a lightweight plastic tube. There are several types of plastic tubes on the market. Some are telescopic and others are simple tubes with end caps. The tube should be light but also durable enough to withstand being tightly strapped to your pack. The size and



### Travel Supplies—Watercolor

1. Daniel Smith travel kolinsky sable brushes
2. Japanese brush pens
3. Daniel Smith travel boxes
4. Winsor & Newton half-pan watercolors
5. Winsor & Newton Cotman watercolor box
6. Winsor & Newton brush holder
7. Fudemaki brush carrier
8. Fabriano and Arches watercolor blocks
9. Sumi ink pads
10. Hardcover sketchbooks
11. Collapsible brush washer

All supplies available from Daniel Smith, Inc.,  
4130 1st Ave. S.,  
Seattle, WA 98134;  
call (800) 426-6740.

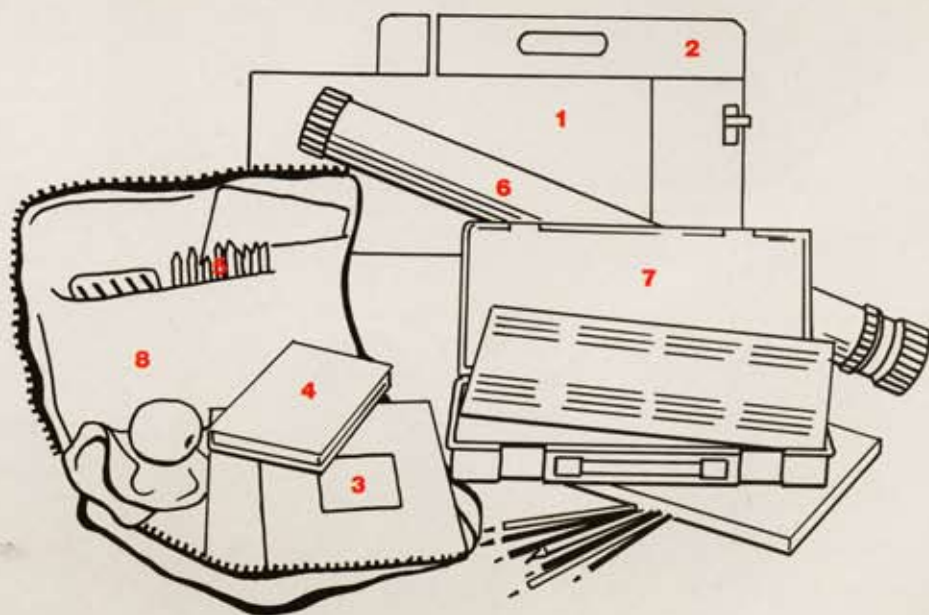




**Travel Supplies—  
Drawing and Pastels**

1. Featherweight boards
2. Giant clipboard
3. Canson pads
4. Canvas sketchbooks
5. Derwent colored- and graphite-pencil sets
6. ArtBin tubes
7. ArtBin pastel box
8. Soft attaché case

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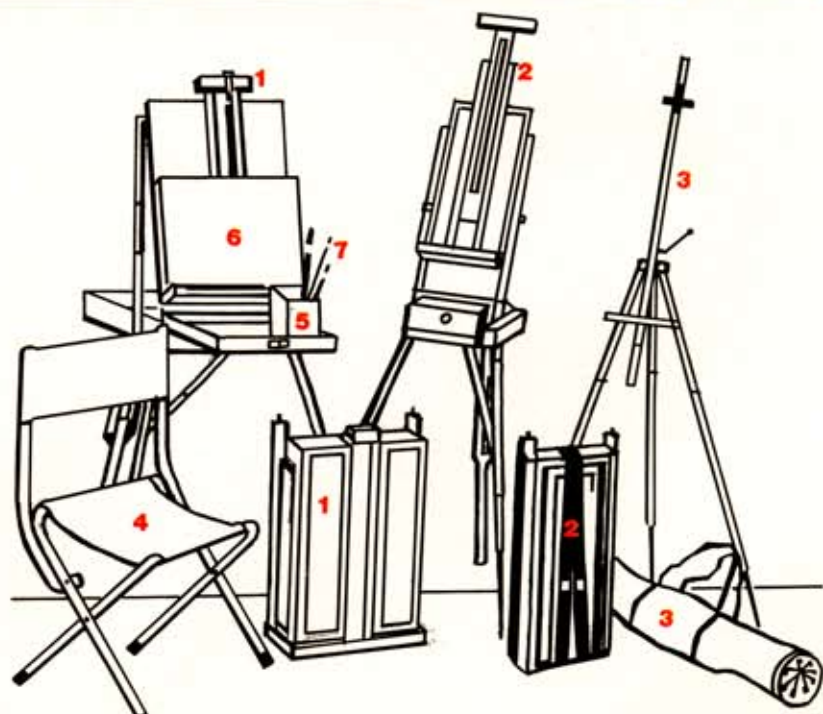




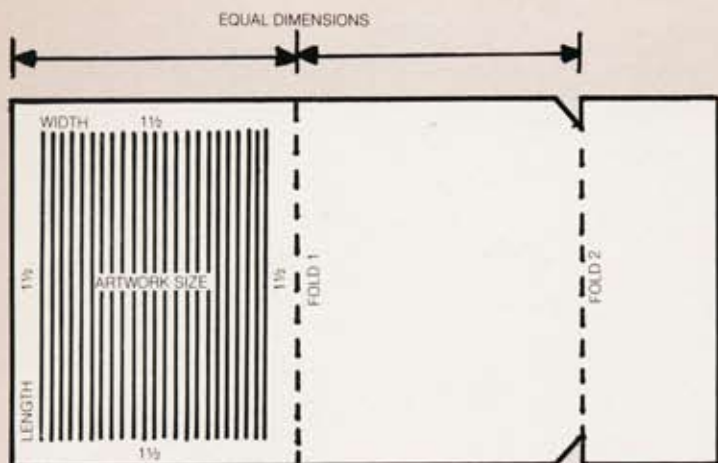
**Travel Supplies—  
Easels and Pack Chair**

1. French easel (shown open and closed)
2. Backpackers easel (shown open and closed)
3. Italian portable easel and carrying case (shown open and closed)
4. Daniel Smith pack chair
5. Raphael notched water can
6. Fabriano watercolor block
7. Daniel Smith Series 44-08 kolinsky watercolor brushes

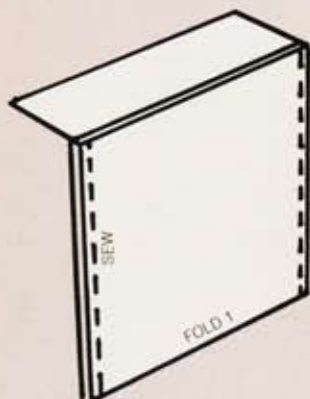
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## Satchel



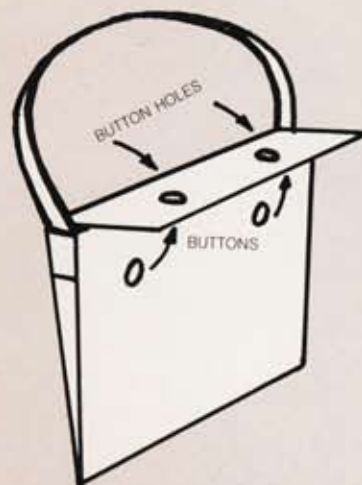
1. Cut pattern  $2\frac{1}{2}$  times the width of artwork, 3" longer than the length of the artwork.



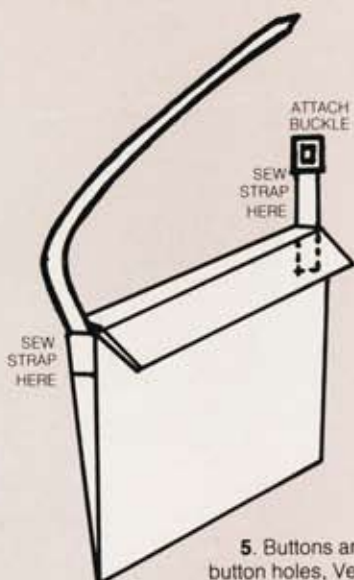
2. Fold along fold 1. Fold right sides in. Sew along outside edge  $\frac{1}{2}$ " from the edge.



3. Invert satchel right side out. Fold edges inward and sew along edges  $\frac{1}{2}$ " from the edge.



4. Sew strips to sides of satchel. Long strap should be 50". Short strap should be 6". Buckle should be looped through free end of the short strap. Long strap should be laced between buckle.



5. Buttons and button holes, Velcro, snaps, etc. should be attached to flap and satchel body for complete closure. Attach buttons first. Then close flap and mark where buttons touch the flap and make buttons on those points.

too long, you might buy a set specifically for outdoor use, cut the handles to a shorter size, and round off the ends.

A few items, such as rubber masking fluid, should be carried in special containers. The containers that most of these products are packaged in are prone to leakage, so it's very important to carry them in leakproof plastic containers, which are available through outdoor suppliers. A handy companion item for liquid frisket is liquid dish soap. I've found a 1-oz. plastic, squirt-top, squeeze bottle works very well for dispensing the soap—just squeeze a little soap onto your brush and rub it into the hairs, and the brush is ready to be dipped into the liquid frisket. Another item that should be carried in special containers is thinner. Thinner can be carried in aluminum 0.3-liter fuel bottles, which are commonly used by backpackers. They won't break (glass jars will), they won't leak, they won't dissolve (plastic bottles will), and they're very light.

The more compact and lightweight your art bin, the less room you'll have for supplies such as palettes. Since palettes are durable, they can withstand being carried loose with the other items in your pack. Just be sure to clean your palette after use, or enclose it in a bag of some sort to prevent unused paints from staining the other goods in your pack. Palettes made of plastic are my favorite.

*Continued on page 98*



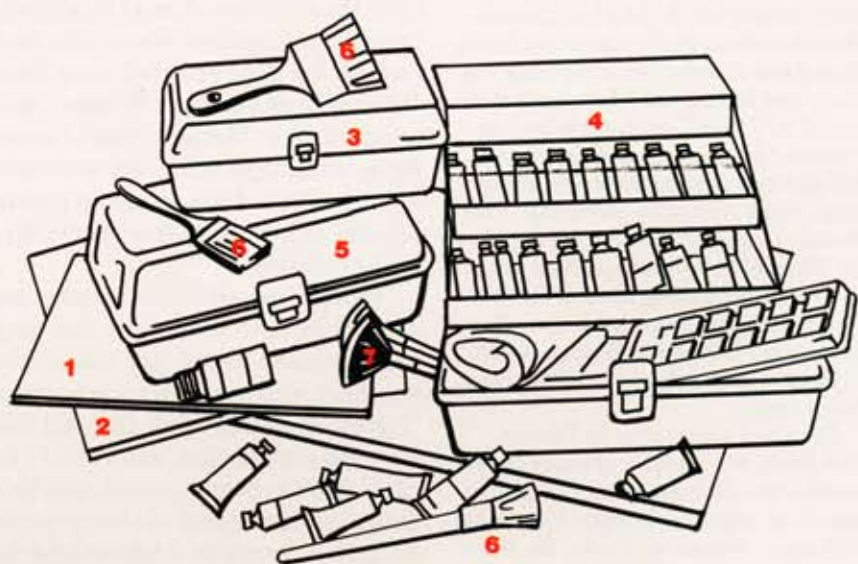
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**Travel Supplies—  
Oils and Acrylics**

1. Prestretched canvas boards
2. Prestretched canvas panels
3. ArtBin 8713 with palette
4. ArtBin 8734 with brushbox and palette
5. ArtBin 8999
6. Three sizes of Isabey French housepainting brushes
7. Raphael badger-fan blending brushes

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Feb 6-10  
BERMUDA  
Mar 6-11; Mar 13-18  
APPLETON, WISCONSIN  
April 17-22; April 24-29  
BIRD IN HAND, PENNSYLVANIA  
May 8-13; May 15-20  
COPPER CENTER, ALASKA  
June 5-10; June 12-17  
CANNON BEACH, OREGON  
July 10-15; July 17-22  
WARM SPRINGS, VIRGINIA  
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QUEBEC  
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Colorado Springs, Colorado ..... May 22-26  
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Fairhope, Alabama ..... September 12-14

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pose some photographs to capture the details in the lights, and they overexpose other shots to better record the shadows. I'd like to suggest the addition of the color note to this procedure; it adds the human element and helps to give the final painting a little more authority.

All of these observations bring up one final point. There's no real substitute for a little thought and understanding when it comes to realistic painting. It might be just as wrong to think of literally copying nature as it is to literally copy photographs. I believe that the best painters really do neither. It is always the thought and decision-making of the individual artist that makes a painting great; there are just no easy answers. That's what makes painting such a challenge, and that's why realist painting will always be there to amaze us, no matter how advanced our science and technology become in the future. •

## BACKCOUNTRY

*Continued from page 51*

and there is certainly no shortage of these on the market.

## THE EASEL

A majority of the paintings I've made on location have been created without the use of an easel; I simply sat on the ground on a small pillow and rested my block on my legs. This arrangement was fine until I wanted to work from a higher vantage point and in a larger format. Then, the only solution was to use an easel.

I've since found that a field easel is another important item to have, but I've yet to find one ideally suited for backcountry use. An adequate easel is about the best one can expect until manufacturers produce an ideal model, which would collapse roughly to the size, shape, and weight of a camera tripod, and would accommodate at least a 36"-high board or block. Since you probably won't find such an easel, look for one that weighs no more than seven to nine pounds and can easily be carried on the outside of your pack.

There are some minor shortcomings when using a compact field easel. Most of these can easily be resolved, but you may have to do things a bit differently from the way you are accustomed to. In the studio, one often takes things for granted; chairs and tables, for example, are commonplace. But in the field, chairs and tables are sheer luxuries. It's not that backpackable chairs or tables don't exist, but they are additional weight to haul on your back that you might prefer

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April **Helen Van Wyk** (Oil), San Diego, Calif.

Apr 29- May 6 **Ray Loos** (Watercolor/Drawing), Mexican Riviera Princess Cruise

June 19-23 **Joyce Pike** (Oil), Morro Bay, California

Aug 14-18 **Al Brouillette, ANA, AWS, NWS** (Acrylics), Santa Barbara, California

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top because they act as a cooler—they absorb sweat and cool your clothes and skin when the wind blows. They also keep the blazing sun off your skin, thereby saving you from the discomfort of sunburn, and they keep a good many bugs from nibbling on your flesh. A broad-brimmed hat is useful for the same reasons, and it keeps the direct sun out of your eyes. If wearing long pants and a shirt interferes with your getting a suntan, you can dress more scantily and use a good sunscreen lotion. I don't advise this, however.

As I mentioned earlier, ultraviolet light is a potential problem. It reflects off surfaces such as snow, water, sand, and even white artboards. Not only can it burn your skin, it can also burn your eyes, thereby causing snowblindness. Most skiers and mountaineers wear sunglasses, and artists who work in full sun should also wear them. It is worthy to note, however, that ultraviolet light can reflect off many sources, so even if you're working in the shade, you may be susceptible to snowblindness if you are surrounded by highly reflective surfaces or if the subject matter you are painting is very bright. The best prevention from snowblindness is to wear neutral, gray lenses with ultraviolet protection. If you think sunglasses will change your perception of colors, you're right—sunglasses will slightly alter the values of the scene you are looking at, but they will also alter the values of colors you see on your palette and on your painting. In other words, things will appear different, but they will appear different in relation to one another.

The last topic on outdoor protection is insects. As I mentioned earlier, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt will keep a lot of bugs off your skin, but you'll need to keep them out of your pants and off vulnerable areas such as your face, hands, and neck. You can best keep insects out of your pants by tucking the legs inside your socks or by wearing pants with elasticized cuffs. Keep insects away from exposed skin by using insect repellent. My favorite repellent is Muskol—it's very effective and a little goes a long way. Other repellents such as Off also work well, and most repellents can be applied to clothing as well for extra protection.

Don't be discouraged if you think bugs are going to haunt you each time you venture out to paint. Some areas have more insects than others, and certain seasons of the year are worse than others. I've experienced many days without encountering insects, but since nature is often unpredictable, I always carry insect repellent.



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Reference books:

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*Encyclopedia of Associations*

**THE JOYS AND BENEFITS**

At this point, you might be wondering whether or not it's worth all the preparation and effort to get out there and paint. However, if you stop to compare the stimulus of painting outdoors to painting in the studio, you will find that they are worlds apart. There is a great and constant variety of activities occurring in nature's backyard; therefore, there is a multitude of things to observe and learn, and there is an ever-flowing stream of stimuli to please the senses and spark the imagination.

Change is the eternal constant in nature. Spend just one day painting a scene and you'll see the entire area change—perhaps the colors change and the shadows move as the sun's position changes. Maybe you'll notice that as the light changes, shapes and forms will be revealed that you had not anticipated. Maybe you'll laugh when you discover that an object that appeared flat and narrow in the morning seems to be round and broad in the afternoon. You might even decide to choose certain aspects of the light, color, shadows, and forms that you witness throughout the day and combine them to enhance certain qualities or complement certain aspects of the painting.

You may not be able to experience true solitude in the backcountry, for there is certainly no shortage of activity, both living and nonliving, to keep you company. You can, however, have solitude from man and all the repetitious and artificial sounds, smells, and stimuli he's created. Even if it's just for one day, it can be a real pleasure to leave the modern world behind, to walk in nature and experience it with an open mind. •

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