



T A R A W I N O N A

WATERCOLOUR ON CANVAS

1. THE BLANK CANVAS

Watercolour ground or gesso needs a 'normal' gesso to adhere to, so canvases must first be prepared as you would for an acrylic or oil painting. Easiest is to buy shop-prepped canvases. If you do it yourself, a minimum of 2 coats, 3 is preferable, smooth.

2. WATERCOLOUR GROUND (GESSO)

Prep your canvases with 2 - 3 layers of watercolour ground 2 days before you wish to paint. I suggest spreading it on with a palette knife and then brushing it smooth with a wide soft brush. You can use a very small amount of water to wet your brush and help smooth it. Make sure each coat is dry before adding the next coat. Watercolour gesso brands vary in their dry time, so check the instructions.

Schmincke, Daniel Smith and Golden make watercolour grounds or gesses which are all great and give different effects. The Schmincke and Daniel Smith smooth grounds are similar. Golden gives a more hard edge feel to the paint.

Watercolour grounds come in white, transparent and in the Daniel Smith range other colours such as beige, gold and black. You can also tint the grounds yourself. Schmincke make smooth (like hot press paper) and rough grounds. The rough gesses are fun to paint on. They do absorb more of the pigment though, so paintings will dry lighter.

I also recommend using watercolour ground to prep a canvas if you are going to paint with Acrylic inks. It gives them an extra tooth and a beautiful flow without the manufactured ridge marks of the canvas texture.

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3. PAINT - THE FUN PART!

Painting watercolour on canvas is a different experience to painting on paper. There is a wonderful freedom to it! The main difference is that watercolour on canvas is hygroscopic, so if it gets wet it will lift off. This means you can remove 'mistakes'. You must be mindful when splashing water around.

TIPS

- I suggest using less water than you would on paper. The canvas slightly repels the water, so it takes much longer to dry than when painting on paper
- Plan your painting in stages. The watercolour will go where it is wet. If you are creating a detailed section, think about allowing this to dry first before painting next to it.
- Layering of glazes behaves differently to painting on paper. You can do this to a certain extent, though try to reduce your brush strokes as you will lift off the paint layers underneath
- Babysit your painting. As it dries, lines/tide marks may appear that you do not like. You can easily remove these.
- Do not fiddle! Put a sign on your desk to remind you. Allowing the pigment to swirl and settle without disturbing it will give your painting greater clarity and luminosity.
- Be patient! It does take a while to dry.
- Have plenty of paper towels to dab with and wipe excess water off your brush
- Experiment! You can rub it out (hurray!)

MAGICAL MAGIC ERASERS

Hint - try using Magic Erasers for some great effects and to get rid of unwanted 'mistakes' (use the erasers without the chamois layer or detergents) You can buy these in Woolies in the cleaning section. They are fabulous! Be aware that they will remove a small amount of the gesso as you use them. They can also be used gently on paper. I even use them to paint with sometimes!

4. VARNISH

Watercolour is fragile and **MUST** be sealed and protected with layers of UV varnish to stop it reactivating, getting water splashed on it or fading with UV rays

FIRST STAGE - SEALING THE WATERCOLOUR

You must spray the varnish at the beginning in thin coats to seal the watercolour in. **DO NOT** brush the varnish on at this stage, as otherwise the watercolour will 're-activate and lift off. Minimum of 3 coats of spray to begin with.

THE GLOSS VARNISH RULE - Always varnish at this stage with a gloss. The rule of thumb is varnish to protect with gloss varnish.

SOFT GEL GLOSS - ARCHIVAL SACRIFICIAL LAYER

For the highest archival purposes, Golden recommends at this point that you brush on a coat of soft gel gloss. This becomes a permanent non-removable part of the painting and means that any varnish following this coat can be removed for archival purposes. If you are not worried about archival purposes, you can go ahead and finish with 6 coats of spray varnish or 2 coats of brushed on UV solvent based varnish.

FINAL COATS OF VARNISH

PAINTED VARNISH - Final coats of varnish be UV protective. Solvent based varnishes seal your painting in and give it the best protection. In Australia I use Matisse UV varnish as the Golden solvent varnishes are not available. If you would like a less shiny look to your painting, to bring it back to the original watercolour matt look you can use a matt varnish for the final coat.

Matisse do not make a satin or matt UV varnish in their solvent range, so I use the spray varnish to reduce the glare. I have found that on dark paintings, using the matt post gloss coats make it look speckled or a bit cloudy, whereas painted matt varnish looks great (but you can't get Golden matt solvent based varnish in Australia) **ALWAYS** test first!

SPRAY VARNISH - Golden and Krylon make the best spray varnishes to the highest archival standards. Golden say that 2-3 coats of spray varnish equal 1 coat of painted varnish. The first 6 coats must be gloss, the final few matt to reduce the sheen. I put between 8 and 12 coats of varnish on, leaving about 20 mins between coats for drying. Make sure you wear a high spec respirator mask.

NOTE - Always begin with gloss varnish until you are happy that your painting is protected and then apply matt or satin based varnishes to create the sheen you want. Test first. Golden recommends you use satin on top of their gloss as sometimes the matt reacts strangely.



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A DIFFERENT WAY OF VARNISHING - AIR-BRUSHED VARNISH THEN SOLVENT VARNISH

Another school of thought is to first airbrush a (preferably UV protective) water-based varnish so that it soaks in and binds with the pigment particles. I would say about 4 coats. Once you have let it dry, you can then paint a solvent based UV varnish on.

IMPORTANT POINTS

Remember to brush or blow dust off before you varnish.

Make sure your painting is dry!

ALWAYS test varnish first when you are using different sheens on a small corner of the painting. Sometimes the matt varnishes can behave strangely when painted over the gloss.

If it is raining or very humid it is best not to varnish. First the varnish may dry too quickly or cloud (the best place to varnish is in an air-conditioned room) Also the watercolour will absorb the moisture in the air and possibly re-active - do not put your painting in front of a heater to dry it as it will crack - if you are concerned direct a (non heat) fan onto the surface before varnishing.

Always begin with gloss coats and then move on to satin or matt. No more than 2 coats of satin or matt spray is recommended as they can begin to cloud the painting.

VARNISHING ACRYLIC INKS

For varnishing acrylic inks, follow the steps from the Soft Gel gloss step. You do not need to do the initial first 3 spray coats. I would suggest a minimum of 2 coats of archival UV resistant varnish. I paint a minimum of 2 coats of water based UV varnish (gloss) then a final coat of UV solvent varnish and then matt or satin the painting to the sheen I desire.

Varnishing is a critical part of the process and must not be skipped with watercolour. Yes it is a pain - but the results are worth it! And no more paintings behind glass - the immediacy of the paint speaking directly from the canvas is very powerful.



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