

# CHOOSING WATERCOLOURS

*Watercolour painting is a medium which is distinct from other forms of painting for its immediacy and colour intensity. Watercolour painting is ideal for artists who like to paint and travel, as excellent results can be obtained with a minimal amount of supplies. Ask our staff about our watercolour information supplement "The Watermark".*

## WATERCOLOUR PAINT

For centuries the production of watercolours involved the making of brittle cakes of paint. In the 19th Century, William Winsor and Henry Charles Newton of Winsor and Newton fame, added glycerin to the process of manufacturing these cakes to develop moist pans. Glycerin enabled the cakes to retain moisture, reduce brittleness and increase the paint's solubility in water.

In comparison, tube paints are made of pigment combined with Gum Arabic, glycerin and Ox Gall. The composition of these paints has not changed significantly over the years except for the replacement of Ox Gall with a synthetic wetting agent. Gum Arabic continues to be the primary binder in watercolour paints and is made from a gum, which seeps from the Acacia tree. Gum Arabic is also bottled separately as a watercolour medium and is used to increase drying time, add greater transparency to watercolours and increase gloss. When used in moderation and combined with paint and water, Gum Arabic is excellent for glazing and creating the illusion of depth.

The Gum Arabic, in which pigment is carried, is the component of watercolour paint which is soluble in water. The medium enables the insoluble pigment particles to disperse over the paper surface evenly. Most pigments simply lay on the surface of the paper, however, there are some pigments, which are considered "staining" pigments and as such, actually stain the paper fibres.



## ARTIST & STUDENT GRADE WATERCOLOUR PAINTS

The quality of watercolour paints varies from artist to student quality, depending upon the quantity and quality of pigment used. Whether the pigment is genuine or synthetic, artist quality paints have a much higher pigment load and consist simply of pure pigment, Gum Arabic and glycerin.

Student quality paints on the other hand, contain a much lower pigment load and like artist quality paints can contain either genuine or synthetic pigments. Since the pigment load is much lower, fillers are often used to bulk up the paint. The result is a more economical paint for the student or beginner watercolour painter.

Although used in artist grade paints, synthetic pigments are also used in student grade paints to replace rare and expensive pigments. Synthetic pigments are sometimes referred to as hues. For example, Cobalt Blue Hue does not contain real cobalt but is instead composed of a synthetic pigment. Hues are intended to match as closely as possible to their genuine counterparts. The concentration of colour is not as strong with hues as it is with genuine pigments and consequently, the results you achieve with hue colours is different.

Probably the most valuable and irreplaceable pigments are the genuine pigments of Ultramarine Blue (Lapis Lazuli) and Rose Madder Genuine. As most seasoned watercolourists will attest, no synthetic could ever match the colour and quality of either of these genuine pigments.



### *Are different brands of watercolour paint compatible?*

Yes, different brands of paints are compatible, though it is important to keep in mind that mixing different grades of paint may yield unpredictable results due to the difference in transparency, opacity and pigment load. For example, given that artist and student quality paints have different pigment loads,

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and in addition student paints contain fillers, student quality paints may deaden the vibrancy of some artist colours.

Also, given that the perception of colour in watercolour paintings relies heavily on the light and whiteness reflected by the paper, it is important to have some experience and/or knowledge of colour mixing, and the transparency and opacity of particular watercolour paints. This type of knowledge can be obtained from books on watercolour paint and colour mixing, however, much of it is gained through your own experimentation and practice with the media.

## GOUACHE

Like watercolours, gouache is a combination of pigment, binder and wetting agents. Gouache differs, however, with the inclusion of inert pigments such as chalk and blanc fixe which produce opacity instead of transparency in the colours. Since these colours are matte and opaque, their working properties and relationship to paper differ from those of watercolours. When painting with gouache, it is the combined reflection off of the paper, the paint, and the inert white pigment which produces the vibrancy and intensity of the colours.

Gouache paint produces a good, opaque coverage without being applied thickly and is most commonly

used in graphic design, fashion design and illustration applications.

## WATERCOLOUR PENCILS & WATER-SOLUBLE CRAYONS

Watercolour pencils and water-soluble crayons are great drawing and painting tools for mixed media. Watercolour pencils can be used on dry paper and then altered with the application of a wet brush, or they can be used on damp paper for more intense colours and effects. Water-soluble crayons can be used with watercolour pencils and are ideal for intense colour and bold strokes whether they are used dry or wet.

When sketching out preliminary lines for your final work in either traditional watercolour, watercolour pencils or water-soluble crayons, consider using a water-soluble graphite pencil. On first appearance, this drawing tool is not unlike regular graphite pencils, however, since they are water-soluble they can be blended and worked into your final piece with the application of water.



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