



T A R A W I N O N A

WATERCOLOUR ON CANVAS

Painting with watercolour on canvas opens up a whole new world of possibilities. The immediacy of the painting, not stuck behind glass is wonderful - not to mention removing the cost and hassle of framing. It is similar to painting on paper with some exciting differences, such as being able to rub out.

1. THE BLANK CANVAS

Watercolour ground 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 ground brands vary in their dry time, so check the instructions. Schmincke, Daniel Smith and Golden make watercolour grounds or gessos which are all great and give different effects.

SMOOTH - like hot pressed paper. The Schmincke and Daniel Smith smooth grounds are similar and allow free flowing effects. Golden gives a more hard-edge precision

ROUGH - gives a textured surface like lumpy cold pressed paper. Can be sculpted with a palette knife. The rough grounds do absorb more of the pigment, so be aware that paintings will dry lighter. Schmincke and Golden make rough grounds.

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.

TIP - Watercolour ground can be painted onto paper-based paintings to correct 'mistakes'

3. PAINT - THE FUN PART!

Painting watercolour on canvas is wonderful and full of surprises. There is such a freedom and immediacy to it. The main difference from painting on paper is that the watercolour on canvas doesn't completely sink in and stain the ground, and so remains hygroscopic - meaning if it gets wet, it will lift off. This means you can remove areas of paint after it is dry. It also means it can make a layering of glazes challenging, as the new layers can lift off the old

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. The watercolour may also pool and flow to areas you would prefer it not to!
- 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.

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.

THE GLOSS VARNISH RULE - Always use gloss varnish first to protect, then satin or matt for sheen adjustment. If you put too many coats of matt or satin the varnish will become cloudy. No more than 2 coats painted matt or satin

FIRST STAGE - SEALING THE WATERCOLOUR WITH AEROSOL VARNISH

You must spray the varnish at the beginning 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 gloss spray to begin with. I use Golden UV MSA gloss varnish. It must be gloss varnish at this stage, do not use matt or satin for sealing as they may cloud.

Make sure your painting is dust free before you begin

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

Once the painting is sealed as above, you must finish with the final coats of solvent based UV varnish to seal your painting in and give it the best protection. Varnishes can be sprayed on or painted. It is recommended a minimum of 2 coats painted or 4-6 spray.

SPRAY VARNISH - I put between 4-6 coats of gloss varnish on first, with the final 2 matt to take the painting back to looking like watercolour. Leave about 20 mins between coats for drying and make sure each coat is touch dry before adding the next.

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.

Make sure you wear a high spec respirator mask and gloves. When spraying I also wear eye protection and a disposable painting suit. It is toxic so look after yourself!

PAINTED VARNISH - 2 coats minimum of gloss varnish, then one to adjust sheen. Make sure the painting is laid flat and do not paint the varnish too thickly. It is tricky and takes practise! Watch for puddles and pools and do not over work. Test first.

In Australia I use Matisse UV varnish as the Golden solvent varnishes are not available in tins. 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!

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.