

Secret Brush Skills for Watercolor Painters:

Bands of Color:

This exercise is designed to hone your wash laying skills in the form of single strokes of color laid down side by side in whatever pattern your first stroke takes. The object is to concentrate on the white line you are forming between each stroke. Try not to touch any previous strokes, keep the white lines of unpainted paper unbroken.



Mix several puddles of different colors on your watercolor palette. I used a round #10 red sable for most of this exercise. A round #4 red sable was used to add smaller variations in the gaps.

A larger brush that holds more paint will allow you to make longer continuous brush strokes.

Fully load or "charge" your watercolor brush with paint and starting at an edge of your paper, start painting a winding line of paint across the page.

Keep the width of the brush stroke as consistent as you can. You can recharge your brush as needed and pick up where you left off.

While the last stroke is still wet, rinse out your brush and grab the next color. Start pulling another linear stroke next to last one painted. Follow parallel with the previous stroke as it snakes across your page.

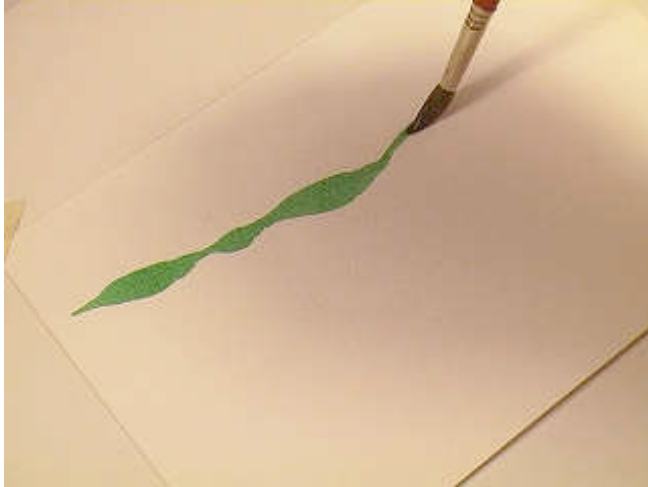
Do not let the washes touch. Leave white paper between each stroke. This is the time to be daring...try to get as close as you can to the previous stroke. How thin can that white stripe get?



Repeat as necessary with different colors until you've filled the paper, then rinse. This exercise requires a certain steadiness of hand to do without letting the washes touch as you maneuver across your paper.

Thick 'N' Thin

Artists add interest and variety by altering the thickness in a single stroke of a flowing paint. By using the tip of your brush you can get a fine line flowing. If you add pressure as you pull the stroke the brush spreads and the stroke thickens. If you lessen pressure the stroke will get thinner. This exercise combines this brush skill with a twist on the [Bands of Color](#) exercise.



Start by pre-mixing several puddles of different colors, basic primary colors are fine.

Make sure your brush is full but not sopping wet. Work the tip on a clean area of your palette until it comes to a satisfactory point.

Starting at the edge of your paper gently pull a fine line with the tip. Start to apply pressure to the brush to thicken the stroke.

Then lessen the pressure until the line thins out again. Continue this thick'n'thin stroke across the page.

Rinse your brush and change colors. Start a new thick'n'thin stroke next to the last one.

You can try to thicken your stroke where the adjacent line is thin, but in particular, avoid touching the other washes with the new colors you lay down.

If your brush starts to run dry, reload your brush from your palette and continue the stroke where you left off.

You will notice that different pigments and brands of watercolor paint have different "flow" characteristics as you practice.



This exercise will help you learn to develop more expressive lines through brush and wash control.

Being able to instinctively thicken or thin a brush stroke on command while you are painting, and have it go where you want it, is a good thing. It is a learnable skill as you will see.

I used a round #10 red sable for most of this exercise, while using a round #4 red sable for smaller fill-in strokes.

Wrist Flick

The Wrist Flick is a playful stroke that can be easily overdone. And it is sometimes overdone because the artist just couldn't get that last branch or blade of grass to lay the way they wanted. So they try again. As an alternative to screwing up an otherwise decent painting I suggest practicing and exploring this technique so you know how to do it when you need it. Screwing up while practicing is O.K. Just try some more until you're comfortable with it.



Start by preparing a few colors to work with on your palette. Mix up some medium value washes in several colors.

The Wrist Flick is easily done with a decent round red sable or a rigger-style brush.

Load your brush with paint and angle the tip of the brush towards you as pictured. This is the starting position for the Wrist Flick.

This is the ending position of the brush stroke. Pivoting from your wrist push the brush tip up and away in a "flicking" motion.

The last part of the stroke flicks out in a feathery point. Practice several times in each color you have.

Vary the thickness of the strokes as you try to imitate grasses, branches, or even feathers.

I rested my brush hand on top of my other hand for some of the brush strokes here. Try this technique for stability and control of detailed flick strokes.



Continue practicing the stroke on your paper. You don't have to paint a scene like this one, but be aware that one may grow naturally as you practice.

Along with suggesting grasses, branches, and feathers effortlessly, the Wrist Flick and variants are handy when rendering hair in portraiture or wildlife painting.

A little Wrist Flicking can go a long way to finishing off a landscape painting. Too much can do a painting in before you know you've gone too far.

Painterly Strokes

The feel of a fully loaded watercolor brush slapping on the paper can be exciting and scary at the same instant. Being free with your brushwork and paint can be a bit intimidating at first, but it is a lot of fun. You can see the brush shape in strokes made with this brush technique. Generally speaking any painting done in a loose and free technique would be considered a "Painterly" painting.



Mix up some watercolor paint on your palette in several colors that may work well together.

Start by laying the full brush on the paper and lifting away cleanly. That is the shape of your brush fully charged. Try more short dabbing strokes across your paper.

Rinse your brush and change colors.

Experiment with some longer sweeping strokes. Keep your brush strokes uniform in width as you start to overlap strokes to develop shapes.

Play with different groupings of brush strokes across your paper.

Rinse your brush and change colors. Continue laying down similar brush strokes trying different angles of attack.

Allow your wet brush strokes to intermingle as you progress.



This "full brush" painterly stroke lends itself easily to landscape and watercolor gesture sketching.

This brush stroke is only one of many that are considered "painterly" in quality. It is loosely based on the watercolors of Frank Wilcox, Frederick Childe Hassam, Maurice Prendergast, and Edward Hopper.

Variations of painterly styles can be found in works as diverse as those of Charles Demuth, Paul Cezanne, Dong Kingman, Georgia O'Keefe, Andrew Wyeth, and John Singer Sargent, among many others.

The Stab



Start by pre-mixing puddles of color on your palette. You may want to use an old brush to practice this technique.

Load your brush with color and take a gentle "stab" at the paper. Watch your brush and notice the fanning pattern of the hairs as you push it into the paper. Although it looks otherwise, this is not a violent stroke. You have no intent but to find some new technique.

Continue poking around on your paper, adding a twist or spin to your stroke by rolling your brush in your fingers as you paint.

Experiment with angles of attack to find the best spreading point for the brush you are using.

Consciously try to shape the hairs as you press a stroke into the paper. Give it a little wiggle while the brush hairs rest on the paper to make them align.

Try a slow motion stroke—tipping your brush so the pressure point is on the tips of the hairs. This presses more paint into your paper, making a more defined stroke.



Rinse and switch colors and/or brushes. Continue to practice spreading and twisting your brush, building texture across the paper.

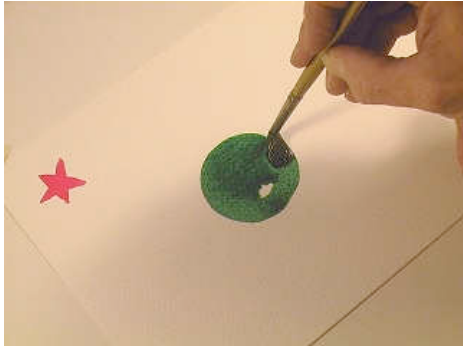
Look for organic shapes and textures as you allow your strokes and colors to overlap and blend.

This is another example of a what is considered a painterly stroke.

The "Stab" technique works best in conjunction with other brush strokes unless all you need is texture for your painting.

Cutting Edges

This exercise utilizes your skills in drawing and your brush control in painting edges of washes in various shapes. Use geometric shapes in a variety of sizes, and colors using the largest brush possible for each size. You have to know how to paint the shapes you see before you. Since we all know how a circle, square, triangle, rectangle, or star, looks you'll know immediately if you've succeeded. Painting shapes requires the use of several brush techniques you can develop simply by practicing them.



Start by mixing up several pools of primary colors to work with.

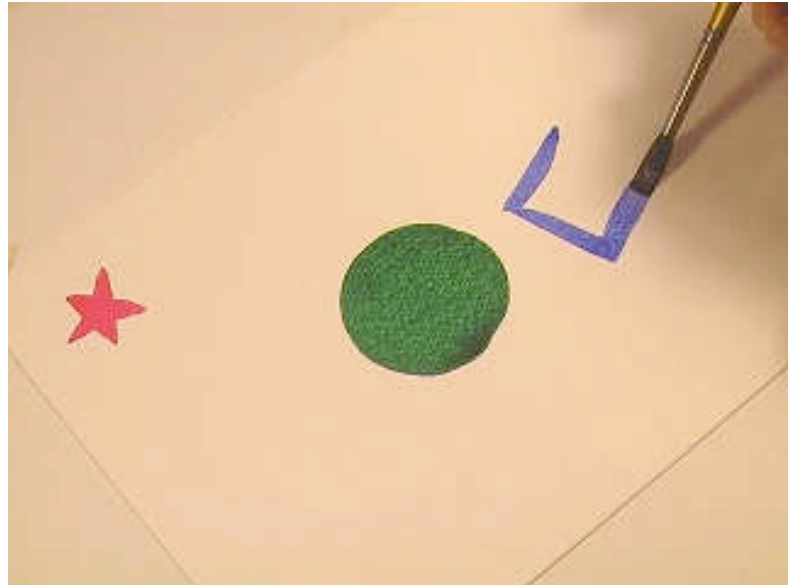
From my experience "cutting an edge" is a sign painter's term for pulling a clean line of paint with your brush. A clean line being a line that is smooth and flowing with no irregularities.

Notice the twisting motion controlling the upstroke of the circle shape.

Consider each shape before you start to paint. What is the minimum amount of brush strokes needed to create the edge of the shape?

A circle? One or two strokes. Triangle? Three. Square. Uh, four. You get the idea. The five-pointed stars were done several ways. I cut both edges of each arm on some (ten strokes), tried five thick'n'thin strokes, and drew a star doodle: one stroke, five intersecting lines.

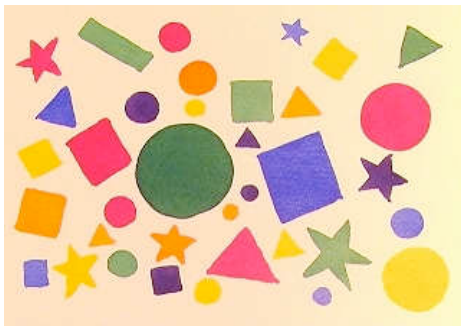
If your brush is too full to get a proper point, touch it on a sponge, tissue, or towel to remove excess paint before you start.



While you have one color in your brush try painting all the different shapes across the page in that one color. Rinse your brush out, switch colors, and repeat.

For sharp corners use the very tip of your brush and start the brush stroke at the corner point of the shape.

For circular shapes, start your curving brush stroke inside the edge of the shape and pull the stroke into position before continuing the stroke.



Tissue Paper watercolor textures

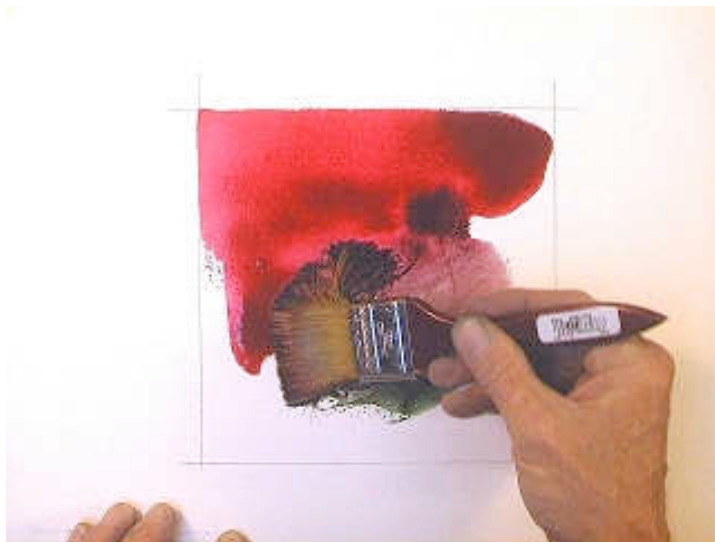
OBJECT: Learn to create unique watercolor texture with tissue paper.

MATERIALS:

Watercolor paper, a paint brush, & a crumpled piece of white gift wrap tissue paper.

COLORS USED: Permanent Rose, Alizarin Crimson, Sap Green.

I started by wadding up a single sheet of tissue paper and preparing washes of Sap Green, and a wash of Permanent Rose and Alizarin Crimson.



Making a field of color

Using my 1½" wash brush I loaded it up with the previously mixed Permanent Rose and Alizarin Crimson.

I proceed to lay washes and cut in the edges in with red.

I dipped the corner of my (red) brush into some Sap Green and stabbed and mixed these two colors on the paper.

Before the big cover-up

I continued to scruff in the middle a bit and then thoroughly rinsed my brush.

I finished painting the rest of the surface with a strong Sap Green wash intermixed with the reds from before.

The surface is wet and saturated with watercolor paint in strong colors.





Clean that mess up!

I spread the tissue out and shaped it into the approximate size I needed.

Being careful to cover the entire area, I positioned the tissue over the wash and gently pressed down with my palms.

I did not press the tissue entirely flat, allowing the crinkles and creases to do their job.

I set the example aside to dry, almost.

Tissue paper watercolor textures

I knew that a couple of the pigments I used have high binder levels (see the salt tutorial) and the tissue paper could be glued to the painting if I let it dry completely.

I lifted a corner to see if the design was set and gently pulled the tissue paper off to reveal the effect you see.



Plastic wrap watercolor texture

OBJECT: Learn how to create unique watercolor textures with plastic wrap.

Before the flood

MATERIALS:

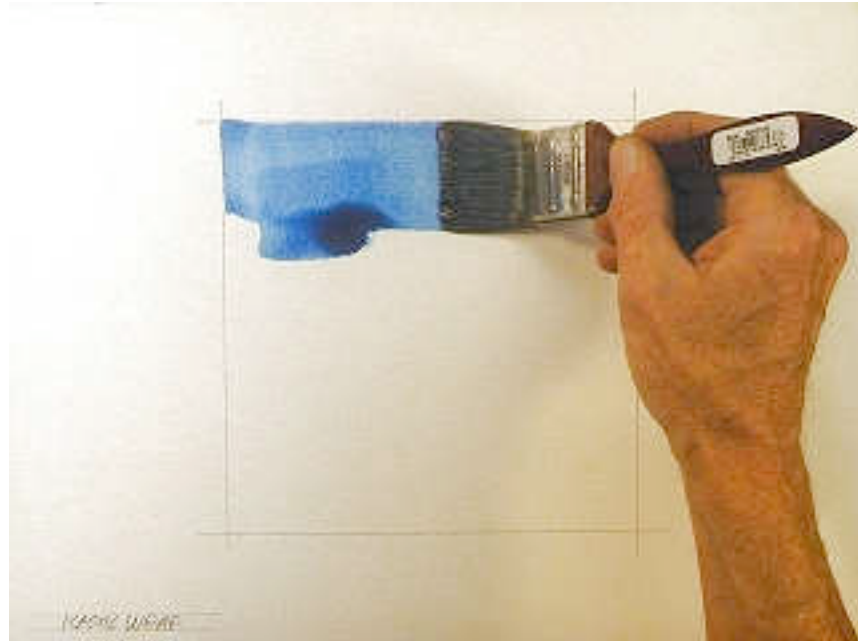
watercolor paper, a paint brush, and plastic food wrap.

COLORS USED:

Pthalocyanine Blue, Sap Green.

I start by mixing

a large wash of Cobalt Blue and laying in a large loose wash from the upper left corner on across the top of the paper.



The under-painting completed

I finished the underpainting with Sap Green, spreading things around in interesting shapes.

I measured off a piece of plastic wrap by sight, ripped it off the roll, and spent a minute trying to un-cling it from itself.

Laying down the plastic

I roughly shaped the sheet with my hands and pressed it into the wet washes.

I pulled the plastic sheet out a bit to cover the whole wash.



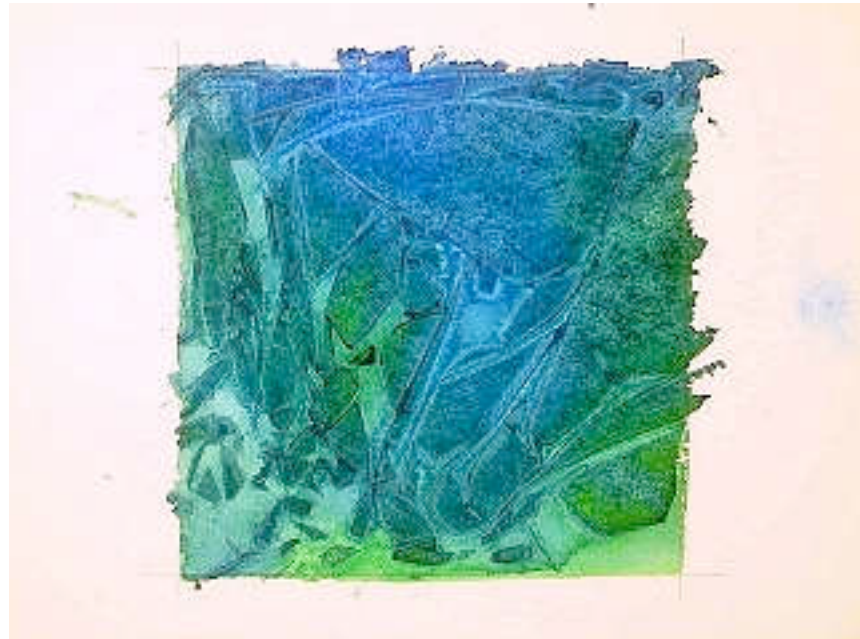
Pretend to know what you're doing

I spent a few seconds playing with the shapes. Making some raised, flat, and stretched areas in the plastic.

You do have some control over the final outcome at this point, so take your time. I set it aside to dry flat and undisturbed.

Plastic wrap watercolor texture

I had a teacher who used this technique as a starting point for large acrylic paintings. I now understand his enthusiasm for it at the time. The effect always gives surprises and is startlingly beautiful to look at.



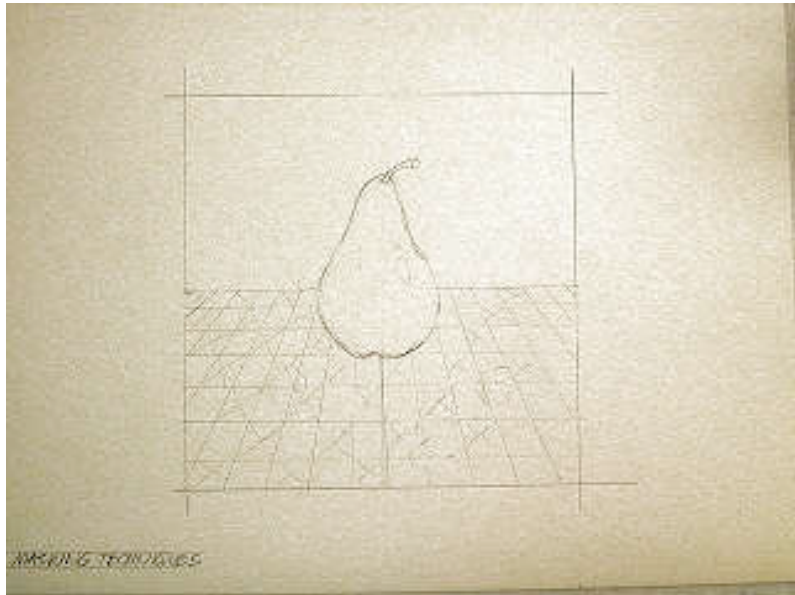
Masking (Frisket) watercolor tutorial

OBJECT: Learn watercolor masking techniques.

MATERIALS: Arches #140 CP watercolor paper, Incredible White Mask Liquid Frisket, masking tape, a #6 Liquitex synthetic Basic round (for frisket use only), Grumbacher 1" flat red sable, Kalish Kolinsky Red Sable #8 round, and a Kolonok #4 round Kolinsky red sable brush. ...and a blow-dryer, a scrap of paper and a square of artist's crepe rubber.

COLORS (various manufacture): Cadmium Yellow Light, Cadmium Yellow Medium, Alizarin Crimson, Dioxazine Purple, Cobalt Blue, Phthalocyanine Blue, Phthalocyanine Green, Raw Umber, Burnt Sienna. Colors chosen are transparent and semi-transparent.

A stark yellow pear on a dark background and checkered tablecloth became the subject matter.





Protecting your lights

I started by stirring the liquid frisket. The solids tend to settle out if not used often enough.

Dipping my already damp #6 synthetic round into the frisket I used the scrap paper as a palette and smoothed my brush to a point.

I then painted a layer of liquid frisket over the entire pear, stem and all.

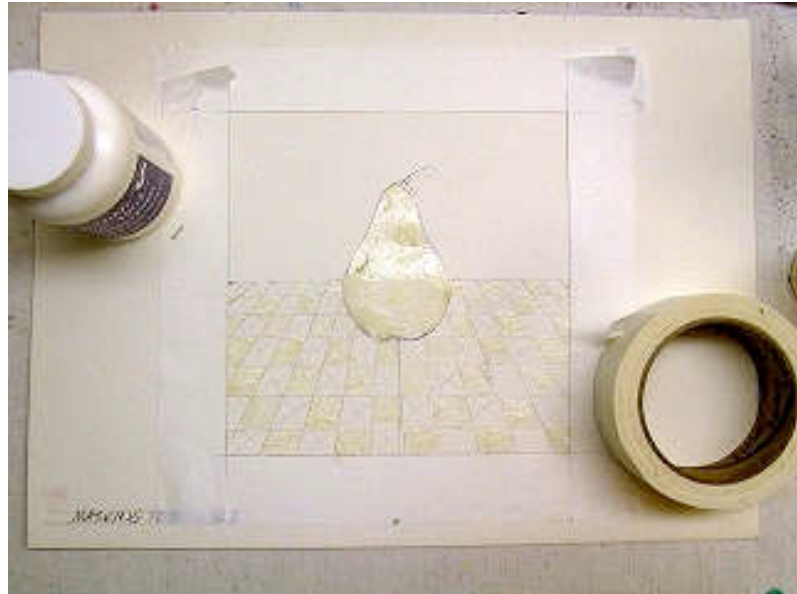
Do not use your sable brushes for frisket. It will ruin them by getting embedded in the hairs.

Use a synthetic hair brush, moisten it before use. For even easier cleaning, use mildly soapy water for wetting and rinsing your frisket brush.

Masking the details

After the pear was masked I decided which squares in the tablecloth pattern were white and proceeded to mask them all with frisket. Notice the "X" marks the spot in the squares to be dark.

I taped off the edges of the entire painting with masking tape, gently smoothed the inside edges down and allowed the frisket time to dry.





It's quicker than you think..

Using washes of Alizarin Crimson, and Dioxazine Purple I laid in the red squares of the table cloth.

I varied the color towards purple as the wash receded behind the pear, and graded the main red wash to a lighter red towards the foreground.

Dry it up... Lay in background

After letting the first wash dry, I lightly mixed Pthalocyanine Green and Alizarin Crimson to form a dark murky bluegreen color. With no background detail we'll rely on color and value instead.

I washed in a dark angled green area and adding a touch of Pthalocyanine Blue graded the wash to a lighter bluish green trying to be as "painterly" as possible. I carefully cut in the line of the edge of the tablecloth.



Underpainting complete... drying time

I finished off the background by mixing Alizarin into the Pthalocyanine Green to make a deep dark Maroon and blended into a shadowy upper left corner.

At this point take a moist brush or tissue and carefully dab up any puddles of paint resting on the frisket.

Allow painting time to completely dry.

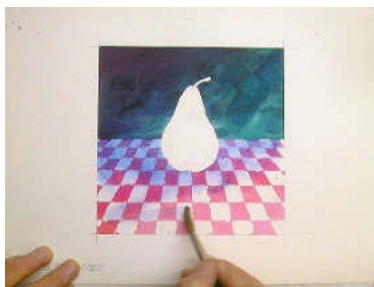
Removing the mask...

To remove dried liquid frisket you need a Natural Rubber Pickup. They come in little squares in paper sleeves. They are made of a crepe, a crude rubber used for the soles of shoes. It has a high tack.

Gently stroke the dried liquid frisket from the edge of the painted area into the masked area. I work in short strokes from top to bottom or left to right, pulling with an even light pressure.

The rubber pickup will roll and pull up the dry liquid frisket. Do this carefully and remove all traces of frisket.

If your paper is not totally dry, you can accidentally pull some paper fibers up with the frisket.



Adding an illusion of depth

I wanted the covered tabletop to have a sense of depth and worked on the areas in shadow.

Using my #8 red sable round brush I loosely mixed Cobalt Blue, Phthalocyanine Blue, and Dioxazine purple in a couple areas of my palette.

Varying the colors as I went, I graded the shadow areas from cooler richer blues to warmer lighter blues in the foreground.

Points of light

After letting the last areas dry, I wanted to keep some highlights open on the pear before I continued.

Using the #6 synthetic round brush, I covered a couple highlight areas on the right side of the pear and let it dry.



A singular pear

I started working on the pear by laying a light glaze of Cadmium Yellow Light (and Medium) over the entire pear shape.

Adding tiny amounts of Raw Umber, Phthalocyanine Green, and Burnt Sienna I started modeling the form of the pear. I dropped dark "pin pricks" of the pear surface detail in with the tip of a #4 round red sable brush.

Final strokes and clean up

I let the work on the pear dry and then continued modeling the shading on the pear.

Using cool gray washes (Burnt Sienna and Pthalocyanine Blue) I further modeled the shadow side and other areas of the pear.

The tablecloth needed to be more fully realized so I devised a simple floral design over the "X" squares to pull it together. Using a #4 round red sable and Alizarin Crimson in varying values I systematically painted the pattern on the cloth.

After painting was complete, I let the painting dry again and removed the last of the frisket using the natural rubber pickup.





Final example painting

To clean up the finished painting I used a kneaded eraser to remove most traces of the pencil drawing in the painting itself.

Click photo to enlarge.

Here we have a 7" square watercolor painting of a yellow pear on a red-checked tablecloth painted using the Liquid Frisket and Masking Tape techniques.

This tutorial uses a representational approach the the subject matter, pre-planning was needed to protect areas needed for later stages of the painting. More spontaneous approaches to masking are also viable alternatives.

You can use liquid frisket on areas already painted for some amazing multi-layered effects. This works with varying degrees of success depending on the underlying pigments.

Reference tools: Glazed color grid

OBJECT: See how your colors interact with one another as glazes.

**Something for
your reference
wall**

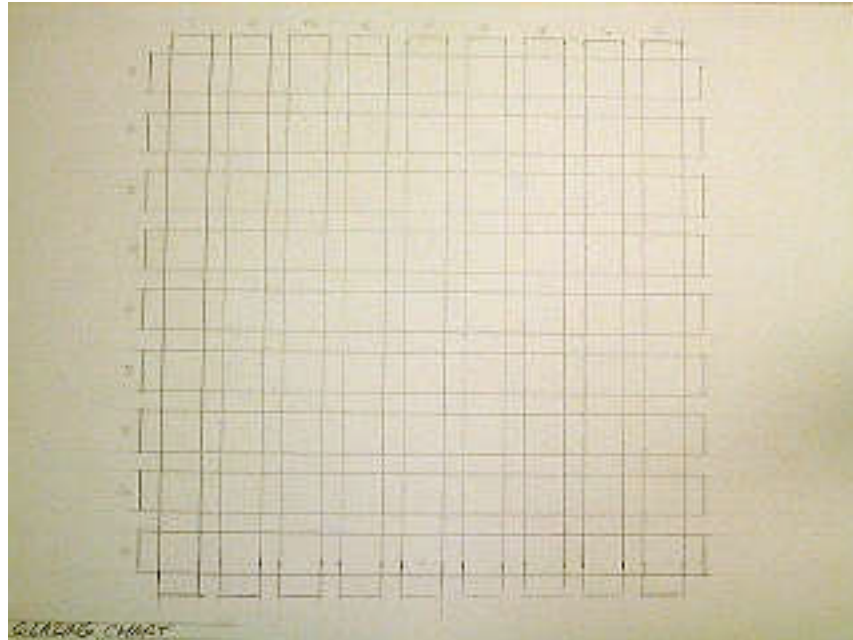
**Creating a
glaze grid** will
allow you to see
how the colors
you have
interact with
each other.

**I decided to
use 9 bright
colors:**

Cadmium Yellow
Light, Cadmium
Orange,
Cadmium Red,
Alizarin
Crimson,
Dioxazine
Purple,
Pthalocyanine
Blue, Cobalt
Blue, Sap
Green, and
Pthalocyanine
Green.

**I drew a 9 x 9
grid** of 1/2"
bands. (You can
skip the drawing
step if you can
paint a straight
line without a
problem)

**You should
use your own
palette of colors
arranged
correspondently.**





Laying some stripes

Try to mix each color to about 50% of it's hue strength.

Starting with my lightest yellow I painted a full stripe of color down the paper in an even tone. I used a #10 round red sable, but you can use what works best for you.

Following the rainbow of the palette I chose for this grid, I painted through the reds to blues to greens, completing the first row of color bars.

I let the piece dry thoroughly before...

Rinse and repeat

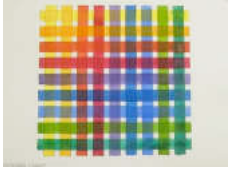
I flipped the grid around for easier painting.

Starting with my lightest yellow I proceeded to paint the same sequence of color bars across the first washes.

When you lay these second color bars over the first ones lay the washes as cleanly as possible.

Try not to disturb the underlying washes.





s'pretty innit?

You now have a color reference chart that shows you what?

Click image to enlarge.

It shows you:

- 1)** Color transparency, semi-transparency, or opacity
- 2)** Colors created when your colors overlay each other
- 3)** Colors that tend to bleed or stain when glazed over

Tack it up in your studio as a painting aid.

Use it and others to help you determine what your personal artistic palette of colors should be.

Use it to identify the troublesome pigments and their behaviors.

ax Resist watercolor tutorial

OBJECT: Learn to use wax-based media for watercolor 'resist' technique.

Materials and drawing

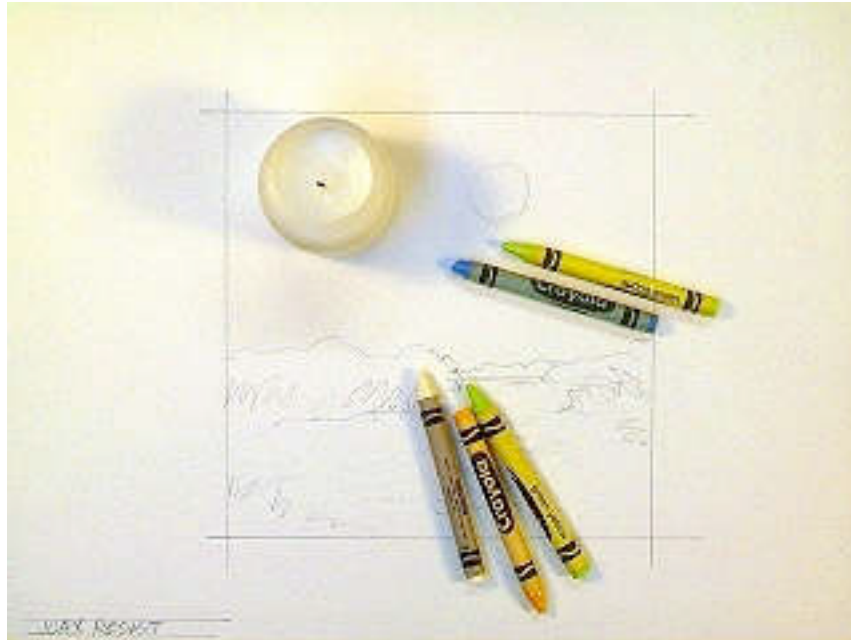
MATERIALS USED:

Arches CP #140 watercolor paper, a 1" red sable Grumbacher wash brush. A candle and a number of light colored crayons from an old pack of 64.

COLORS USED:

Permanent Rose, Ultramarine Blue, Dioxazine Purple, Phthalocyanine Blue, Burnt Umber.

I gathered the materials and roughed in a quick landscape in pencil.



Is that a moon?

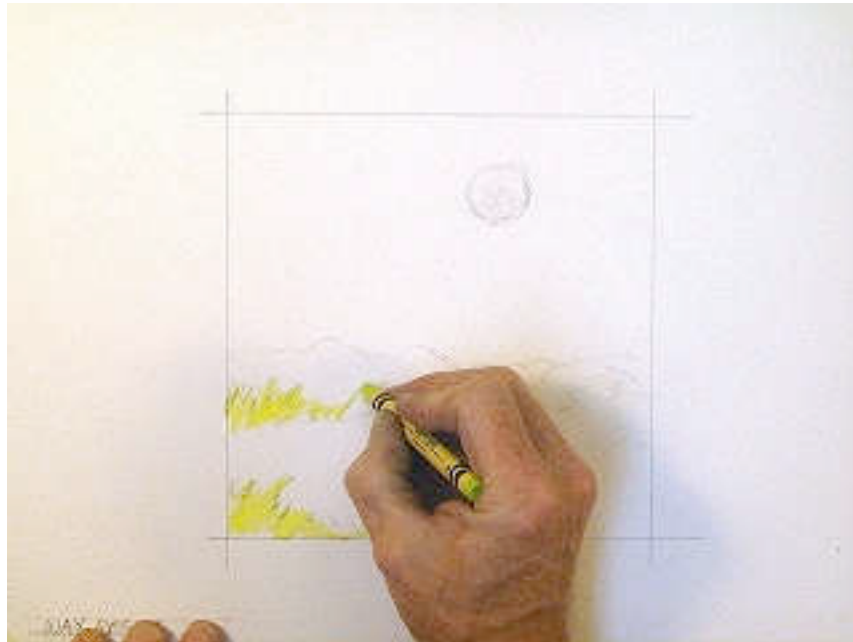
I started by drawing the moon in with the edge of a candle.

I couldn't see the wax on the paper so I continued to throw in some cloud forms that I couldn't see.

I then rough in some reflections below the moon, in the soon-to-be dark lake.

Picking out some grassy areas

Using a yellow-green crayon I drew in some grassy reed areas around the edges of the lake area.



It is futile to resist

Using a yellow crayon I added more details to the grassy areas.

With the yellow-green crayon I put a light tone along the edge of the horizon.

I finished by dotting a few stars in the sky with a white crayon and using a light periwinkle blue to try and catch some highlights in the lake area.

Are the stars out tonight?

I mixed a intense Ultramarine Blue wash and started laying in the night sky.

The areas covered with wax resist the paint, and stay white. Not quite what I had visualized, but I digress and continue.



Maybe a little more color

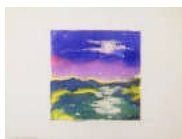
As I washed in the rest of the sky area I added some Permanent Rose and a touch of Dioxazine purple towards the horizon line to liven things up.

I mixed some Ultramarine Blue and Burnt Umber into a medium gray and started to cut in the background hills over the resist areas.

Shifting colors and water tones

The gray didn't work out too well so I layed a wash of pure Ultramarine over top of the background hills to pop up the color.

I then mixed some Pthalocyanine Green with a bit of the previous gray wash and pulled the green wash over the surface of the lake, revealing more resist detail.



It's easy to resist

I continued with the grayed-green wash, leaving a bit of white paper and drybrush toward the far shore to accentuate the reflections on the water. Some backwash came down from the blue hills so I worked the blue into the lake.

Click image to enlarge.

The wax resist technique requires some thought and preplanning if you are doing representational work.

Trying ideas with tracing paper -

Part 1

OBJECT: Learning to test design ideas before you commit them to paint.

Trying ideas with tracing paper - Part 2

OBJECT: Learning to test design ideas before you commit them to paint.

Flipping and rubbing

To prepare your new design elements for transfer you need to turn your tracing paper into transfer paper.

Any soft lead

graphite instrument will do. I use graphite sticks because you can cover large areas quickly by using the side of the stick.

On a flat, smooth surface such as the back of a drawing pad or scrap foam board, flip your tracing paper over and rub graphite over the areas where your lines are.

Remember, you are coating the BACK of the drawing with a fairly





Distribute evenly

After you've coated the paper with graphite you need to even out the graphite coating and smooth away the graphite dust.

Take a wadded tissue and, using a circular motion, smooth the graphite into the tooth of the tracing paper.

Make sure all areas to be transferred to the painting are covered.

Shake any excess graphite dust into the trash can.

**Getting it
on the
painting**

**Take your
"cartoon";**
and position
it on your
painting.
Tape an
edge or two
down,
gently.

**Trace your
design**

using a ball
point pen
and a light
touch. I use
a red pen
because it's
easier for
me to see.

**Use
moderate
pressure**
when
tracing.

**Too much
pressure**
can bruise
grooves into
the surface
of your
watercolor
paper. The
dents can
show up as
dark lines if
painted
over.





Interest added: background

On the far left you can see the transferred image of the figures.

I refine the drawing at this point by working over the transferred areas with pencil.

On the immediate left you have the finished figures.

I used three colors, raw sienna, dioxazine purple, and cadmium red to quickly paint in the figures in a loose manner. These were painted with a #4 round sable brush.

The figures are really nothing more than indications of people. People shapes. Although they are in silhouette, the colors suggest details that aren't really there.

Interest added: foreground and middle ground

I decided to approximate the trail tracks left by previous mechanized hikers. I've seen them before, but I've never really studied them in depth. A ruts a rut, eh?



A fairly dark mix of pthalocyanine green, alizarin crimson, and a little ivory black was used to get some interesting grays.

I used a lighter gray to rough in the lines and then intensified the darks where needed.

After the painting dried thoroughly I removed



AFTER: A different perspective

The visual flow of the original painting (click image below) reads vertically, right up the big blue tree trunk (left of center), off the page, and back down the tree on the right to the path, which leads you to the middle of the page.

With the changes, the visual flow starts again up the blue tree trunk, you jump immediately to the people in the distance and pan back to the foreground. Which again pulls your eye up the tree on the right and sweeps left across the canopy of color.

Notice how the addition of people draws your interest and implies a story in process.

BEFORE:



Materials and intentions

Tracing Paper
#1 or #2
(soft)
Drawing or writing pencil
Graphite stick - 4B or softer
(optional)
Ballpoint pen - (I used red)
Plain Facial Tissues
Masking tape



Requirements:

A painting that's not quite "there" yet.
The desire to finish the painting
Some ideas to try



BEFORE: Focal point without a payoff

This painting (see above) had laid around the studio for a few months collecting dust and cat hair. It was an O.K. painting as it was, but after living with it for a time I decided there were some simple additions I could add to "complete" this painting.

All elements in the woods scene were working to pull you straight down the muddy path to...what?

An empty spot (see left.)

And not a very interesting trip there either.

**Laying
down some
paper**

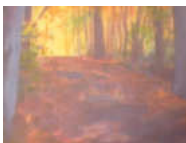
**Something
was
missing.**

The setting looked rather ominous in spite of all the bright fall colors. I felt like *anything* could come tearing over the crest of the hill at any moment.



**Giving it
some
thought,** I started by laying some tracing paper over the area I was going to work on.

**I used
some** masking tape to gently tape a couple edges down to keep the tracing paper in position.



Can you see what you're doing?

Your tracing paper should be translucent enough to see the basic details of your underlying painting.

If you have a light box to work with, heavier papers such as layout or plain bond paper can be used in a darkened room.

Elements of interest

By this time

I had decided to add a strolling pair of figures in silhouette.

I loosely

drew in some figures. Just some basic human forms.

I wanted to

give the impression of the figures walking away from the viewer, but that was secondary to setting the scale of the scene by deciding on the height of the people in the distance.

The middle and

foreground seemed fairly non-descript so...





Maybe a little tracking...

To show evidence of others enjoying the park I doodled in some muddy tracks.

The figures established that the path was just wide enough for an access road so I added some indications automotive tracks.

I threw in some random bicycle or motorcycle ruts because that's what I usually trip on.

alt watercolor texture effects

OBJECT: Using table salt for unique watercolor texture effects.

Materials and objective

MATERIALS:
Arches #140
CP watercolor paper, Iodized Table Salt, Grumbacher 1" flat red sable. A small square of dry cellulose sponge.

COLORS (various manufacture)

: Alizarin
Crimson,
Cobalt Blue,
Sap Green





Start out with a painting

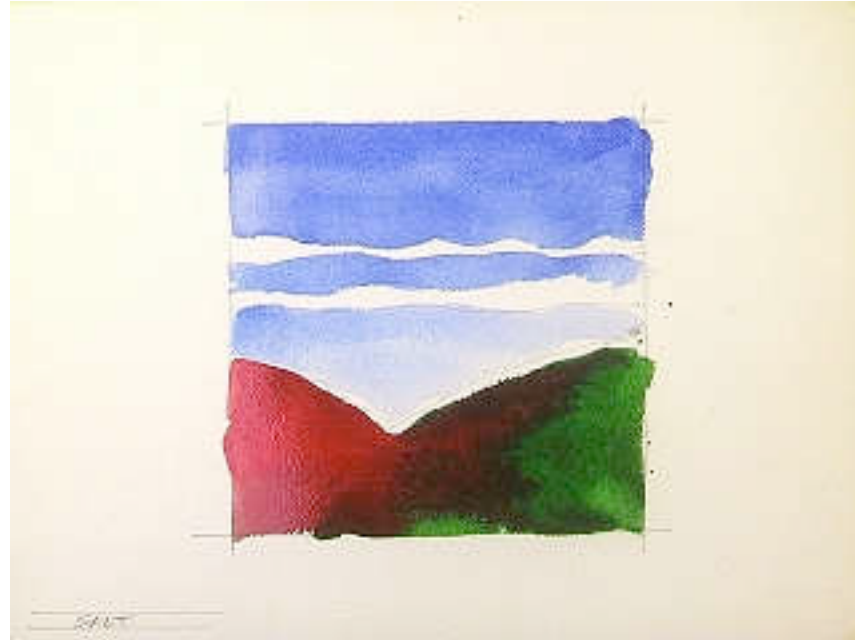
Using a 1" flat red sable I use washes of Cobalt Blue to paint a sky area. I graded the sky using lighter bands of Cobalt Blue closer to the horizon.

Using straight Sap Green I blocked in the right hill element.

The hills ran crimson

I washed in the Alizarin Crimson hill on the left and pulled a stroke up the top edge of the Sap Green hill a bit.

I let the Sap Green and Alizarin Crimson battle it out where they met in the middle.



When it rains...

Holding my new tool, a canister of salt, I slipped open the metal spout and tried a few light dustings of salt crystals and watched.

Hmmm... there's salt sitting in puddles of paint. Looking like...salt sitting in puddles of paint.

As the minutes passed, I decided to add a bit more salt to the heavier areas of wash on the bottom.

Wow, I'm impressed!

There's not much happening at this stage. So now I watch the drying to see what happens.

There were a few areas I'd left to drop the salt on when almost dry. I dropped a bit of salt in those areas.

I set it aside to dry thoroughly.



Pass the salt please

As the painting dried, the salt's effect on the watercolor washes became visible.

But there was salt stuck all over my painting!

Using a clean dry hand I gently started brushing away the salt from the sky area.

As I got to the hill sections heaviest with salt it felt like I was sanding my skin off! There was more available binder (gum arabic) in the more intense washes which held the salt tight.

Change of plans.

The proper tool for the job

I cut a dry cellulose sponge into a small square to use as a surrogate for my skin.

This enabled me to quickly and gently rub and wisk away the remaining salt. When removing any abrasive from your paint (salt, sand, etc.) take care not to scratch the paintings surface. Brush lightly.



The salt watercolor texture effect

Click image to enlarge.

As the washes dry the salt crystals suck up pigment gradually, creating a myriad of light star-like shapes. This is most noticeable in the sky areas and was less effective, and different, in the darker areas.

Experiment with various types of salt: table salt (iodized and non-iodized), sea salt, rock salt, kosher salt, etc. Larger grained salt will produce a larger, more pronounced starring effect.

I have no idea how salt affects the longevity of your art. Considering salt's corrosive nature I would think over time it may interact with pigments and natural paper fibers in an unintended way.

Alcohol watercolor textures

OBJECT: Learn the affect of alcohol on watercolor washes.

**Materials
and set up**

I drew a square and found some Q-tips and 91% Isopropol Alcohol.

MATERIALS USED: Arches CP #140 watercolor paper, a 1 1/2" wash brush, the above mentioned items.

COLORS USED: Dioxazine Purple, Ultramarine Blue, Cobalt Blue.



Laying the field of attack

I mixed a large amount of Dioxazine Purple and started blocking in a large wash on the paper.

The "before" picture

I continued painting in the rest of the loose wash with a Cobalt Blue and layered in some Ultramarine Blue in the upper left corner.

Prepare to Drip.



The first wave not as effective...

Dipping a Q-tip into the alcohol I proceed to tap and drip alcohol directly into the washes.

As the alcohol hit the wash it repelled the paint, pushing it away while leaving a lighter tint of the wash exposed.

Because the wash was so wet, I had to repeatedly drop alcohol onto the open areas to keep the flowing paint at bay.

Getting interesting now

As the watercolor washes

continue to dry I try some smaller splatters of alcohol throughout the area.

During evaporation there

passed a peak time for the effect to work best...although everything look interesting so far.

You will notice a "fish eye"

effect in the middle of most the lighter areas where the color slightly darkens.





Finished example: alcohol and watercolor

I finished playing around and set the painting aside to dry.

Click photo to enlarge.

Alcohol and watercolor don't mix well. The results of their fight on the paper is strangely organic in nature and not achievable using any other technique.

The "fish eyes" are a signature of this technique, so it's obvious to other painters what you are up to.

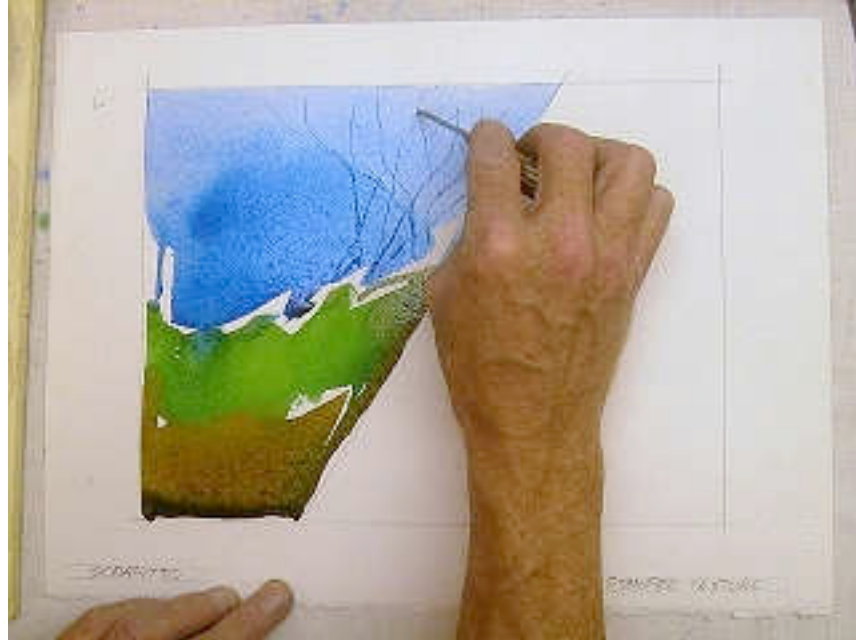
Use it judiciously or with total abandon, it's your nickel.

Sgraffito and Stamped watercolor textures

OBJECT: Learn sgraffito and texture stamping watercolor techniques.

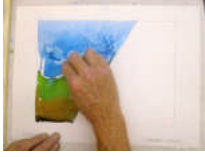
Etching dark lines

Sgraffito is an Italian term for scratching techniques usually associated with scratching through layered ceramic glazes to expose the underlying glazes. Do you recall those rainbow colors covered in black crayon you would scratch pretty pictures into as a child? Same concept. Still fun.



Shown in this example is a variation scratching a line with a fine sharp point, in this case a pen knife. **The wet paint is sucked into the bruised paper fibers as you scratch across the wash, creating dark lines.**

Used judiciously, this technique is excellent for adding details to landscape paintings in the form of naked trees and branches, and other flora.



Broadside scrapes on credit

I often use old credit cards, cut to shape, to scrape larger areas of paint around.

The smooth flat edge will act as a squeegee and push the paint off the area you are scraping.

It's on the brush!

Many brushes come equipped with angled scrapers built into their handles. I have several sizes of synthetic brushes I've purchased just for their handles.

I use the scraper end of my old Grumbacher 1" flat red sable and proceed to push some light color tree trunks up and into the "sky" area. Notice the dark edges that automatically form where you scrape away the paint.

Had I waited another minute the scraped areas would not have as much back fill (fuzzy edges).

Timing is very important. Scrape too soon, you'll get backfill. Scrape too late and it won't work at all. You'll burnish a smear through your paint.





Feats of stamping

Stamping is putting paint on something and pressing that something onto your painting. The stamping material you choose could be anything organic or synthetic. Try the classic potato, pencil eraser, or leather, lace, burlap, leaves, grasses or your fingers. Use your imagination, possibilities abound.

Using some facial tissues I waded up, I dipped into green and crimson washes I had prepared on my palettes and stamped some texture in the upper section.

Sponges!

I used a rather stiff slice of a sea sponge and dipped into some Sap Green and stamped the middle section.

The range of size, texture, density, and other variations in natural sponges is wide.

This sponge gave an excellent rough organic texture when stamped. I'll have to remember that.



This could go on forever...

A finer small soft sponge, a cellulose sponge, and some rather tribal use of various hand parts take place...

(A flurry of activity and a couple of blurry photographic sequences forced this montage, sorry —ed.)

Oooo, that was fun... where's the soap?

Click image to enlarge.

As lame as some of the technical execution was in parts of this particular sequence, I found myself thinking of this tutorial as a piece of art and continued trying to "pull it together."



I nested colors in colors using thumb and fingertips and signed it with a big red hand print. A tip of the hat to the Lascaux artistians.

BASIC SKILLS



Flat Wash

The first basic watercolor skill to learn. Take some time and learn to paint flat washes. It will be time well served.



Graded Wash

The second basic watercolor wash skill. Learn how to make an evenly graded dark to light wash.



Glazed Wash

Getting multi-layered jewel tones in a simple composition using the technique of glazing your watercolor washes.



Wet-in-wet Technique 📺▶

An exciting exercise in the free flowing possibilities of watercolor. Practice often, it's fun.



Dry Brush Technique 📺▶

Proper brush handling and paint consistency is needed in this easily learned watercolor technique.



Lifting Wet Watercolor 📺▶

Watercolor lightens easily when wet. Plan ahead before you paint.



Lifting Dry Watercolor 📺▶

Lifting and lightening dried watercolor paint. (Elbow grease and a light touch)

ADVANCED SKILLS I



Splattering Textures 📺▶

Some people do it on purpose. A fun technique for the playful at heart. With Spray (below)



(and) Spray Textures

Recycle your toothbrush for some fun spraying action. Don't use it for your teeth again, that's just gross.



Sgraffito Textures 📺▶

A light scratch, a burnished caress, an aggressive knife attack...linear texture. With Stamped (below)



(and) Stamped Textures

Sponges, tissues, and anything you can get your paint to stick to can be a "handy" tool.



Back Wash

Textures

Intentional drips or controlled back washes. There's lots of texture in simple water.



Alcohol Texture

It's not just for boo-boos. Flick a bit on your watercolors and watch what happens.



Salt Texture

Kosher or not, you'll see sea salt in action and the problems it can create. You want fries with that?

ADVANCED SKILLS II



Tissue Paper Texture

Next time you unwrap a present, save that tissue! It does fascinating things to paint.



Plastic Wrap Texture

It's not just for leftovers. See how this common item makes unique textures.



Painting with Frisket

Painting using basic liquid frisket masking techniques for saving the lights in your watercolor painting.



Using

Wax Resist

From crayolas to candles, an irresistable technique. You get the idea.



Color Grid Exercise

An exercise to learn about how your colors work with each other as transparent (or not) glazes.



Tracing Paper

Testing ideas and adding elements using a tracing paper transfer made with graphite.

[Part 2 Here!](#) 



Blow Dryer Tips

Learning to dry and not fry when your artistic patience is wearing thin.

Tower St. Martin, Soreze

step-by-step Impressionist watercolour painting.

Allan Kirk's impressionistic watercolour exercise shows how to capture the mood of a bright, and and sunny day in medieval Soreze in the Tarn in southern France.

Step One - Drawing and Masking Fluid

(Read this stage fully before starting, it will give you a clear overview of the process)



Initial Drawing

To begin with cut the Arches rough 300gsm watercolour paper to size (22 x 28 cm) and using masking tape attach it to a board. You can just use an old piece of hardboard as your painting board.

Now complete a simple line drawing using a 4B pencil. Use a soft pencil to draw with, and don't mind if the pencil is visible on the finished picture. It can be erased, but you don't need to bother.

Concentrate upon your drawing and try to get it to be accurate. You don't want detail but you do want accuracy at this stage (that is you

Step Two - First Wash

(Read this stage fully before starting, it will give you a clear overview of the process)



First Wash

Wait until the masking fluid is completely dry.

1. Wet the paper thoroughly with clear water.

Use your large squirrel mop brush and wet all the paper thoroughly with clear water. Make sure that the paper is wet all over.

2. Apply very wet colour wash to the whole picture.



Second Wash

In this step you will apply a second wash to the buildings and street.

Use your existing colour mixes in your palette. In addition add a mix of Cobalt Blue, Cobalt Violet and Burnt Sienna. This will be used to

Deep shadows and shutters

Wait until the work from step three has dried completely before beginning this step.

In this step you will use the Pro Arte sword liners and develop the intricate dark tones in the street, on the tower and round the front building. Use the existing colour mixes in your palette.

You will also deepen the buildings and shadows that exist. (for example there is a little Raw Sienna on the front building. If you look closely you will see that it is wet on dry and has a harder edge that other washes.

The front shutters are a grey colour, and you can add the shutter shadows when it is dry or nearly dry. In this exercise the shutter shadows on the front building were added when the grey shutter colour was quite wet. If this happens you will get bleeding, but this in itself can add interest to the whole picture.

The Process

1. Apply pigment and water to your palette regularly as you work. Mix a dark tone of Cobalt Blue and Burnt Umber for the darkest sections.
2. Work carefully on the dark tones down the street, using your darkest mix.
3. Add Raw Sienna to the front building in a haphazard way that indicates the crumbling render.
4. Apply another wash to the building shadows on the left. Keep the shadows varied and interesting.
5. Add the dark tones to the roof and chimneys.
6. Work quickly and freely, do not get bogged down in details.

Step Five - Final Details

(Read this stage fully before starting, it will give you a clear overview of the process)

To complete the work:

1. Add suggestions of windows to the buildings in shadow.
2. Add suggestions of hinges on the shutters.
3. Add hanging lamp to street in dark tones
4. Touch up dark shadows all over painting.
5. Do not over do the darks, keep the work loose and free. Keep the mystery of lost and found edges in the shadows.

