Scenic Delights

By Christina Hecht

Using bleach as a medium

Creating art frequently involves the application of color to a canvas, wall or object. Other times the artistic process involves the removal of some element, such as carving away wood or clay, to reveal the work of art.

To make the beautiful cards shown here, Jeannie Comcowich used an unconventional painting material—household bleach—to remove color from cardstock. Her stunning scenes are infused with light, shadow and depth.

Stamping in Colorado

Comcowich started stamping in the early '80s. "Those were the days when finding rubber stamps was a momentous event," she says. Three decades and 9,000 stamps later, this nature lover's largest selection of images are those depicting outdoor vistas, landscapes and animals.

A life-long crafter without "any formal art training," the Colorado native enjoys stamping because it enables her to "make terrific things without being able to draw." She belongs to two stamping groups

Materials

- bleach
- cotton swabs, paint brush, paper blending stumps
- dark-colored cardstock, colored and patterned paper
- black embossing ink
- embossing powder (preferably clear)
- glue or sticky tape
- scissors
- embellishments (optional)

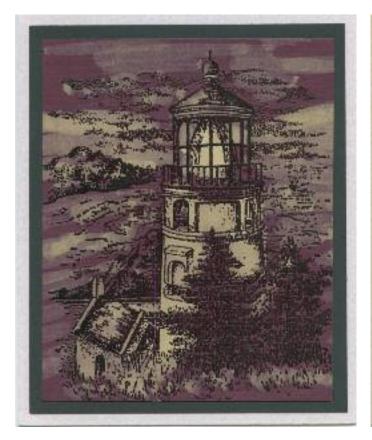
where attendees exchange artwork and talk shop while working on new pieces. "I've learned the most from these clubs when we all share different ideas and techniques with one another."

Comcowich is a sixth-grade teacher and typically does most of her stamping during the summer vacation downtime. "That's when I create a big reserve of cards, so I have something to send when the school year starts and things get hectic again."

Comcowich relishes writing letters and sharing her stamped art with 20-plus pen pals, some of whom she's been corresponding with for almost two decades. In addition to her husband and two grown children, another of the stamper's great-



MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE / Jeannie Comcowich (Stamp credits: Mountain scene—Talkabout Images [Creative Impressions].)



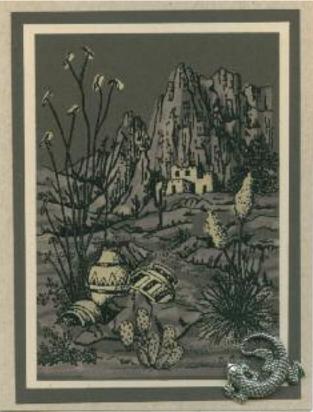
1.IGHTHOUSE / Jeannie Comcowich (Stamp credits: Lighthouse scene—Talkabout Images [Creative Impressions].)

est joys is discovering decorated envelopes and cards in the mailbox—she invites fellow enthusiasts of nature stamping to write to her at 7039 Reed Ct., Arvada, CO 80003.

Bleach painting

Comcowich got the idea to use bleach when she watched a stamp demonstrator ink a stamp with bleach—rather than ink—and then stamp on colored paper. "The idea is nothing new, but it's incredibly quick, easy and you get fabulous results."

For the absurdly low cost of a gallon of bleach and a handful of cotton swabs it's possible to create great looking cards. Comcowich has found that scenic images that allow for a variety of light and dark values



SOUTHWEST POTTERY / Jeannie Comcowich (Stamp credits: Desert scene—Talkabout Images [Creative Impressions].)

are best suited for this type of technique.

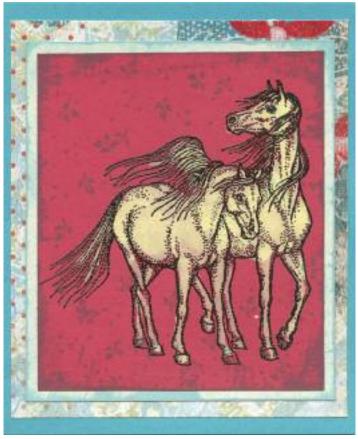
Wearing old clothing is also recommended in the event of wayward drops of bleach. Those who are sensitive to chemical smells might consider doing this technique in a well-ventilated area or outdoors.

Because the idea is to remove color from a stamped scene, it's necessary to start with dark-colored cardstock. Always test a sample of the cardstock first: different colors and how the paper was manufactured may produce unexpected results. With some types of colorfast paper, the bleach may have very little effect. For example, Comcowich bleach-painted two different brands of paper that were the same shade of green—one brand bleached to lighter yellows and greens, while the other brand resulted in bleached shades of tans and browns.

The cards shown on these pages are spectacular examples of how the careful application of regular household bleach to remove color from cardstock produces sophisticated monochromatic scenes possessing a wide range of value and intensity.

Step-by Step Bleach Painting

- 1. Stamp the image and heat emboss it with embossing powder. Embossing creates raised lines that help prevent the bleach from bleeding into other areas of the scene. Comcowich's prefers stamping images using black pigment ink and embossing with clear powder, but consider experimenting with different colors of embossing powder—you may discover an interesting color effect.
- 2. Always use fresh bleach. Bleach loses its effectiveness over time and with exposure to air. Pour a small amount of bleach into a glass and replenish as needed. Always replace the cap on the jug of bleach to prevent exposure to air or spillage.
- 3. Dip a cotton swab in bleach and paint the areas of the image you want to lighten. Don't absorb too much bleach on the applicator as it may overflow beyond the embossed line into other areas. For extra large areas, try to apply bleach in a single application to prevent creating streaks or splotches.
- 4. To make an already bleached area lighter, simply apply more bleach. Always use a gentle swiping motion. Rubbing the wet paper may cause it to break down and pill.



PALE PALOMINOS / Jeannie Comcowich (Stamp credits: Two horses—B & Js Art Stamps.)

Cardstock Guidelines

- There are no steadfast rules as to which type or brand of cardstock works best—experimenting is the best approach. Cheap or expensive cardstock makes no difference.
- Dark colors provide the greatest contrast. A Comcowich favorite is navy blue paper that bleaches to turquoise.
- The bleach technique may be used on colored envelopes. Insert cardstock inside the envelope so the bleach doesn't bleed through to the other side.
- Some cardstock takes longer to lighten than others and sometimes the effects aren't evident until the paper is completely dry. Be patient, put a piece aside and check on it later to see if you've achieved the desired results—you can always apply more bleach.

Another way to create light areas is to allow the bleach to "puddle."

If an area is to be only slightly lightened, dip the swab in bleach and let it sit for a few minutes before applying it to the cardstock—the exposure to air decreases the potency of the bleach and it will be less effective in eliminating color from the cardstock.

- 5. When a cotton swab is too thick to paint detailed areas, simply remove some of the cotton fluff and twist the end to make it smooth again. Fine-tip paint brushes or paper-blending stumps are ideal tools for applying bleach to detailed areas. Always rinse the paintbrush after use.
- Always use fresh bleach.
- Don't absorb too much bleach on the applicator.
- Allow the bleached cardstock to dry thoroughly.
- 6. Allow the bleached cardstock to dry thoroughly. A heat gun or hair dryer may be used to speed up the process, but be careful not to melt the embossed image.
- 7. Should a drop of bleach accidently mar your work, simply finish the card and allow it to dry. Use a marker, chalk or pencil crayon in a color similar to the cardstock to blend away the errant spot as much as possible. Use a fine black marker to go over the embossed lines of an image that may have faded or need to be thickened.
- 8. Layer the finished scene over colored cardstock and patterned paper in hues that complement the artwork. Add embellishments for dimension or a touch of elegance. Be creative and draw in additional details or

add a pop of color or glitter in areas that have been bleached.

Mountain Landscape

This card possibly depicts the Colorado foothills where Comcowich grew up. It's a glorious summer night in a verdant valley and the moonbeams subtly illuminate the trees, grass, water and plants in varying shades of green.

Extra bleach was used in the middle of the river to lighten it and create the appearance of concentrated moonlight reflecting on the water's surface. Similarly, bleach was reapplied over the sky to make it appear lighter and brighter than the meadow and foothills.

1.ighthouse

The bleach technique enables stampers to recreate the appearance of light beams penetrating the deepest recesses of night. As the light ebbs farther away from the main source, the beams grow weaker and eventually become enveloped, as if by a dark blanket.

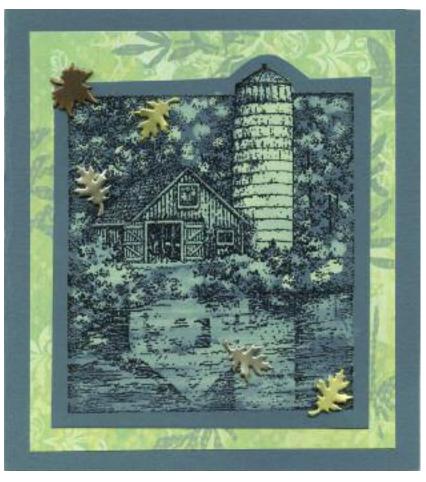
A few lines of bleach streaked across the upper portion of this scene create a stormy and turbulent sky. The dark purplish paper adds to the moody, tempestuous aura of the storm. Tufts of grass growing at the base of the lighthouse were lightened to represent the strong illumination from the tower above.

Southwest Pottery

This scene may be representative of one that occurred hundreds of years ago on the Sonoran Desert. The dark gray night sky cloaks the desert mesa and moonlight reflects off the smooth adobe walls, clay pottery and blooming agave flowers. The silver lizard appears to be the only creature stirring.

Pale Palominos

A single image of two horses stamped on a bright red background is brought to life with bleach. The lively ponies could have been colored with markers, yet the bleach technique provides lovely authentic shading to the animals' coats. Since the area around the horses is practically all one



HARVEST MOON / Jeannie Comcowich (Stamp credits: Barn scene—Talkabout Images [Creative Impressions].)

hue, the use of colorful patterned paper as a background layer adds movement and life and makes the ponies pop.

Harvest Moon

Autumn leaves tinged in copper, silver and gold flutter dryly in the brisk fall breeze. It's harvest time and farmers are busy filling their silos with feed and grains before the falling leaves are replaced by snowflakes.

Similar to the lighthouse scene, the sky was not entirely bleached out. Instead, irregular shaped spots were created across the sky and trees to give the appearance of shimmering stars, shivering tree limbs and autumn leaves flung about in the night air.

The reflections in the water were lightened to realistically mirror the barn and silo illuminated by the moon.



Christina Hecht is a regular contributor to RSM. She lives and stamps in Gila Bend, Arizona.