

Creating Excitement in Watercolour with Atanur Dogan

(Class Notes from Atanur's classes, November 2010, written by Christine Fenn)

"What attracts me and excites me about watching Atanur work is how he enthusiastically manages to bring the best of both worlds "abstract and realism" to life on the paper"
-Christine Fenn, Student

Painting Basics

Choosing which paint to use is personal preference; however "Artist Quality" paints provide stronger pigment (colour intensity and longevity). Choose brushes for their ability to hold water and pigment. Natural bristles do this well.

The most important things to know about your palette is: what paints in your palette are. - transparent paints (provide luminosity), what colours are opaque, what colours are cool and what colours are warm.

Creating Depth

Cool colours are used to make your subject appear to recede, for example a blue or purple wash over a landscape will cause the wash area to retreat into the background. Fog and mist can be represented using blue or purple.

Warm colours are used to make your subject appear to advance. Use bright, clean, fresh colors (ensure that your water is clean) for the foreground.

You may want to set up your palette in a colour wheel or configuration of your choosing to easily identify which paints colours are cool, warm, transparent and opaque.

Knowing your tones (grey scale), exploring and creating shadows, is crucial to creating depth and reality to your paintings. Squint at your reference and seek out the shadows you need to create in your work. Use your palette freely to create those shadows and you are guaranteed colour excitement. Know that your darks will change the intensity of your lights as you add layers and you may need to go back in and intensify the colours of other areas as the painting takes shape. Watch for colour balance as you develop your work.

It is always better to preserve the white of your paper where light/white areas are indicated. When doing this, always preserve a larger area of white paper than you think you will need as the area can quickly diminish as you lay down paint. If you have to mask off small detailed areas, use wax, rather than using Frisket, white gouache, or scratching your paper. Wax doesn't compromise the luminosity of your water colour as much as the other strategies. Keep it simple to keep your work fresh.

Creating Excitement (Atanur's Technique)

Traditionally shadows are often represented with purple, grey or dark blues, but to create excitement in your paintings, look at your palette and experiment using any dark hue to provide your dark tones. Be daring. Lay down a dark line or shape, lay down another (for example a blue brush stroke, then a purple brush stroke), then lay down a little clean water to allow the shadow to form on the paper as the two colors flow together.

Use lots of water in your paintings and let the water do the work on your paper instead of mixing colours in your palette. This is the magic of water colour! Have fun. Don't concern yourself with drips or what you think may be a "mistake" –this is only "technique". Lay the colours down, using a variety of broken lines and shapes versus one long line with your brush stroke(s). Follow the directional form of your subject matter. Never use only one colour. When the area is almost dry, go over the area with a wet brush to soften edges. You want the colours to mix and blend, but not so much that they lose their integrity, this takes patience and practice. *****

Method

From the beginning, focus on where you want the work to go. Plan your piece as you would a game of chess. Change your water frequently so that the colours remain fresh and don't become muddied. Identify your focal point and concentrate on drawing attention there using highlights. As your piece develops, continue to squint at your subject matter to ascertain the light and dark tones.

In portraiture the eyes are vital as they tell the story. The highlight in the eyes is very important and this is a good example of where you could effectively use a wax resist to protect the white paper.



Lay down the lines/creases or shadows of the face allowing them to dry, then go back in with water to soften the areas. Faces are not symmetrical. One side is always different from the other.



Timing is everything as you lay down the pigments. Don't get ahead of yourself in your excitement. As you work and develop your piece, you want the paint to be dryer, but not too dry or your edges become harsh. If this happens, lay down more water.



If you lay down more pigment when the area is too wet, the colours will flow together and their integrity will be lost. If this happens, squeeze out your brush and blot up the colour, wait for the area to dry a bit, and then tackle the area again.

Detail requires planning and timing. Avoid over-working details. Don't be afraid to exclude or edit details from your subject if you feel that it doesn't work well with your piece. Take frequent steps back to evaluate your progress.



Always practice your art. Everyday life provides many opportunities for you to seek out inspiration or to plan your next piece.