

# *Watercolor Basics for All Levels*

## *By Ronald Malone*

### Material and Tools Checklist (marked in "red")

#### Watercolor brushes

You can spend a lot of money on brushes. By spending more on your brushes does not necessarily mean you will get a higher quality brush. The three advantages to some of the "high-end" brushes are, 1) last longer, 2) more paint loads into the brush, and 3) the tip does not deteriorate so quickly. The best budget-conscious brand is Black Velvet Squirrel. If you want the best brush, it is the Kolinsky sable brush (CheapJoes.com has a cheaper version of Kolinsky brushes called, Cheap Joe's Dragon Tongue). For a good, beginner set is the Da Vinci Brand which are available at Michaels.



The minimal brushes needed for this class are:

- No. 4
- No. 8
- No. 12
- 2" wash brush

If you plan to devote your time and energy in watercolor paints, you should add these sizes:

- No. 2
- No. 10
- Flat brushes in 4, 8, 10, 12 sizes



#### Paper

- We will use White Cold Press watercolor paper (see paper options attached). You have options of brand, sizes, finish, single-sheet or blocks, and thickness in lbs. (see paper sizes attached). Preferred brands are Arches, Hahnemuhle, Killimanjaro, or Fabriano Artistico. Do not buy Strathmore or the Cranson brand. The ideal size use in class is approximately 8" x 11". I suggest you used on of the following:
  - Single sheet, 22" x 30", 300 lbs., cold press, cut into 7 1/2" x 11" sections, or
  - Blocks, multi sheet, 9" x 12" (approximately), 140 or 300 lbs., cold press



## Paint Pigment

Finding and selecting the best watercolor paint can be difficult. There is a large variety of watercolor paint on the market and the choices can be overwhelming; especially when you must choose from hundreds of different colors! It is difficult to get good results using poor quality paint. I've seen new artists become discouraged because they couldn't achieve the results they expected, when come to find out, it was a result of poor-quality paint. The worst is probably the Prang cake set. The brands I have used successfully are Winsor Newton Professional (preferred), l'Aquarelle, Cheap Joe's American Journey, QOR, and Daniel Smith. For budget-conscious artist starting out, check out Cheap Joe's or the DaVinci brand. Don't buy black, gray, or white colors. Try and find transparent paint. Most are identified on the tube (The Arches transparency delineation is "solid square" = opaque and "open square" = transparent). The seven colors needed are:

- Cool yellow (Lemon Yellow)
- Warm yellow (Yellow Titanate)
- Warm red (Winsor Red)
- Cool red (Magenta)
- Warm blue (French Ultramarine)
- Cool blue (Cobalt Turquoise)
- Neutral brown (Burnt Sienna)



## Palette

If budget is an issue, use white plastic plates for your mixing palette. Bring several for additional paint-mixing space. There are many watercolor palette-types available. I like Cheap Joe's watercolor palettes. They have a lid for prolonging your paints from drying out. If you plan to make watercolor a serious endeavor, buy a porcelain palette. It cost more but will last a lifetime and paint will not stain the surface.

- White plastic plates
- Watercolor paint palette (you can use one of the plates to save money)



## Water Bucket

Water muddies down quickly when using a cup or glass. Use a gallon container. You can cut the top off a white bleach bottle. Make sure the container is white and does not break easily. Coffee cans are not a good alternative since they are not clear or white, and you cannot see if the water needs to be changed.

- 1-gallon white, water container



## Hair Dryer

You can use a hair dryer to speed up drying time. This increases the time you spend painting.

- Hair dryer (extension cord is probably needed).

## Pencil and eraser

- Three #2 pencils (or mechanical pencil)
- White eraser, extra soft (no pink or gummy erasers). Drafting erasers work. Cheap Joe's has a 12-pack for \$13.99.



## Clean up

Paper towels are the quick and clean “picker upper”. The blue shop version sold in the “big box” stores or auto supply stores work great without leaving an imprint from the paper embossment on your paper. I use micro clothes or a sponge for blotting the excess water or paint in my brush. Harbor freight has a 4-pack of micro towels for \$2.99.

- One roll of paper towels, and-or
- Cloth towels



## Paper Prep:

### Watercolor sheets

If using 300# paper, there is no need to tape the paper to a backing board. Cut the sheet into 7 ½” X 11” sheets.

### Blocks

If you have a watercolor paper block you are ready to paint. Remove the black cover sheet. When ready to remove the sheet use a palette knife or sharp edge to separate.

## Watercolor Paper Options

### Finish

**Cold Press** - The cold press finish has a light texture and is the most common watercolor paper finish. It reflects light well, retaining the transparent quality of watercolors. A light tooth makes it easier to achieve certain details.

**Hot Press** - The hot press finish is often used for portraits and illustration because the smoothness allows for fine details. With a minimal vellum texture, the character of the paper fades and digital scanning is easy.

**Rough** - The rough finish has an effect close to that of handmade paper and encourages a loose style. This rough tooth paper helps to achieve effects of texture and showcases granulating watercolors well.

### Sizes

The most economical watercolor paper to come in single sheets, measuring 22” X 30”. To prepare ahead for the class cut the sheet into ¼” sections (7 ½” X 11”). Use 300 lbs. weight.