

Watercolour Memories

'Lamp Black and New Gamboge, the new green'

INTRODUCTION

MY PALETTE



Although I have a gallery, I do most of my paintings in one of our bedrooms which I have converted into a studio. On one side I have a large worktop with a large studio easel fixed to it for doing large Mediterranean paintings.

On the other side is a desk for my other watercolours. I invested in a large daylight unit which can be moved to either side of the room. This enables me to paint when the light is poor from the window.

This is my watercolour palette which I have used for over twenty years. The japan box wears out after a while and has to be replaced but the plastic palette and water pots have travelled with me wherever I go.

When I am painting at demonstrations or at my art classes people wonder how I get 'such nice water- colours' out of the mess they see in my paint tin.

You can see from this picture that I use pans instead of tubes and there is a real reason for this.

If you squeeze colour out of the tube onto the palette, when you go in with the brush to pick up some paint you will find that even after you have added it to the water there is still soft paint clinging to the brush which will transfer to the paper too heavy for your wash.

With pans and my set up I have 3 or 4 strengths of colour. I work the brush into the harder colour in the pan to loosen it and dip my brush into one of the wells of water in the palette. Then I go back to the pan and drag more colour into the angled reservoir adjacent.

This allows me have drier colour at the top of the reservoir, a wetter mix to the bottom and a weaker wash altogether in the well. If I want strong colour I can just drag from the pan itself. I always use two containers, one for cleaning and rinsing my brush and the other for clean washes, and I constantly change the water in them between washes.

As for brushes I use round Kolinsky sables apart from the very small oo's as I find they wear out just as quickly as the cheaper synthetics. I don't use any flats or riggers as I find they are too distinctive a stroke, but if you like them that's fine.



I don't understand people who state its wrong to use this or that religiously, or condemn the use of photographs. I think you use what ever you like to achieve the results you desire.

For instance one of my colours is Lamp Black. When students first start my art classes they have been told by others that its wrong to use black. I wonder why then, that paint manufacturers make so many different blacks.

They soon find out that you can create lovely dark greens using Lamp Black and New Gamboge.

Back to brushes, I use a large No. 14 to wash in skies and first foreground washes, then a No. 8 or 9 for the bulk of the painting going gradually down to 2's and 00's.

You don't need to go mad on expensive brushes but if you can treat yourself to a good sable No. 8 or 9. It is your main work horse and will reward you with years of painting. pleasure.

I only use Arches 300lb rough watercolour paper, I have tried many papers but this one suits my style of dragging the side of the brush loaded with paint across the broken surface of the paper.

Those first washes on this lovely white paper are the start of a new adventure and never fail to raise my spirits.

I use Winsor and Newton artist watercolour pans. My main palette is only 6 colours.

Yellow Ochre and Paynes Grey; combined in washes they produce lovely wall textures and strong shadows.

Burnt Sienna and French Ultramarine; you can make beautiful greys from these with sublime granulations.

Lamp Black and New Gamboge; as I said earlier this combination creates summer trees better than any other.

As extras I have Cerulean Blue for Mediterranean skies, Alizarin Crimson for warm shadows and Cadmium Red for the odd splash of colour.

Now for the lesson, just like my art classes we are not going to do exercises, but get straight into a painting.

I feel you will learn more this way, and have a finished painting to show. As we go on I will show you lots of my work and how I built the painting.

Where you need to see how to paint something specific such as a winter tree or figures, I will do detailed demonstrations throughout the various lessons.



This farm is down the lane from my house and I have painted it a few times. It is wide open and flat, with just the dales behind so you see some great skies and in the Summer some dramatic sunsets.



I have drawn more detail than I normally do so that you can see clearly where to put the masking fluid. I use masking fluid to protect my final whites so that I can do the first washes more freely to keep a freshness to the painting.

When you do this picture don't over draw the trees, just suggest the main trunk and branches and lightly pencil in where you want your fine branches.

The first wash is French Ultramarine with a little Burnt Sienna to grey the blue. Start above the break in the sky and drag your wash up and out.

Quickly wash in light Yellow Ochre and drag out to the edges of the paper. As you come down the sky add the original wash but weaken it..

Finish at the horizon below the hill. Use the same wash to create a shadow at the front.

Use Burnt Sienna for the bushes tapering them into the middle distance. Use the side of the brush to feather the edges out.

While wet drop in some patches of Paynes Grey into the undergrowth. Use the same colours to make the exposed ploughed field.

Make your strokes head towards the farm so that the perspective is right, leveling them in the middle distance.



Using a stronger French Ultramarine with some Burnt Sienna deepen the shadow in the foreground. You will notice that I washed the sky right down through the hill behind the farm.

We are going to put snow on the hill but to stop it competing with the foreground snow, the wash has toned it down.

In order to highlight the hill you are going to add another layer of sky stopping above the hill.

With the same colours for your original sky, but stronger, make a broken wash from the centre into the top left corner.

As you come down the left hand side drop in weak Yellow Ochre then drag it out across the paper to leave the shape of the hill.

'Use the side of the brush for broken washes'

Go to the top right and wash in Ultramarine/Burnt Sienna to create a broken wash down the right, drop in Yellow Ochre then finish off the shape of the hill with the Ultramarine Sienna mix.

To create the feel of snow drag a stronger wash of the same across the hill leaving lights on the top. Use the side of the brush quickly and move across the hill down to the snow line leaving broken areas of lighter paper to simulate snow covered hills.

Next use Paynes Grey fairly dry and paint a dark line under the roofs of the buildings and before it dries fill in the sides with Yellow Ochre blending it into the Paynes Grey to create a shaded area under the roof.

If the Paynes Grey is too wet it will flood into the Yellow Ochre. Paint in the mass of trees on the left with Burnt Sienna then drop in Yellow Ochre and French Ultramarine while wet. Keep the wash broken to allow light through the trees.

To frame the buildings paint the trees behind with Lamp Black and drop in some Yellow Ochre. Remove the masking from the left trees and tone down with watery Yellow Ochre.

When dry use Paynes Grey to paint the finer branches. Keep them simple and emphasise the left of the trunks as well. Next paint in the middle tree with same colour starting fine then broaden as you come down the trunks. Do the same for the far right tree keeping it simple.



On the far right tree make the trunks vanish below the snow line. Don't have one trunk coming down, this helps the feeling that the tree is just below the horizon line.

Then make a weak wash of Paynes Grey and with the side of the brush wash into the finer branches. This will loosen them and give the illusion of even finer twigs.

Coming down to the foreground use a fine brush with Paynes Grey on some of the whites left when you dragged in the broken field. Go to the left hand side of the whites, touch your brush to them and drag it away to 'model' the highlights.

Now remove the masking fluid from the buildings and add a little French Ultramarine/Alizarin Crimson wash to the shadows on the roof and barn. Using Paynes Grey and a fine brush emphasise the underneath of the roof and soften with a wash of Yellow Ochre to create the shadow under the eaves.

Add a few windows and door the same way. For the main tree use Lamp Black to paint in the main branches and trunk, then lighten the right of the trunk with Yellow Ochre. Start at the outside edges of the tree and fill in the finer branches working towards the main branches. There is a detailed demonstration of this farther in the book.



When I refer to using the side of the brush for a broken wash, this is what I mean. If you have the brush upright when you move it across the paper you paint a distinct shape with the point of the brush and it fills in the surface of the paper.

Twist your hand and keep the brush relatively parallel to the paper and drag it across the surface placing paint on the top of the rough paper and leaving broken whites or highlights if you have a previous wash there.



It is not dry brush work, you can have the wash fairly wet, in fact for larger washes it will need to be wet. It is actually the speed you move the brush across the paper that creates the broken washes.

For foregrounds if you quickly wash Yellow Ochre across the paper using this method, then do the same with Paynes Grey you will get a nice broken wash where the two colours meet and blend in patches.

The trick is not to keep dragging your brush back and forth across these washes or you will turn them to mud. For stonework pull the Yellow Ochre downwards and drag the Paynes Grey across to achieve a broken stone effect.



In summer trees use the side of the brush to 'feather' the edges of the foliage. Be careful though, as you try to feather it that little bit more your tree may turn into a forest.



BISHOP'S CLOSE FARM

15" x 11" Arches 300lb Rough

Finish the tree off with a wet wash of weak Yellow Ochre dragged from the edges towards the centre of the tree. Don't fill it all in and while still wet drop in a wet wash of Paynes grey as well. If you wanted to give the tree a frosted look you could use a single sided razor blade to scrape back parts of that wash when it is dry. I like the white patch left in the sky, it gives the feeling of clearing clouds.

For a more dramatic sky add another broken wash using the same colours again but stronger. Vary the shape of this wash and keep it to the outer edges so that it does not over power the light in the sky.

A good exercise that I recommend to the students in my classes is to cut a sheet of watercolour paper into eight pieces 11" by ." and paint a range of skies. Fill the top two thirds or more of the paper with skies of various colours and strengths. Do them quickly one after the other and then when they are dry add other washes to suggest clouds etc. Do them wet in wet or as in this demonstration straight on to dry paper. When they are finished a quick flick of land and trees, or even a river and you have a picture.

In my art classes we do paintings that can take up to four separate lessons to finish, but every now and then its nice to paint a 'quickie' and the results are very good. Its great to paint larger detailed watercolours but the freedom of doing a fast picture in one session is what watercolours are for.

When you finish a painting you should put it in a mount and frame to get the real effect. When my students finish a picture I always show them the painting in a nice double mount and frame that I carry with me. They call it 'The Magic Frame' as it instantly alters the way they see the picture.

Buy yourself a decent frame and some mounts in various colours (I prefer and always use an ivory mount with a white inlay) and try your paintings in them before deciding whether you like the finished result or not, you'll be pleasantly surprised.