

HT265

WATERCOLOR

Walter Foster

HOW TO  
DRAW &  
PAINT

# Watercolor 1

*Learn the basics of watercolor painting*



Starting with a sketch ■ Creating soft blends  
Composing a painting ■ Learning special techniques

BY CAROLINE LINS COTT





# Watercolor 1

The unique properties of watercolor make it an exciting, spontaneous, and interesting medium. Because it is mixed with water, it has wonderful translucent qualities—and often unexpected effects. Once you understand the way watercolor works—and have learned to let it work for you—you will be amazed at how easy it is to create beautiful paintings. You'll even learn to appreciate the “happy accidents” that occur with watercolor, which often add a lot of character and interest to your paintings. In the pages to follow, I will introduce you to some basic watercolor applications and a few tricks of the trade, covering a wide range of fascinating subjects. I hope that these examples will inspire you to pick up a brush and begin painting. So are you ready? Let's get started! —*Caroline Linscott*

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# Choosing Your Painting Materials

I REALLY ENJOY going to art stores and browsing through the huge selection of supplies, looking at all the beautiful paint colors and feeling the different brushes. But how do you know what to buy? My advice is to buy the highest quality materials you can afford. It's better to have just a few professional-grade supplies than it is to have many student-grade items. High-quality materials will last longer, be easier to use, and help create better works of art. I will cover the basics of choosing materials here, but for further information, refer to *Watercolor & Acrylic Painting Materials* by William F. Powell in Walter Foster's Artist's Library series.



## Paint Preferences

I have two different sets of watercolor paints: a box of dry pans for outdoor work and a selection of semi-liquid tubes for studio painting. A set of pan colors lets me view the whole rainbow of color choices at a glance, but I think it's fun to go through all the separate tubes and pick out colors that appeal to me. I also take great pleasure in squeezing out the thick colors from tubes and mixing pools of rich, bright colors.



◀ **TUBES OR PANS?** Tubes are great for painting large areas and applying washes because you can squeeze out a lot of paint at once. Pans are light and compact, which make them handy for outdoor painting and when traveling.



## My Choice of Colors

I suggest starting out with the colors shown here, which provide a good base for mixing almost any other color you could want. There is a range of warm and cool samples of each color (see pages 10 and 11 for a discussion of warm and cool), and you will be able to use this palette for a variety of subjects.



◀ **ROUGH** paper has a very coarse texture. The grain will add texture to your painting, so it's best for subjects without a lot of fine detail.

◀ **COLD-PRESS** paper has a medium texture. I recommend it for beginners. Its slight texture won't interfere with detail work.

◀ **HOT-PRESS** paper is less absorbent, with a smooth surface and very little grain. It is best suited for washes and fine detail work.

## Paper Foundations

You can buy watercolor paper in sheets, blocks, or pads, but I like to pick out my own individual sheets. The sizes vary, but I usually choose a standard size, such as 22" x 30". Papers also vary in thickness, which is expressed in weight: the heavier the weight, the thicker the paper. For most of the paintings in this book, I used a 140-lb. cold-press paper, which has a medium weight and is soft and absorbent.

## Artist's Tip

For detail work, it is important to retain the point on your fine round brushes. Always clean your brushes with mild soap and warm water, and lay them flat or hang them bristle-down to dry. When they are completely dry, store them with the tips up to protect them.





### Picking a Palette

I mix my pan colors right in the paint box or on the lid, but I use a palette for mixing tube paints. Watercolor palettes come in a variety of shapes and sizes, and most are made of plastic or china. All watercolor palettes have recessed wells for keeping the colors separate. I use a big plastic palette with wells around the edges and a large mixing area in the center. My palette has a lid, so I can save my colors between painting sessions.

▲ **CHINA OR PLASTIC PALETTE?** Both types are easy to clean and stain-resistant. Plastic palettes are light in weight, so they are ideal for painting outdoors.

▼ **A MEDIUM ROUND** will hold a lot of paint, which makes it a good all-around brush.

### Brush Up on Brushes

Watercolor brushes are made with natural hairs, synthetic hairs, or blends of the two. I've learned that you don't need to splurge on expensive red sable brushes; there are some good synthetic-bristle brushes that will let you do everything you'll ever need or want to do. I use a variety of shapes and sizes, each for a different purpose. The five brushes shown on this page provide a good starter set.

### Handy Extras

I always keep these extra items on hand when I paint: tissues, paper towels, cotton swabs, a palette knife, white artist's tape, a pencil, an eraser, and a sponge. I also keep a water container and an old towel close by for cleaning my brushes.

### My Painting Area

I recommend creating a comfortable workspace where there is good lighting—natural light is best. I just make sure I have enough room to place all my materials within easy reach.



▼ **A SMALL ROUND** with a pointed tip is used for fine details.

▼ **A BRIGHT** is rectangular, with short, stiff bristles—the chisel edge and sharp corners can be used to paint details and straight lines.

▼ **A ONE-INCH FLAT** is perfect for applying washes, backgrounds, and gradations.

▼ **A FAN** is great for adding textures, painting grasses, or creating feathered edges.

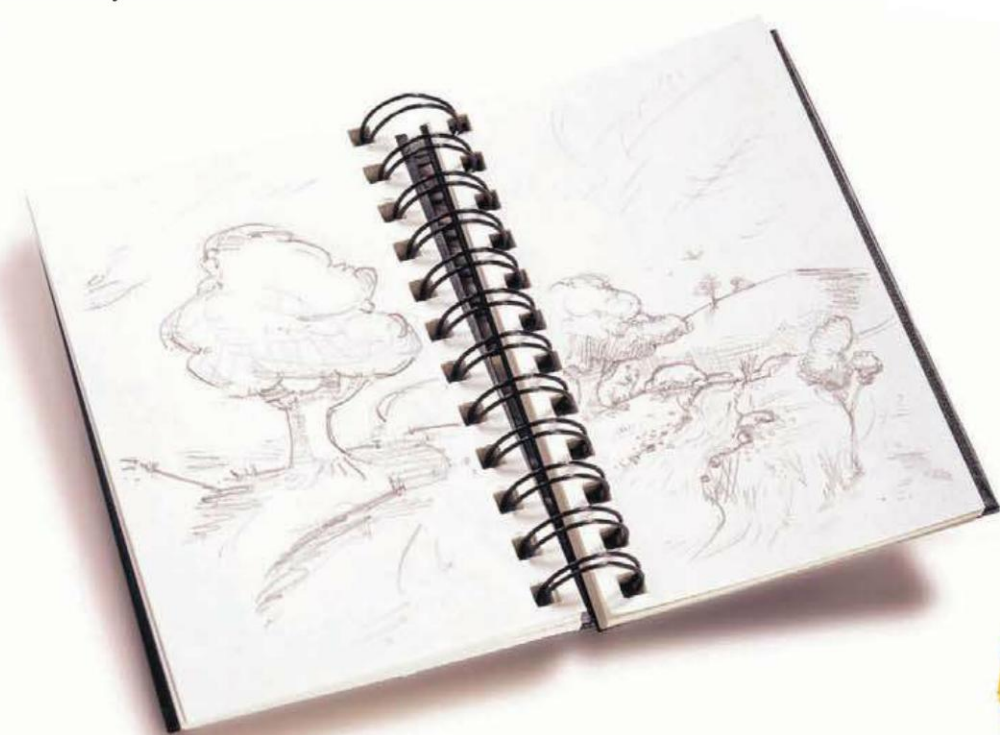


# Start with a Sketch

I ALWAYS START my watercolor paintings with a good drawing. This is the time when I plan where everything will be placed on the paper. Don't let the idea of drawing scare you! The sketch doesn't have to be precise and finely detailed; you simply need some guidelines to follow. I urge you to sketch from life as often as you can, but when that isn't possible, use photographs as models.

## Drawing from Life

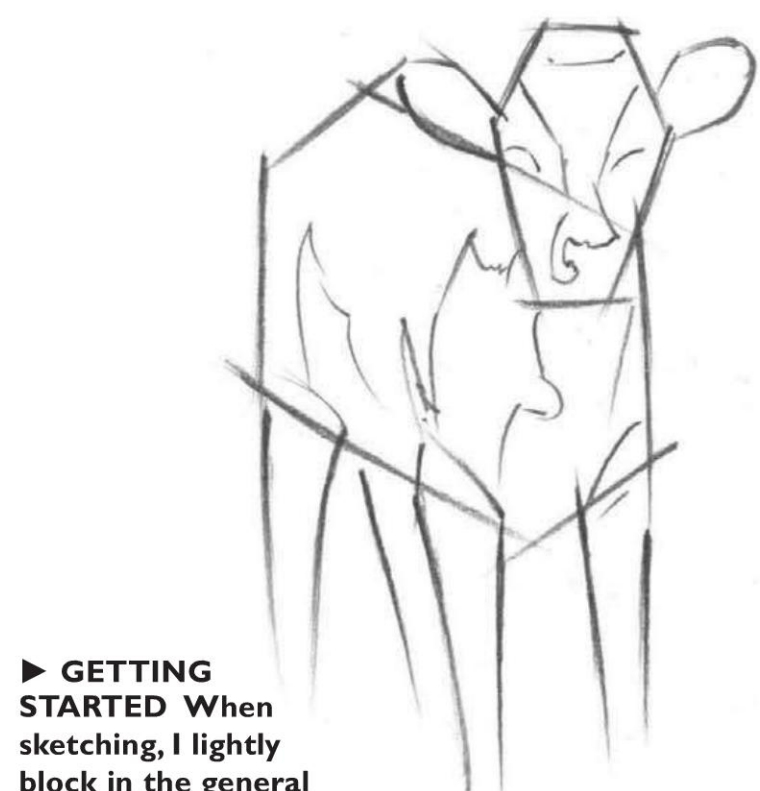
There's nothing like experiencing your subject firsthand, so draw from life every chance you get. Keep a sketchbook for making quick drawings of interesting things you observe. Your sketchbook will be a very personal thing and a valuable learning tool, helping you open your eyes and really see things in depth. Make a lot of different sketches, because the more you practice, the better you will become at drawing what you see.



◀ **SKETCHING ON LOCATION** I always carry a sketchbook with me and make small drawings of whatever catches my eye. This gives me a good source of reference material for future paintings.

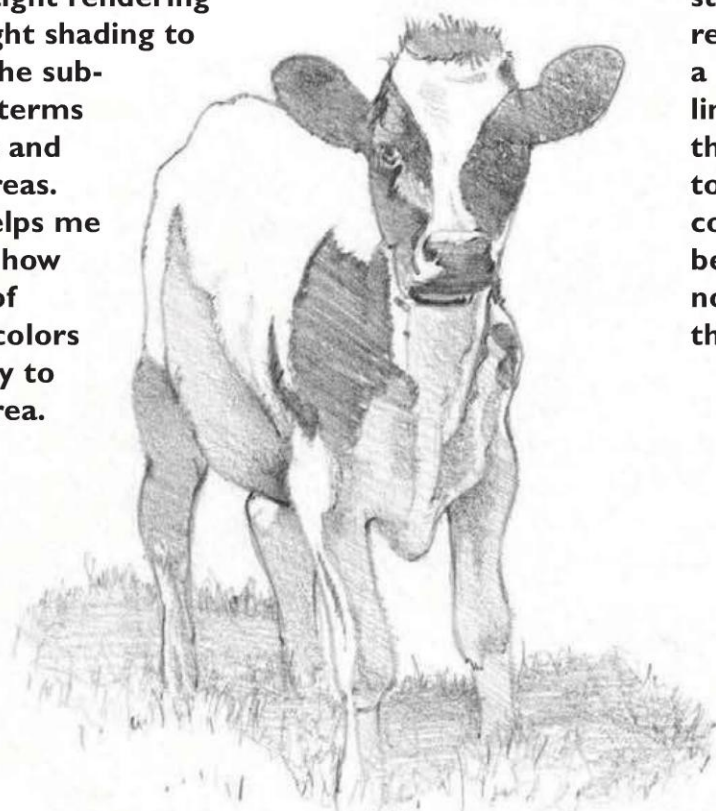
## Artist's Tip

Before beginning to paint, always use artist's tape to secure all four edges of your watercolor paper to the painting surface. This will prevent the paper from curling or warping. Let your work dry completely before carefully removing the tape.

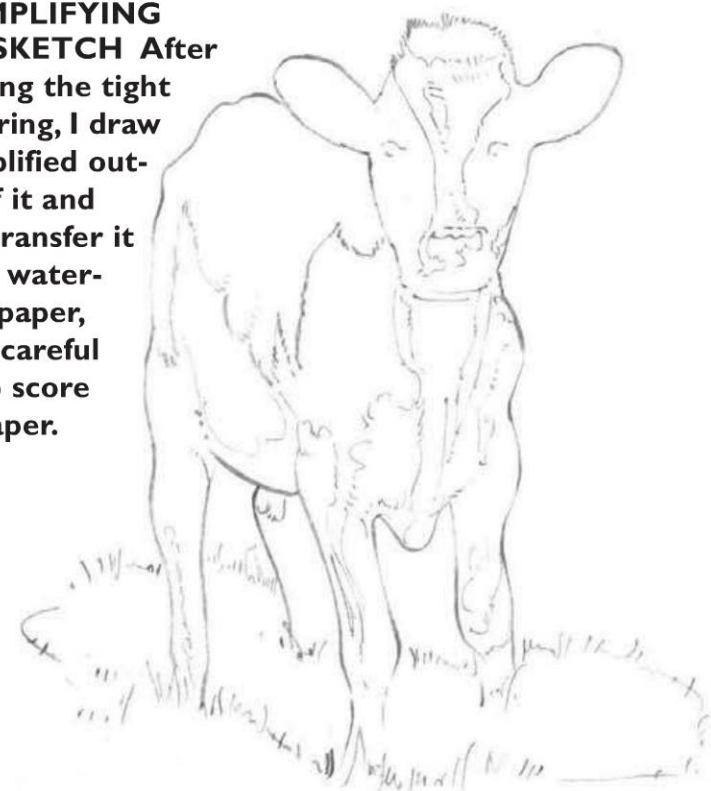


▶ **GETTING STARTED** When sketching, I lightly block in the general shapes and masses of the subject first, then develop the form by smoothing and adjusting the lines.

▶ **ANALYZING THE COLOR** Sometimes I do a tight rendering with light shading to study the subject in terms of light and dark areas. This helps me decide how much of which colors to apply to each area.



▶ **SIMPLIFYING THE SKETCH** After studying the tight rendering, I draw a simplified outline of it and then transfer it to my watercolor paper, being careful not to score the paper.



## Transferring a Drawing to the Painting Surface

Once you have a drawing you are happy with, you will need to transfer it to your watercolor paper. A good method of transferring is to use artist's carbon paper. You can also make your own "carbon" by shading the back side of your drawing paper with a soft lead pencil.

Place the artist's carbon or shaded side onto your painting surface; tape or hold it in place; then trace over your drawing. The image of your sketch will be transferred to the watercolor paper.

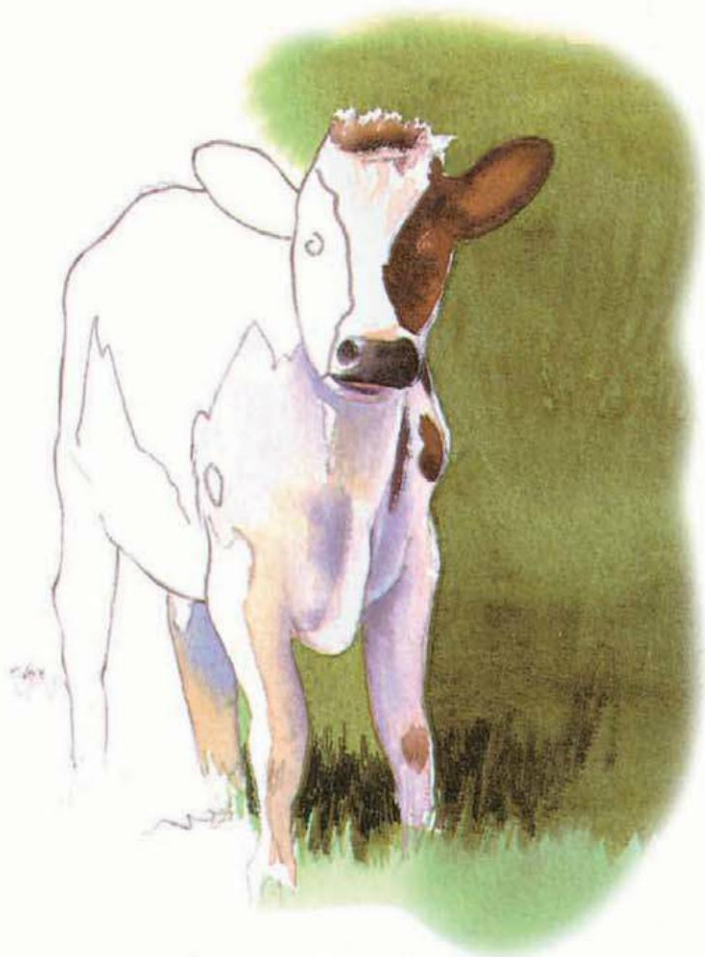






**ARTISTIC LICENSE** This is the actual piece I created from the photo on page 4. I simplified the scene and focused on only the two cows on the right.

► **BUILDING THE FORM** Once the sketch is complete, I apply the color slowly, working from light to dark to build depth. I look to the photo for reference only, often changing the colors and the placement of objects. Remember that you are the artist and you make the decisions. This is one of the greatest pleasures of painting!



### Using Photo References

Sketching or painting from life is ideal, but this isn't always practical. Your subject may not sit still, or the light you want to capture may change too quickly. That's when photo references come in handy. I encourage you to take your own photos as much as possible, but you can also use pictures from books or magazines. I keep a collection of images in an idea file (sometimes called an *artist's morgue*). Then, whenever I can't think of anything to paint, I look through the file for ideas. (Note: Don't copy the photos exactly; just use them for general reference. You may infringe on copyright laws if you reproduce someone else's photo exactly.)



# Creating Soft Blends

SOME OF THE MOST FREE-FLOWING and translucent effects I've achieved in watercolor were done by painting wet-into-wet—either wet paint onto wet paper or wet paint into wet paint. With wet-into-wet, colors bleed together, creating softly blurred edges and wonderful atmospheric effects. I also use washes of wet color onto wet paper to quickly lay in large areas of diluted color. Washes are an excellent way to paint backgrounds—skies and water in particular.

## Controlling the Flow of Paint

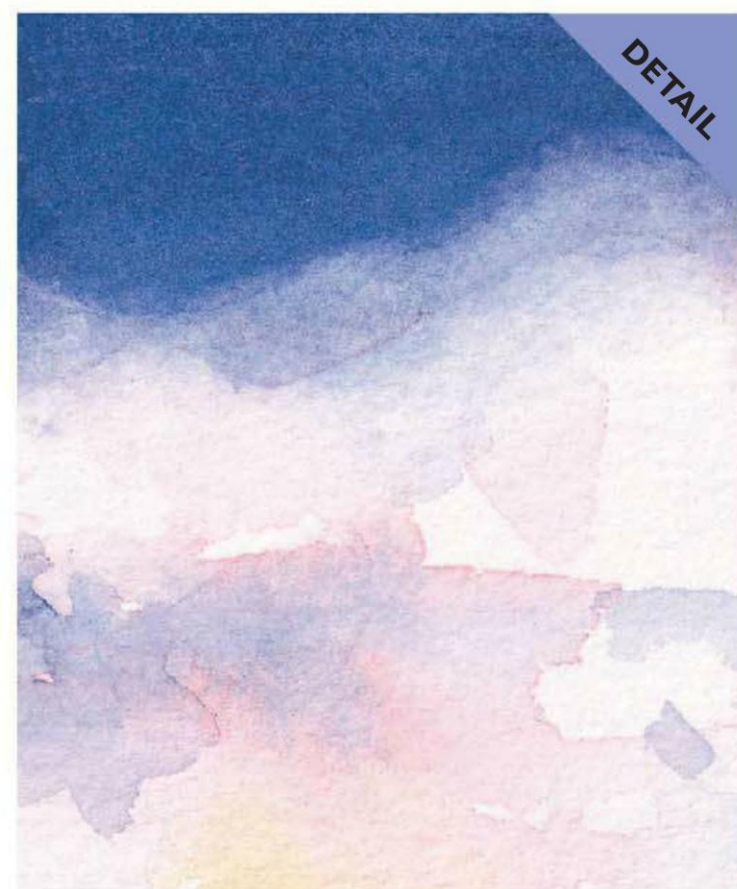
When painting wet-into-wet, both the amount of control you have and the effects achieved will vary, depending on how wet or dry the watercolor paper is. When I want the colors to flow and merge freely, as in the ocean sunset at right, I wet the paper first and then apply color with a wet brush. For more subtle blends, as in the leaf below, I just dampen the paper. Sometimes I apply color and tilt the paper to control the direction of the flow of paint.



◀ **SUBTLE BLENDS** For the soft blending of colors in this leaf, I wet the paper only inside the leaf's outline. Then I added sap green and touches of alizarin crimson, letting the colors merge on the paper, rather than blending them first on the palette.

▶ **GRADUATED WASH** Here is an example of a graduated wash using cobalt blue and water.

▶ **CONTROLLED FLOW** In this detail of the ocean sunset, I applied a wet-into-wet wash of ultramarine blue and permanent rose for the top part of the sky, controlling the flow of paint by wetting the paper only where I wanted the color to go.



## Artist's Tip

*I often use a large, two-inch-wide house-painting brush for applying large washes of color.*

## Making a Background Wash

A wash is a useful technique in which heavily diluted color is applied over a large area of a painting. For a graduated wash, as shown above, I first lay in a horizontal band of color at the top of the paper and then make successive, overlapping strokes with water only. The color from the first stroke will flow downward, creating a beautiful graded effect. For a solid wash, I apply the paint in slightly overlapping horizontal strokes, reloading the brush with paint often enough to keep the color smooth and even.

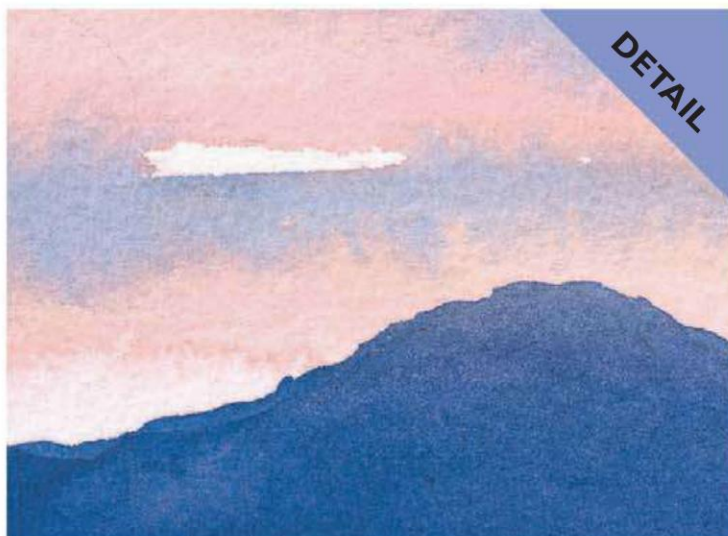




**OCEAN SUNSET** I often use a limited palette (as I did here) for painting wet-into-wet because then I'm not as likely to overblend or "muddy" the colors.

### Letting the Colors Bleed

I paint wet-into-wet quickly and freely, letting the colors bleed. Sometimes the most interesting color blends occur by accident. In fact, much of the appeal of working wet-into-wet is discovering the spontaneous effects that are produced by just letting watercolors be watercolors. It is fun to see what happens when the colors run and intermingle.



◀ **FREE FLOW**  
This detail of the sky in the painting above shows where I allowed translucent washes of permanent rose and Indian yellow to blend to form a peach tone and bleed into the ultramarine blue, creating a smooth blend.





# Adding Detail

**PAINTING WET-INTO-DRY**—applying wet paint onto dry paper—gives me more control over the flow of the paint, so I can create finer detail than I can when painting wet-into-wet. Using a drier brush is another way to add details in sharper focus, either directly onto the white paper or over a background wash that has been allowed to dry. The contrast between darks and lights and between soft blends and crisp details creates interest and adds depth to my paintings.

## Using Less Water for Finer Details

With more paint and less water on my brush, I am able to paint fine lines and make accurate, refined strokes. This allows me to create very realistic, detailed renderings, as I did with the girl in the garden below. Layering translucent colors wet-into-dry (called *glazing*) also creates much darker and richer colors than painting wet-into-wet, which helps give my detail areas more definition.



► **NEAR AND FAR** This field of flowers is an example of how I create depth by combining wet and dry techniques. I used wet-into-wet washes of dark, muted shades for the background and lighter, drier washes in the middle ground and foreground. I reserved the greatest detail and purest colors for the flowers in the foreground.

◀ **PAINTING DETAILS** I used wet-into-dry almost exclusively in this finely detailed painting. I left white for the lightest values and added a little more water on the brush for a softer effect for the child's skin and the kitten's fur. Then I used a very dry brush for the detailed texture of the bricks and bench. Finally, I built up the rich color of the flowers with layers of wet-into-dry, using a small, fine-pointed brush for the petals.

### Artist's Tip

*You can use a hair dryer to speed up the drying process, but be careful about using it on very wet paint, or you may blow the paint farther than you want it to go.*



◀ **DRYBRUSH EFFECTS** Dry-brush is an excellent method of creating detail. Because I use very little water and only a small amount of paint, the color catches on the raised grain of the paper instead of sinking into the paper, as it does with a wash. It's easy to build complex details and textures, as I did in the wood grain here, by using a fan brush to apply layers of drybrushed color over one another.







### Creating the Illusion of Depth

I enhance the sense of depth in my paintings by using a technique called *atmospheric perspective*. Atmospheric perspective shows how moisture and particles in the air soften and cool images over distance. For example, distant objects (such as mountains) look blurred and appear more blue and purple than do objects viewed at close range. I create this illusion by varying the intensity and “temperature” of the colors, keeping the most muted and coolest colors in the background, and by contrasting sharply focused images in the foreground with softer, more painterly images in the distance.

### Adding the Background

This garden gate is a large area of white, and I wanted the flowers to be very bright and pure in color, so I painted the background last.

Many artists like to lay in a full background wash first, painting around any areas that are to remain white, and then build up the elements of the painting with layers of wet-into-dry.

I prefer painting the foreground details first and then carefully washing in the background color around the forms, retaining the areas of pure white paper. It takes a bit of practice to be able to paint around the forms, but it is worth the extra effort.





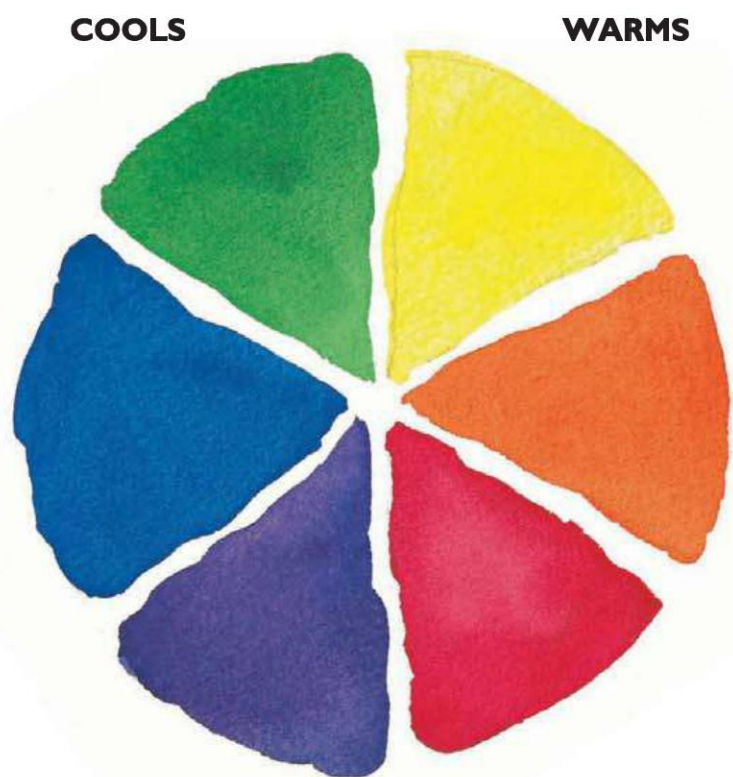
# Color Creates Moods

COLOR AFFECTS OUR FEELINGS and arouses our emotions, which is evident in expressions such as “feeling blue,” “seeing red,” “green with envy,” and “tickled pink.” This means that my choice of colors will determine whether my paintings will seem warm and cozy, cool and refreshing, or vibrant and dramatic. Knowing the basics of how colors relate to and interact with one another will help you create feeling—as well as interest and unity—in your paintings.

## Choosing Colors to Convey Emotion

Warm colors (reds, yellows, oranges) convey energy and excitement; I use warm colors when I want to express passion and other strong emotions. Cool colors (blues, greens, purples) tend to be more relaxing and calming; I choose cool colors to create feelings of peace and serenity. Complementary colors (two colors directly opposite each other on the color wheel) have the most contrast; I use a complementary color scheme when I want a vibrant and lively effect. As you can see here, I have used flowers to demonstrate how color can be used to create different moods for the same basic subject.

► **USING A COLOR WHEEL** A color wheel is a handy visual reference showing how colors are related: warm colors and cool colors (see explanation above); primaries (red, yellow, blue) and secondaries (orange, green, purple); and complements (such as blue and orange). A color wheel is helpful when choosing a color scheme for a painting.



### Ideas for Cool Color Schemes

- Chilly, snowy winter scenes
- Dew-kissed morning landscapes
- Calm lakes and streams
- Quiet, peaceful evening light
- Clean, crisp mountains

### ▲ COOLS: CONVEYING CALM

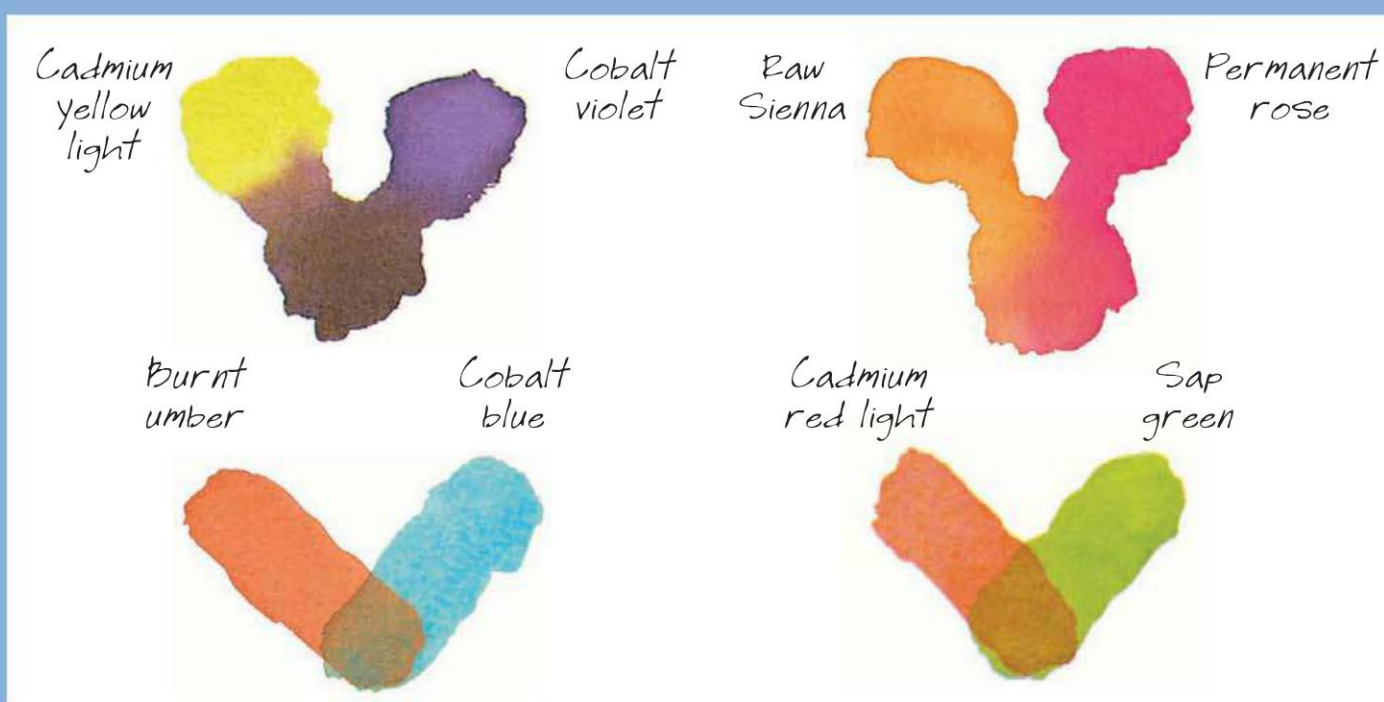
I painted these irises with cool blues, greens, and purples. Notice the tranquil feeling the painting conveys. I like the way the fresh, cool palette lends itself to the clean edges of the petals and leaves.



## Color Mixing

Although you can mix colors on the palette, the translucency of watercolor allows you to layer and mix colors directly on the paper as well. Where two or more colors overlap or bleed together, another color will be created.

You can apply a wet color over a dry color, or wet over wet. Practice overlaying colors to see the various effects produced. Try layering two primaries to create a secondary color. Mix two complementary colors together, and notice how they neutralize, or gray, each other. Experiment with different color combinations and layering methods so you can get a feel for how watercolors work.







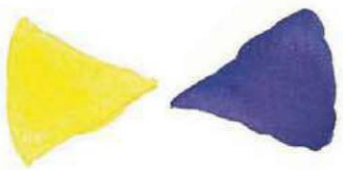
◀ **WARMS: TURNING UP THE HEAT** Here I chose a wide range of yellows and reds to paint a group of gladiolus. This predominantly warm palette evokes a feeling of a hot summer day. Use warm colors when you want to create a bright and cheerful mood in your painting.



**Ideas for Warm Color Schemes**

- Hot and sunny landscapes
- Passionate, fiery sunsets
- Cheerful floral scenes
- Comforting firelit rooms
- Happy, playful children

▶ **COMPLEMENTS: MAKING AN IMPACT** Here I used a complementary color scheme of yellow and purple. There is something almost magical about this contrasting combination. The colors really enliven one another, making the painting very vibrant and eye-catching.



**Ideas for Complementary Color Schemes**

- Bright carnivals and parades
- Bustling marketplaces
- Exciting celebrations
- Invigorating sports events
- Bold advertisements and signs



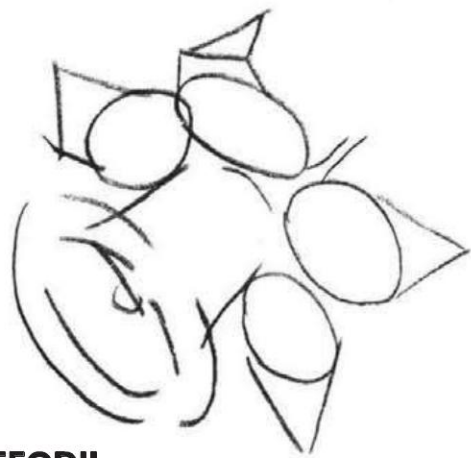


# Focus on Flowers

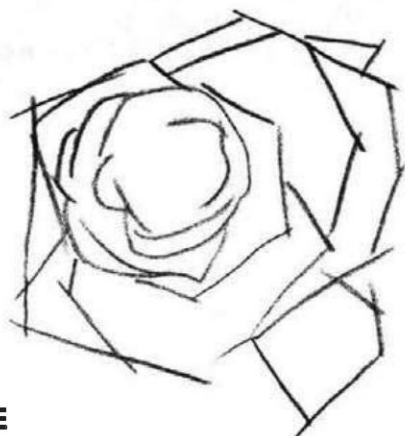
FLOWERS ARE MY FAVORITE SUBJECT because they are so accessible, so varied, and so naturally picturesque. The translucent characteristics of watercolor make it the perfect medium for capturing the delicacy of a petal or the variety of colors in a bouquet.

## Sketching Flower Shapes

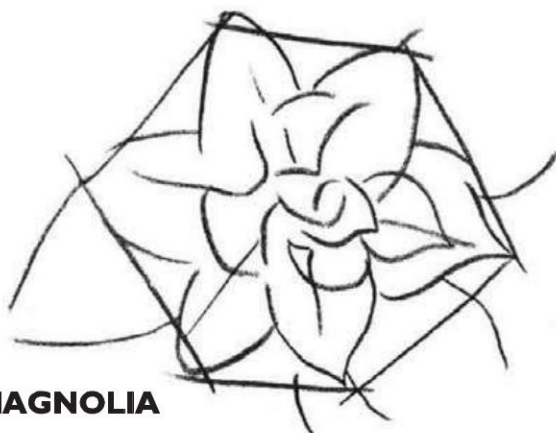
Whether flowers are part of a larger landscape or the center of interest in my painting, I always start with a sketch. Rather than focusing on the intricacy of each petal, I begin by simplifying the flowers into basic shapes, such as circles or hexagons. Next I sketch in the details and then erase my guidelines when I'm finished.



DAFFODIL



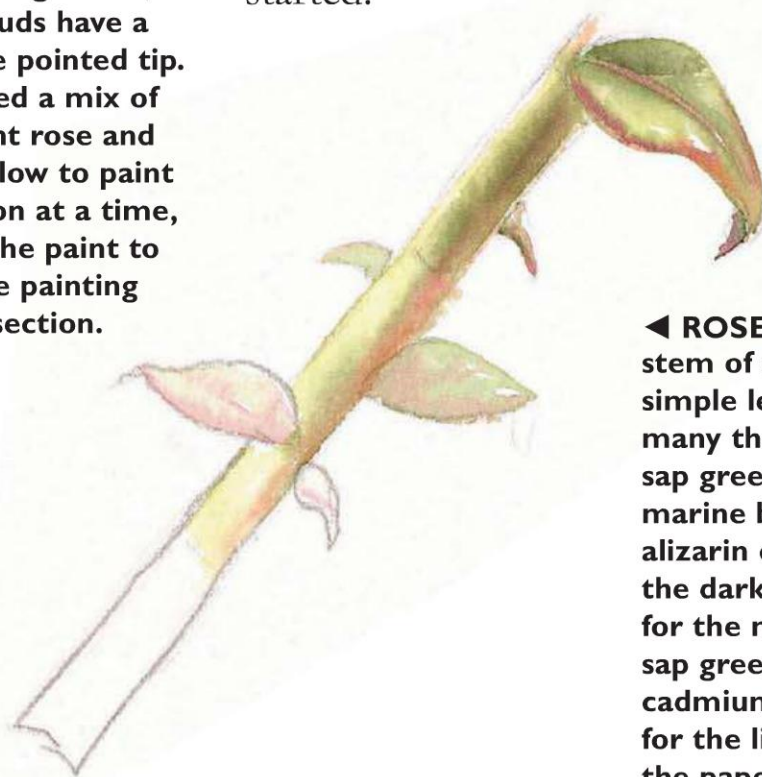
ROSE



MAGNOLIA



▲ **ROSEBUD** Roses grow on long stems, and the buds have a distinctive pointed tip. Here I used a mix of permanent rose and Indian yellow to paint one section at a time, allowing the paint to dry before painting the next section.



◀ **ROSE STEM** The stem of a rose has simple leaves and many thorns. I used sap green, ultramarine blue, and alizarin crimson for the darks, sap green for the midtones, and sap green mixed with cadmium yellow light for the lights. I left the paper white for the lightest highlights.



**HOLLYHOCKS** Instead of painting every flower from a straight-on view, I varied their positions to create a more dynamic and realistic presentation.

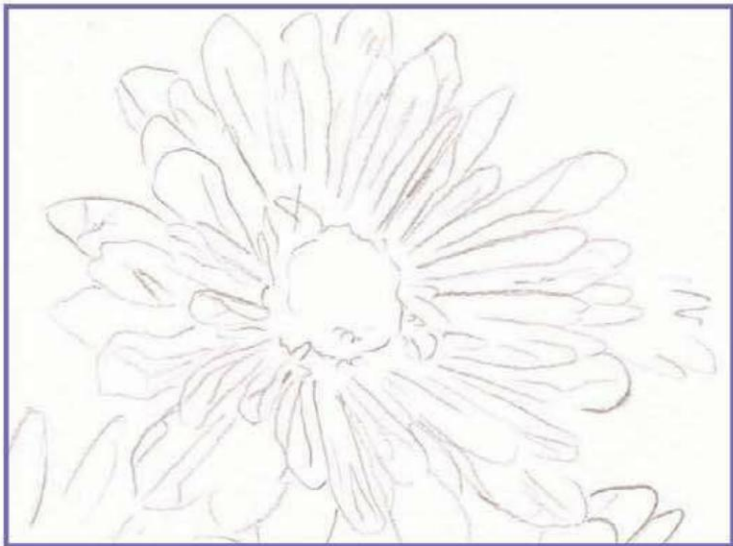


## Painting Different Flowers

In the chart below, I have illustrated some of the differences and similarities among three flower subjects: a daisy, a rose, and an iris. With practice, you will learn which techniques are best suited to a particular type of flower. Whichever methods you use, begin with a sketch of your subject, and then block in the dark and light areas.



► **PEACH BLOSSOMS**  
Peach blossoms grow in clusters on very short stems. Their buds aren't as clearly defined as rosebuds are, so my brushstrokes were more free and less defined.



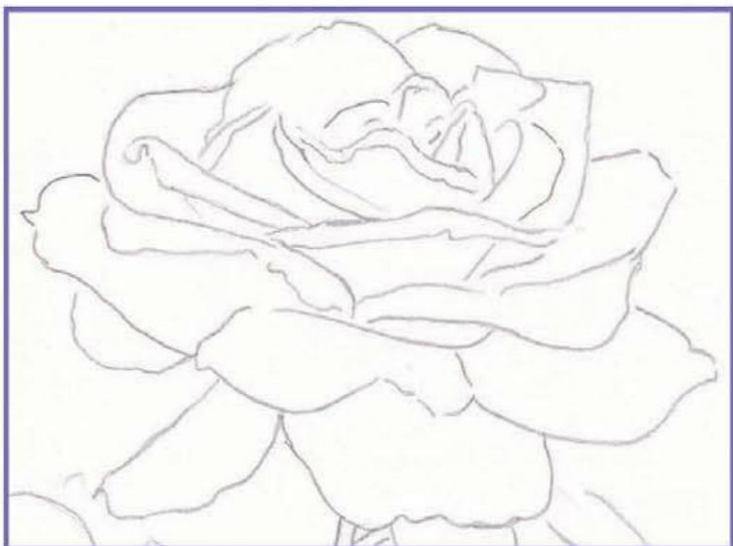
**DAISY** This daisy has a circular form, but the center is turned so that it doesn't face straight ahead. Experiment with different angles and compositions, even when doing a simple study.



Since this daisy is white, I let the paper show through, adding color mostly around and between the petals to create the shape. I painted the shadows with a mix of cobalt blue and violet.



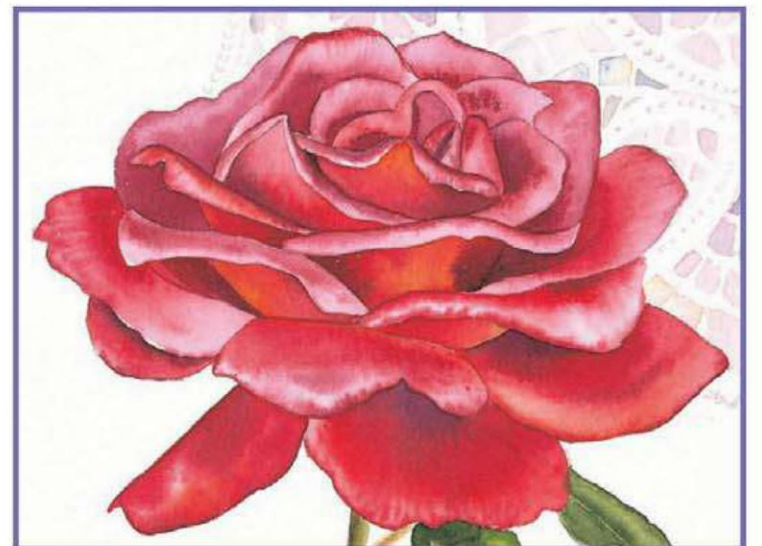
I used cadmium yellow light, sap green, and burnt sienna for the center, letting the colors bleed into each other. Finally, I painted the background using a wet-into-wet application.



**ROSE** This is one of the more difficult flowers to draw. Take your time, and really study how the petals fold and overlap. I focused on basic shapes, then refined them by adding curves and details.



I applied alizarin crimson, cadmium red light, and Indian yellow wet-into-wet to each petal. For defined edges, I painted one petal at a time, letting each area dry before working on the next.



Notice how the combination of dark and light values of the same color creates the shapes of the petals—and thus the whole flower—with the lightest highlights on the tips of the petals.



**IRIS** After blocking in the basic shapes of the flower, I indicated areas where the shadows fall because I prefer to work around the lightest areas. Then I worked out the shapes and angles of the petals before applying any color.



Using a warm color scheme of Indian yellow, raw sienna, and burnt sienna, I built the petals gradually, letting the paint dry between layers. I added cobalt blue for the shadows and saved the white of the paper for the lightest highlights.



Sometimes I add a solid background behind a flower to accentuate it. Here I used a small bowl as a template for painting the blue circle. Notice that the contrasting blue background spotlights the bright yellow iris.



# Looking at Leaves

WHETHER YOU PAINT LANDSCAPES outdoors or still lifes in the studio, your paintings will benefit from an in-depth study of leaves. Although leaves are often overlooked in favor of the more dramatic beauty of flowers, I find them to be quite attractive in their own right. I like to gather some specimens from my garden and look closely at what details make each leaf unique. This way, I can replicate the leaves in my paintings.

## Painting a Variety of Leaves

Leaves come in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and hues, so no two are painted exactly the same way. Here I have demonstrated some of the most common shapes and colors. I advise you to study the patterns of their veins and the variations in their texture. Making each leaf unique will keep your paintings from looking formulaic.



### ◀ NARROW LEAVES WITH LIGHT VEINS

Here I applied a blue and yellow underpainting; then I used layers of sap green for the leaves, letting some of the background colors show through to suggest veins.

▶ **VARIEGATED LEAVES** Using a controlled wet-into-wet technique, I manipulated the flow of the colors to create the leaf's pattern.



◀ **FERNLIKE FRONDS** With a small round brush, I painted from the outside to the inside, completing each leaf with one stroke.



◀ **SHINY LEAVES** I rendered each leaf by applying layers of transparent sap green, working light to dark. I left some areas lighter—or even retained the white of the paper—to suggest highlights where the sun strikes.



## Mixing Greens for Leaves and Foliage

Making a color chart will help you depict the myriad shades of green found in leaves and foliage. I made each green sample by mixing the color above it with the color below it: for example, the first shade was made by mixing cadmium yellow light with ultramarine blue.





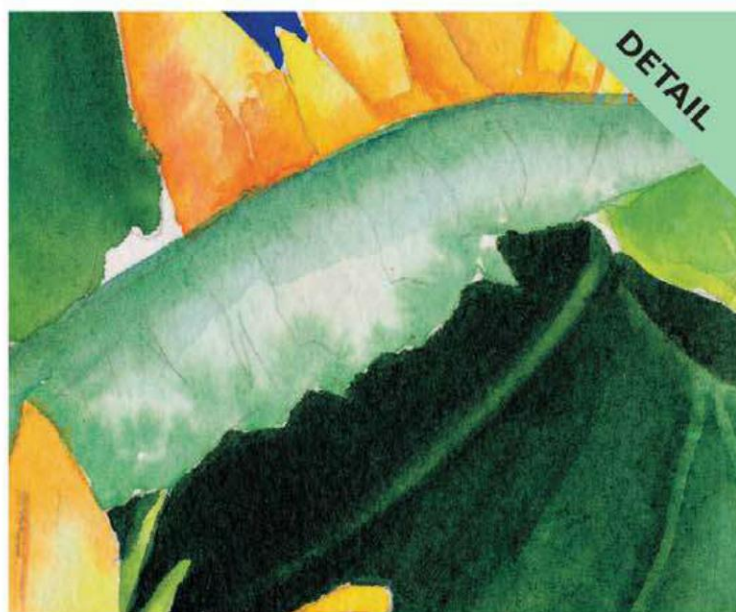
▲ **CURLED LEAVES** For these leaves that curl in different directions, I varied the color values, making the undersides of the leaves darker than the tops. This contrast created depth and form.

### Expanding Your Use of Color

As you establish the forms of your subjects, remember that cool colors are often best for shadow areas (that recede), and warm colors are more suitable for light areas (that come forward). Even if the only color you are using is green, you can create cooler hues by adding more blue or warmer hues by adding more yellow.

### Combining Leaves and Flowers

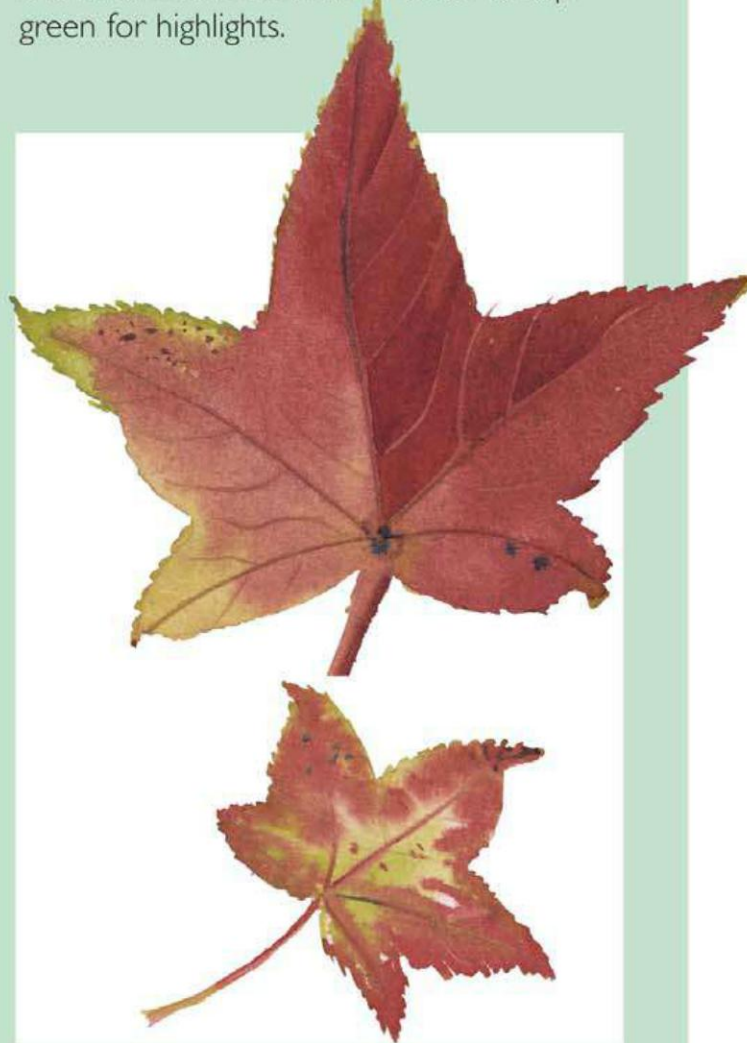
You can achieve a variety of moods and effects when combining leaves and flowers in a painting. I often use leaves to create a dramatic backdrop to set off the flowers, as in the sunflower painting below. But I also use them to subtly frame and complement the blossoms (see pages 20 and 21). Try both methods—I think you will be pleased with both results.



▲ **LEAF AND FLOWER** In this detail of the painting below, you can see how the dark green leaf offsets the yellow flower. I painted the underside of the leaf with a rich mixture of sap green, burnt sienna, and ultramarine blue.

### Autumn Palette

The colors of fall provide a completely different subject for study. For the late autumn leaves below, I used burnt sienna and alizarin crimson, with a touch of sap green for highlights.



**SUNFLOWERS** Painting sunflowers is always a great joy. Here I used deep green for the leaves to contrast vividly with the petals' golden-yellow hues.





**BUTTERFLY FANTASY** Unleash your creativity and let your imagination soar! Watercolor is wonderful for this decorative style of painting.





This designlike method lends itself well to other simple motifs, such as dolphins, flowers, or dragonflies. Experiment!



# Special Techniques

WATERCOLOR IS IDEAL for experimenting with different techniques and special effects—for example, one of my favorite techniques is using ordinary table salt to create mottled textures, as I have done on the owl on the opposite page. By using the simple methods shown below, you will be able to produce a wide range of fascinating textures, create white areas and highlights, and even correct mistakes.

## Creating Texture

Variations in texture make paintings more dynamic and lifelike, and they are a lot of fun to create. I add textures to my paintings for two reasons: either to add visual interest with a special effect or to copy the textures found in nature, such as fur, bark, or sand. Some special effects are achieved by adding paint, and some by taking paint away; some require special artist's materials, such as a palette knife (a special tool for mixing paints), and some can be done with simple household items, such as a toothbrush. I hope you will try some of these techniques and see what effects you come up with!

## Correcting Mistakes

Contrary to popular belief, there are several ways of making changes or correcting errors in watercolor. If you haven't gone too far with your painting, you can always put the whole thing under cool running water and gently sponge off the paint. For smaller areas, wipe off the color with a wet sponge (as shown below) or cotton swab, or gently scrub off the color with a wet brush. If the paint has already dried, you can scrape off small blemishes or clean up ragged edges with a sharp knife or a razor blade.



**SPATTERING** This technique of flicking paint on the paper is particularly good for creating grain textures. For a fine spatter, load a toothbrush with fairly thick paint and run your thumb or finger over the bristles. For a coarser texture, use a bristle brush and tap it sharply on your finger or the handle of another brush. (Use some scratch paper to cover the parts of your painting that you don't want to get spattered.)



**LIFTING OUT** This is a method of removing paint from the paper, returning to white or near-white. To create soft, cloudlike shapes, blot the wet paint with a crumpled tissue or paper towel. To remove dry paint, wet the brush, lightly scrub away the paint where desired, and then blot with a tissue or paper towel. (Note that some colors stain more than others do, so they will not lift out as completely.)



**MASKING FLUID** This is a great way to retain the pure white of the paper. Use an old brush to apply masking fluid in the desired areas; then let it dry. The mask will protect the paper from any paint applied over it. When the paint is dry, rub off the mask with your finger. Because the fluid is applied with a brush, the strokes of white it leaves match the strokes of color, creating a painterly effect.



**SPONGING** Sponges not only remove paint well, but they also make great tools for applying color and creating texture. You can dab the paint on lightly for an open texture, or press more firmly and even twist the sponge for a more solid effect. Layering different shades of color will add more depth and interest to your painting.



**ADDING SALT** Salt slightly repels paint, creating dappled patterns. Sprinkle table salt or crystals of sea salt onto wet paint, allow the painting to dry, and then gently brush off the salt. The results you achieve will vary depending on what the underlying color is, how wet the paint is, and how large the salt crystals are.



**KNIFE PAINTING** A painting knife or palette knife can be used to remove color in long, sweeping lines, as in these blades of grass. While the paint is still wet, stroke the edge of the knife through the color, working from bottom to top. (You can also apply paint with a palette knife; just use the paint straight from the tube.)





**▲ COMBINING TECHNIQUES**  
 Here I used almost all the techniques described on page 18. After laying in washes for the owl and the branches, I used salt to create the spotting in the feathers. Then I used a painting knife for the branches in the upper-left corner and a sponge for the leaves.



**◀ STARTING OUT SMALL** When you try a new technique, start with an easy subject, such as sand, which I created by spattering. I also use spattering for textures of bricks, pebbles, foliage, bark, and dirt roads. Practice on a piece of scrap paper first, to get a feel for the technique before you use it in a painting.



# Painting Outdoors

THERE IS NOTHING QUITE LIKE going outdoors and painting from life. Painting on location is an excellent way of observing nature, and watercolor is particularly well suited for outdoor painting. The supplies are easily portable, and the medium's delicacy is perfect for capturing impressions of light and atmosphere.

## Simplify the Subject

Watercolor is perfect for a loose, impressionistic style. I approach outdoor paintings by first simplifying the elements into basic shapes—that is, by painting in the large masses of light and dark. (You could become overwhelmed if you try to paint every leaf and petal you see.) Below are a few tips for painting groups of plants and flowers in their natural setting, as in the garden scene at left.



▲ **SUGGESTING FORM** I often represent flowers and other plants with large, simple masses of lights and darks. Notice how the large areas of yellow and green provide just enough information to suggest the plant's general form.



▲ **RESERVING WHITES** I keep my colors lighter and brighter by leaving some white areas among the larger masses of color.



▲ **FOCUSING ON COLOR** For large bunches of flowers, I focus on the general colors and the light and dark areas—I don't try to paint each blossom.

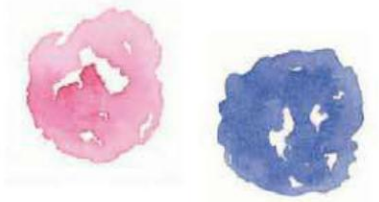
**PAINTING ON LOCATION** I made a quick watercolor sketch in the field and finished this painting in the studio.





### Capture a Sense of Spring

Choose subjects that truly interest you, even if it's simply your own backyard! I love painting spring gardens. The rains have made the air clear and the sun is gaining strength, bathing everything in soft light. The colors of the new vegetation are always vibrant; the bursts of color really enliven the garden. To convey a spring feeling and ensure that my painting is full of life, I keep my colors pure and fresh.



*Permanent rose and cobalt violet*



*Cadmium yellow light and sap green*

▲ **SPRING PALETTE** These are the colors I used for the spring garden at left. I love the bright pinks and purples, and the greens and touches of yellow add contrast and interest.

### Picking a Time of Day to Paint

An important element of painting outdoors is choosing a time of day to paint. Morning and evening colors are generally cool; afternoon colors are warm—so choose a time that suits your mood and palette.

The photo at right was taken in the late afternoon, when the shadows are strong. Some of the best times to paint are the morning and the late afternoon or early evening, when the sun strikes at an angle, creating long, slanting shadows and exciting contrasts of color and light. Notice how the extended shadows of the trees form a dappled pattern of darks and lights, adding interest to an otherwise flat expanse of green and providing a sense of depth.





# Composing Dynamic Paintings

AN ATTRACTIVE PAINTING not only has appealing subject matter, it also has a pleasing composition. *Composition* refers to the way objects are placed and how they relate to one another. A good composition will seem balanced and harmonious, and it will lead the viewer's eye into the picture.

## Creating a Center of Interest

Your paintings should have a center of interest, or "focal point," but you don't want the viewer to ignore the rest of the painting! I try to make sure that my compositions lead the eye through the painting and toward the focal point. I often arrange the elements in a triangular pattern, or I lead the viewer's eye along a curving path or a row of trees. I also use color to create interest—for example, pure colors tend to attract attention; so do contrasts between dark and light.



◀ **POOR DESIGN**  
In this sketch, all the elements are crowded into the center and are on the same plane. The tree's shape and branches are too uniform, and the path leads the eye out of the picture.



◀ **GOOD DESIGN**  
Here a few subtle changes have greatly improved the composition. The center of interest is off to the side, the elements are on different planes and are overlapped, and the eye is led into the scene.

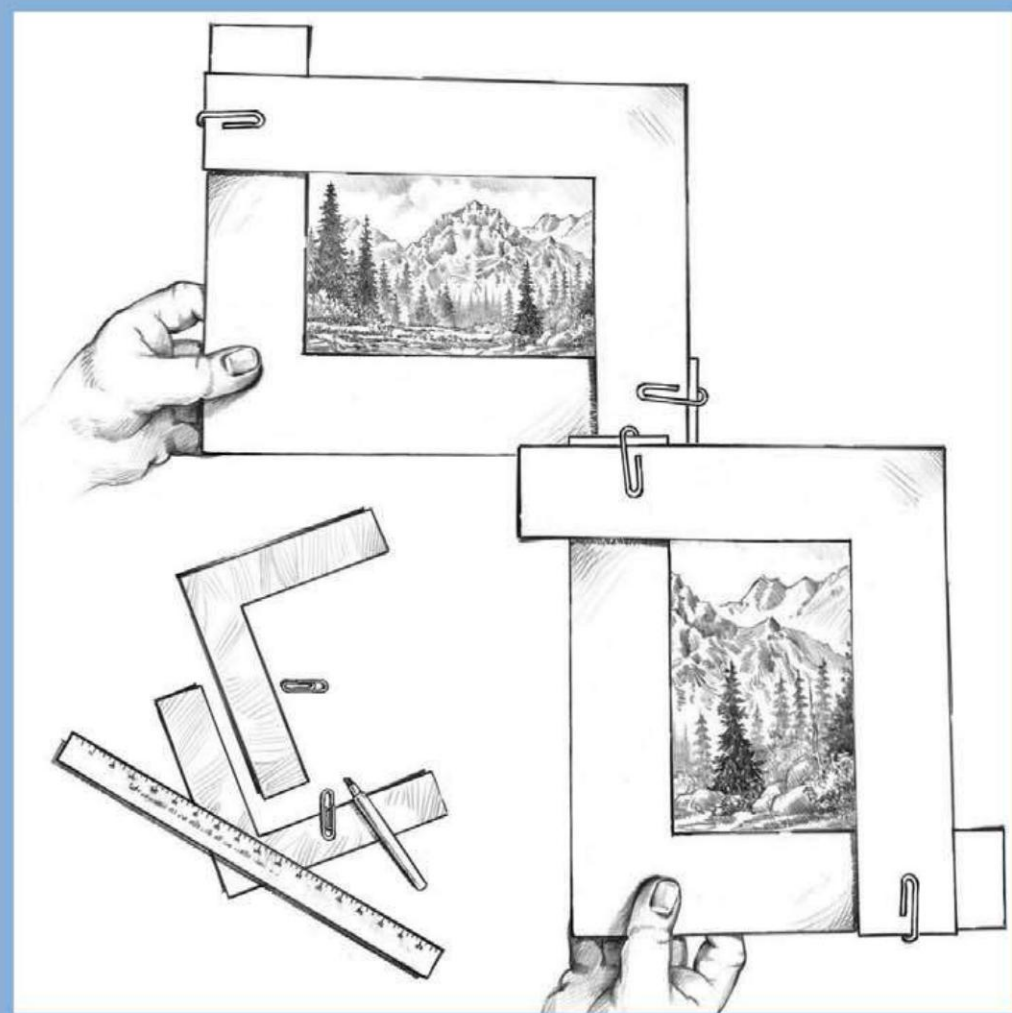
▶ **COMPOSING WITH DIAGONALS**  
For this beach scene, I arranged the main elements in a triangle to create a sense of movement. The eye is drawn through the painting, along the diagonal lines of the imaginary triangle. I also used touches of red here and there to help attract the eye and lead it around the painting.



## Choosing a Viewpoint

The angle at which you view a subject can have a dramatic impact. A straight-on view can seem static and dull, whereas an angled viewpoint—either from left or right or from above or below—introduces diagonal lines, creating interest and movement. Decide what you want your focus to be, and choose the viewpoint and format that works to its best advantage.

A viewfinder can help you isolate parts of a scene and examine it in different formats (vertical or horizontal). You don't need to go out and buy a viewfinder; you can make one quite easily with L-shaped pieces of cardboard, as shown below. Paper-clip them together to form a square or rectangle, and look at your scene through the center. Hold it at different distances from your eyes and at different angles to explore the possible viewpoints and formats for your composition.



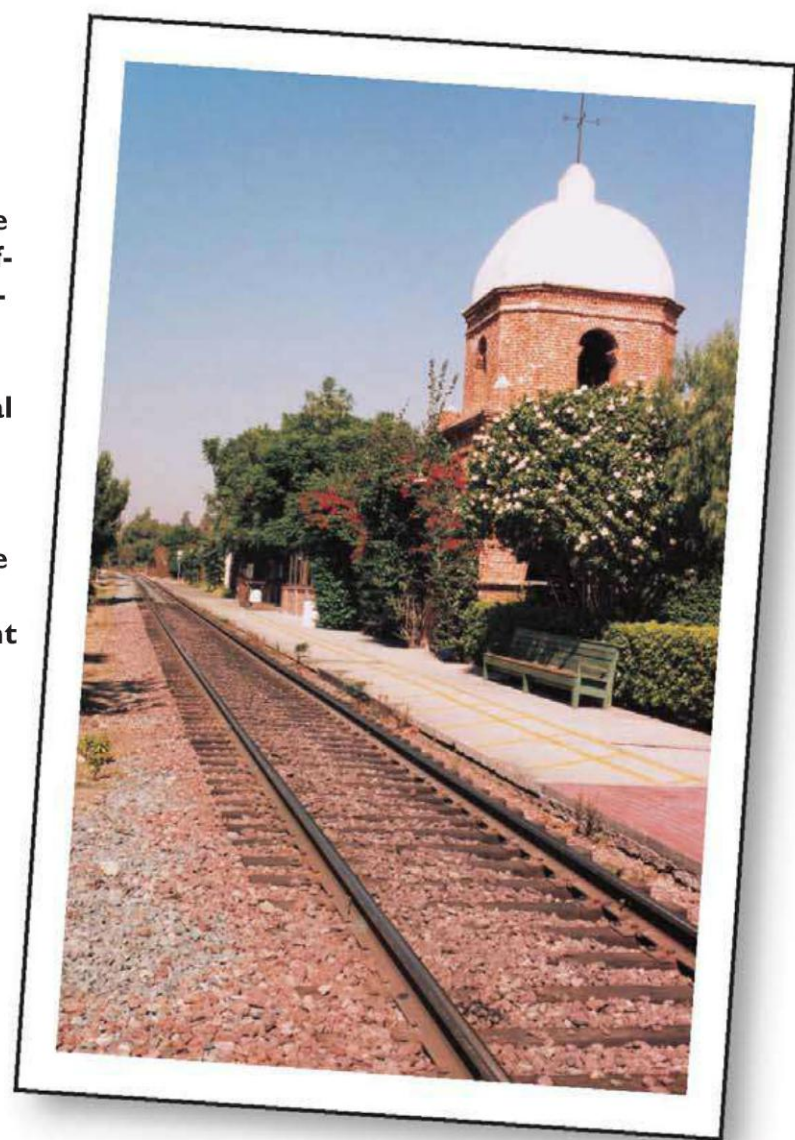


### Arranging the Elements

I believe the best way to work out a composition before you begin painting is to make a number of quick, “thumbnail” sketches or small watercolor studies of your subject. Don’t worry about drawing all the details at this point; just focus on the general forms. Move the elements around, varying their sizes, shapes, and colors until you find a composition that works for you. (Keep in mind the various methods for creating a center of interest.) Try combining elements from several different photographs to create an original painting. Remember, you don’t have to be a slave to your references; compose the scene the way *you* want it to be. (This is known as *artistic license*.)

▼ **PLANNING A COMPOSITION** I put a lot of forethought into this linear composition before actually painting it. I broke the scene down into three major elements: (1) the train depot and surrounding foliage are the center of interest, (2) the railroad tracks invite the viewer deep into the picture field, and (3) the foliage on the left acts as a counterbalance and keeps the eye from wandering out of the painting.

► **SELECTING A FORMAT** This is the photo I used as a reference for the painting below. I changed the format from vertical to horizontal by cropping out the uninteresting foreground and adding some colorful foliage on the left. I also altered the viewpoint slightly to focus more squarely on the tower.





# Adding Life to Still Life

STILL LIFES ARE COMPOSED of inanimate objects, such as pottery, fruit, nicknacks, or even a favorite teddy bear—but they are by no means lifeless! An effective still life setup has movement and vitality. I like to paint still lifes because they give me the opportunity to make glass look fragile, silver look reflective, and apples look good enough to eat. It's fun to make objects appear realistic through the use of light and shadow (which creates depth), the careful placement of objects, and the use of color to convey mood.

## Setting Up a Still Life

Creating a harmonious setup takes advance planning. The composition should draw the viewer in and direct the eye from object to object. I often use diagonal lines to lead the eye around the painting. (Avoid placing objects evenly spaced in a row; horizontal lines lead the eye out of the picture.) I also make the objects relate to one another by overlapping and staggering them on different planes.

### Ideas for Still Life Setups

- Timepiece
- Musical instruments
- Culinary items
- Gardening tools
- Sports equipment
- Antiques
- Art materials
- Fruits and vegetables

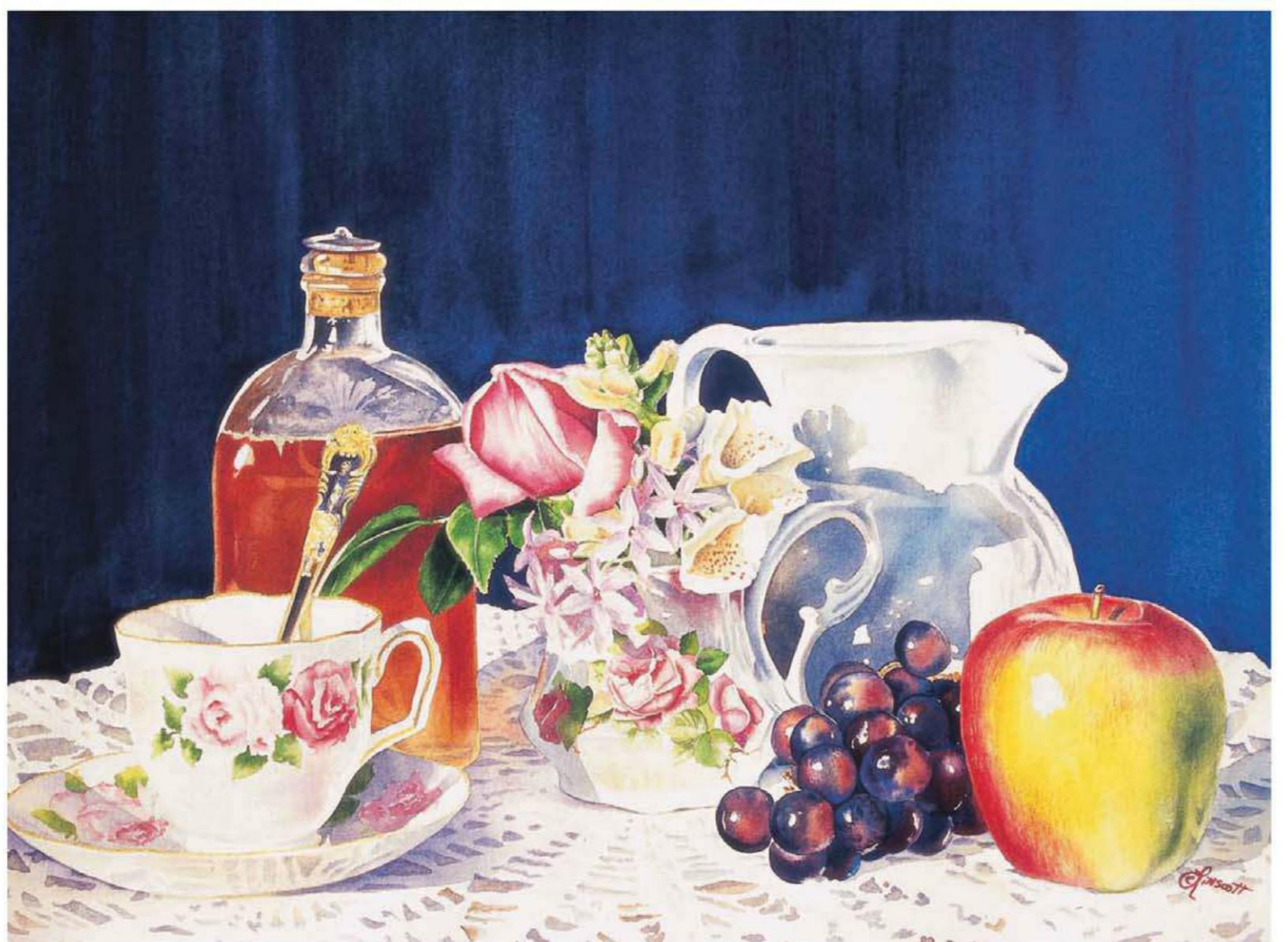


► **GOOD AND BAD SETUPS** The setup at the top shows a good balance of elements of varying shapes and sizes, effective use of spatial planes, and dynamic diagonal lines. The setup at the bottom was poorly composed, with unimaginative horizontal lines and dull viewing angles.

## Finding a Theme

A successful still life usually has some kind of theme. I often choose objects that are related by type or by function, such as a bowl of fruit or a collection of pottery. The elements can also be tied together by color or shape—either because they are visually similar (such as in the example on page 25) or because they make exciting contrasts (as in the example at right). You may also choose a very personal theme, selecting objects that have particular meaning or sentimental value to you, such as a child's first shoes and drinking cup or a group of beloved books.

► **ENLIVENING THE ARRANGEMENT** I avoided making this still life too static by grouping objects of very different shapes and colors.





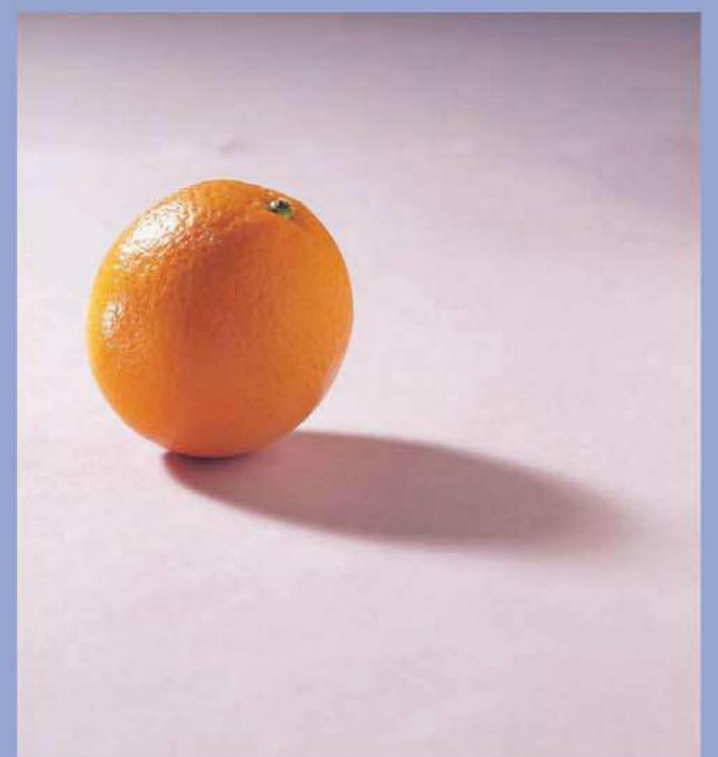
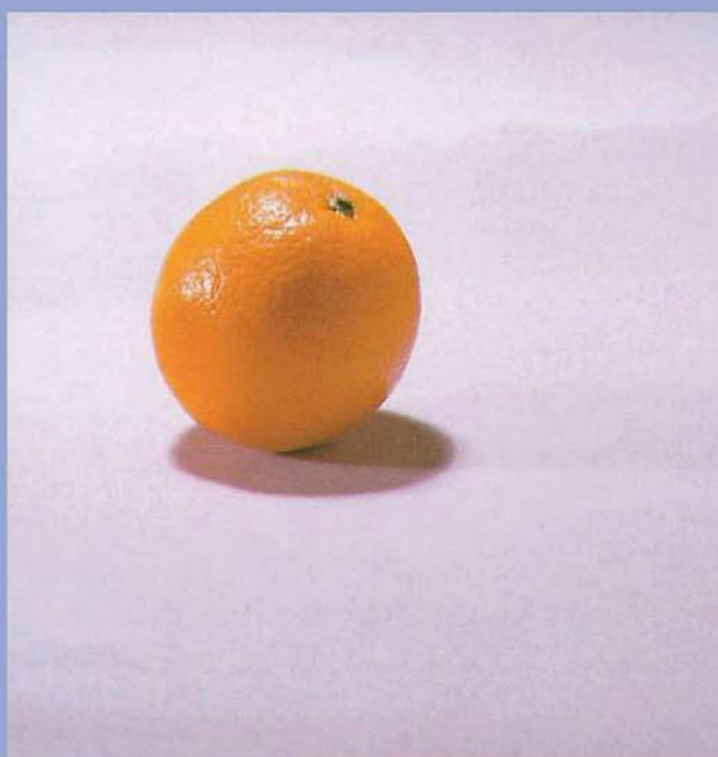


**UNITING THE ELEMENTS** Here I used similar patterns and colors to tie the objects together, creating a more harmonious composition.

## Choosing a Light Source

When setting up a still life, lighting is almost as important as the objects themselves. Light defines the forms by creating highlights and shadows—and cast shadows, whether long or short, can be an interesting element in the composition. Try using a portable lamp with a flexible neck to experiment with different lighting angles and effects.

Notice how the direction of the light affects the cast shadows in the examples at right. The light source is high and behind the first orange, creating a strong highlight on the left and a short cast shadow toward the front. The light source is low and to the left of the second orange, so the shadow is long and cast toward the right. Keep these points in mind to help make your paintings look realistic.





# Rendering Water

WATER IS A DRAMATIC and dynamic painting subject because it has so many moods and takes on so many forms—and watercolor is the perfect choice for painting water scenes. The fluidity of the medium makes it easy to capture the different reflective qualities of water—whether it's a calm and peaceful pond, a moving and invigorating stream, or a turbulent and violent sea. I begin by determining the mood I want to convey in my painting, and then I choose the appropriate colors and techniques to match that feeling.

## Depicting Wave Action

Crashing waves are an exciting subject to paint. The action is very powerful, and the play of light and color has a dramatic impact.

I begin by simplifying the wave into a basic curved shape. Then I use contrasts of light and dark colors and hard and soft edges to create the form of the wave. Keep in mind that darks recede and lights come forward.

Several special techniques help me capture the freedom and movement of ocean waves. I add salt to the wash behind the waves to depict the sea spray. Or sometimes I use sandpaper or a razor blade to scrape back the paint to suggest foam or reflected light. I also create soft edges around the waves by lifting out with a paper towel, or I create a backrun by adding water to the edge of the wash before it has dried.



## Painting Reflections

I am fascinated by the way water reflects an image of anything above its surface, including the sky and clouds. I always make the reflection mirror the colors and tones of the surroundings, but the shape and size of the reflection depends on whether the water is still or moving. When painting still water, keep in mind that the reflections are the same size and shape as the object being reflected. But in moving water, the curved surface of the ripples and waves lengthens and distorts the reflections.



## ▲ STILL WATER

I painted this simple scene using only two colors: permanent rose and ultramarine blue. I painted wet-into-wet for the sky, water, and trees, letting the trees and their reflections merge. Notice that the water reflects the sky colors as well.



Permanent  
rose



Ultramarine  
blue

## ► WATER LILIES

Here I painted the water using all the blues on my palette, applying vertical strokes wet-into-wet and letting the colors bleed down the paper.







◀ **QUIET SUNSET**  
Here the moving water reflects the warm, brilliant colors of the sunset. I laid in the sky and water with wet-into-wet washes of yellows and permanent rose. Then I added the purples wet-into-dry. Finally, I used a razor blade to scrape out the reflected light on the distant water.





# Painting Fur and Feathers

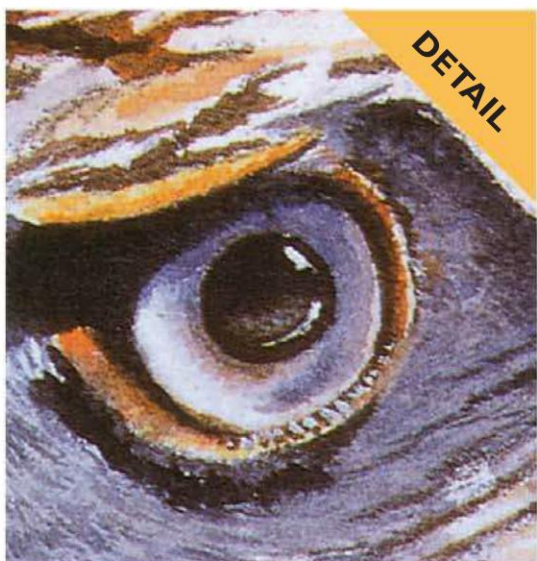
I LOVE ANIMALS—and I love to paint them with watercolor because the medium is so versatile. I can depict the softness of fur with wet-into-wet washes, and I can easily duplicate the texture of hair and feathers with drybrush. It's fun to explore the realistic effects that can be produced with different brushes and techniques.

## Suiting the Technique to the Texture

When I'm painting a subject from a distance, I merely suggest the fur or plumage, concentrating on the subject's form instead. But when I'm painting from a closer view, I apply special techniques to achieve a more detailed rendering. Below are some examples of animal textures.



▲ **CHOOSING TOOLS** I used a small, pointed brush for the finest details.



▲ **RENDERING THE EYE** If you capture the look in an animal's eyes, you really capture its likeness. It's not difficult to do if you study your reference carefully and simplify the parts into basic shapes. I started with a modified oval and then applied the layers or glazes of color, leaving the highlights white.

► **COMBINING TECHNIQUES** I have shown the varying textures in this hawk by using smooth, wet strokes for the beak and eye and rougher drybrush for the head feathers.



**FEATHERS** For the illusion of feathers, start with a wet-into-wet wash, and then apply layers of wet-into-dry to build up the depth and color. Define the dark edges of the feathers last, using a fine, dry brush.



**THICK FUR** To re-create thick fur, apply one layer of drybrush over another, varying the colors and the length of your strokes. Smooth out any rough areas by going over the strokes with a dry fan brush.



**FLUFFY DOWN** To make the smooth blends and soft edges of down, use many layers of wet-into-wet washes, controlling the flow of paint by wetting the paper only where you want the color to go.

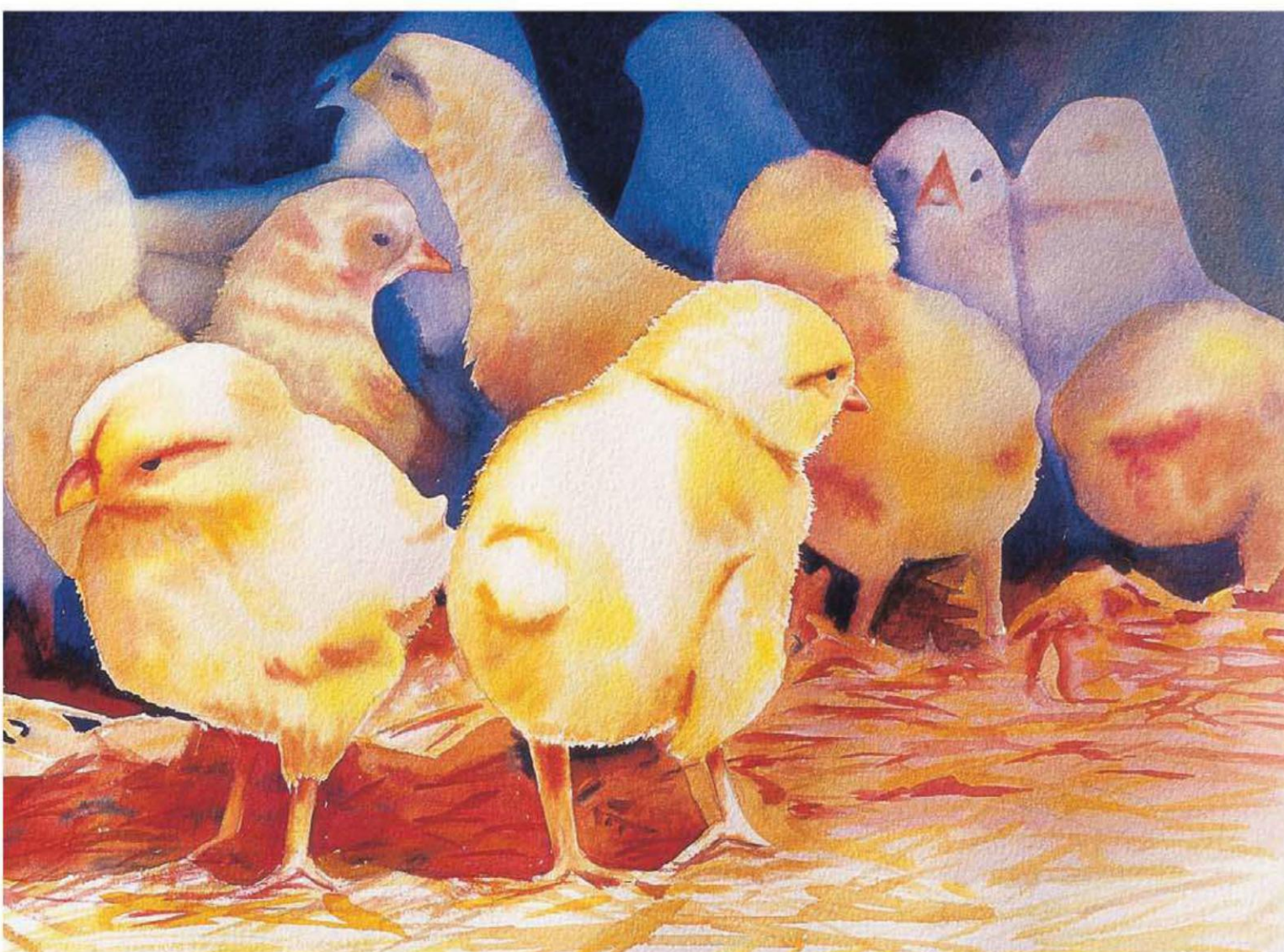


**FINE HAIR** To paint wispy strands of hair, make light, quick strokes with a fairly dry brush. Always stroke in the direction of growth, lifting the brush at the end of the stroke to create a tapered end.





**PAINTING NEGATIVE AREAS** In this painting of my cat Victor, I painted around and behind the fur, letting the dark background define his long hair.



### Creating a Pet Portrait

Some of my favorite paintings are of the animals I know best—my pets. I like a pet as a model because it is always around (if not underfoot), and I can study and sketch it in its different positions. To achieve a likeness, I create many sketches, looking for the details—such as the expression in the eye or a particular pose—that will help convey its personality and individuality.

#### ◀ VARYING VALUES

These little chicks are all the same color and texture, so I had to vary the values (lights and darks of the same color) to keep them from looking like one big blob of yellow. Notice that the dark shadows between the chicks separate them from one another.



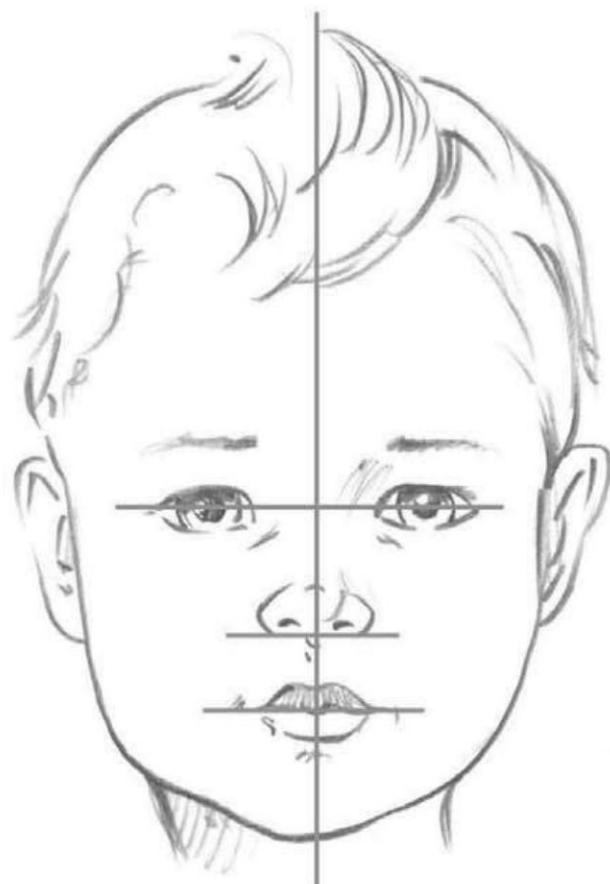
# Capturing the Charm of Children

IT'S HARD TO FIND a more appealing subject than children. I have enjoyed painting my own children since they were just babies. Because each piece freezes a moment in time and preserves it forever, I now have a very unique, personal record of their childhood. When painting your own children or grandchildren, try to capture their youth and innocence by keeping the colors light, bright, and fresh.

## ► CHECKING PROPORTIONS

I use guidelines as shown here for placing the facial features. Notice that the eyes are lower than the halfway point, and so the forehead appears larger in relation to the face than it does for adults.

(Sketches by William F. Powell)



► SKETCHING MOVEMENT I draw from life as much as possible, but sometimes I use photos to sketch children in action. To express their movements, I focus on the general angle of the arms, legs, and head in relation to the torso.



## Start with a Good Drawing

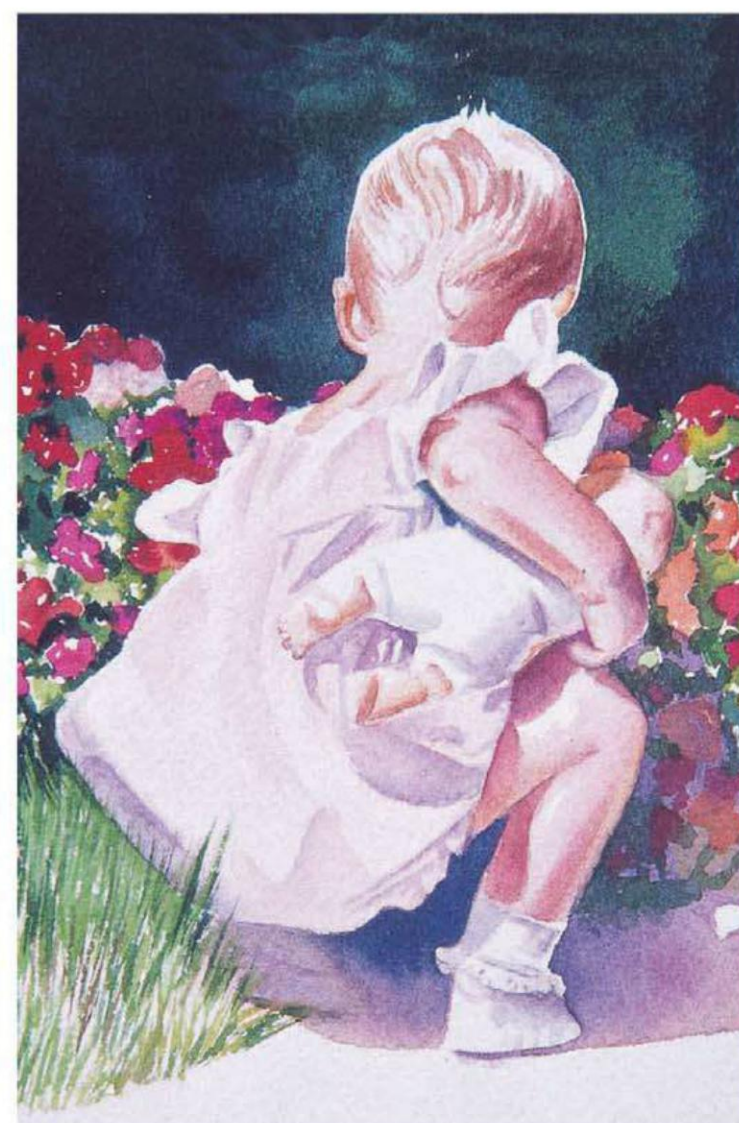
As with any subject, I always start with a good drawing. I suggest you practice sketching children as often as you can. Observe them engaged in different activities, making many quick sketches so you learn to see what makes children unique. Pay special attention to their proportions as you draw, so your final paintings will look like real children instead of small adults.

## ◀ PAINTING A CHILD'S PORTRAIT

A portrait should be a close physical likeness that also conveys the child's personality. For this portrait, I used bright colors and strong lighting to focus on the child's face and sunny disposition.

## ► PUTTING A CHILD IN A SCENE

Including a child in a larger scene may be easier than painting a specific portrait. I chose this pose to focus on the general forms and skin tones without worrying about capturing a likeness.







### Creating Flesh Tones

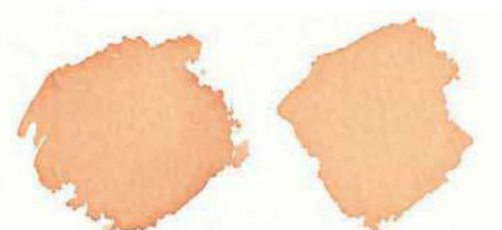
My approach to painting flesh tones is to decide on a general overall color, which is usually a mixture of light or dark yellows and reds. I use a lot of water and very little pigment when mixing skin colors. To lighten the base color, I add water; to darken the shadow areas, I add a touch of blue or green. For the strong highlights—such as on the tip of a nose—I often just leave the white of the paper.

▼ **PALETTE FOR LIGHT SKIN**  
These are the mixes I use most often for light-colored skin tones.

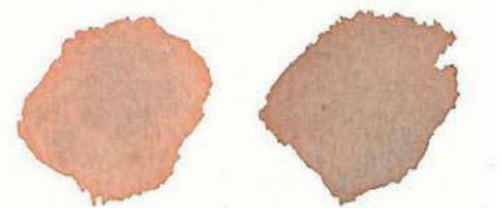
*Light values on the shoulders: Indian yellow mixed with specks of cadmium red light and permanent rose*



*Middle values on the forearm and upper back: Alizarin crimson mixed with burnt sienna*



*Dark values in palms of the hands: A touch of cobalt blue added to the middle-value colors above*



### ◀ USING LIGHT AND SHADOW

In this painting of my son as a toddler, I concentrated on the vibrant contrasts made by a strong light source. Painting wet-into-dry for the background made it especially dark and rich, and the contrast against the light skin tones really makes the subject pop forward.





## About the Artist

**Caroline Linscott** has been interested in art and fascinated by color for as long as she can remember. A professional artist who paints primarily in watercolor, Caroline has remarked, "I am very fortunate to be doing what I love and do best. I feel as though I'm on an escalator with no end in sight as to where my art journey will take me." Although Caroline minored in art in college, she didn't begin painting in watercolor until about 1989. A long-time admirer of fine watercolor painting, Caroline started taking local art classes in Sedona, Arizona, and she became "hooked" on the medium. Caroline now lives in Southern California, where she teaches watercolor to children and adults. Caroline is also very active on local arts councils and in the arts community, and she served as president of Women Artists of the West for three years, ending her tenure in 1998. She is also the author of a book titled *Art of the American West*.



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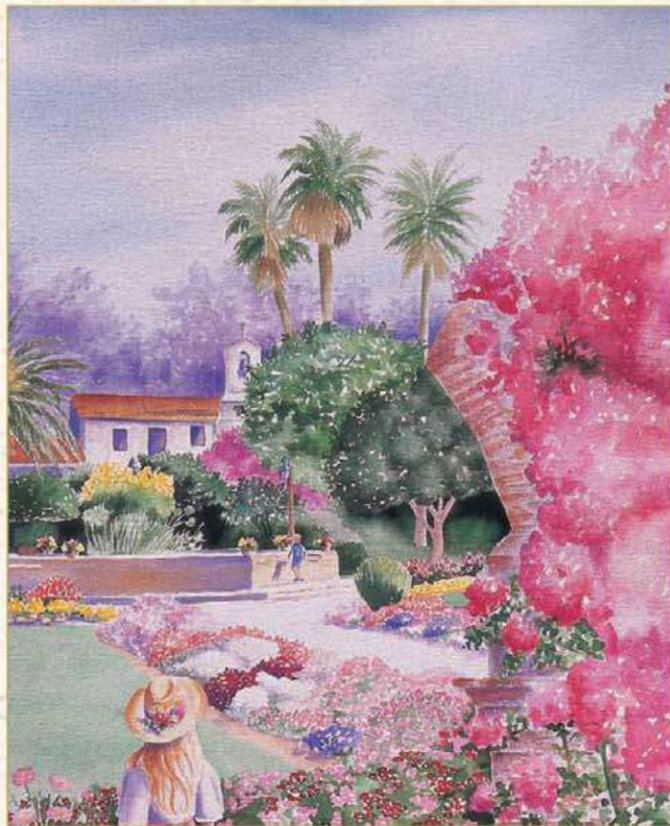


# Discover the art of watercolor

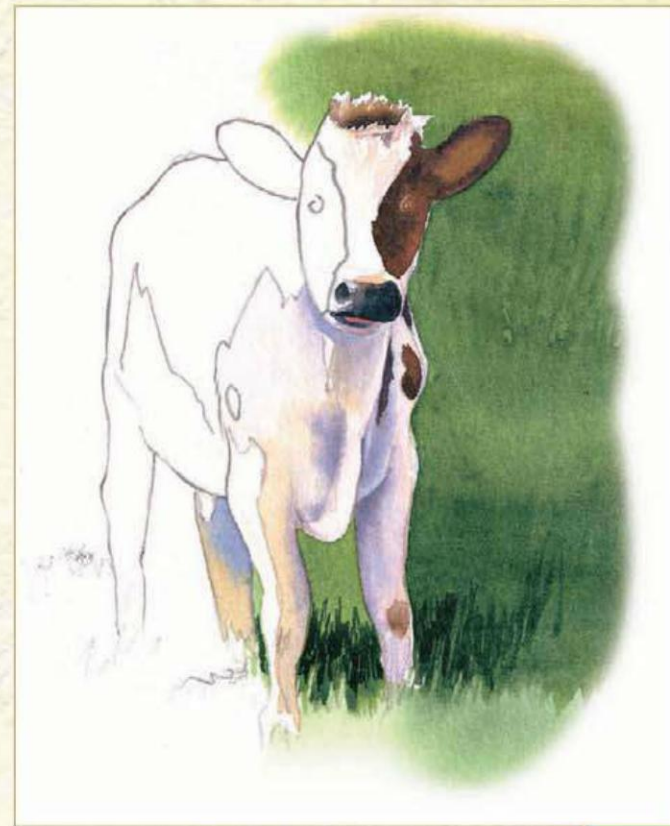
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