

Botanical Art Online

Botanical Illustration | Part 2 | Watercolour

Watercolour Part 1

Introduction



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Above: page from my sketchbook showing all of my colour mixes which are worked out in advance and adjusted in practice, where necessary.

Introduction

There can be no doubt that watercolour is the most appropriate medium for botanical and floral painting. No other medium, if used correctly, can capture plants in a naturalistic style or accurately portray the delicate petals of a flower. Watercolour is incredibly versatile and washes can be layered to achieve great depth of colour, texture can be built up through the use of different brush techniques and light can be achieved through delicate tints overlaid in washes.



In this module I focus on the purist method of watercolour painting, put in the simplest terms, this means using the white of the paper for highlights, markings and pale colours. This is opposed to mixing colour with white paint. The only time I would employ the use of white paint to add fine hairs on stems and leaves when appropriate to do so.



All too often, watercolour techniques and theories are overlooked in art classes. I believe that it is important to learn the basics **technique**, to understand theories and to be clear regarding the interaction of light and shade on colour if you want to make a good painting.

This knowledge forms the building blocks for an artist to create a better painting, enabling the focus to be on the subtleties of subject and composition, rather than a struggle over uncertainties regarding technical issues with the painting.

Of course this doesn't mean that it will be easy, it's not! and with every new subject the artist is presented with a new challenge. But having the right knowledge and skills allows the artist to make informed decisions.

What you will learn in Part 1 of this Module:

- About the purist watercolour method
- About watercolour colour, palettes, colour theory, hue, saturation and tonal value, tints, colour mixing.
- Identifying the colour in your subject

Materials required for the course

- **Artist quality watercolour paints.** Such a Winsor & Newton (see Materials document on web site)
- **A putty eraser, a Tombow retractable or dust free eraser**
- **Tracing paper** to transfer preparatory drawings.
- **Good quality sable brushes,** we all find our favourite brushes over time, W & N Series 7 or sable Round, size 1, 4 and 6 are good for starters. Short round miniature brushes are recommended for 'dry brush', such as Rosemary and Co spotter brushes or W & N miniature series 7 brushes, Sizes 1, 2, and 4 are recommended. I also find a W & N 3mm and 6mm flat brush 'one stroke, very useful for stems also a small synthetic filbert, such as Pro Art Masterstroke, series 61 and a flat shader series 62 both are great for cleaning up edges and softening. Kolinsky sable brushes are worth investing in as they last for years if well looked after. Some of the less expensive ProArte brushes are actually very good for painting fine detail and lines but they don't last so long. If you wish, you can invest in more brushes as you progress onto larger works.
- **Hot Pressed (HP) Watercolour paper** for you practice pieces, such as Arches HP 140lb, Stonehenge Aqua or Moulin de Roy are good options. Fabriano Artistico has been relaunched so may be worth a try again
- **A flat white palette** to mix your paint, of a reasonable size and preferable ceramic, a tile will do.
- **A linen or musin cloth,** for drying the brush.
- **Optional – Ox gall liquid and Gum Arabic** to help with the flow of the paint.

Part 1. Introducing Watercolour

The Colour Palette: Choosing your Paints

Your colour palette should be fairly limited initially with a balance between transparent and opaque colours. I hear people suggest that you should only have 6 colours, however the fact that watercolours are not pure primaries means that this is unrealistic when it comes to painting some of the bright subjects found in nature, so I recommend that you add some of the brighter colours too. You should have no more than 20 colours in your paint box (preferably less). All should be permanent light fast colours including weak and strong tinting colours and single pigments. If you look at a tube of paint or the packaging from a new pan you will see a number that begins with P, this is the pigment number, e.g. PB29 is French Ultramarine. Many colours have more than one pigment but single pigments are better because they are pure and make more reliable mixes.

Note: I refer to Winsor & Newton Artist Quality paints throughout this module but these can be substituted with other brands by cross checking pigment numbers but bear in mind that manufacturing processes differ and even the same pigments can be quite different between brands.

A **limited palette** will assist you in developing your understanding of colour mixing from the primary colours - red, yellow and blue to the secondary colours - green, orange and violet and 'tertiary' colours - browns and greys; the earth colours. You will be able to mix all of the colours that you need by using the recommended palette below.

Recommended Palette

You can start with a **basic 'primary' palette**, I suggest something like this to enable you to experiment, this is my own palette:

4-5 reds e.g. Quinacridone magenta, Quinacridone Red, Scarlet Lake, Permanent Carmine or Permanent Alizarin Crimson and Permanent Rose

4-5 yellows e.g. Transparent Yellow, Winsor Yellow, Winsor Lemon and Lemon Yellow NT

4 - 5 blues e.g. Cerulean, Cobalt, Winsor Blue green shade, French Ultramarine and Indanthrene Blue, Manganese Blue is also a good blue if you can find it.

If you are struggling with any of the basic terms there is a sheet of 'Watercolour Terms' in the Appendix. It's worth printing off and laminating.

Additional Colours

Over time, as you become more familiar with colours, you can add, however, there is little to be gained from having 'too many' paints because many colours can be easily mixed. Don't be tempted to add every colour that you see suggested but have the flexibility to add if you feel it's worthwhile. There are no hard and fast rules.

Learn your colours!

Recommended exercise

I strongly suggest that you paint a simple colour chart for your paint box with the names of each colour. This provides easy reference and to enable you see what you are using at a glance and will assist your learning the colour names.

Nothing fancy but use your usual paper because the colours differ slightly on is on each type of paper. HYaf l`Y`ko Yl[` `g^]Y[` [g@nj` Zq`_jY\`f`_`fge` `Y`j`d` `e` p`lg`a watery one as shown.

I keep my paints in the order of the W & N Colour chart but it's a matter of personal choice. I suggest you arrange them in order of colour groups though. Note: this is my old paint box! I use less than half that number of paints now!



You can download the W & N chart using this link:

<http://www.winsornewton.com/assets/ColourCharts/AWCColChartEng.pdf>

About warm and cool colours

Colour can be described as warm or cool, so think of them in terms of temperature. The reds are the warm colours and reflect more light at the red end of the light spectrum and the blues reflect light at the cool end - everything else falling along a scale in between.

So all reds are always warmer than yellows, and all yellows are warmer than blues. This is the simplest explanation, however colour temperature is 'relative' -

Perhaps you're wondering what this means? With each colour there are warmer and cooler variations of a basic hue. For example, some reds are cooler than other reds and so on. Looking at the basic 'primaries' you can see that Scarlet Lake is warmer than Permanent Carmine.



Colour temperature is very important in colour mixing and in particular with light. The way that light falls on a subject and the interaction of light and shade is intricately linked to temperature. We shall look at colour temperature again this later in the module. But rather than worrying about individual colour temperature, try to identify the different colours in a subject, you will start to see that a red flower has more than one red, it **usually has a warmer and a cooler version of the red.**

Identifying Colours

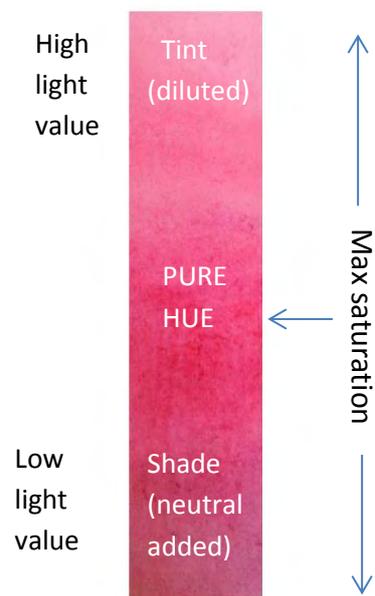
Hue, Saturation and Tonal Value

I shall describe this in as few words as possible to enable you to grasp the basic points to build upon.

1.HUE – This is the **basic colour** in your subject or paint, which is seen as either **red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet or magenta** (even in a white flower) **Work from the hue first in order to identify the colour of your subject.**

2.SATURATION – is the **strength of The hue**. Every hue has a **saturation point**. Thereafter the **saturation decreases as a colour becomes lighter or darker**. So adding water to dilute, or mixing with a neutral colour, both reduce saturation. Thus two separate flowers may appear to be a different colour but can actually be of the same hue but at higher or lower saturation. If you need to go darker than the saturation point where the hue is pure, don't be tempted to keep adding more paint, this doesn't make it darker, instead the paint just gets thicker and unsightly. Instead you add a neutral to darken it, either by adding a complementary colour or neutral tint mix. A neutral tint is made by mixing 3 primary colours e.g. indanthrene blue plus permanent alixarin crimson and transparent yellow, which make a neutral black but is not the same as a ready made black.

3.TONAL VALUE – This distinguishes a lighter from a darker colour, for example a light blue has a lighter tonal value than a dark blue. A subject in the shade will have a lower light value than a subject in the light even though it may be the same hue.



Identifying the Colour in a Subject

The first step is to identify the hues (colours) by looking at the **mid tones** in a subject. Always look at your subject in **good natural** daylight to identify the hues.



In the photograph of the peony, shown here, you will see that the flower is essentially pink, which is a red hue. Then the basic hue is **affected by the light and shade**. So we need to **identify all of the different hues** before painting.

The **basic hue mix** from the red palette is:

Permanent rose + a lesser amount of quinacridone magenta. the mix can be biased towards a warmer or cooler red (warmer = more permanent rose and cooler = more quinacridone magenta) also working with light washes or thicker more creamy mixes as well as dry brush for maximum saturation all effects the appearance of the colour.

Adding a very small amount of the neutral tint mix (described earlier), will desaturate and darken the pink or you can try using a complementary colour. The complementary to red is blue, so French ultramarine or cobalt blue could be used. You will discover that there are several ways of achieving the same or very similar colours!

I identified in hue across the flower. The warmer areas are near the middle and have more permanent rose in the mix, whereas in the cooler areas, upper left have more quinacridone magenta in the mix.

(because quinacridone magenta leans toward blue.) On the left of the flower, where the light source is, there is a **high light value and low saturation** and **on the right there is low light value and low saturation, in the low light areas I can desaturate the basic hue using a neutral tint mix**. I extracted colour swatches from the painting to assist in this process of **finding all of the tints and shades of the basic hues**. All of the colours shown below the image are derived from the three colour mix described above.

It is clear to see that the basic hues are very **transparent** and this is **achieved using tints** For the **tints, a basic hue is diluted**. For the **shades a small amount of neutral tint mix or a complementary colour is added**, such as Fr Ultramarine. Neutral tint mix can create a darker shade without altering the colour, complementary colours can be more unpredictable and result in a muddy look, so you need to understand the interaction between colours by practicing mixing and this is why I paint small colour swatches before I begin the painting. I use the neutral tint and complementaries, however, much of the work can be done with the basic hues first.

Activity

Obtain a flower of your choice and complete the following:

1. Identify the BASIC HUE, how did you identify it?
2. Think about the levels of SATURATION of the HUES, where is saturation higher or lower?
3. Look at the TONAL VALUE in relation to the LIGHT VALUE of each colour?
4. Identify a COLOUR MIX for the flower, making reference to the TINTS and SHADES
5. Paint a colour card naming all of your mixes.

In the next part Watercolour Part 1. You will learn the watercolour washes and dry brush techniques.

Don't worry at this stage if these descriptions appear daunting, over time this will make sense to you and you can come back to review and reflect

For more information refer to the W&N website which has some excellent information on colour properties such as, transparency, granulating colours and warm and cool colours <http://www.winsornewton.com/products/water-colours/artists-water-colour/spectrum-lists/>

Image below: watercolour techniques practice.



