



Cold Weather Painting by Rae O'Shea, PAPJC

There really is no reason to be cold when you paint outside in the winter. With the right equipment and a little foresight you can enjoy this season just as much, if not more, than any other. When you paint in frigid temperatures you want to work quickly so the first thing to do is make sure you have all your equipment and that once you get outside you can set up quickly. It is good to pick an area to paint that is out of the wind because you don't need another element to battle. Know exactly where you want to go and don't waste time in getting started.

You will need the right clothing in order to stay outside for any length of time and the most crucial areas to keep warm are your feet, your hands and your head. It is important to dress in layers so that the air gets trapped - and warmed - between the layers, and so that you can remove a sweater or coat if it should warm up while you are painting.

1. Get good, warm boots. Not hiking boots but boots that will keep you warm while you are standing in snow for a long time. I recommend Cabela's Trans Alaskan Pac Boots. There is 5 inches of insulation between your feet and the ground as well as a protective layer wrapping around your foot and lower leg. There is even a pocket where you can insert a hand warmer-but in -10 degrees I never needed to do this. The boots keep your feet as warm as if you are standing inside all day. Some people like to stand on a piece of cardboard or carpet-anything that insulates your feet from the snow is helpful. With the Trans Alaskan boots you won't need to do this.
2. Layer thermal underwear, fleece and/or sweater under a down coat-the longer the better for maximum coverage. Ski or snow pants keep your legs warm and protected from winter chill. A gaiter will protect your neck without the bulkiness of a scarf, and a fleece balaclava is helpful in keeping your head warm with or without a hood or hat. The idea is to have no gaps in your coverage. A gaiter or scarf can be pulled up over your nose in the coldest weather and goggles can be used to protect your eyes, although some artists find them annoying.
3. Keeping your hands warm is the trickiest part. Some people layer latex or rubber gloves, glomits (fingerless gloves with an attached mitten to pull over the hand you aren't using), and thermal or down gloves. Hand warmers are also helpful. Painting with bulky gloves can be frustrating and annoying-but they are necessary when it is bitter cold. Frostbite can happen pretty quickly in the lowest temperatures. I've had to curb my tendency to rip off my gloves because the coldest temps can be pretty painful.
4. IF YOU ARE PAINTING NEAR OR IN THE WOODS DURING HUNTING SEASON DRAPE AN ORANGE CLOTH OVER THE BACK OF YOUR EASEL OR WEAR AN ORANGE HAT OR SCARF. The legs of an easel can look an awful lot like the legs of a deer and you don't want to be mistaken for the target!
5. It is helpful to carry heavy-duty plastic sheeting or garbage bags with you to lay on the ground for your backpack or other equipment to sit on and keep dry.

Dressed like this, you should be able to be outside for hours, although you might want to take a break and warm your hands every couple of hours. Or plan on completing your painting in two-three hours. If you start to shiver or feel chilled despite your layers go inside and warm up. This is a sign that your body isn't

coping with the cold and you shouldn't ignore it.

You may find that your usual materials aren't behaving the way you are used to in warmer weather. My oil paints became stringy in temperatures under zero and I had to add Liquin in order to keep them fluid. Some paints get stiffer so you need to keep them moving around. One artist who was painting on copper found her paints becoming slippery in colder temperatures. You may have to play around with your materials until you find the best way of compensating for extreme cold.

As usual when painting outside, especially if you are painting alone, listen for a weather report before you go so you aren't caught in a storm, take a cell phone, snack and water, and large plastic garbage bags (they are good for extra insulation should you need it.) Don't walk in the snow in any area that you are unfamiliar with where there is a chance of stumbling into water or falling through ice.

Enjoy it! No season is more magical to paint!

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