



An Introduction to Watercolours

By Carol Swan

GUM BLOSSOMS

This project is to introduce the beginner to one of the methods used in Watercolours using Art Spectrum watercolours and to hopefully take away some of the mystery that seems to be surrounding the subject. This particular technique is generally referred to as “Wet on Wet”.

PAPER

Watercolour papers are offered in a perplexing variety of sizes, weights, textures and prices. There are a lot of good brands such as Arches, Whatman, Favranco, Saunders and so on. I think one should try them all and decide for yourselves which suits you the best.

I use Arches 100% Rag Gelatine sized – 300 gms – 390x540 mm cold pressed ½ sheet, for this painting.

Paper Texture

There are 3 paper textures normally available:

“Hot Pressed” (smooth)

“Cold Pressed” (Medium Texture)

“Rough”

Before you start to paint check your paper and choose the smooth side to paint on, there is hardly any difference and it will work on either side but if you paint on the smooth side it tends to stop the colour from “bleeding”.

PALETTE

A palette can be as simple as a white dinner plate – you can put the colours around the perimeter and mix in the centre. This works well, however, these days you can buy in the cheap shops, watercolour palettes at a very cheap price, and it makes painting so much easier as the palettes have wells to mix the colours in, which means that you don't have colours running in to one another which often will create mud.

MATERIALS

¼ of a sheet of Arches watercolour paper.
100% Rag Gelatine sized – 300 gms Cold Pressed
A Backing Board – to which your paper will be taped
Winsor & Newton Art masking Fluid, or Art Spectrum masking fluid, often you will find that the cheaper brand of masking fluid will discolour the paper.
Liquid Dishwashing Detergent
Stylus tool
6B Lead Pencil
Soft Eraser
Tissues
Synthetic No 3 Round Brush
00 Liner Brush
No 4 or No 6 Fan Brush
Tracing Paper
Masking Tape
COLOURS

You will find that everyone will change the colours to suite their home. However I am going to give you a group of colours that is most often used. Art Spectrum Watercolours: I use Art Spectrum as it is an all Australian company, and the colours have been produced to suit our life style.
French Ultramarine
Warm Sepia
Cadmium Yellow
Olive Green, Sap Green, Payne's Grey, Australian Red Gold, Australian Leaf Green Dark, Spectrum Crimson, Burnt Sienna.

- Trace your design onto the tracing paper
1. PREPARING THE DESIGN FOR TRANSFER
Using your 6B pencil, rub the back of the tracing paper to create a cover of carbon. Gently wipe off any excess carbon with a tissue.
 2. TRANSFERRING YOUR DESIGN
With the carbon side down on the Watercolour paper and your design placed so that the branch of the gum tree is in the upper left hand corner of your paper, you are ready to trace your pattern on. Use a Stylus tool, but do be careful not to make an indentation in the paper. The reason for transferring the pattern this way is, if you were to transfer the pattern with commercially made carbon paper, you would not be able to remove the transferred design. You can use an eraser but be very careful not to break the surface of the paper.
 3. TAPING YOUR PAPER
Tape with a good quality masking tape, the water colour paper on all four sides to your backing board.
 4. CONDITIONING
First condition your No. 3 Round Brush with some of the liquid detergent. To do this just dip your brush into the detergent and wipe off the excess with a tissue, just leave a little residue in the brush.
 5. MASKING
Dip your brush into the Art Masking fluid and simply block in all the design. When masking in the blossoms, you will need to use your liner brush to achieve the fine lines required for the skirt. Load your brush carefully and paint in as many fine lines as you are able, this will give a lovely fluffy appearance when you are finished. Add to the bottom of

the skirt, fine dots for the pollen You must continually keep conditioning your brush with the detergent. Wash your brush frequently in clean water. Repeat this process until you have fully blocked in your design. You should not be able to see the paper through the masking fluid. The reason for the continual conditioning and washing of the brush is so that your brush does not clog up. When you block in your design make sure you give the leaves a nice point.

7. COLOUR WASH

The most exciting part.

Before you start your colour wash, you must mix all the colours thoroughly on your pallet.

Thoroughly mix the paint so that all the pigment is dissolved. Be sure to mix enough paint for your washes.

The masking fluid has to dry before the next stage. Drying time depends on the weather and also on how thick you have painted it on to test whether it is dry just lightly touch with the tip of your finger.

It is important that you make enough colour to paint ALL of your background before you start.

8. COLOURS FOR THE BACKGROUND

French Ultramarine

Cadmium Yellow

Warm Sepia

Spectrum Crimson

APPLYING THE BACKGROUND

Using your Fan Brush and clean water, wet the paper thoroughly in a criss cross motion so that all the paper is covered. Hold the paper up to the light to make sure you haven't missed any spots.

Start on the left hand top corner with your French Ultramarine and work down the left hand side of the painting, this is supposed to represent the sky. If it looks to be too dark, dip your brush into clean water and pull down the sheet to graduate the colour. Wash your brush and add a little Cadmium Yellow to add some sunshine, also add a touch of the Cadmium Yellow to the right hand side of the paper.

Keep the top right hand corner free of colour, if by chance you have brought colour in where it is not required you can always remove it whilst it is still set by using a tissue to "blot" the colour, I always work with a tissue in my hand.

Make sure that you work quickly and don't fiddle. Your paper should still be wet. Add a touch of your Warm Sepia for the shadows under each of the Gum Nuts, remember to pull down the sheet, your shadows would not appear above the gumnuts. Add little of the Spectrum Crimson around each Blossom to give a soft hue effect.

The main thing to remember is not to play with it as your paint by now is starting to dry and you will create water marks.

Allow this to dry thoroughly, without force drying. When dry you may decide that the colour in your background is too light so you can repeat the process again. Remember though that you will have to wet the paper again. You can just strengthen areas of colour, such as behind the blossoms, but all the paper has to be wet to do this. This procedure can be repeated as many times as you like. In this particular painting I gave it 2 washes. Always remember you are better to be too light than too heavy, you can always add more colour but you can not take the colour out once it is there. Also you can't change the colours mid stream. Allow to dry thoroughly.

9. THE NEXT STEP

Take off the Art Masking fluid. This is done when the background colour is thoroughly dry. Just rub it off with your fingers, it can be pulled off if you have applied it thickly.

10. PREPARING FOR THE LEAF CHARACTERISTICS

Using your liner Brush and your masking fluid, paint a fine line down the middle of each gum leaf, remember to condition your brush first with the detergent.

11. BRANCHES

First make sure that each area you paint is wet with clean water.

Mix Warm Sepia and water to make a wash, this mixture you can dilute when necessary.

Using your No. 3 Round Brush paint the underneath side of the branch allowing the water to work for you it should run easily for you providing you have applied enough water. You must leave highlights on the top of the branch, you can use a tissue to take off colour if need be, so work with a tissue in your hand. When the branches run into a gum leaf, don't

just stop when you reach the actual leaf, make sure the area is wet and run a little of the Warm Sepia down the stem and into the butt of the leaf itself.

14. GUM NUTS

Paint in the gum nuts in the same way as the branch. Make sure that the gum nut is wet with clean water, then run the Warm Sepia down the left hand side of the nut this will create a shadow Always remember to leave the white showing for your highlights. You are not really painting you are allowing the water and the paint mixture to work for you.

15. LEAVES

Again with your No. 3 Round Brush, wet the area you are about to paint with clean water and paint each leaf individually, any leaf that is behind another, paint first and any shadows caused by the covering leaves are painted using Brown Earth. Allow to dry before starting on the leaf that touches as the colour would bleed into one another. The leaves are painted with Olive Green, Sap Green, Warm Sepia and where there are leaves that are near the blossoms you could add a little Spectrum Crimson. Next time you are near a gum tree, have a close look at the leaves, it is surprising how many colours you can see in them. I have even added a touch of blue for reflection from the sky behind. You must allow the colours to run into one another so that it doesn't look like a patchwork leaf.

16. BLOSSOMS

Not a lot is done with the blossoms, as you have already achieved the desired colour of the blossom with your colour wash behind. However again you will enhance by shading. Mix together a little of your Warm Sepia mixture and mix a little Spectrum Crimson and under each nut and into the skirt of each blossom paint in the shadows. Don't forget to first of all wet with clean water before you apply the paint. I found that when painting the blossom I had more control using my Liner Brush. You can also pull a little of this colour into the skirt of the blossoms. . To finish the blossoms add Cadmium Yellow to the tips, this should be applied sparingly, but it does give a lift to the painting, it should look like pollen on the tips.

17. FINISHING THE LEAVES

To finish you can rub the masking fluid off the leaves, this should leave a fine seam down each leaf. If you have been too heavy handed and your seams are too wide, use your liner brush and run a fine line of Warm Sepia to the left hand side of the seam. If you feel that the seams are too stark, just very lightly add a wash of the appropriate colour over the leaves.

18. ADDED TOUCHES

You can make a wash of your Warm Sepia and Olive Green, and outline areas that you may feel need it, such as points of the gum leaves, or areas that have bled. However do be careful not to over do it.

I hope that this painting opens up yet another area of painting for you.
Happy Painting, regards, Carol Swan

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