

Watercolor Anywhere with Maggie T Sutrov

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Intention

Painting on site is a way to be present and more deeply notice your surroundings. It is about the experience *at least* as much as the end product. The moment of fully connecting and noticing is the real gift. The painting is a souvenir of that moment, and a connection to that place. That is true whether you consider it a “successful” painting or not. Of course, we will look at techniques and processes so that you can express what you hope to express, but do not judge your efforts harshly. Let them stand as the moment in time that they are. Let this class be a collection of experiences, a bundle of tools and practices that you can adapt and use in your own ways as you travel through this world creating art.

Find Your View

This is as simple as the question, *What catches your eye?* Are you drawn to what is close up? Are you drawn to expansive scenes? When you look through a viewfinder, what do you include, and what do you leave out? How will you *compose* your composition? How does your eye move around this scene? Notice which quadrant major lines or shapes are in. This will help you define where on the paper to put down these elements.

Find Your Gesture

How do we get our view onto our paper with the life and energy of the moment?

- Contour Practice:

Using a permanent marker or [ink brush pen](#), find the contour lines. What are the outside edges and most important lines that make up the scene? Practice finding them quickly. A confident line has more energy than a slow and exact line. A black ink line allows for a lot of forgiveness in how your watercolor flows.

- Shape and Value Practice:

Using a single color and brush, find the shapes that define the scene. Use dark and light values to define emphasis. Again, put down your impression. Don't work for precision. Practicing with a single value helps you see more. Beyond using this as an exercise, starting thinking in terms of shape allows you to work straight in with watercolor when you don't want a defining black ink line.

Control and Flow

Watercolor is simply pigment suspended in water soaking into paper.

The ONE rule of watercolor: **Where the water goes, the pigment will flow.**

There are no other rules. We are building an innate feel for the ratio of how much water to how much pigment for the effect you are looking for.

Water brushes take a little getting used to, but a good one gives even water when you squeeze it, allowing you to leave behind the water cup and to paint anywhere. Use the largest you can find. [Pentel Aquash Large](#) still has a fine tip for detail, but covers well. The [Pentel Aquash Flat](#) is great for looser work. The [Niji 12mm Flat](#) allows for filling in skies, larger areas. Get to know the feel and flow of whatever tools you use.

One downside to water brush pens is that they only come so large. If you are going to use a larger paper (about 11x14 and up), you may want traditional brushes to maintain the same looseness, gesture, and to cover space while on site. Recommended: use a paint brush a size larger than you feel comfortable using.

Color and Contrast

We create the energy and emphasis of a painting through the colors we use and the contrast we create. Our eyes are directed to areas of high contrast--areas of difference. Areas of subtle contrast also intrigue our eye because we need to study them more. We will use color to create contrast in several ways.

- Value--Dark vs light

Any one color can be varied by the ratio of pigment to water. Some pigments have naturally darker values.

- Temperature--Warm vs Cool

In simple terms, Red, Orange, Yellow are warm, and Green, Blue, Purple are cool. It is helpful to notice the parts of your view that are "warm" and the areas that are "cool".

However, in truth, color temperature is a continuum. Colors are warm or cool in comparison to each other. For instance, if you have three reds on your palette: Cadmium Red, Quinacridone Rose, and Alizarin Crimson, the Cadmium is almost an orange, and so it is warmest. Alizarin Crimson, as a burgundy, is close to purple, so it is the coolest.

- Saturation

Primary Colors: red (magenta), yellow, and blue. For true primary colors, I recommend Quinacridone Rose, Cadmium Yellow Light, and Pthalo Blue.

Secondary and Tertiary Colors: Colors mixed on a color wheel using primary colors.

Pigments: While you can mix any color with magenta, yellow, and blue, we like having other colors in our palettes. Synthetic and natural pigments each have their own qualities, and are lovely additions. It is, however, important to understand where these colors fall in relation to a color wheel's spectrum.

Fully Saturated Colors: These colors can be found on a color wheel. Basically imagine a brilliant rainbow. These colors can be mixed with no more than one or two primary colors.

Less Saturated Colors: All complex, muddy colors, browns and greys --HOWEVER, I am not going to speak in terms of brown or grey in this class. Less saturated colors are created when you have three primary colors mixed in some ratio. For instance: if you have a green (yellow and blue), and add a drop of magenta, you will have a less saturated green. Similarly, Burnt Sienna is a less saturated red. When you look at your environment and see a "brown" or "grey", ask yourself what color it is a less saturated version of.

The Two Mindframes

Any artwork makes use of two mindframes to create something: Creating and Critiquing

When we are creating, we are in the flow. Paint is moving, or the notes or flowing, or the poem is pouring out of us. This is where we want to spend our time!

Any time you start judging, the art-making stops. As soon as you wonder where to put your next stroke, or if that note was on tune, or what word should follow next, the creating has paused. Be kind to yourself. These pauses can help you refine your artwork. (Stop and step back to look at your painting from a distance every so often!) However, it is dangerous to spend too much time here, especially if you forget to be kind. Remember, creating art is an experience. Let yourself be in the moment. We will take time periodically to reflect, share what we notice, and possible "what ifs" to help us all grow, but when you are painting, let yourself flow with the paint.

Paper We Used:

[Strathmore Postcards](#)

[Strathmore watercolor paper 5x7in](#)

[Arches Hot Press 90lb](#)

[Arches Cold Press 140lb](#)

Note: You can get Arches from Ben Franklin on occasion. They also sell blocks sometimes with sealed edges so you peel your painting off once complete--another route for plein air painting. The links I shared for Arches are through [dickblick.com](#), which gives you a shipping quote after purchase (you can refuse if you don't like the quote.) It's annoying, but their customer service and products are nonetheless good. Their [tube watercolor paint](#) is also one of the best deals if you're putting together a big enough order to warrant paying for the shipping.

Paint and Palettes

I most often purchase Daniel Smith watercolors via Amazon.

If I am ordering supplies from Dick Blick, sometimes I will order their brand (cheaper and decent quality)

Your palettes included Windsor Newton [Cotman watercolor](#), which is a good beginning option. The colors you have are similar to my palette, but not exactly the same. Windsor Newton Cotman also has travel palettes such as [this](#) and [this](#). My suggestion: purchase one of these or similar, then refill with tube paint as needed. That way you can upgrade to higher quality paint over time, and replace colors that you don't ever use. If you want to treat yourself to a high quality metal travel palette, check out [Art Toolkit](#).

Colors Currently in my palette:

- Cadmium Yellow Light
- Cadmium Yellow Medium
- Cadmium Yellow Deep or Isoindoline Yellow
- Cadmium Red
- Transparent Pyrrol Orange
- Quinacridone Rose
- Alizarin Crimson Permanent
- French Ultramarine Blue
- Prussian Blue
- Pthalo Blue (green shade)
- Pthalo Green
- Paynes Grey
- Burnt Sienna
- Yellow Ochre

SATURATION

Labels on the color wheel include: Yellow Ochre, Cadmium Yellow Deep, Cadmium Yellow Medium, Cadmium Yellow Light, Lead Yellow, Pthalo Green, French Ultramarine Blue, Prussian Blue, Quinacridone Rose, Quinacridone Magenta, Quinacridone Red, Alizarin Crimson, Permanent Alizarin, Transparent Pyrrol Orange, and Burnt Sienna.

VALUE
DARK → LIGHT

TEMPERATURE
WARM
COOL

HIGH SATURATION CAN BE MIXED WITH NO MORE THAN 2 PRIMARY COLORS

LOW SATURATION COLORS MIXED WITH 3 PRIMARY COLORS
DON'T THINK IN TERMS OF BROWN or GREY, THINK LOW SAT. VERSION OF

WAYS OF MIXING COLORS
GLAZE ON PAPER ON PALETTE

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