

In early paintings, choose subjects that 'forgive'

This is another in a series of lessons on art and drawing by special columnist David Messing. He has taught for eight years and operates an art store, Art Store and More, 18774 Middlebelt, Livonia. Messing encourages questions and comments from readers. You may write him at his store or c/o Observer Newspapers, 23352 Farmington Road, Farmington MI 48024.



By David Messing
staff writer

Hopefully you were able, this week, to get your supplies together or buy whatever you needed to start watercolor. Remember that the subject you choose has a lot to do with the success of your painting.

Choose a subject that can "forgive" a little. In other words, if you paint an apple or a barn a little bigger than the model, then nobody cares or even notices.

On the other hand if you are painting your spouse's portrait and his or her nose is a little bit big or a little to one side than you and your painting are in trouble.

Watercolor as a media is very unforgiving. Since you paint with transparent watercolors, the white of the paper is supposed to show through each color. This is why watercolor is hard to repair.

IF YOU try to lighten an area you mix white in a color and it becomes "creamy" and less transparent. The area you are trying to fix begins to look like a billboard saying "I didn't make a

mistake here!"

Like my 4-year-old son Adam (bambi), I was walking through the living room when out of the corner of my eye I saw he was digging out a tube of chapstick with a screw driver. Even though I hadn't even looked at him yet he yelled out, "It's O.K. Dad I'm not doing muffs." And in your painting you will be the guilty one who points out all the little repairs you made.

While I am on the subject of repair, there are one or two alternatives to starting your painting over. Number one is if you paint with the Dr. Martin dyes that I mentioned last week, you can easily fix a mistake. And you do this with Dr. Martin's color remover.

Simply place a drop or two on the area and before your eyes the mistake goes away. Color remover comes in a cute little bottle and it costs about a dollar. But if you're not into "cute" little bottles, just use chlorine bleach it works almost as well.

I AM SURE the next alternative many well-known water colorists and teachers do not know about. It is called an air eraser. An air eraser is like a miniature sand blaster. It runs off an air compressor and you can control a fine spray of particles which simply removes the color from the paper. An air eraser costs around \$80 and that is not too much a price if it can save a painting.

Let's say you decide to paint a mailbox on an old weather fence post. Sounds exciting doesn't it? Well you have to start somewhere. So first draw your picture in pencil. Use an H/2H/3H or 4H pencil because the "H" or hard pencils make a light gray line and are easy to erase later. "B" or soft pencils are blacker and muddy up your paper.

If you feel the drawing of any subject will be difficult, simply work out your drawing on this white drawing paper. Then transfer to your watercolor paper by rubbing graphite all over the back

of your original, tape it in place on your clean paper, then trace over the lines you wish to transfer. Now reduce your pencil lines to one clean line and then lightly erase those lines so that there is merely a faint image on your paper.

Now carefully wet with clear water, just the dark side of the post. The water will set on top of the paper and appear

glossy for just a few seconds. Soon the wet area will take on a satin sheen. While you are waiting for the water to soak in the paper, you should be mixing the color brown you wish to paint in.

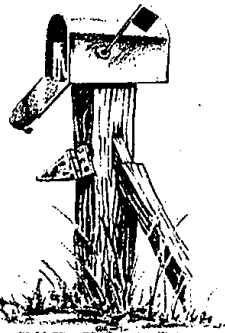
SIMPLY TOUCH the brush to this area and the brown color will quickly flow out of the brush and bleed only to the areas you previously wet. You may smile here as you watch the color flowing and fading as it begins to slow down. It's natural spread. You may, however, frown if your wetting with clear water went out of the lines you wished to stay in.

Here is a very basic part of watercolor painting. Always have a tissue on hand or in hand to quickly absorb any little overflows or quickly remove a color that is too dark.

The brown that you just painted should be dark but still transparent. It should show a graduation of color, richest where you touched the brush in and lightest where it finally stopped flowing. This first color you introduced should not be overworked.

Simply add the color to the wet area and let the color flow untouched by you. Remember the color can only flow to the areas you carefully wet first. This I call the base colors.

So in our picture the base colors are dark brown for the dark side of the post, light brown for the light side, bluish gray (paynes) for the mailbox, red



Artifacts

for the flag, rust for the hinge and yellow to green for the weeds. The base colors can be painted rather quickly.

REMEMBER to keep them light and transparent. Now if you wish to paint the wood grain in the dark side of the post you want a clean line so you do not wet the area first. Simply mix a dark brown into your brush and paint fine lines of wood grain. Lighten up the brown for the wood grain on the light side of the post by thinning the brown with more water.

By thinning the color you lighten the color because more of the white paper shows through the color. So all the large base colors are painted onto wet paper and all the fine lines are painted onto dry paper. Because the colors are transparent you can re-wet areas over and over introducing color over color.

I like to paint the whole picture first in light washes to produce a ghost image. Then if I am happy with the look of it, I introduce a rich wash and my details, of course, are last. Remember 1. light pencil drawing, 2. chart the course of the flow of color, by wetting each area individually, 3. paint in base colors first. Paint fine lines when areas

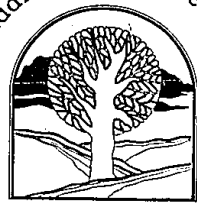
are dry.

Of course this is merely a beginning approach to watercolor. Your success with watercolor is not dependent on your paint, paper or brushes. Your success or failure is your own decision. Now I do not mean to say everyone must succeed at watercolor. Your decision is "what media will I allow myself to fail in?"

That is to say "I will fail in charcoal drawing and divert my efforts to succeed in watercolor" or vice versa. At any rate you will enjoy watercolor if for no other reason than just to watch the flow of color. If you repeatedly have trouble painting realistically with watercolors, before you put them in your garage sale, try non-objective or design painting. To me just the flow of a pure color "wet in wet" on white paper is pleasing and frameable.

ARTFUL HINT: I showed a customer how to use the different hardnesses of pencils and she showed me what she did. In drawing a black cat, she drew all the fine line hairs with a very hard 6H pencil. Pushing hard with this pencil she made many fine grooves in the paper. Then she went over the drawing with the soft blacks, 6B to 2B pencils. The soft black did not fill into the fine grooves made by the hard 6H pencil. The finished product was a beautiful black cat with what appeared to be fine white hairlines surrounded by rich blacks.

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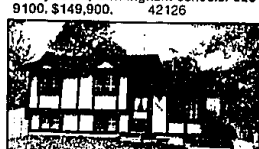
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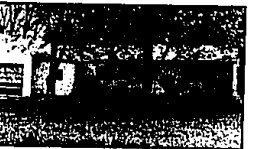
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