

Media Techniques: Graded Watercolor Wash

OBJECT: Learn to lay a graded-toned watercolor wash.



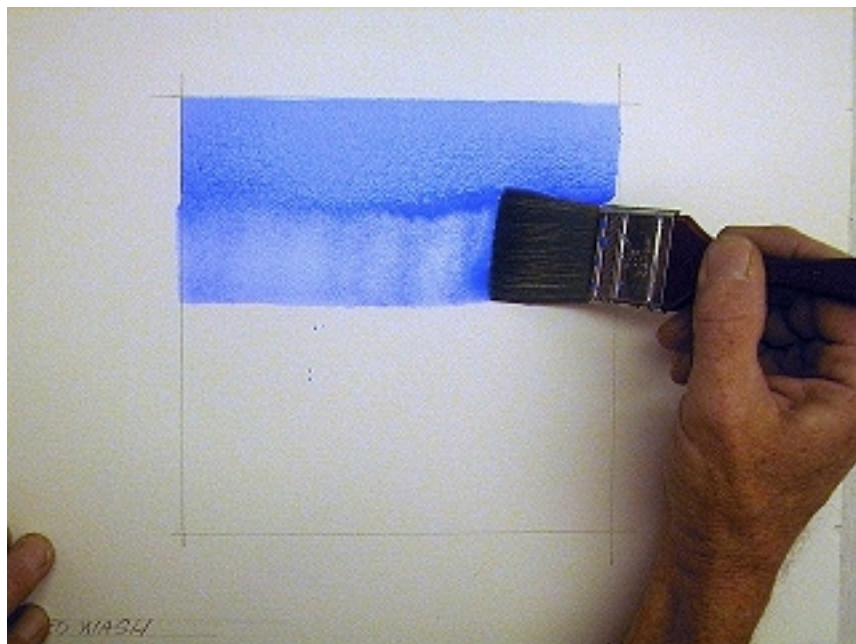
[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
Preparing to wash

Draw a square or rectangle on your paper.

Select a darker hue for your wash (it's easier to see) and mix a liberal amount of medium intensity (30-50% value) paint your brush. In a clean part of your palette mix *another* puddle at about half the intensity of the original mixture.

MATERIALS USED: I'm using a 1 1/2" (381mm) Winsor & Newton Series 965 flat wash brush and Winsor & Newton Cobalt Blue watercolor paint for this lesson. The paper is Arches #140 CP.

Charge your brush with paint from the darker mix, and starting in the upper left corner touch your brush to the paper and gently pull a straight line of paint to the upper right corner.

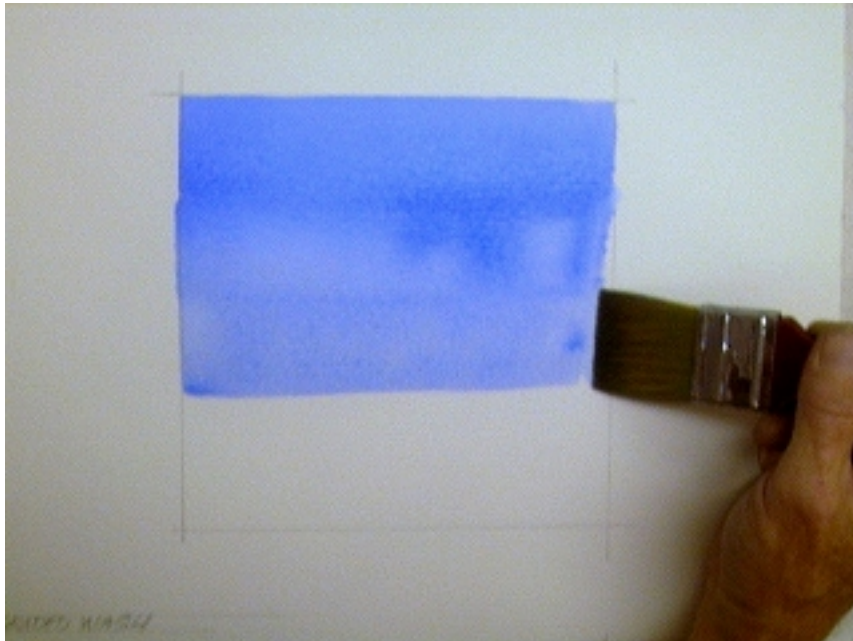


[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
Light

Dab your brush on a sponge or paper towel and refill your brush with the lighter mixture.

Start your second stroke overlapping the bottom of the previous stroke.

Notice that the left side of the stroke has already flowed together with the top stroke. Let gravity do its work.



Rinse your brush and blot it on a towel or damp sponge, refill from the lighter mixture.

Make your next overlapping stroke.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Lighter



Rinse clean and dip your wet brush into the lighter mixture, further lightening the wash.

Lay your next overlapping stroke.

TIP 1: If your stroke doesn't flow evenly or breaks up, charge your brush and repeat the stroke IMMEDIATELY.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Lightest

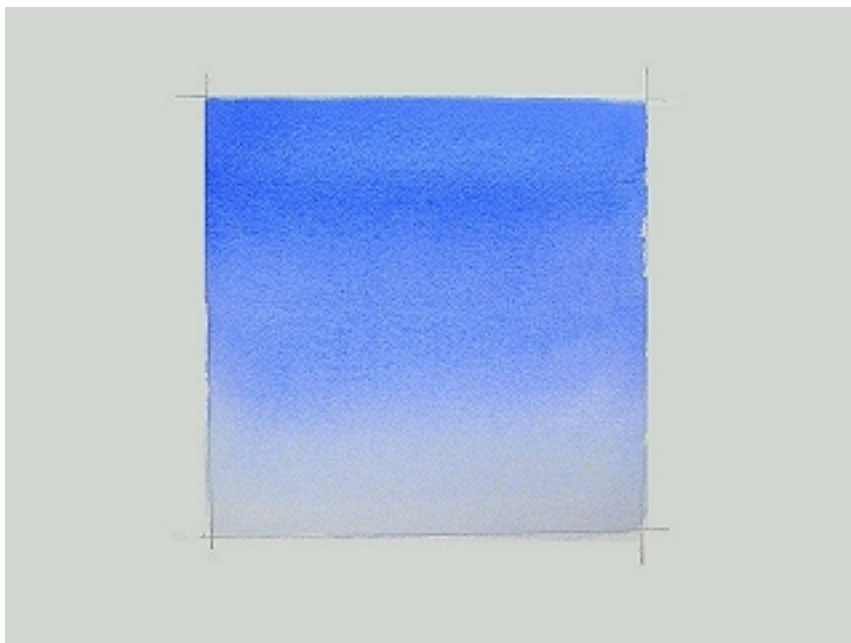


[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

A clear finish

Rinse your brush well and using clear water start your last overlapping stroke.

Squeeze the water out of your brush and pick up the bead of paint at the bottom of the wash.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Ask the paint settles and flows, minor imperfections in tone will usually smooth themselves out before they dry.

This example shows some graining in the final wash. Cobalt Blue is a coarser and heavier pigment that settles into the texture of the paper.

TIP 2: Try practicing your graded washes with different colors and intensities. Each color has its own physical properties that affect how they feel and flow in washes.

TIP 3: Practice transitioning one color into another for interesting multi-color effects.

Perfecting a graded wash may take a little more practice than a flat wash, but any time painting is time well spent.

Media Techniques: Lifting Wet Watercolor Paint

OBJECT: Learn watercolor color-lifting techniques for wet paint.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Facial Tissues

Wad up some facial tissues and use them as a negative painting tool.

Facial tissues are absorbent and leave a softer-edged impression. Use gentle pressing and twisting, or a dabbing motion.

If you try to scrub with a facial tissue, most will fall apart and soil your washes.

Excellent for clouds, soft lighting effects, and puddle control as you paint.

You can use TP but that's gross and most brands fall to pieces or leave lint all over your painting. Good for blotting brushes (Zoltan Szabo), leave it on the roll though.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

It's a sponge, Bob."

In the band of green in the middle-ground I used a wrung out natural sea-sponge.

Natural sponges will lighten a watercolor wash in a little more dispersed and textured manner.

Light texture will be more pronounced if color is lifted as the wash is getting drier.

You CAN scrub your paper with a natural sponge, just watch out for paper damage.

Synthetic cellulose sponges abound in my studio. They can blot large areas (and your brushes) quickly and can be cut into any shape you need.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Paper Towels

Here, I blot some simple shapes with a folded paper towel to lighten the foreground.

Paper towels can impart an more angular and mechanical texture as you blot a wash.

Paper towels can suck up a lot of paint VERY quickly.

A large fresh wash of non-staining color can be completely removed at times. If you lay a glaze over another wash and it was a mistake, quickly lay a flat section of paper towel down and blot the entire wash up before it has time to affect the underlying wash.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

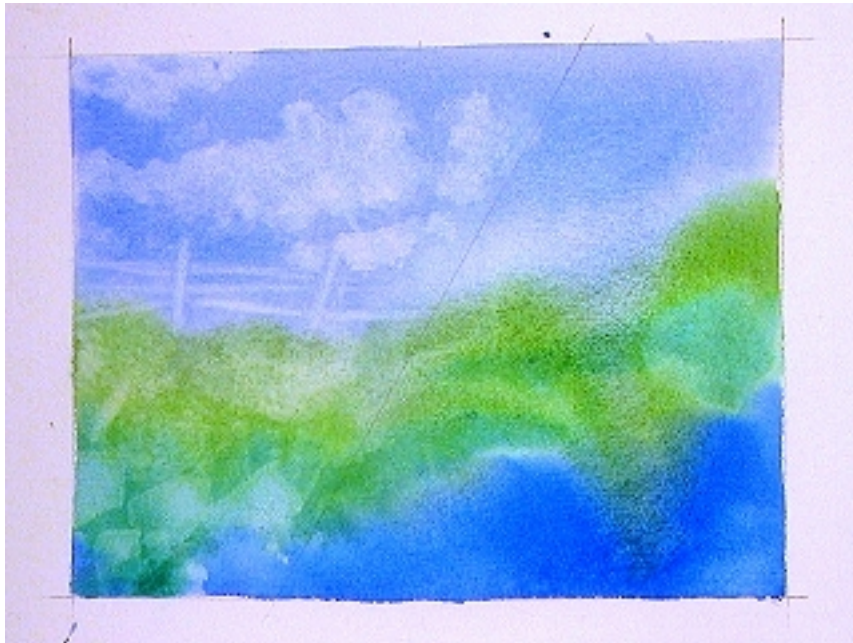
Negative brush work

The brushes you put the paint down with can also pick the paint up.

Rinse clean and squeeze out excess water. Your brush will wick up the wet paint.

Using a damp 1½" wash brush, I blotted the brush to keep it's edge.

Sweeping back and forth I pick up the color with the edge of the brush, blot the brush dry, and pick up some more. I "drew" in a line of fence thingies.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
The finished lifts

Other techniques for lifting wet color
I've used:

1. Spraying water to wash away areas of color.
2. Using various absorbent fabrics and towels.
3. My hands or parts thereof. Your skin can pick up color like a stamp pad. You'll leave personal textures. **DON'T PICK UP TOXIC COLORS IN THIS MANNER! (and don't use your tongue either, duh...)**
4. Several cats in my lifetime have lifted paw prints out of a wet wash.
5. **Sgraffito techniques** will scrape away color but bruise the paper in the process.

Media Techniques: Dry Brush Watercolor Tutorial

OBJECT: Learn dry brush watercolor painting techniques.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

The parched painter

MATERIALS USED: Arches #140 CP watercolor paper, Grumbacher 1" flat red sable, and Kolonok's #4 flat and #8 round Kolinsky red sable brushes.

COLORS USED (various manufacture):

Cadmium Yellow Medium, Cadmium Orange, Cadmium Red Medium, Alizarin Crimson, Cerulean Blue, Cobalt Blue, Ultramarine Blue, Hooker's Green Dark, Burnt Sienna, and Burnt Umber.

First off, I lightly sketched a random landscape design on the watercolor paper using a #1 pencil.

With a light wash of Cerulean Blue I scumbled a rough sky in, dragging and pushing my 1" flat red sable to create texture.

I wanted some underlying tones to dry brush the subsequent strokes over.

I made a light wash of Hooker's Green Dark grayed with a touch of Alizarin Crimson and I painted the background tree line around what is now determined to be a lake using the #8 round red sable .

Using a wash of Dioxazine purple I painted the shadow areas of the tree, keeping the edges rough with broken washes.

While this was still wet I added some blue accents with a mix of Cobalt blue.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Laying some foundation washes



I tried to keep the under painting as dry and broken looking as possible, except for the lake area which needed some suggestions of the reflections and flow of the water.

Using a gray made of Burnt Sienna, Cobalt blue and Hooker's Green Dark I scuffed in a foreground bank area.

I let the under painting dry.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Letting the under painting dry



I mixed up a strong blue wash from Cobalt and Ultramarine Blue using a #4 flat red sable.

Holding my brush at a rather severe angle I let it lay on the paper with varying pressure as I dragged strokes to create the shadows and texture on the tree trunk.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

A tree emerges



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

It's Fall!

After finishing the large tree trunk I decided it was fall (which it was at the time) and using all the Cadmium colors; yellow medium, orange, and red medium, I roughed in fall foliage with some rather garish colors.

I used the Kolonok #4 flat red sable for these washes.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

A change in plans

As I finished the riot of color on the far banks I added a light wash of orange as a reflection in the lake of the large background tree followed by a run of pure Cadmium yellow medium down the bank under the far tree. I mixed a dark bluish gray from some Cobalt blue and Burnt umber and quickly drew in some dark accents strokes on the large tree trunk.

At this point I considered the flaming trees and though of the dark maroon maple trees across the street. Using the underpainting as a base I scrubbed in the main tree shape with a mixture of Alizarin crimson and Pthalocyanine green which gave an adequate maroon color.

As I worked on the big maroon tree in I relied on the natural spread of the #8 round red sable brush to help create convincing foliage textures.



I decided the water in lake would be a greenish brown. I used Hooker's Green Dark and Burnt Umber to get a satisfactory color.

I start dragging texture parallel with the horizon line, across the lake using the not-too-wet #4 flat red sable.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
The classic water effect



As I pulled each stroke across the lake I varied pressure on the brush to create the "sparkly" water areas.

TIP: If your brush is too wet, you'll lay a flat wash. Blot your brush on a flat damp sponge or paper towel to adjust the amount of paint in the brush.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
A lake appears before me



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

A little detail and punch up



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Just a minute, almost done...

Using Hooker's Green Dark I made a medium toned puddle of paint. I used my #4 flat red sable brush, charged, and blotted. I tweaked it between my thumb and finger to spread the hairs a bit.

Using an upward "flicking" motion I added some grasses under the tree. I used some of the same color on the far bank.

I decided the lake had some swampy areas near the shore and I added some calligraphic indication of cattails.

By now, the blue in the sky was looking a little too light. I mixed up some more Cerulean Blue, a little darker this time, and scumbled the sky areas again.

Using the same blue and a #8 round red sable brush I added the sky color to the lake reflections.

Finished! Click image to enlarge.

Media Techniques: Glazed Wash Watercolor Tutorial

OBJECT: Learn transparent watercolor glazing effects.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

[A little information](#)

I will improvise a landscape on the fly to show the principles of glazing watercolor washes.

MATERIALS: Arches #140 CP watercolor paper, Grumbacher 1" flat red sable, Kalish Kolinsky Red Sable #8 round, Kolonok #4 flat Kolinsky red sable, Winsor & Newton Series 820 #8 Round, and a Kolonok #4 round Kolinsky red sable brush. A blow-dryer.

COLORS (various manufacture): Cadmium Yellow Light, Cadmium Yellow Medium, Cadmium Orange, Cadmium Red Medium, Permanent Rose, Dioxazine Purple, Cobalt Blue, Ultramarine Blue and Sap Green. Colors chosen are transparent and semi-transparent.

Using my 1" flat red sable brush I used a Cobalt Blue wash to block in the sky, mountains, and river area. I broke up the wash and added some clear water to soften the area that would be a waterfall.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

[A mountain and red clouds](#)

This lesson is designed to be as obvious as possible. Using bright transparent colors allows you to see how each subsequent wash is affected by those washes lying under it. Plus it allowed me to play with a new style of painting.

Using the same 1" brush I mixed a transparent wash of Permanent Rose and painted a band of red clouds across the sky area.

Rinsing my brush I mixed up a light wash of Cadmium Yellow Light and started painted the mountain area. I continued to the foreground and layed in a large yellow under wash.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

I got the blues

Staying with the 1" flat red sable I then used a light Ultramarine Blue and Cobalt Blue mix to block in a mountain horizon and negatively define the background smaller yellow hill.

For some reason, after I undercut the background yellow hill with blue, I then pulled a blue stroke straight down and cut the left corner in and lifted off with a flip.

TIP 1: Allow each wash time to dry before overlaying the next color. You can use a [blow dryer](#) to effectively and safely dry your painting: Low setting, at least 10" away from surface, keep it moving, NO STEAM!



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

More color!

Same brush, different color. Needing to detract and balance the blue I had just finished, and making some interesting colors along the way, I mixed a straight wash of cadmium orange. I made orange banks in the foreground and then laid the orange over the rose and blue in the sky.

You'll notice the jewel-like qualities of working with pure colors in a transparent manner. The glazed wash could just as easily be a faint muted gray on a solitary rock in a large, photorealistic landscape painting.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Hey! A different brush

Switching to my #8 round red sable I mixed up a very strong Cobalt Blue wash and strengthened the line of mountains at the horizon, varying the width by twisting and changing pressure on the brush as I went.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Creating on the fly

Using the same #8 red sable and Cobalt Blue wash I started playing in the waterfall after stopping on a far bank. Sometimes visual clichés are your friends, a few blue circles at the bottom of an apparent blue hill can become the bottom of a waterfall.

Rinsing well, I made a puddle of Cadmium Yellow Medium and used that to paint some areas on the banks and some repetitive circles inside the blue on the bottom left.



After the previous washes dried I used varying values of Dioxazine Purple to add color variety to the foreground waterfall bubbles.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
A few more bubbles



I wanted some major elements to start pulling this thing together so of course I thought: trees. I rummaged around my studio and found items I could trace circles off of—I found three different sizes.

Using the #8 round red sable I mixed up some bright, transparent Sap Green and painted three circles.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
A consideration and a deep breath



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
Flora and lumberjacks

Staying with the same brush, I mixed a light wash of Cadmium Red Medium and layed the lumber under the lovely green foliage.

Rinsing and picking up some Cobalt Blue, I added some minor accents on the water near the background and foreground banks as well as a shape in the sky. A small orange rectangular area was added to the left foreground.

I then alternately used Cobalt Blue, Permanent Rose, and Sap Green washes to paint some icons of grass randomly around the foreground.



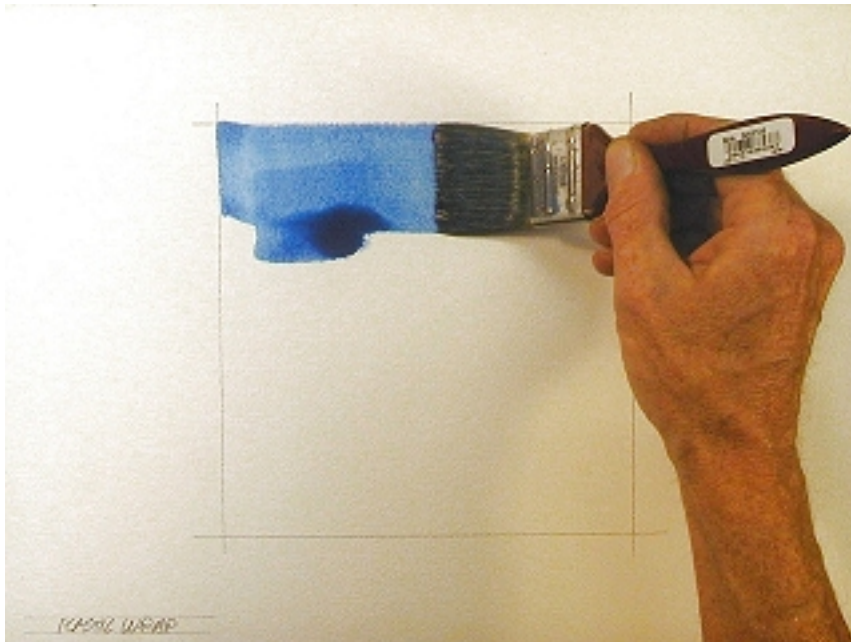
[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
Details to Final painting

Permanent Rose and Cadmium Red Medium were used to add the final details. The trees were found to be fruit trees with red fruit, some on the ground. And each trees trunk was striped like a barber's pole.

If you look closely at the enlarged version of the finished painting, you can see how each layer of paint you apply affects all that came before. Values change for the darker by default, but the colors created by glazing washes over one another can be truly beautiful and effective.

Media Techniques: Plastic Wrap Watercolor Texture

OBJECT: Learn how to create unique watercolor textures with plastic wrap.



MATERIALS USED: Arches CP #140 watercolor paper, a 1½" Winsor & Newton Series 965 wash brush, plastic food wrap.

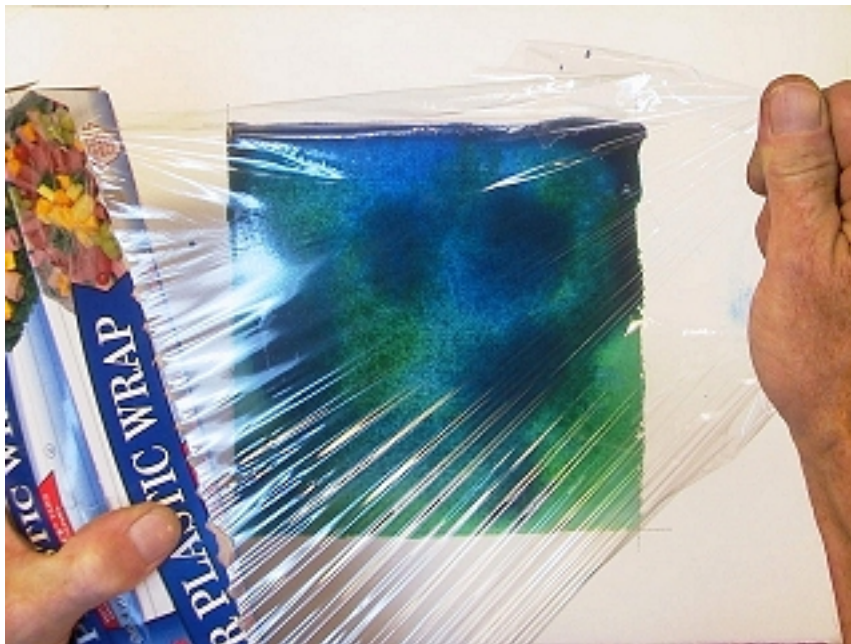
COLORS USED: Phthalocyanine Blue, Sap Green.

I start by mixing a large wash of Phthalocyanine Blue and laying in a large loose wash from the upper left corner on across the top of the paper.

I used my 1 ½" wash brush for the color washes

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Before the flood



I finished the underpainting with Sap Green, spreading things around in interesting shapes.

I measured off a piece of plastic wrap by sight, ripped it off the roll, and spent a minute trying to un-cling it from itself.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

The under painting completed



I roughly shaped the sheet with my hands and pressed it into the wet washes.

I pulled the plastic sheet out a bit to cover the whole wash.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Laying down the plastic



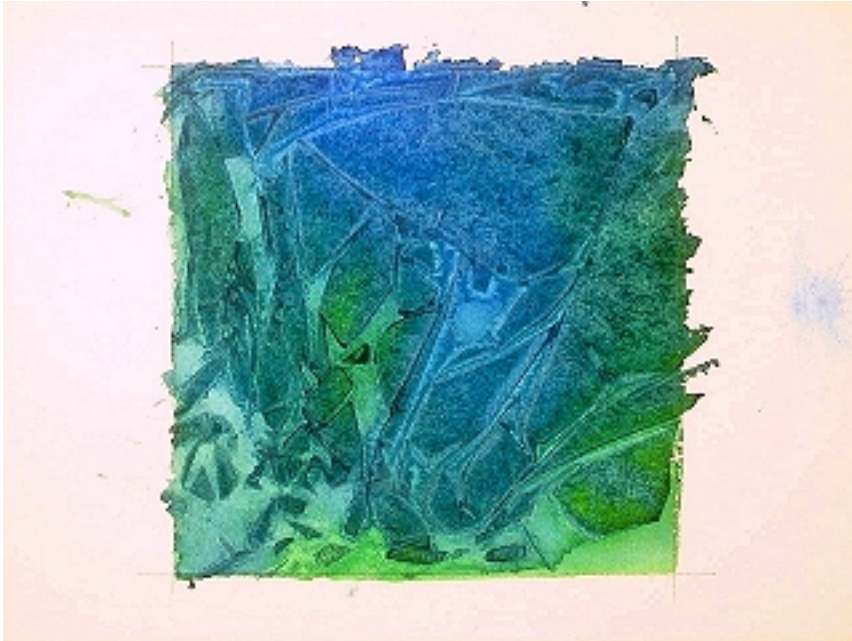
I spent a few seconds playing with the shapes. Making some raised, flat, and stretched areas in the plastic.

You do have some control over the final outcome at this point, so take your time.

I set it aside to dry flat and undisturbed.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Pretend to know what you're doing



I had a teacher who used this technique as a starting point for large acrylic paintings. I now understand his enthusiasm for it at the time. The effect always gives surprises and is startlingly beautiful to look at.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Plastic wrap watercolor texture

Media Techniques: Tissue Paper Watercolor Textures

OBJECT: Learn to create unique watercolor texture with tissue paper.



[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

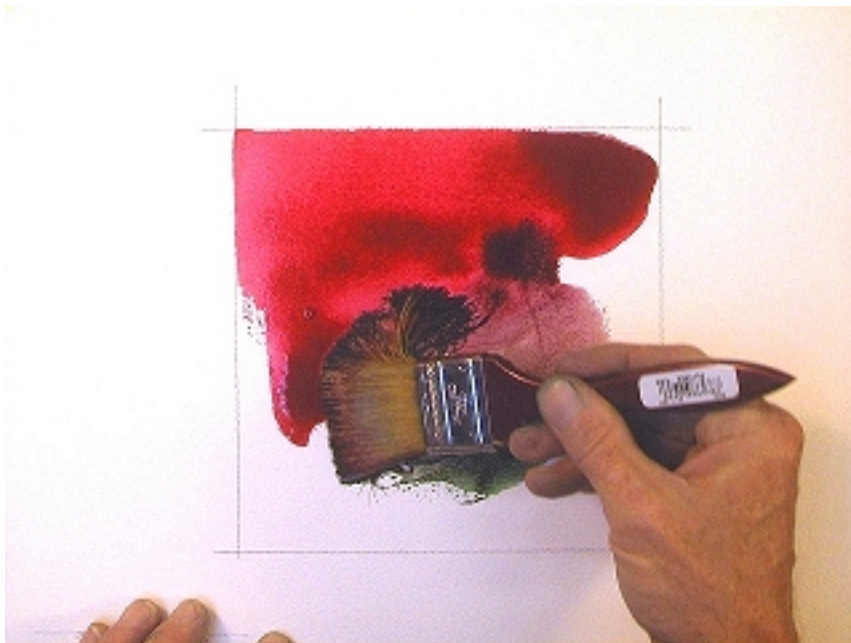
Materials and intentions

MATERIALS USED: Arches CP #140 watercolor paper, a 1½" Winsor & Newton Series 965 wash brush, a crumpled piece of white gift wrap tissue paper.

COLORS USED: Permanent Rose, Alizarin Crimson, Sap Green.

I started by wadding up a single sheet of tissue paper and preparing washes of Sap Green, and a wash of Permanent Rose and Alizarin Crimson.

I contemplated their fate.



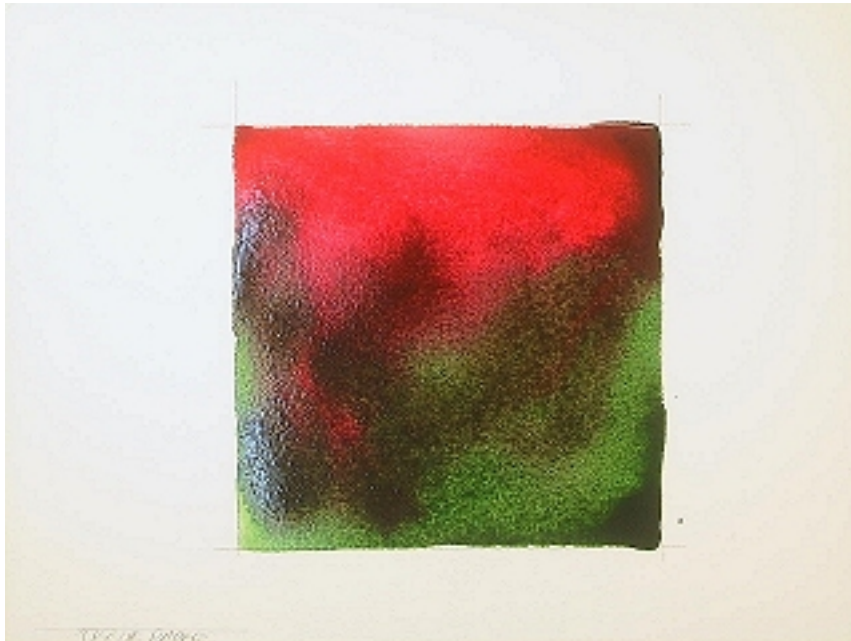
[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Making a field of color

Using my 1½" wash brush I loaded it up with the previously mixed Permanent Rose and Alizarin Crimson.

I proceed to lay washes and cut in the edges in with red.

I dipped the corner of my (red) brush into some Sap Green and stabbed and mixed these two colors on the paper.



I continued to scruff in the middle a bit and then thoroughly rinsed my brush.

I finished painting the rest of the surface with a strong Sap Green wash intermixed with the reds from before.

The surface is wet and saturated with watercolor paint in strong colors.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
Before the big cover-up



I spread the tissue out and shaped it into the approximate size I needed.

Being careful to cover the entire area, I positioned the tissue over the wash and gently pressed down with my palms.

I did not press the tissue entirely flat, allowing the crinkles and creases to do their job.

I set the example aside to dry, almost.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
Clean that mess up!



I knew that a couple of the pigments I used have high binder levels (see the salt tutorial) and the tissue paper could be glued to the painting if I let it dry completely.

I lifted a corner to see if the design was set and gently pulled the tissue paper off to reveal the effect you see.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Tissue paper watercolor textures

Media Techniques: Salt Watercolor Texture Effects

OBJECT: Using table salt for unique watercolor texture effects.



MATERIALS: Arches #140 CP watercolor paper, Iodized Table Salt, Grumbacher 1" flat red sable. A small square of dry cellulose sponge.

COLORS (various manufacture): Alizarin Crimson, Cobalt Blue, Sap Green

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
Materials and objective



Using a 1" flat red sable I use washes of Cobalt Blue to paint a sky area. I graded the sky using lighter bands of Cobalt Blue closer to the horizon.

Using straight Sap Green I blocked in the right hill element.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
Start out with a painting



I washed in the Alizarin Crimson hill on the left and pulled a stroke up the top edge of the Sap Green hill a bit.

I let the Sap Green and Alizarin Crimson battle it out where they met in the middle.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
The hills ran crimson



Holding my new tool, a canister of salt, I slipped open the metal spout and tried a few light dustings of salt crystals and watched.

Hmmm... there's salt sitting in puddles of paint. Looking like...salt sitting in puddles of paint.

As the minutes passed, I decided to add a bit more salt to the heavier areas of wash on the bottom.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)
When it rains...



There's not much happening at this stage. So now I watch the drying to see what happens.

There were a few areas I'd left to drop the salt on when almost dry. I dropped a bit of salt in those areas.

I set it aside to dry thoroughly.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Wow, I'm impressed!



As the painting dried, the salt's effect on the watercolor washes became visible.

But there was salt stuck all over my painting!

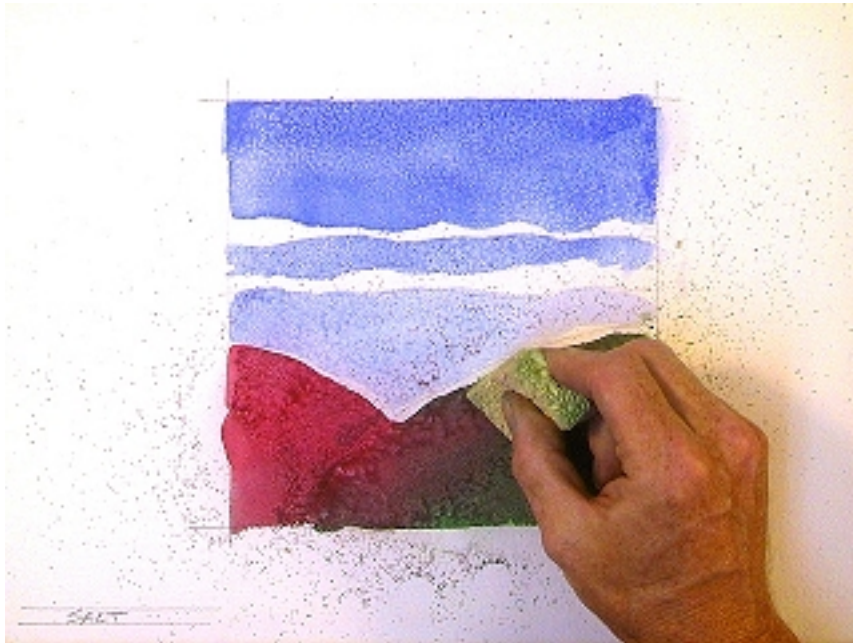
Using a clean dry hand I gently started brushing away the salt from the sky area.

As I got to the hill sections heaviest with salt it felt like I was sanding my skin off! There was more available binder (gum arabic) in the more intense washes which held the salt tight.

Change of plans.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

Pass the salt please



I cut a dry cellulose sponge into a small square to use as a surrogate for my skin.

This enabled me to quickly and gently rub and whisk away the remaining salt. When removing any abrasive from your paint (salt, sand, etc.) take care not to scratch the painting's surface. Brush lightly.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

The proper tool for the job



As the washes dry the salt crystals suck up pigment gradually, creating a myriad of light star-like shapes. This is most noticeable in the sky areas and was less effective, and different, in the darker areas.

Experiment with various types of salt:

table salt (iodized and non-iodized), sea salt, rock salt, kosher salt, etc. Larger grained salt will produce a larger, more pronounced starring effect.

I have no idea how salt affects the longevity of your art. Considering salt's corrosive nature I would think over time it may interact with pigments and natural paper fibers in an unintended way.

[\(Click to enlarge\)](#)

The salt watercolor texture effect