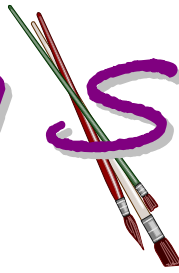




Brush Strokes



By Mary Baumgartner

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PRODUCING A TRANSPARENT WATERCOLOR PAINTING

Thinking about and completing a painting in transparent watercolor is an exercise for the brain. It's time to put on your "thinking cap" and decide what it is you want to paint. The first thing to begin with is what **excites** you! Painting can be so much fun, challenge, and pleasure if you are excited about what you are painting. After you have wrapped your brain around an idea it is time to begin sketching.

Step One-- My first thoughts begin on a piece of paper from my printer. I fold it in half and then in half again so I have 4 quarter sheets to experiment with. I use a pencil and begin my sketch. What am I thinking as I begin drawing? What have I decided to paint? That's where I begin. My last painting was the product of something that I found very exciting. After making at least four thumbnail drawings, I had no difficulty selecting one of the four to make a more refined drawing and even color it with either colored drawing pencils or colored watercolor pencils. This process became the painting shown here:



"A Knight With the Peaches" by Mary Baumgartner

Step Two-- My next step is to decide what size I want this painting to be. Remember it begins with the drawing and in my case the sketch which is 5-1/2 x 4-1/4. This can be vertical or horizontal, depending on the subject. After deciding which direction (based on the subject I have chosen) I now decide the size. Usually I use a full sheet of 140 lb. Arches watercolor paper (cold press). This paper is 22" x 30" with which I feel more comfortable. If you choose to paint on 300 lb. cold press paper, stretching isn't necessary but it's a new learning process.

Think of the space you have in your studio or the place you have chosen to paint. You need more space for a full sheet of paper, and you need a board to staple it to after it has been soaked so you can stretch it. After it has totally dried you are in a position to place tracing paper over the top so you can draw and erase and never disturb the surface of your paper. If you have chosen a quarter sheet of the above paper, your final size drawing will be 11" x 15" or half a sheet will be 15" x 22." Does your drawing suggest to you what size your finished work will be?

Step Three--When you finally finish drawing your idea, then it is time to transfer the drawing to the paper. Have you thought about the following things?

1. *Where is the focal point of your drawing?*
2. *Where is the light coming from?*
3. *Have you arranged the objects in the drawing into a pleasing composition?*
4. *Are you excited about what you have drawn and will paint?*

Now that you are into the drawing and feel the composition is working, you can begin to transfer the drawing and think about the base color that needs to be painted as a first wash or layer. This first step can determine the direction you are going for the full painting. Leave the work alone for while, go for a cup of coffee, or even leave it for a day or so until you are completely satisfied with what you are about to do. First layers of color are critical because of what color goes on top of this layer.

Will you cover the entire sheet of paper with a wash first? If so, what color? Will you begin painting one of the objects in the drawing first? If so, where will you start? Remember, it is your painting and your judgment presiding over the finished product. If you are painting from a photograph, use the colors in your palette to interpret what you are seeing. Make sure you can see the finished product *in your mind's eye* before you begin the painting. Choose your colors carefully and think in terms of layers. Which color will you be able to paint over the underlying color so that you do not produce mud? Don't rely on the photograph, but use your "artistic license" to create YOUR painting.

Where Is the Light? When I paint, I always plan a light source I will carry through in my painting. Then after completing the above steps, I decide where to start with brush and paint. I usually do not start on my center of interest but I am constantly aware of how I can bring the viewer's eye into the main attraction. Plan the painting so that you are in control and are not totally relying on a photograph or the objects themselves. Rely on your painting style. You have involved yourself in setting up the subject so that you know you have produced the very best painting you are capable of. This always gives you artistic license to change anything about the composition that isn't working after you begin painting. Most of the time my work is realistic and detailed, but my more successful paintings have focused on the rearrangement of the objects into an exciting conclusion to reach my objective.

Creating Excitement with Color--Obviously I love color and my work portrays a lot of color, a lot of values, and many different subjects. If I can paint it, I can teach it. Therefore, I do not limit myself to one subject. I have the ability to draw anything, so if I can see it, I can draw it, and many times I only see it in my mind. This is the challenge I choose because I'm a teacher, and I do not want to ever say the words, "I don't know." I know because I've tried it at some time and am able to pass it on to my students.

Experimenting with 300 lb. Arches cold pressed watercolor paper I have found that it simulates painting on a "wet sweat shirt" in that once the paper is touched with a wet brush, it immediately sinks into the paper; therefore it works better if a section that needs paint is first painted with just a wet brush—no color. Then be ready to go for that section immediately with the color you have mixed so that the color will not backwash and leave "blossoms" all over your art. Using 300 lb. Arches hot pressed paper feels to me like I'm trying to paint on a slick doorknob. Think about your painting skills and what you want to achieve and make the proper choices *with knowledge*.

Keep Your Palette Clean--One important thing I have noticed while teaching is that most of my students do not clean their palette very often. After each section that I paint, I clean my palette because I do not want to pollute the next color by getting any of the remaining paint from the palette into the new color. It only takes a little effort to pull out a Kleenex from the box, wipe the palette clean and begin to mix the new color at that time. This becomes a habit after you have done it several times. Another important activity is to spray the paint wells of your paint box frequently as it will then be ready for the next step if it is damp.