

Introduction

Water colour is a versatile medium that affords artists a great amount of freedom in regard to subject matter and painting styles. Water colour painting techniques can vary from broad, sweeping washes of colour to fine, tightly detailed subjects. You easily can combine loose, impressionistic techniques with photorealistic methods. Or, with planning, you can create deep, richly coloured works by painting many transparent layers over previously applied colours.

Even though each artist individualizes his or her paintings with a personal impression of the subject and colour, most artists follow the same basic steps to begin painting. First they choose a subject, either using a photograph for reference or painting from life. (Few artists paint from memory or their imaginations.) Then they sketch out the subject on paper, determining the composition, or how the elements are arranged in relation to one another. (A good composition should be pleasing to the eye, taking into account the relationships between negative and positive spaces, as well as principles such as unity, conflict, repetition, balance, and harmony.) Then most artists use pencil or charcoal to lightly

block in the basic shapes of the composition on the painting surface. Finally they apply colour.

Applying colour is the most exciting part of painting. The ability to see colour and the lights and darks in colour is one of the most marvelous senses we possess because it opens the door to unlimited avenues of expression. It is the contrasting lights and darks within a painting that create the illusion of dimension (or form) on the flat surface. Colour can be manipulated in an endless number of exciting ways to produce unique and expressive works of art.

These lessons will provide an excellent start to experiencing the art of water colour painting. Just remember:

Practice will be the key to your success, and your skills will improve with perseverance. Happy painting!



Tools and Materials

Water colour Paints

Water colour paints are available in three forms—in tubes, in small plastic or metal containers known as “pans,” and in blocks of colour called “cakes,” which are used to refill pans. Most artists choose tube water colours because they are already moist and allow you to squeeze out a large amount of colour quickly, making them easy to use. Pan and cake paints, however, are small and light, which make them ideal for travel. Reeves water colour paints are available in both tube and pan styles. The project in *Water Colour Step-by-Step Painting Guide* uses burnt sienna, magenta (equivalent to alizarin crimson), yellow ochre, lemon yellow, ultramarine (blue) and cerulean blue hue.

In theory, you can mix these six colours to create just any other colour, but in practice its best to start with a small array of colours. Note that white paint is not used in these projects; traditionally, watercolourists use the white of the paper rather than opaque white paint.



Flat Brushes

One of the most common style of brushes used with water colour is the flat brush. A flat brush has bristles of equal length, which are usually about 1-1/2 times the width of the ferrule (the metal band that holds the bristles). The flat is an important tool for covering large areas and applying washes. You can also use the tip and corners of the flat brush to produce fine detail. Reeves produces a variety of water colour paint brushes, including flat brushes in varied sizes and hair types. The size of each brush is indicated by a number (a smaller number indicates a smaller-sized brush), and brush hair type is categorized as either natural or synthetic.

SUPPLIES Since 1766, Reeves has been manufacturing excellent-quality paints and brushes and has long been established around the world as a wonderful source of art material for beginners.

Round Brushes

Round brushes are also commonly used with water colour. The hairs of a round brush taper gradually to a fine point, and this design allows the brush to hold a large amount of water and colour. The round brush can also create a variety of strokes. You can pull the brush to make long strokes or stroke with the brush along its side for broad, sweeping effects. You can even use the tip of the round to “draw” fine details.

Water colour Paper

Water colour paper is categorized by weight, size, and surface texture. Generally weights range from 72 to 400 lbs; the heavier the weight, the less tendency it has to warp when wet. Lighter-weight papers work well for smaller paintings, but for large paintings, it's wise to use papers with weights of 300 to 400 lbs. Paper texture refers to the paper's surface and varies from rough (a heavy texture) to plate-finish (a smooth surface). The most popular is a medium textured paper known as “cold pressed.”

Mixing Palette

Palettes contain wells for pooling and mixing colours while painting. Palettes are available in many different materials, including glass, ceramic, plastic, and metal. All are easy to clean, but glass and ceramic palettes are heavier and usually more expensive. Palettes also come in a variety of shapes—circle, square, oval, etc.—and sizes, but they all contain multiple colour wells and at least one large, flat area for mixing colours and creating washes.

Work Space

Your work station can be an elaborate structure or just a corner in a room, but two elements are absolutely essential: comfort and good lighting—natural light is best. If possible, set up your studio in a place where you'll have few distractions, and include a supportive chair. When you're comfortable, you'll be able to paint for longer stretches of time, and you'll find the overall experience more pleasant.

Other Necessities

There are a few other items you might find handy in your painting adventures. A sketchpad, pencil, and eraser are always a good idea to have on hand for quick studies and blocking in your sketch before you paint. Two jars of water, one for rinsing brushes and one for clear water washes, are essential. A toothbrush, alcohol, paper towels, and tissues each can be used to accomplish a number of interesting special effects. A spray bottle or mister will help to keep your paints (and sometimes even your paper) moist. A hair dryer can be used to reduce drying time. And you may find that masking tape and masking fluid are useful for protecting edges and saving whites.



EXTRAS Although you may not use these additional tools on every painting, it's a good idea to have them on hand.



WORK STATION When you set up your work area, keep all your materials within easy reach, and make sure you have adequate artificial light if you work at night.



PALETTE SELECTION No matter what style of palette you choose, try to find one with a large, flat area for mixing and creating washes and one with plenty of wells for holding all your colours.



WATER CONTAINERS It's a good idea to have two water jars ready to use: one for washing brushes and the other to hold clean water for diluting your paints. If you choose to use only one jar, make it a big one and change your water often.

Using Frisket

Using frisket is a way of saving the white of your paper. Liquid frisket, or masking fluid, is the type most commonly used by watercolourists. To apply, dampen an old brush and stroke it over a bar of soap (the soap prevents the bristles from absorbing too much fluid); then paint the frisket over the areas you want to remain white. Wash the brush and let the frisket dry completely. To remove the dry mask, rub it gently with your finger or with a rubber eraser.



FRI SKET TYPES Liquid frisket, or masking fluid, is a latex-based substance that is either white or slightly coloured. (Coloured mask is easier to see on white paper.) Paper frisket is a clear adhesive that you cut with scissors or a utility knife and adhere to the painting surface.

Colour Theory and Mixing

Colour and the Colour Wheel

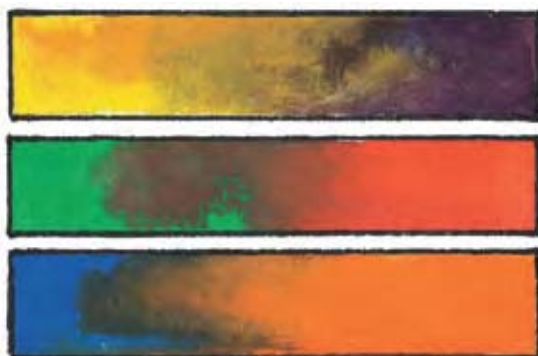
To mix colour effectively, it helps to understand some colour theory. There are three *primary* colours (yellow, red, and blue). All other colours are derived from these three. *Secondary* colours (purple, green, and orange) are each a combination of two primaries (for example, mixing red and blue makes purple). *Tertiary* colours are the results you get when you mix a primary with a secondary (red-orange, yellow-orange, yellow-green, blue-green, blue-purple, and red-purple). Complementary colours are any two colours directly across from each other on the colour wheel. In addition, there are three other terms to remember when mixing colours - *hue* - the pure colour or gradation of colour, *value* - lightness or darkness of colour; and *chroma* or saturation, the strength and brightness of colour.



COLOUR WHEEL A colour wheel is a convenient visual reference for mixing colours. Knowing the fundamentals of how colours relate to and interact with one another will help you create a desired mood—as well as interest and unity—in your water colour paintings. Note that colours on the red side of the wheel are considered to be warm, while colours on the blue side are cool.

Mixing Complements

Direct complements (such as yellow and purple, red and green, or blue and orange) can mute, or “gray,” one another better than any other colours on the wheel. You also can create natural grays by mixing complements in varying amounts.



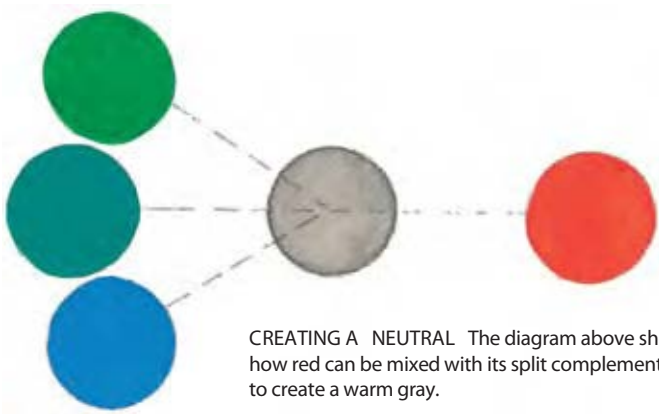
BLENDING COMPLEMENTS Notice how complementary colours appear when loosely mixed on white paper. You can also mix colours on the painting itself.

Analogous Colours

Any three colours next to each other on the colour wheel are called “analogous colours.” Analogous means that there is a close relationship with respect to hues. That is, the hues are similar but slightly different, as shown at right. As you look around the colour wheel, you will find other groups of analogous colours. Using related groups of colours in your paintings creates a sense of colour harmony.



WARM HUES Yellow-orange, yellow, and yellow-green are analogous to one another.



CREATING A NEUTRAL The diagram above shows how red can be mixed with its split complements to create a warm gray.

Transparent Colour Glazes

Colours can be changed or planned by building up thin *glazes*, or transparent layers. The effect of transparency results from mixing the paint with water. For example, apply a layer of paint and allow it to dry. Then paint a glaze of another colour over it. The eye mixes the colour visually.



COOL COLOURS Cool blues convey the quiet of this snow scene.



WARM COLOURS Warm, vibrant colours express an autumn mood.

Creating Moods

Colour invokes emotional responses. Soothing colours are often used in work areas, schools, and hospital rooms. Colour is also used to enhance product sales. Study advertisements and notice that warm, cheery colours attract attention while drab, grayed colours are not interesting.



HIGH KEY A high key painting uses a lot of white and projects a soft, airy feeling.



LOW KEY A low key painting uses dark colours and is usually more somber.

Split-Complements

Draw a straight line between two direct complements. The colours above and below a colour's direct complement are called its *split-complements*. Split-complements allow for a greater range of colour mixtures, and they "gray" the opposite colour differently than its direct complement.



GLAZING Here strips of yellow, orange, and green were painted and allowed to dry. Thin glazes of magenta, ultramarine, and burnt sienna were painted over them.

Selecting Colours

Colours should be chosen according to the painting's scene and mood. A snow scene needs cool blues, complemented by orange for accents and graying. An autumn scene requires a warmer palette of reds and oranges, complemented with greens and blues. Remember that colours on the red side of the wheel are warm while those on the blue side are cool.



NOISE Pure complementary colours applied next to each other can be loud and unsettling.



MYSTICAL Blues and purples create a mood of mystery and foreboding.



COOLNESS Lightened cool colours result in a calm, serene feeling.



WARMTH Yellows, reds, and oranges suggest heat and warmth. Reds can imply danger.

Water colour Washes

A *wash* is a thin mixture of paint that has been diluted with water. And as simple as the method may sound, washes are an integral part of water colour painting. They can play the role of a flat backdrop to more dramatic visual elements or serve as an underpainting for further colour work. They also can stand alone to convey mood and atmosphere. When

washes are layered on top of one another, the technique is called “glazing,” which is a great way to establish darker colours. Washes can be applied on wet or dry paper, and a combination of the two can also produce expressive results. Experiment with the various kinds of washes to see how they can work for you.



FLAT WASH The most common kind of wash used in water colour is the flat wash. A flat wash is a simple way to fill in a large area with a solid colour. Load your flat brush with water-diluted paint; then tilt the paper while you sweep slightly overlapping, horizontal strokes across the page. Maintain the same depth of colour from the top to the bottom by adding more paint to your brush between strokes. Let gravity help the strokes blend together. (You can also wet the paper before applying paint for a lighter, softer wash.)



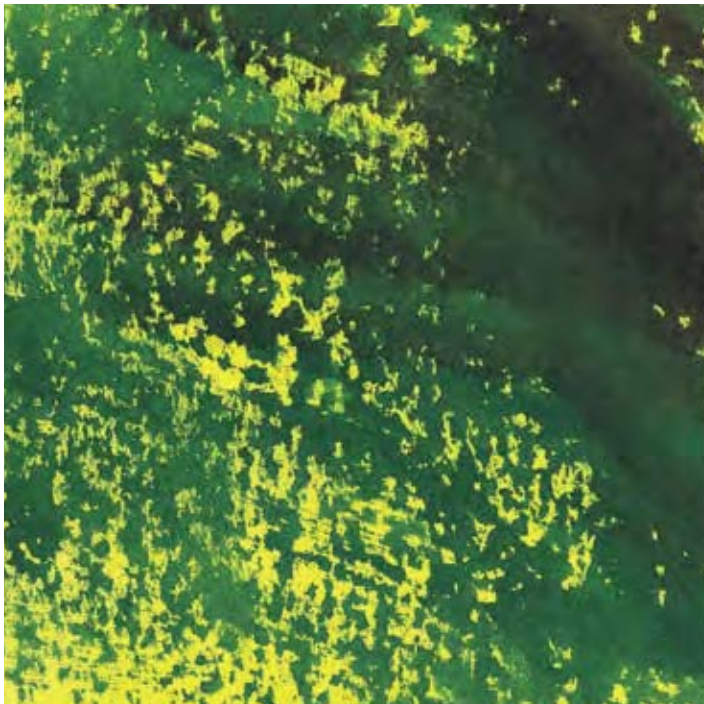
GRADED WASH Graded washes also are used quite frequently, and they're the perfect method for painting realistic water and skies. Graded washes are laid in the same way as flat washes, but more water is added to the pigment for each successive line of paint. With this technique, the colour transitions from dark to light. To create a graded wash, paint horizontal strokes across the top of the tilted painting surface with a flat brush, and add water between strokes to fade out the colour gradually as you work down the paper.



VARIEGATED WASH A variegated wash makes use of several different colours laid in uneven bands. The irregularity of the lines helps the multiple colours merge without obvious boundaries. Damp paper also encourages the colour blend. Unlike other washes, the variegated wash dries with variations still intact. This technique often is used to paint sunset skies or peaceful seas.



SPONGE WASH You can use a sponge instead of a brush to paint washes as well. To apply a sponge wash, first wet the paper. Even with damp paper, the paint won't run as much with a sponge as it can with a brush. Paint the wash as you would a regular flat wash, dipping the sponge in the paint before each stroke. Continue laying in even lines until the page is covered. The slight streaks between lines of colour will merge as the painting dries flat.



DRY WASH A dry wash is one that is laid in on dry paper. The dry paper gives you more control over the spread of the colour, producing a crisper, more defined appearance. Dry washes can be used alone, or they can be applied over previous (dry) applications of colour. Here a dark green mixture is drawn over a dry base of lemon yellow.

Wash Variations

The same basic techniques used for the flat wash and graded wash can be manipulated in other ways as well. You can change the appearance of your watercolour washes by blending them with preexisting layers of paint or by altering the dampness of your paper. If you're not sure how much paint to use or how damp to make your paper, try experimenting on a scrap of watercolour paper before using the technique in your painting.



RUNNING WASH Though many colours are mixed on the palette, others are mixed on the paper itself. This multi-coloured wet-into-wet wash produces a unique blend of colours by "running" the colours together. For this method, apply washes of different colours; then, while your water colours are still wet, tilt the paper to allow the colours to run and blend together.



WET WASH Dampening your paper before you paint produces a unique effect. The colours spread unevenly, and they bleed and run freely over the wet areas of the paper, blending together to create a soft, diffused appearance. The wet wash method produces a beautiful, natural-looking sky, as demonstrated here.

Basic Water colour Techniques

Water colour painting boils down to one basic technique: controlling moisture. The strength of a colour, the fluidity of the paint, and the texture of brushstroke are all determined by the amount of water used. But water colour painting also uses more specialized techniques to create dynamic effects. Every technique produces a unique result, so be sure to familiarize yourself with each!

Paper Moisture

Controlling the moistness of your watercolour paper is very important. Watercolour paint will act differently depending on the paper's dampness, as shown at right. Controlling the moisture allows for greater control of techniques and colour blends. Experiment on scraps of paper with varying degrees of dampness, and observe how the colours blend and react.



Saturated Paper



Semi-Moist Paper



Damp-Dry Paper



Dry Paper

Brush Moisture

You can control both the amount of moisture on your paper and on your brush. When you load your brush with a lot of water, your brush will glide smoothly and the moist paint will soak into the grains of the paper. However when you use just a bit of paint on a dry brush, you must drag the brushstroke across the support; then the pigment catches on the raised grain of the paper. Varying the amount of moisture on your brush can produce an entirely different appearance to your subject.



WET-INTO-WET Painting onto a wet support with a damp brush is called painting "wet-into-wet." This technique is used to achieve soft-edged objects and smooth colour blends, such as the natural-looking transitions between yellow and red in this tomato. To paint wet-into-wet, use a flat brush to go over your support several times with clear water. The paper should not be dripping, but thoroughly saturated. Your brush should also be damp, but not so wet that you can't maintain some control over your edges.



DRYBRUSH As the term drybrush implies, this technique involves applying colour with a dry brush—or without using water. This technique is much more precise than wet-into-wet painting; with drybrush, you can paint sharp edges and detail, controlling for the colour running and blending that occurs with wet painting techniques. Drybrush is used to achieve texture, such as the woodlike, weathered texture of this basket weave. Drybrush also can be used to render animal fur, hair, or grass.



COMBINATION When you combine techniques and paint with a moist brush and dry paper, you gain more control over the spread of your paint. By combining methods, you can develop soft shapes, as in wet-into-wet, but with more defined edges, as shown in the example above. Most paintings combine all three techniques, beginning with the softest shapes wet-into-wet, working up to wet-on-dry, and finishing up the details using drybrush.

Special Techniques and Textures

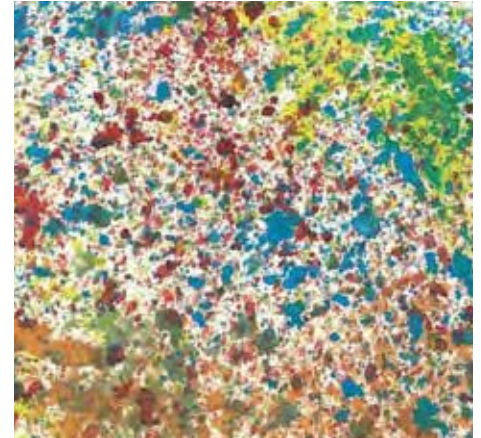
Watercolourists often use more tools than just brushes and paint to produce realistic renderings. There are many “tricks” to creating just the right look for pebbles in the sand, rough bark, and white clouds, among other things. These special techniques are all simple methods that result in a beautiful array of complex textures and patterns.



SCRAPPING Use this technique to retrieve thin lines of lighter values. Start with a wash of colour, and then use a pointed or beveled tool, such as a brush handle or dull kitchen knife, to scrape away a thin line of the wet paint and reveal the lighter value under-neath. In the example above, the highlights of the cattails and grass blades have been scraped out. For this technique, the paint should be fairly damp but not too wet.



USING SALT Use the salt technique to create dynamic, eye-catching backgrounds for still lifes or to depict a starry night, a sunlit ocean, autumn leaves, or fluffy bird feathers. To accomplish this effect, sprinkle salt on the paper while the paint is wet. Let it dry completely, and then brush off the salt. The salt absorbs the paint, producing unique mottled effects, as shown in the example above.



SPATTERING To produce a speckled effect, load a flat brush with paint. Hold the brush over the paper, and strike it against your finger. The paint will fly off the bristles onto the paper. You can also load paint on a toothbrush and run your thumb over the bristles. Protect the areas you don't want to spatter with newspaper or cardboard. You can spatter with one colour or combine multiple applications of colour, as shown.



USING ALCOHOL Alcohol repels water colour paints. Thus, when a bit of alcohol is dropped into a wet wash, unusual, exciting shapes and textures can result. This technique works best on smooth paper. Here alcohol was dropped into a still-wet wash of yellows, reds, and burnt umber to produce a startling effect.



LIFTING COLOUR This technique can be used to lift out either highlights or “mistakes.” While the paint is still wet, press a crumpled tissue or paper towel into the paint. You can dab or wipe the tissue to lift out colour, as shown above, or you can leave the tissue or paper towel in place, removing it when the paint has dried. The texture that results can be used to create a variety of surfaces. (You can also use a damp sponge or paintbrush to lift out colour from dry paint.)



LIQUID FRISKET Traditional watercolourists do not use white paint; instead, they save the white of the paper. To do so, you can simply paint around the areas you intend to keep white. Or you can use a liquid mask, paper frisket, or wax (such as a white wax crayon) to repel the paint. Here liquid frisket was stroked on the paper before applying the paint.