

Using Watercolor Instead Of Oil

Although watercolor painting is many centuries old, its application as we know it today is fairly recent. Used in the past by the Egyptians on papyrus and by the Chinese on silk, it gradually evolved to become an important medium on paper. Its original use on paper was to elaborate upon line drawings with monochromatic washes. Color followed, with the line still used for drawing and modeling of form. It was not until Winslow Homer appeared that watercolor became a medium to be handled directly on the spot in a broad manner. While these early watercolors were used as a means of study from nature for subsequent oils, they came to have all the power contained in the heavier oil medium. Watercolor continues to be a medium that lends itself readily to painting on the spot, and working directly from nature is the most vital part of learning to handle it, aside from the original intention of studying the various aspects of nature. It is only after a long period of outdoor study that a reasonably convincing watercolor can be made in the studio. If you have worked in oils, you will find the knowledge you have acquired in painting with this heavier medium very helpful in doing watercolors. Experience in drawing and composition, and the training of your eye to see color, will all stand you in good stead. Now all you have to do is master the technique of handling watercolor! To acquire this technique requires much practice. When working in oils you could finally arrive at the desired effect by much mixing of color, scraping the canvas for a fresh start, and making changes by the application of an opaque color over a previously painted area. Now you must work more directly. The beauty of watercolor lies in its fresh, transparent effect, and the approach must often be one in which the value, color, and drawing are accomplished in a single operation. However, while this is the ultimate effect you may want to achieve, a subject can be painted by separating these important ingredients into progressive stages. The paper upon which you work is also a vital factor in imparting luminosity to a watercolor painting, because the whiteness of the paper showing through the transparent color aids in establishing a brilliant effect. The novice has a tendency to work with too small a brush on an equally small surface. I advise you to work with as large a brush as possible and to do your early work on a half sheet rather than a quarter sheet. This will help to prevent a niggling or timid approach; the larger brushes and working size will force you to work more broadly. Later, when you have acquired more technical facility, you can work on any size. Though preliminary drawing is always stressed, as you progress you will undoubtedly want to try other methods, possibly painting a subject directly with color or combining watercolor with other media. You will find that watercolor is an excellent medium for experimentation.

About the Author

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