

## WATERCOLOUR BOTANICAL/FLOWER PAINTING TECHNIQUES

### General Painting Method

Watercolour paint consists of pigment bound with gum arabic (extracted from acacia trees), mixed with glycerine. Its characteristic transparency enables a build up of washes working from LIGHT to DARK, particularly favoured for flower painting and botanical work.

#### Masking

Prior to painting it may be useful to use **masking fluid** for certain areas e.g. stamens, stigmas, tiny flower components, to save them from contamination from adjacent washes. They can then be painted carefully later after removal of the mask. If used for veining, hard lines result which are difficult to soften out, however it can be effective for larger central veins, if felt appropriate. Don't leave the masking fluid in situ for days, as the paper may pull off when the fluid is removed. Also it is risky to use it on painted areas, as it can remove the paint when it is rubbed off. (Sometimes the fluid needs to be thinned with water a little to avoid these mishaps)

The quality of line is very important, so a good brush must still be used. Rinse the brush regularly to avoid clogging or try thinly coating the brush in tablet soap, to create a barrier between the brush fibres and the masking fluid, then apply – rinse regularly for large areas of masking, starting the barrier process again.

Alternatively - a ruling pen can be excellent for small areas.

#### Stage 1

The first colour wash is applied to cover all main areas, traditionally known as the **tea wash**. This is the lightest colour in the subject area, which for example may be the shade of the lightest veins in a leaf or the edge of a rose petal. Pre wet the area first, then apply the wash working **wet into wet**, allowing more colour to flood into areas which are darker in the subject. Two tones could be used wet into wet if appropriate. Leave the highlights very pale or as white paper for some subjects. For warm green leaves, an initial 'undercoat' wash of pale yellow gives a rich glow to subsequent colouration.

When this wash is dry, erase all outer pencil lines, to leave natural soft edges.

#### Stage 2.

Apply the second wash. This is the medium tone, called the local colour - the main predominant colour of the subject area. On stems leave a third of the tea wash showing, elsewhere, whatever appropriate. Work around leaf veins that are already correct as the tea wash colour. Alternatively these veins could be **'lifted out'** later when the second wash is almost dry: run a fine moistened brush tip along their location to lift off paint and/or blot with paper towel if necessary, to help reveal the tea wash colour.

Generally, light coloured veins are 'lifted out' or 'left alone', dark veins are lined in, or formed, then blended out a little after applying.

Segmented leaves should be worked one segment at a time on top of the tea wash, using wet into wet, or **dry brushing**, leaving about a third of the tea wash showing. Dry Brushing is using short delicate strokes in one direction from dark to light, with very little paint on the brush (hence 'dry brush') to build up tone. It is a very controlled and time-consuming technique and brush strokes should not be too visible.

For darker shadow areas add blue/purple to the local colour for application, also for areas of overlap etc.

For receding components in the composition, a more blue version of the second wash aids visual recession and perspective.

#### Stage 3

Apply the third wash which is a much darker version of the above local colour, corresponding to the darkest areas of the subject area. This can be achieved by adding blue to the stage 2 colour, or perhaps try adding the complementary. This stage is designed to increase the depth of the local colour in the shadow areas. Apply to the relevant area and blend outwards into the local colour areas, use dry brush if you prefer.

In the case of the stems, only cover a third on the darker side of the stem, to leave the other two tones alone to convey a fully rounded stem - showing light, medium and dark.

## **Stage 4**

### **Final Shadows and Details (where the plant portrait really come to life)**

A shadow mix is used again to intensify previously worked darker areas using dry brushwork or blending. This mix is selected according to the colour it is intended to darken, being a more shadowed version of stage 3 – usually through adding Paynes Grey. The shadow mix is used to define edges, intensify overlaps, work the cast shadows of stamens on petals etc. A possible shadow mix for leaves could be Prussian Blue, Payne's Grey and a little Hookers Green, however this is very personal to the type of green it is intended to 'shadow'.

Paint in all remaining details such as stamens, stigmas, veins on petals, pollen dusting, hairs, thorns etc, using gouache if necessary to define them.

Tint in remaining highlights or veins which need softening to naturalise them.

White gouache could be stippled into the centre of a highlight to sharpen it if necessary.

Soften hard edges or drybrush work by brushing the area over lightly with clean water (and blotting off if needed). This can be very effective for crinkly petals which look a little too hard, or intensely veined leaves. Softening in this manner is best used on stretched 'not' papers and hot pressed papers.

White hairs on a white background can be illustrated using a 2H pencil; white hairs on a coloured ground can be shown using white gouache edged with a darker colour, whilst hairs viewed end on can be shown using white dots.

## **Undercoat Tonal Shadow Method**

### **Stage 1**

This method uses grey shadows mixes to render light, medium and dark tones of grey on all the structures, to capture the full form of the plant from the outset (rather than work it up in colour stages, as above). The local colour is then applied on top. It is essentially a kind of monochrome painting, but the colours of the greys vary according to the variety of finally applied local colours they are designed to 'shadow'. It is a very traditional method, creating beautiful highly subtle modelling, but it takes some practice in that the concentrations of the grey mixes have to be strong enough to show through the top coats, but not too weak as to be hidden. Of course colours and shadows can be strengthened later in the same manner as the general painting method.

For best results work on hot pressed paper, which has the most effective staining ability for this method.

So the colour of the grey mix is selected according to the 'top coat' colour eg. A pinky grey to undercoat pink rose petals, a green grey for bright green leaves. It is applied wet into wet for smooth large components such as large petals or flat leaves, or dry brush where appropriate e.g. segmented leaves, where the strokes should be from dark to light and in the direction of growth for each segment. Highlights and areas demanding pure colour should be left white. Varying the concentration of the mix (thick or thin) allows naturalistic rendering, covering approximately 2 thirds of each area, in suitable concentrations.

Light veins should be left white for tinting in later, dark veins can be lined in and shadow tone built up around them.

### **Stage 2**

The magical stage. Apply local colour 'top coat' washes as glazes when the undercoat is dry. This colour stage is much quicker than the general method, as all the 3D form modelling has been done at the undercoat stage.

Enjoy.