

Beginning

WATERCOLOR

Tips and techniques for
learning to paint in watercolor

MAURY AASENG



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Walter Foster



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a division of Quarto Publishing Group USA Inc.
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Artwork © Maury Aaseng

Cover Design: Jacqui Caulton
Design: Melissa Gerber

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Introduction

Painting with watercolor is a dance between pigment and water that creates images that other painting techniques can't capture. The soft edges and the pigment flow create images of ethereal beauty and vibrant intensity. Watercolor can produce works that resemble a faded memory, capture the mystic nature of light and atmosphere, and render subjects as highly detailed or veiled and impressionistic.

The variety of subject matter is almost matched by the variety of techniques that can be used to harness this painting style. In this book, you will learn how to begin painting with watercolor through examples and exercises that will help you master the techniques.

Be prepared to get wet, and yes, occasionally frustrated. But also prepare to be amazed at what you can create as you develop your skills in a medium that can be explored over a lifetime!







A watercolor illustration of a purple flower, possibly a lily, is positioned on the left side of the page. The petals are rendered in various shades of purple, from light lavender to deep, dark violet, with visible brushstrokes and a soft, painterly texture. The flower is partially cut off by the left edge of the frame.

GETTING

Started

What You'll Need

Learning how to use a few essential tools, including brushes and other equipment, will help you immensely as you begin your watercolor-painting journey.

ROUND BRUSH: The universal brush for watercolor, a round brush is easy to control and can create a variety of thicknesses. A brush with a pointed end can be used to create a wide or fine stroke, depending upon whether pressure is applied with the base or the tip of the brush. A blunted brush has less variety but greater consistency of stroke width.



A useful skill to practice is creating strokes close together. Start by creating one wavy brushstroke, varying the pressure to achieve different thicknesses. Add additional strokes, leaving just a little space between each. This technique helps you gain control of the brush and understand how to paint accurate shapes and lines.

FLAT BRUSH: A flat brush can create strokes, shapes, and thicknesses that a round brush cannot. Brush bristles are composed of either synthetic hair or natural animal hair.

A synthetic flat brush creates a stroke with less texture. Water drips off the brush with less consistency than from a natural brush, which results in the brushstrokes randomly dispersing more or less pigment. With a natural-hair flat brush, the texture of the bristles is evident, and the pigment is released more uniformly.



Synthetic flat brush



Natural flat brush

ANGLED BRUSH: This highly versatile brush can create the fine tips of a pointed round brush and the wide strokes of a flat brush. By twisting the brush as you paint a wavy line, you can create an incredible stroke variety. An angled brush is also a very effective tool for creating natural-looking features such as flowers (see page 44) and trees (page 50).



USING *two* COLORS AND AN ANGLED BRUSH, YOU CAN CREATE INTERESTING SHAPES. THE SAME IS NOT POSSIBLE WITH A ROUND OR FLAT BRUSH.

MORE ON BRUSHES



SYNTHETIC FAN BRUSH: Wetting a synthetic fan brush with paint tends to make its bristles clump together. This allows for a jagged edge at the tip of the brushstroke and a wide body at the base.

NATURAL FAN BRUSH: A natural fan brush doesn't release pigment as irregularly as a synthetic brush. Wetting the brush clumps the hairs, though not as drastically, creating a blunter point.



SCRIPT/RIGGER BRUSH: This narrow-bodied brush can be difficult to control due to its bristle length, but it creates fine lines that add nice details when painting landscapes and objects.



MOP BRUSH: This brush has soft, poufy bristles without a point. Though the mop brush's stroke is irregular and without distinct form, the water intermingles and flows to create visual interest, irregular textures, and compelling shapes.



PALETTE KNIFE: This features an angled handle, which allows you to scrape the flat bottom on your painting without dragging your knuckles across it. To use, mix a large puddle of pigment on your palette, and dip the bottom of the knife in the paint. The standard stroke, which is made by pulling the tip of the knife along the paper, can be used for detail work and fine lines. Dragging the knife sideways creates an interesting, irregular stroke that works well for texture in trees, rocks, and other natural objects.



SPONGE: To use a sponge, dunk it in water, and wring it out. It should be damp, not sopping. You can dip the sponge in paint, or use a brush to apply paint to it. Sponges are sold in synthetic and natural varieties. Synthetic sponges come in regular shapes, like circles and squares. Dabbing with this type of sponge creates a more distinct and regular pattern. Natural ocean sponges come in all kinds of shapes and create texture with less-recognizable patterns.



Synthetic sponge



Natural sponge

MOVING BEYOND BRUSHES

There are many other tools to keep in your kit that may not seem as obvious at first. We will explore how to use some of these starting on page 20.

SALT: You can use salt to create textures in your paint that are impossible to achieve with a brush.

SPRAY BOTTLES: These help create soft transitions in color without any brushstrokes. When filled with clean water, they are also handy tools for rewetting your surface if it dries too fast. You can purchase one from an art-supply store, or repurpose an old spray bottle.

MASKING FLUID: You can apply this liquid latex to subjects and areas of your painting to preserve the color of the paper or paint while working around it.

PALETTE: There are so many different kinds of palettes to choose from that it can be difficult to know what to look for. For the most part, any will work in at least some capacity. I look for a palette that has enough paint wells, or divets, to hold a variety of pigments and a wide mixing well. A palette with a flat bottom keeps dirty water away from clean pigment.

PAPER TOWEL: As close to an eraser as you will get with watercolor, towels or tissues can be used to lift color from your painting. They can also be used to paint atmospheric conditions, such as mist, clouds (page 56), and smoke.

PLASTIC WRAP: Another surprising tool, plastic wrap can be used to create interesting backgrounds and hard-to-paint textures, such as rocks (page 40) and frost-covered windows (page 30).

TOOTHPICKS: These are very handy for applying masking fluid to tiny areas, so keep a small stash of toothpicks at all times!

TOOTHBRUSH: Establish interesting patterns by dabbing paint with a toothbrush. It can be especially useful to create a spatter effect.

WATER BOWL: You can't paint without a container that holds water. Change the water frequently to avoid "muddying" the paint on your paper.

