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For many people, one of the trickiest aspects of watercolour painting is learning how to master paint consistency. How wet the paint should be, how much paint to use and how colours work together are just some of the problems facing the watercolour painter.

Producing sheets of 'practice exercises' although useful, can be tedious and may also demoralise us, learning to use any medium should be fun and exciting, so I have devised some simple greetings cards to make, which will help us to understand about watercolours by creating these small paintings.

Getting inspiration for painting comes in all sorts of ways, perhaps we see a photo in a magazine, or a view outdoors, sometimes we collect things, pots and jugs, scraps of fabric, brick-a-brack.

I have an old box my father gave me which contains butterflies from Africa. They have survived for over 50 years and were the inspiration for previous works as well as this project.

Butterflies from 1958.



This is a fabulous little project designed to help you control watercolour. You may use either, watercolour pans, tubes or indeed acrylic inks or acrylic paint as long as it is watered down and used like watercolours.

Materials you will need

Bockingford Watercolour paper 140lb not surface

2B pencil

Paints in various colours

Half Rigger brush

Classic Round (equivalent to a number 12 round)

Masking Tape

Winsor & Newton Iridescent Medium (optional, but wonderful)

Although fun, it's not constructive to just randomly wet a sheet of paper and drop paint onto it, watch it move and play with the paint in this way. Problems occur when you wish to replicate effects achieved in such a way. All of us I

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am sure have created a wonderful effect and think, how did I do that? Or, I wish I could make that happen again!



Fig 1 the line layout

The Classic Round Brush

For working with wetter watercolour techniques a natural squirrel or sable brush holds a large amount of liquid and retains the paint well.

A synthetic brush tends to hold less liquid and the paint has a tendency to 'drop' out of the end of the brush. Synthetic brushes are better suited to dryer watercolour techniques or when using acrylics.

Step 1



Fig 2

Draw some simple butterfly shapes using the layout if you wish, then using the Classic Round brush, wet one half of the butterfly with clean water.

Tip – don't wet both sides of the butterfly or the first half will have started to dry before you are ready to paint it.

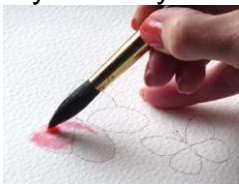


Fig 3

Step 2

Load the Classic Round brush with pale pink (very dilute Permanent rose), then let the point of the brush gently touch the wet surface. The colour will gently flow across the wet area.

You will notice that as you lift the brush more paint will flow out of the brush.

Watercolour pans contain less binder and filler than tubes and therefore tend to flow across the water differently. I prefer to use pans for this very reason.



Insert Fig 4

Place the brush on the lower wing to introduce colour here rather than dragging it downward with the brush and allow the paint to move freely over the wet area.

Step 3

Clean the brush out then mix some strong Cobalt, (not very dilute) as before, allow the point of the brush to touch the wet surface. Notice how the stronger pigment does not travel as far as the wetter dilute pigment.

Apply a brush touch to each wing tip, letting the blue move naturally into the pink.



Fig 5

Step 5

Whilst the first half is still wet, wet the other half of the butterfly shape avoiding the body. The body will act as a dry barrier between the two areas of wet paint. Paint will only run into a wet area, so providing these two sections don't touch, the paint will not run between the two halves.

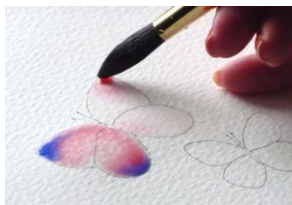


Fig 6

Step 6

Add the pink as before. Aim to achieve the same strength of colour as the first wings. Achieving symmetrical wing colours may be tricky at first, but this is a great way of learning to control watercolour.

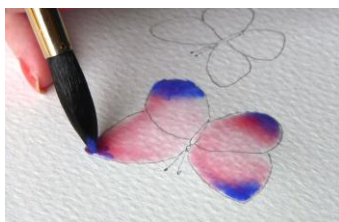


Fig7

Step 7

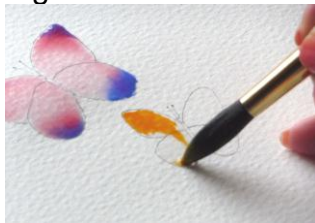
Add the blue as before, notice how strong the colour is on the tip of the brush. Avoid touching the painting and let it dry naturally.

If you want to control smaller, perhaps even stronger sections of paint, then a Rigger brush is ideal for 'dropping in colour'

The Half Rigger brush

Rigger brushes were first developed to paint the rigging on boats, hence the name, Rigger. They are fairly long in proportion to their width and ideal for painting fine lines, but also great for wet in wet techniques such as this. The Half Rigger is slightly shorter than a traditional Rigger and easier to use.

Fig 8



Step 8

Wet half of the second butterfly.

Using the Classic Round, drop in a strong mix of Cadmium Yellow Deep. Let the colour flow naturally. You will notice that this colour moves quickly over the wet surface, far quicker than Permanent Rose. Some colours seem to do this – I call these, 'Rushing Colours' because they rush across the wet surface.



Fig 9

Step 9

Using the Half Rigger brush, and a strong mix of Indigo (this colour does not 'rush') place the tip of the Half Rigger into a corner of the wing shape.

Then place a spot in the centre of the lower wing; you will notice that this colour hardly moves at all.

Continue with the second half of the butterfly, attempting to produce a symmetrical wing design.

Fig 10



It's a good idea to practice with your watercolours in this way to get used to how they behave on wet paper.

Continue to use any combinations of colour that you like, letting the colours merge and run within the shapes you create.



Fig 11

Notice how watercolour is transparent, and how when one wing overlaps another, the colour changes, rather like placing layers of tissue paper one on top of another. You may also notice that some colours are more transparent than others and some may be quite opaque.

Once this is all dry, we can then add vein details on the wings, the bodies and the antennae.

Tip – make notes of which colours 'Rush' in your palette, it will be really useful to refer to in the future.

A good idea is to build up a reference painting to refer to in future.

Fig 12

Making a card using your study.

Fig 13



Stick a border of masking tape around your butterfly shapes, then draw more butterflies, making sure that they fill the card area and overlap each other. It is a good idea to let some of the butterfly shapes finish outside the card area. This can create a more pleasing design.

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Tip - If you are planning to make a card from the outset, make sure you place the masking tape on the right hand side of the paper to allow for the finished card to fold correctly, unless of course you want to create a non-folding card.

Tip – to prevent colours running, make sure the previous butterfly shape is completely dry before you apply more shapes on top.



Fig14

Once the butterflies have all dried, add any details using the Half Rigger brush then, using the Classic brush add a very pale background colour, dropping in stronger pigment wherever you choose.

Finally when this too has dried, remove the masking tape to reveal a crisp neat edge to your image.



Fig 15

Tip – it is a good idea to tear the tape away from your painted area in-case the paper tears a little of the paint.

Finished picture

Fig 16 8cms x 9cms





Fig 17
9cms x 10cms

For this example I used a wet in wet base of Cadmium Yellow, then dropped in Burnt Sienna Cadmium Orange and Permanent Rose. Once dry I added more Cadmium Orange and Permanent Rose to the lower wing. Details were added using a Half Rigger brush and the darks created by mixing Cadmium Yellow, Permanent Rose and French Ultramarine. The proboscis was done by wetting the shape using the Half Rigger brush and Cadmium Yellow, then the dark colour dropped in and allowed to run along the wet section.

Fig 18



13cms x 14cms

For this painting I used Cadmium Yellow, Permanent Rose and French Ultramarine for this study. I began with a wet-in-wet start and my Classic brush, dropping in a very dilute mix of Permanent Rose into a pale base of Cadmium Yellow. I mixed these colours together and dropped this colour into the wing tips. Once dry I added the darker details using a dark mixed using all three colours.

Using Iridescent Medium.

This is a wonderful medium if you like card making or crafting, or if you want something a bit special and unusual in you're paintings. Iridescent Medium is a liquid that you can either mix with watercolour or apply onto the paper before you begin. It looks like Mother of Pearl when it is dry, and is most effective when moved against the light (rather than framed behind glass) this makes it ideal for card making.

Tip – If you are using Iridescent Medium keep it separate from your watercolour pans, or you could have glittering paintings in the future when you don't want them.



Fig 19

Permanent Rose, Permanent Rose mixed with Iridescent Medium, Iridescent Medium alone, French Ultramarine mixed with Iridescent Medium.

Tips on using Iridescent Medium

- Mix the medium thoroughly before use by shaking the bottle.
- Add about half a teaspoon (or less) of the medium to your mixing surface.
- Use it diluted with clean water directly onto your watercolour paper (where you require the mother of pearl look) and let this dry before painting over it.
- Alternatively, mix a little of the medium with your paints on the mixing surface.
- The effect is far greater when using transparent colours.

It is of course wonderful when used for shells or butterflies or if you enjoy painting fairies, resulting in a shimmering effect in the light.

I hope you have enjoyed this project, I have had such a positive response to it, painting butterflies seems to have been very popular!