

# Fun & Joy

Newsletter from YongChen.com

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### Demonstration

#### My process of children's book illustration

Because of my realistic painting style for my children's book illustrations, I'm often asked if I start the illustration process by taking photos of my models, then paint from the photo reference. My answer is, as always, it is not that simple.

Here, I am using one of my watercolor illustrations from my newest children's book "Finding Joy" as an example to show you how I start my process.



#### Conceptual drawing

As soon as I receive a manuscript from my editor or art director, I read the story many times. Soon the story becomes a movie in my brain. I can see the people, their ages, the locations, and the emotions I wish to convey. Then I use a big piece of drawing paper and start sketching, to put the movie floating in my mind down on my drawing paper, scene by scene. This is called the conceptual drawing stage. In this example, I used charcoal to draw, then applied a light wash with gray ink.

I don't think about models in this stage. All the drawings were right from my imagination without any photo reference. This is a very important stage in the entire illustration process. When I finish the conceptual drawings, I send them to my art directors for their feedback. There usually are requested changes, which means I need to modify my conceptual drawings until we are both satisfied.

Then the next step is research and finding my perfect models.

#### Research and drawing

Research can be a very long, in-depth process. If you want to do the best job for

your new children's book, you need to understand the story and the characters inside out.



For "Finding Joy", I did extensive research. I visited web sites that documented the adoption journey with pictures; interviewed people who had similar experiences as the characters in the story. I tried to understand every detail and collect as much visual material as possible. I even went to China to trace the journey in the story. I took a plane to China, and visited an orphanage in a southern city. I met the caregivers and the children in the orphanage. This experience gave me the final confirmation and the emotional connection to the story and the characters that I needed.

Meanwhile, I searched for the perfect models for the characters in the book. Once I found them, I gave them directions about what they should be thinking and how they should be acting at the moment. I used a digital camera so that I didn't need to worry about how many shots I had to take. Photos of my models only serve as my reference materials along with other photos I had collected, like houses, trees and locations.



#### Draw, refine, and draw again

While I am doing drawings and research, I will read the story again and again. Not only to gain an understanding of the

writer's original meaning, but to refresh and further develop my own vision of the story, and my interpretation of the situations. I will not rush to start painting.

I modify the drawings a few more times as my understanding of the story deepens. In this drawing, the older lady on the right hand side becomes more emotionally involved in the activity of the caregivers and the baby girl, just by changing her body gesture.

In the process of doing the revisions, I must keep the final book and the flow of pages in mind. I must choose the best drawings for each page and make sure there is enough room for the text on each page.

#### Watercolor painting

The most anticipated moment is when I start painting. After months and months of drawing, research and interviews, I was finally ready to start the watercolor paintings.

I start with the painting that excites me the most, then proceed to the other pieces. I keep all the paintings arranged in order in my studio, so that I can relate the one that I'm working on to the rest. This helps to make sure all the paintings for the book are unified.



To learn more about this children's book and other illustrations, visit the "[Finding Joy](#)" children's book section of the YongChen.com web site.

■ This demonstration is provided by Yong Chen. For more painting technique demonstrations, please visit our [online learning center](#). We love see your work, please email your artwork picture to [friends@yongchen.com](mailto:friends@yongchen.com). You may see it posted on our site!

Suggestions

Color, motion, and composition in a painting

Original painting by Chrystal Robinson, Suggestions by Yong Chen



I like this painting; the artist expresses a strong emotion. Yet it seems there is still room to express more. The fires could be bigger, the colors could be amplified and there could be more motion and movement.

So let's begin.

First, I'd expand the painting size, and extend the background and the garment. Then I'd make the fires bigger, much bigger.

The warm purples of the background colors are too close to the warmth of

the colors in the garment. To make the figure stand out, I'd introduce a layer of a cool green color into the background to contrast with the warm reds and purples of the robe. This will create a richer color composition.

Now I'd like to take care of the motion in the painting. First, I'd add more bits of dust to the front, then introduce some bolder strokes of white across the robe.

As the final touch, I'd brighten the purple color in the background behind the head.

To read the illustrated full version of this critique, please [click here](#) to visit our online learning center.



Instructions to Submit Materials for Critique

Send an email to: [critique@yongchen.com](mailto:critique@yongchen.com)

In your email, please state clearly your name, your age, and the medium of your art work. You must attach a digital picture of your artwork in JPG format (no smaller than 300 pixels by 200 pixels). The image you submit must be of an original work of art created solely by yourself.

We thank you in advance for your interest in our critique service, but we must also apologize because we simply can't critique every entry submitted. We do reserve the right to display all submitted works on our site without compensation or notification; however, you as the artist will receive full credit for works used on our site.

About the Artist: Yong Chen

Born in China, Yong Chen developed an interest in art at the early age of 4. A natural artist with a superb eye for beauty, Yong has been teaching painting techniques since the age of 13.

After graduating from college in China and teaching high school art for five years, Yong moved to Boston and studied illustration at the Massachusetts College of Art. Starting soon after his graduation until 1998, Yong taught Watercolor Painting, Watercolor Portraiture classes and workshops at the Massachusetts College of Art and River College. Since then, Yong has been a successful graphic artist and corporate branding expert as well as a children's book illustrator. His published works include *Finding Joy*, *Miz Fannie Mae's Fine New Easter Hat*, *Starfish Summer*, *Swimming with Sharks*, and *Maria's Loose Tooth*.

Yong has also had several solo exhibits of his original artwork in Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

In addition to painting and teaching, Yong works with fellow artists to promote their works in the global marketplace through [www.worldgalleryonline.com](http://www.worldgalleryonline.com).

To learn more about Yong Chen, we invite you to visit [www.yongchen.com/chen](http://www.yongchen.com/chen)

What's New

YongChen.com in mySpace

November 22, 2006, we opened a space in mySpace.com to connect with watercolor learners and professional artists around the world. Within 3 months, we have gathered 761 artistic mySpacers. They are watercolor lovers, professional artists, and people with good hearts.

Please stop by and visit, maybe you'll become a mySpacer if you are not already. Our address is: [www.myspace.com/yongchen](http://www.myspace.com/yongchen)

