

Painting with Watercolour

Beginner and Intermediate

Topic 3: Subject Matter

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Subject Matter

Tips on Choosing a Good Scene (Composition)

The topic of what constitutes a “good scene” is very subjective. You should feel free to paint what *you* want to paint and allow your inner creativity to blossom. However as a beginner, you should at this point look for scenes that are not too complex and allow you to focus on practicing the new techniques you are learning.

Subject Matter

Here are a few points that should be kept in mind when choosing your scene.

- 1.** When you paint a subject, whether it's a person or landscape, you should first take time to observe carefully what you are about to paint. Pay close attention to the colours, shadows, foreground, background, etc., before you begin laying paint to paper.
- 2.** Decide beforehand how much detail you want to include. Unlike oils and acrylics, watercolour painting requires more planning ahead.

Subject Matter

- 3.** There are two ways to approach a watercolour painting. Some paint in all the lighter colours for the entire painting first and then go back over it adding in the darker colours. Personally, I find it best to start on what's furthest away and work towards me. For example, in a landscape scene I begin with the sky, then the distant hills, the mid-range subject(s) and finally the foreground.
- 4.** If you want to paint a lighter subject in front of a darker background, it is best to use masking fluid to first mask it out. When the background is finished, remove the masking and paint the subject.

Subject Matter

Sketching Your Scene

Here are some tips on sketching your scene:

1. Ensure your paper is completely dry before sketching your scene.
2. Make very light pencil marks. If your pencil lines are too dark they will show through the watercolour paint (especially in areas where there are light glazes). **Note:** A pencil mark cannot be erased from watercolour paper once paint—or even clear water—goes over it.
3. The pencil drawing should be a guide only. You do not need to include every detail. Most of the “drawing” should be done with paint. The pencil marks should only be used to help you keep track of where things go, proportions, angles, etc.

Exercise: Sunset Painting

We will use the following scene for a painting exercise.



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