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Loose and lively flowers

Fiona Peart continues to explore the wet-in-wet technique using watercolour and acrylic inks

The wet-in-wet qualities of watercolour or acrylic inks used on a wet surface create unique results. Different paints, paper, and the wetness of the paper contribute to the effects created, which mean that no painting can be replicated exactly

the same way twice. It's exciting, sometimes nerve-racking, and the most spontaneous way to paint, especially for those of you who don't like to draw!

By experimenting with the paint's consistency, you will create sections that you are delighted

with – and sections that don't work. Don't plan to paint a picture until you have done a number of experimental works, and don't worry, you won't waste any. You can trim the sections you like to make cards or small pictures from them. 

YOU WILL NEED

■ Surface

- Extremely smooth paper or card. The paper I use is unbranded 120lb and needs to be stretched. You could equally use smooth thin card from packaging (such as from stockings, tights or shirts), or A4 packs of smooth card

■ Brushes

- Half rigger (equivalent to rigger No. 3, but not quite as long)
- Classic round (equivalent to a No. 12 round)
- Natural-haired brush for wetting the paper and lifting (I use Golden Leaf)

■ Watercolour or acrylic inks

- Various colours. I use Artists' watercolour pans but you could use tubes equally well, although they do flow differently

■ Miscellaneous

- Drawing board
- Fine spray bottle
- Palette knife (optional)

TIP

You don't have to use the specific colours that I mention in this article. Feel free to substitute with whatever you have in your box.

DEMONSTRATION 1 How to suggest a poppy

Techniques covered

- Dropping in
- Moving paint



◀ Step 1

- 1 Tape the paper or card securely to a board then wet the paper thoroughly.
- 2 Load the No. 12 round brush with a strong mix of permanent rose and begin touching the paper with the tip of the brush. Each time you touch the paper, paint is released. Keeping the brush on the paper and moving it along will help you to control the amount of paint released onto the paper. The flow of the paint will depend on how wet the paint mix is and how wet the paper is.

TIP

Once you have the hang of how to create various effects, only then move onto using Hot Pressed watercolour paper to create your paintings.

TIP

The wetter the paper, the more the paint will flow and a lighter colour will result. Avoid manipulating the shape too much; just let the watercolour move as it wants to. Watch what happens, and give it time.



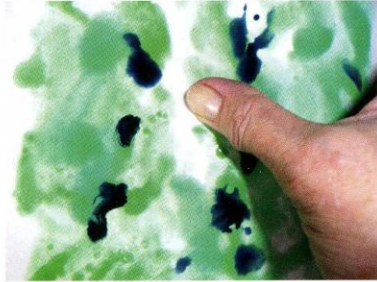
◀ Step 2

- 1 While the paper is still wet, use cobalt turquoise light and emerald green to suggest foliage behind the poppy shape.
- 2 You will be able to push the previous colour back by pressing the brush fully onto the paper and pushing the brush into the colour you wish to move. In this way, you can choose to keep a shape or allow the pigment to rush into a wet area.
- 3 Using the half rigger brush, drop indigo into the flower centre while it is still wet.

DEMONSTRATION 2 How to suggest daisy shapes

Added techniques

- Pushing paint
- Flicking paint



▼ Step 1

1 Wet the paper thoroughly then, using the No. 12 round, drop in blobs of emerald green.

2 Using the half rigger, flick on blobs of indigo. To do this, hold the loaded brush above the wet paper and firmly tap the wood just above the ferrule so that the paint splashes off the tip and onto the paper.

TIP

If you work a little slowly and you want to re-wet your work, use the water spray to gently wet the sections that have begun to dry.

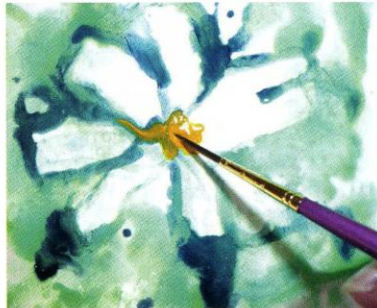
Step 2 ▼

Using your thumb (or a palette knife), push the paint firmly away. The paint will leave white paper and, providing you press firmly, it will not run back into that section. This technique works best on smooth paper.



▼ Step 3

While it is still wet, add the yellow centre using the half rigger. Allow this to gently seep into the background.



Step 4 ►

Look at the shapes created in the background; the patterns will suggest other flowers or leaf shapes, which you can emphasise by adding stalks.

Once you've got the hang of moving the paint around, letting it mix and seeing what it does, the interesting bit follows – manoeuvring or changing what you get to create what you want.

Demonstration 3 (page 16) brings these techniques together.



PROBLEM SOLVING

Things don't always go to plan when using this technique. If you press too hard and scrape or damage the paper, a dark scratched line appears instead of a nice white section of paper. There is no solution to fix this; the line will always be dark. To avoid this happening, use the tool at an angle, less upright and don't press too hard. This takes a bit of practice.

► If you have added colour and want to remove it, you can do so by using the Golden Leaf or natural-haired brush. Wet the brush with clean water, squeeze it out then agitate the section of your painting that you would like to remove. Providing the painting is still wet, the paint will soak into the brush. If the painting is dry, you may need to agitate it a little longer. Depending on the paper you use, most of the pigment may still be removed.



◄ Providing you keep the paper wet, you will still be able to adjust the colour. Watercolour has an unfounded reputation for being difficult to alter. Even when dry, it can be removed. Acrylics, on the other hand, once dry, cannot be altered, so use the water spray to keep the acrylic inks wet while you work on them.

DEMONSTRATION 3 *Poppies and daisies*

These are simple stylised daisy and poppy shapes. There is nothing botanical about these flowers and no drawing is needed; just decide where your painting needs light areas and add a daisy shape.

Step 1 ▶

1 Begin by wetting the paper thoroughly then, using the No. 12 round brush and permanent rose, drop in the flower shapes and some splashes of colour. The shapes will begin to spread out and a halo of lighter colour may appear floating on the surface.

2 Clean the brush then, using a mix of strong cobalt turquoise light, press the brush firmly against the paper and drag it in between the pink sections.



Step 2 ▼

The colours will remain separate providing you avoid mixing them with your brush. Let the paint flow freely and avoid pushing it around at this stage.



TIP

If the paint starts to pool, tilt the board slightly to make it flow better, or let some of the excess liquid soak back into your brush.

Step 4 ▼

While it is all still wet (use the water spray if it has started to dry), move the paint with your thumb to create the white daisy shapes. Push firmly away from you. If the paint is wet enough it will flow back a little, creating a nice clean shape of white paper. It's more about balance and colours at this point than trying to make or copy a picture.



Step 3 ▼

Once you have surrounded the pink shapes with the background colour, use emerald green to intensify the colours. These three colours will now be touching and swirling round the paper but not mixing together. The whole sheet of paper should still be wet.



Step 5 ▼

1 Once you have added more daisy petals, introduce indigo with the half rigger, dropping in colour where you want to suggest a flower centre, or just speckles where you want to darken areas.

2 Using a palette knife or, in this case, the end of a Perspex handled brush, move the paint away into thin lines in much the same way as you moved it with your thumb – only, this time, it results in a thin shape.

3 Continue to add splashes of colour in order to build up the picture. It is important to keep the picture wet all the time; use the spray if you need to but avoid the surface pooling.





◀ *Poppies and Daisies*, watercolour, 15×10½in. (38×27cm). This was completed in one go, keeping the paper wet at all times and working with whatever happened on the paper.

Techniques

▶ Using the tip of the No. 12 round brush you can add more pigment, or lift excess colour



◀ Once you have pushed the white sections away, paint will continue to flow between the areas. Thin stalks pushed away with the Perspex brush handle or a palette knife act as barriers so that colour will remain at either side of the line created.

Make cards from your successes

You may find lovely sections within paintings that you can cut out as art trading cards (which I covered last month). Alternatively, cut sections out and stick them onto backing cards, or attach your studies to cards with cut-out apertures. Don't waste any of your experiments – the more you do, the more you will understand watercolour or acrylic inks.



◀ *Finished Study of Poppies and Daisies*, watercolour, 8×10½in. (20×26cm). This is my finished experimental piece. It is not a painting, but it has lovely sections within it that can be used for cards.



▲ This uses most of the painting, removing the paper that was damaged from scoring too hard

▶ I like to choose long narrow shapes for cards, which crop flowers, leading to a more abstract approach



▼ If you are clever, you can cut a few cards from one study



FIONA'S TOP FIVE TIPS

- Use very smooth paper
- Keep the paper moist at all times
- Let the paint flow naturally without fiddling with it
- If the paint pools, tilt the board to move the paint or let it soak back into the brush
- Put your light, bright colours on first and the darks last