

Doing the job right means using the right materials

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, 23355 Farmington Road, Farmington MI 48024.



By David Messing
staff writer

In the last installment of Artifacts I talked about watercolor paint which is commonly packaged in pans or in tubes. But before I go on to paper, I would like to mention Dr. Martin watercolor dyes.

The dyes are of course water soluble and mix well with any water color tubes or pans. Dr. Martin watercolor dyes come in a wide assortment of color and in two series, the "transparent" and the "concentrated." These colors are so intense that even when mixed with other watercolors they seem to glow.

Dr. Martin dyes are listed as "fugitive" which means they tend to fade. Now, I have tested several of the colors in direct sunlight and the only color I have found to drastically fade is purple.

It is interesting to note here that any color on paper, in sufficient light for viewing, will fade. All pigment exposed to light will fade. The rate at which it fades, however, can be controlled. Dr. Martin dyes are primarily used in artwork to be photographed for reproduction, but they are very pleasing to use for many other applications.

DID YOU ever get the inspiration to do a watercolor and you couldn't find anything to do a watercolor on? When it's 11:30 at night and everyone is in bed and you "wired" to paint and have no paper? Well that never bothers one of my women customers, a sweet lady who often brings her watercolors in to our store for framing.

When it comes time to paint she grabs anything white, or anything flat and paints on it. Once she came in with a detailed painting on a piece of wood. I commented on its odd shape. She said, "Yes and my son is quiet upset. You see that is the back of his stereo speaker and I didn't know it when I began painting on it."

Watercolor paper comes in different textures and different weights. The watercolor textures range from very rough, rough, cold press (some texture) and hot press (very smooth). The weights are measured by "weight per ream" so if a ream of paper weighs 140 lbs. that is the weight per sheet. The usual range is 90 lbs, 140 lbs and 300 lbs. The 90 lbs. being the thinner and 300 lbs. being very thick.

THIS METHOD of naming by weight is due to change, as it becomes confusing if the paper is oversize. For instance a ream of 140 weight oversize weighs much more, so it is called 140 oversize. Someday soon it will be introduced as weight per cubic centimeter. . . who cares? Just tell the person at the store you want to feel the paper and buy whatever you can afford.

Artifacts

All watercolor paper will buckle when you paint on it so you must stretch or prepare it. The only exception is Strathmore Aquarius this is a very smooth very light weight paper. The proper way to prepare or stretch watercolor paper is to soak it for a few minutes. Then lay it flat on a board and wipe off the excess water. Then using craft tape (that's the brown paper with the glue that doesn't taste good) secure the outer edges flat to the board. Then you wait for the paper to dry.

As the tape and paper dry the paper stretches to become very light and very flat. If you are less patient you can leave your paper dry and tape it to a board with masking tape. Then drive in staples every one half inch. And if you are even less patient, just tape down the edges, and if you are even less patient. . . don't try watercolor at all.

THERE IS now, however, a watercolor "block" which is great for less patient people. A block is a pad of watercolor paper with a rubber seal all the way around the pad. This holds the paper flat. So you simply start painting and if you "goof" or when you are finished you simply slide a palette knife under the top sheet and cut off your painting. And low and behold underneath is a clean new white sheet all ready to go.

This is especially helpful if you have goofed because you can dig right back into another painting without taking time to stretch another piece of paper. Water color paper is a lot like the paint, there are many good many good name brands. It is not necessary to know all the brands, just keep shopping until you find one you like. If it fits your needs, then stick with it.

My personal favorite is the Strathmore 400 block. It has a pleasing texture and surface pattern yet the greatest of detail can be easily painted.

I tell my customers that you only need to buy three or four good quality brushes for watercolor painting. Oil painting requires many brushes because it is so difficult to clean each brush each time you need a new color. Water color requires only a swish through clean water and your brush is free of color. Water color brushes are usually sable or imitation sable squirrel hair, skunk, or hair or combined hair and imitation hair.

THE TERM "camel hair" is misleading since camels have wool and not hair. Camel hair is used to describe any water color brush that is not sable. Also a sable brush for oil is not the same as a sable brush for watercolor. Sable comes from the hair of a Siberian mink; the finest softest hairs are used for watercolors and the coarse stiff hairs are used for oil.

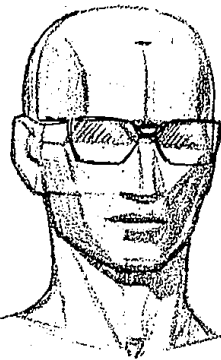
If you feel embarrassed asking what the difference is at a supply store, just look at the handles. The long handle sables 12 to 14 inches are oil sables. The short handle sables about nine inches are for watercolor. I am sure there are many helpful books written about brushes probably titled "Art brushes and the modern man" or something equally catchy. But I am again running out of space. I will however cover the subject of brushes in a later installment of Artifacts.

I am burrying so I can recommend a starting few brushes. In looking up my best brushes I find that my boys have used them for painting plastic models. So maybe I'll be standing at the brush display this week next to you. Any round brush tapers to a point. So a No. 1 or No. 2 round will do well for fine brush strokes. Also you need a larger round for wider strokes probably a No. 3 or No. 4 round. If you have a little extra money get a large round No. 6 or No. 7 or No. 8 (this is not necessary).

Do, however, get an oval wash brush about 1/4 or 1/2 inches. This is a squirrel hair brush, very soft and reddish brown in color. Basically this is all you will need to get you started with your brushes. Just remember, three rounds for painting and the oval wash is for wetting and also painting in large areas.

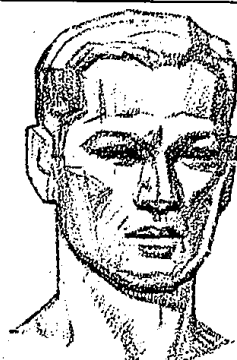
Next week we will try a simple lesson in watercolor painting. I felt it was necessary to cover the different materials first, because of their importance to how your paintings will look.

ARTFULL HINT: If you are painting with watercolor over a large area and wish to have something other than a smooth wash, you can achieve a "natural" texture by lightly sprinkling a few flakes of kosher salt on the area. This should be done when the paint is at the satin sheen stage of drying. It has quite an interesting effect. Try it.



Q. I have a difficult time drawing the human head especially in the placement of the eyes. Help.

A. Every art teacher draws an egg shape oval then starts dividing it up with 1/4 and 1/2 lines. Of course this is the right way to start, but I find students still have



difficulty placing in the eyes. Now this sounds silly but draw sun glasses on the egg shape oval beginning than draw eyes inside the sunglasses. The sunglasses help you locate the general placement of the eyes, which are usually one eye width apart from each other. Oh yes, don't forget to erase the sunglasses.

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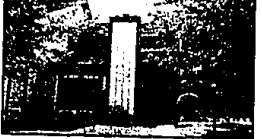
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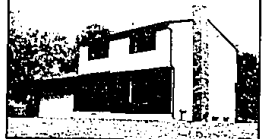
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