

Detailed Hedgerow studies using watercolour.

Introduction

As the summer moves towards autumn, but before the colours all change, is a wonderful time to find painting subjects in our hedgerows. There is an abundance of ripe berries, hips, grasses and wonderful leaves all bursting with colour. Even the tiniest patches of Urban waste ground can have sumptuous blackberries, shiny and dark growing in the wild.

For this project I am using watercolour in wet little sections, dropping in colours into controlled areas of paint resulting in a fairly detailed study. All this is dependant upon an accurate base drawing, so I am going to begin by choosing a subject then really looking at it, drawing it, then painting it all from the live plant.

It is not appropriate to use photos for this as we need to examine the plant, turn it and see how it grows, note the growing points and the subtle colour changes, then create some detailed studies.

Choosing a subject.

Detailed work requires time, so you may choose to begin with a very small sprig such as wild rose hip which can be completed in a morning rather than a branch of berries with lots of leaves.

Hips will stay fresh for a few days, so the same subject can be used a number of times.

Berries will soften and loose their shine within a day or two, especially if not in water, so make sure you are able to allocate enough time for the subject you choose to paint.

Grasses will last for a week or so and make wonderful additions to a mixed study.

Individual leaves can be painted within half an hour, but will begin to curl almost immediately.

Placing your subject.

Although it is good to place the subject in water this is not always possible. We need to be able to look closely at the subject, turn it and position it exactly as we would wish before we begin to draw it, so standing it in a jar of water is sometimes not the best solution.

I like to hold my subject in my left hand as I draw with my right. This means that I need to either draw in a sketchbook or tape the paper to my board so the paper does not move.

An alternative is to tape the subject to the board, so it remains in exactly in the same painting position. Occasionally just laying the subject on the board is the ideal position.

Materials needed to begin.

Smooth drawing paper
HB pencil
Plastic eraser
Masking Tape

Insert Fig 1
Grasses Study.
20 x 30 cms

Project 1 Drawing Study max time – 1 hour

Select three different types of grasses.

Before beginning, look carefully at how the grass grows; notice the direction the seed heads grow in, and the thickness of the stalks.

Place one stem on white paper, on the board next to where you work. Tape the stem to the paper using masking tape if the grass rolls out of position.

Begin with a simple outline to position the grass, and then add tonal shading. Once you have completed your first grass, select a second and complete that drawing before adding the third.

Tip - Work life size or smaller, but not bigger than your subject.



Project 2. Creating a detailed drawing. Max time 2 hours

Choose a stem of blackberries. This could be much smaller than mine, perhaps just three berries and a leaf.

Tip – Snip sections off with some scissors to create a smaller subject.

Before beginning, look carefully at how the berries grow, notice how the individual clusters are tightly packed, and where the light leaves a shiny white spot on each berry. Note how serrated the leaves are and whether the veins are light or dark.

Begin with a simple outline then begin to add tone ensuring that your pencil lines go in the direction the plant grows.

Tip – Build up the tone gradually but if you press too hard and need to remove tone, use a soft putty eraser and press this against the paper (don't rub) to lift.

Fig 2
11 x 15 cms
Blackberry Study



Fig 3
Watercolour 12cms x 17cms



The advantage of having a pencil study is that you have become so familiar with your subject that the painting becomes much easier. You also have a good quality drawing to refer to if the plant wilts or you don't have time to finish it.

Getting Started

Materials you will need

Saunders Waterford HP watercolour paper 140lb

Watercolours, either pans or tubes (I prefer pans)

Permanent Rose

Cadmium Lemon

French Ultramarine

Indigo

Burnt Sienna

My Classic Round natural haired brush equivalent to a size 12

A Half Rigger or Pointer

HB pencil

Putty eraser

Begin with a very light line drawing. This is purely to place where the paint is to go and not a tonal drawing. The less pencil you put onto the paper, the better.

You may decide just to concentrate on the berries as shown here, or complete the entire drawing as shown in Fig 3.

Fig 3a



Fig 3b



For blackberries, I use my Classic Round brush and paint each individual round berry using Indigo, and leaving a tiny light source, I make sure I leave adjacent berries within the cluster dry. Using the Half Rigger brush I drop French Ultramarine onto each of the wet sections and once these have dried I then paint the remaining berries within the cluster. Each single cluster forms a blackberry.

For the lighter berries I use Cadmium Lemon and a touch of Indigo, dropping in a little Permanent Rose.

Tip – Look out for the subtle pinks in stems and stalks. Don't assume they will always be green.



Leaves (on Fig 3)

Using my Classic Round I tackled each leaf as a basic shape, merging the colours then dropping in stronger colour using the Half Rigger brush. Notice the hints of pink dropped into the greens on the edge of the leaves. Once this initial layer has dried, the darker sections are added using the Round brush. The darker leaf veins are added using the Half Rigger.

Studying Leaves.
Fig 5



Top Left

Letting the colours merge into the shape of the leaf and stalk, I then drop in the darker colours around the edge. Subtle colour changes are suggested by dropping in wet dilute colour using the Half Rigger. I drop a strong mix of pink into the wet stalk letting the colour rush up the wet stalk.

The tiny dark dots are achieved by waiting till the sheen has gone off the paper but it must not be fully dry, then using the Half Rigger to gently touch the paper using dark dryer colour. The dark veins are added in the same way.

Centre Top

Using similar techniques as the previous leaf I achieve the lovely pink sections by adding stronger colour onto a wet base of strong pigment. The stronger the colour the less it travels, the wetter or more dilute the pigment the more the colour travels.

These two leaves are wonderful subjects to understand how watercolours run. If the result is not exactly the same as the leaf in front of you, no one will ever know and you will have learnt a lot about colour!

Top Right

This technique requires a steady hand and good brush control.

Depending on the colour of the leaf veins, I begin with a wash over the entire leaf shape using the Classic. (this will eventually be the lighter veins)

Once this has dried I then use a dilute pink to paint the entire leaf shape again, but this time avoiding the tiny veins. It is important to keep the whole leaf shape wet, as stronger colours can then be added with the Half Rigger including lovely darks along the leaf edge.

Bottom Left

This leaf uses the same techniques as the previous one, but after the base colour has been applied and has dried, the sections of green and pink are dropped onto a base of plain water thus keeping the colours separate. The

green must not be allowed to run into the pink, so both colours need to be of equal strengths.

Bottom Centre

The base colour is applied as before then allowed to dry. Masking fluid is then applied over the veins and stalk and allowed to dry. A dip pen is a good tool to do this, as it can be wiped clean after use.

Once the masking is dried the darker colour is then placed on top and allowed to dry. The masking is then removed to reveal the details.

NB Masking fluid needs to be applied very carefully for the results to be delicate.

Bottom Right

The leaf shape is wet all over with clean water then the strong pigments are dropped onto the wet surface using the Half Rigger. The lightest colours are applied first and the darker ones later.

Strong dark colour can be introduced on the edge and the vein is applied once the base colour has dried.



Fig 6
Rose Hips 11 x 12 cms

The same techniques used for the leaves are used for these hips.

The hips are first painted with a light base colour avoiding the shine, then once dry, a deeper more varied layer is painted on top. Orange can be dropped onto red to give a warm glow.

The dry tops of the hips are added next allowing some of the red to seep upwards.

The leaves are kept very simple painted wet into wet.

Fig 7
13cms x 19 cms

A wet in wet background can be done at the start of the painting, after the drawing. Ensure that the same colours are used as you intend to use in the painting. Use the Classic brush and keep all of the colours fairly dilute.



Fig 8
6cms x 7cms



Fig 9
7cms x 8cms



Fig 10
19cms x 14 cms



Suggested Projects you may like to do

Project 1

- Collect some small leaves and keeping the scale the same as the originals (you can even draw round them if you wish!) paint a series of leaf studies as shown in Fig 5 these can be used as a techniques

reference point if you add some colour mixing notes onto your work sheet.

- Limit yourself to half an hour for each leaf.
- Think about which techniques you will use before you begin.

Project 2

Search for a small sprig of berries including some leaves. Make a couple of preliminary watercolour studies as shown in Fig 6, then draw a slightly more complex composition similar to Fig 2.

- Limit yourself to two hours in total for both the drawing and the painting.
- Keep the scale life size or smaller.
- Decide on the techniques you will use before you begin.

Future Project

Develop a series of studies on the one page as shown in Fig 10. Placement will be important so consider carefully where you place the drawing on the paper.