

People watching

Populate your urban landscapes with simple figures, by Fiona Peart



It's always enjoyable to paint a busy street scene, although, at first glance, it might appear daunting. The answer is to break the subject down into small, manageable chunks then the scene won't be as difficult to paint as you might imagine.

Think of people and buildings as two separate subjects. In other words, sketch or photograph your street scenes then insert figures that make an interesting composition.

The subject

I like the colourful buildings, the bridge and the reflections on the wet pavement in the photograph

(above). Although the people look ordinary and wouldn't make good subjects for a painting, I can always add my own figures as long as I stick to the proportions I see in the photograph. Notice where the feet and heads are then you can place any figure in that space.

Drawing the subject

Begin by drawing an empty street (above right). Consider what you want to include in the scene and what you don't think is necessary. This is the type of quick drawing that you could do easily in your sketchbook. Make it small and fairly loose, and avoid unnecessary details.

Once your buildings are in

▲ A simple compositional sketch will help you to make the right decisions when you begin to paint

place, take great care to place the figures in their correct positions. Judge how far below the window the figures appear and where they sit compared to the horizon. Make a tiny horizontal line at the top of the head and the base of the feet to help you remember.

Three-dimensional

Suggest form by hatching the shapes of the figures rather than sketching them with a line (see sketches, below). These drawings have so much more information and interest in them than merely an outline drawing.

Once you have practised drawing groups of people, you are ready to introduce them into any painting.

TIP
See people as shapes; after all, none of us have an outline all the way around.

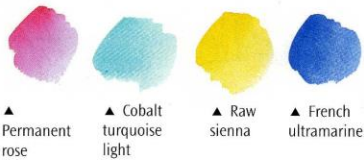


DEMONSTRATION *Passing Shower*

YOU WILL NEED

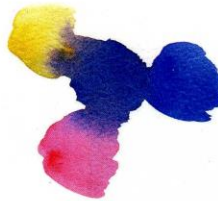
- **Watercolour paper**
 - Saunders Waterford Not 140lb 17½×10½in. (44×27cm)
- **Brushes**
 - Fiona's Classic round squirrel brush (equivalent No. 12)
 - Half rigger
- **Artists' watercolours**

See colours below. You could also use similar colours in gouache or acrylic inks.
- **HB pencil**



COLOUR NOTES

► I often keep my choice of colours fairly limited as I find this creates unity in a painting. I love the vibrant turquoise as an accent colour, but it doesn't make good darks. French ultramarine, on the other hand, enables me to mix a deep, strong contrast colour.



▲ A mix of permanent rose and raw sienna makes oranges that glow.

◄ French ultramarine mixed with permanent rose and a tiny amount of raw sienna makes a transparent dark. This mix can be adjusted to give plummy darks, more blue darks and almost black.

▲ Permanent rose and cobalt turquoise light give subtle mauves.

▲ Permanent rose and French ultramarine give more luminous purples.

Once I have selected my colours I am ready to begin painting...



TIP

Plan your drawing on layout paper first then transfer it onto watercolour paper. Avoid using an eraser on the final painting as this can sometimes scuff the paper surface.

◄ **Step 1**

- 1 Using the layout from my sketch and the reference photograph as your guide, draw the composition. Then tape all the way round the painting area.
- 2 Begin by wetting the sky then using the side of the Classic brush, touch the wet surface with French ultramarine. Mix a little permanent rose with this and a touch of raw sienna to create a neutral grey and add a few cloud shadows.
- 3 Block in the colours on the buildings at the back of the painting.

Step 2 ▼

Continue to add colour until the entire painting (except the figures) is covered in a base colour. Each colour must be reflected onto the wet road. This is done by wetting the lower section of the painting and dropping in the relevant colours in the same technique as we used for the sky area.

HOW TO PAINT BUILDINGS

1 Using the flat of the brush, press firmly along the edge where one colour adjoins the next. Carefully allow the tip of the brush to touch the adjoining shape. Lifting the brush higher will allow more paint to flow out

of the brush, keeping it low will control how much paint is released.
2 Allowing the paint to seep into adjoining sections and create unique bursts of colour is one of the best aspects of watercolour painting.



Step 3 ▶

1 Using the three transparent colours mix a dark purple/blue and apply all of the details with this. No matter what subtle colour changes you see in the reference photographs, keep all of the details simple and use mainly the Classic brush.
2 Use the half rigger for the thin lines. Avoid using it too early or you will be tempted to fiddle!



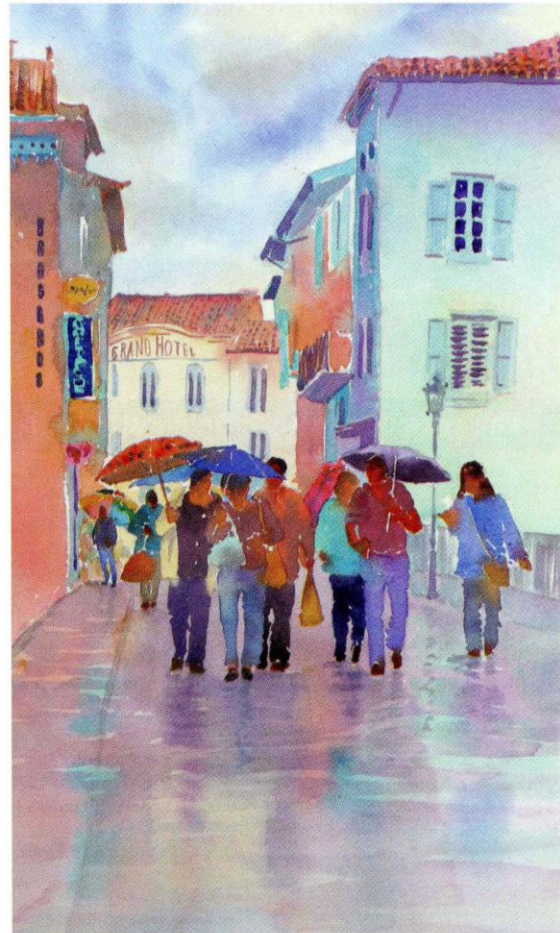
◀ Step 4

1 Now for the figures. Using a mix of permanent rose and raw sienna, block in the skin areas.
2 While these sections are still wet, add the adjoining figure sections rather like a jigsaw puzzle. Allow the colours to run as you did for the buildings.
3 Complete the group of figures in the same way, still using the same combination of colours.



Step 5 ▶

Once the figures are dry, wet the entire lower section of the painting with clean water and drop in a pale mauve mix all over, adding the reflections of the figures as you go. Allow to dry completely then remove the masking tape.



▲ *Passing Shower*, watercolour, 17½×10½in. (44×27cm)