

CLEMETIS MONTANA PROJECT

Negative painting



Fig 1 Clematis Montana

The learning points of this project

- Adapt and enhance a photo as a reference point.
- Analyse the negative spaces within our painting.
- Using a limited pallet
- Understand the importance of letting the paint mix on the paper, so that the colours remain vibrant and luminous.
- Developing the confidence to use dramatic darks.

Our finished painting measures 10" x 13 "

During this project we will build up our painting in structured logical stages keeping the watercolour fairly wet to enable us to complete each selected area.

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Materials you will need for this project

Paper

140lb not surface watercolour paper (I use Saunders Waterford)
7" x 8" plus a small piece to use as a test sheet.

Brushes

Golden Leaf brush

Classic Round (equivalent to a number 12)

Half Rigger

Watercolours – the following colours or similar.

Permanent Rose

Winsor Blue (green shade)

Aureolin

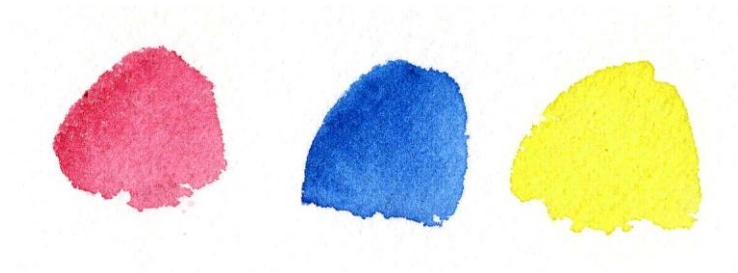


Fig 2

Step 1

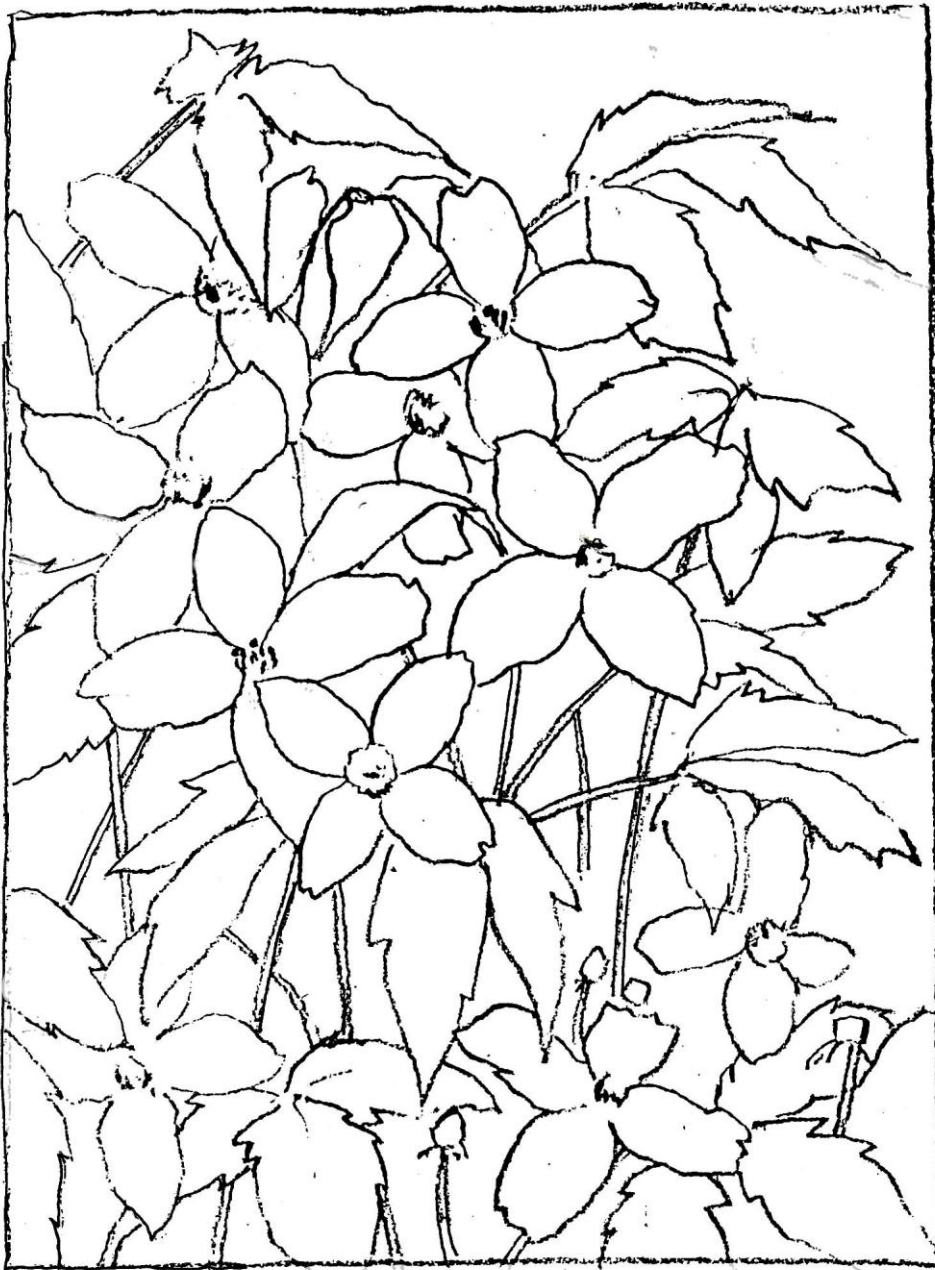


Fig 3 the line drawing – you can scale this drawing up if you wish

Either lightly trace or copy this line drawing onto your watercolour paper.

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Fig 4 photographic reference



Fig 5 selected section

I took this photo of Clematis Montana (Fig 4) when it was in full flower in my garden. It was not a sunny day and the photo quality was not as good as I would wish, but ideal to use as a reference. We are not actually going to copy the photo, just use it as a guide.

I decided to use this section (Fig 5) for my drawing. I liked the idea of some of the flowers being in shadow as well as some that I intend to paint in full sunshine. I also liked the flower on the lower right, so I moved it upwards into my composition.

Although I used the serrated shapes of the leaves, I did not copy them slavishly. What drew me to this subject, was the wonderful chance to paint the leaves using negative painting. The shapes are lovely and crisp, so easier to define on our picture.

Firstly before beginning any drawing we need to select the subject. Once you have your line drawing on your watercolour paper you are ready to begin painting.

Step 2

The wet in wet start



Fig 6 Applying our lightest and brightest colours.

This is a great way to begin your painting. It gets rid of the white paper and provides a good basis on which to continue.

You must work flat for this stage. Wet the paper with clean water all over using your Golden Leaf brush. Avoid the water flooding; the paper should be uniformly wet all over this will give you plenty of time to introduce your colours. You can only do this whilst it is damp, as soon as the sheen goes off the paper you must stop and let the paper dry.

Our aim now, is to apply the paint with our Classic brush by dropping fairly strong pigment onto the wet surface.

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Firstly we are going to begin with our lightest, brightest colours. Drop dilute Permanent Rose where the flowers are positioned, add a little Winsor blue to the mix if you want the colour to become a little more purple in parts. Fig 7



Fig 7 Permanent Rose and Winsor Blue

At the same time drop on the background colours. Mix the Winsor blue and Aureolin in various proportions introducing the Aureolin almost on its own in parts so that you have a variety of greens. Let the colours merge on the wet surface.

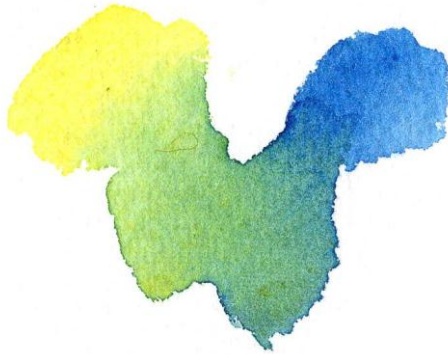


Fig 8 Aureolin and Winsor Blue

TIP – Allow the green to seep slightly or add a little of your purple pink to the pink flowers in the shadows, or those covered with a section of leaf. All other flowers should be 'clean' the pink could escape leaving light patches in the background.

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Once you have paint over the entire painting, drop stronger pigment if you feel you want to, particularly on the bright leaf sections and drop a mix of the Aureolin and Permanent Rose into the flower centres. Add more Permanent Rose to the mixture and position the stalks.

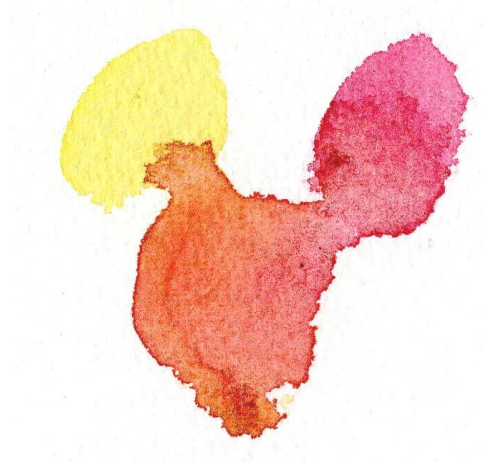


Fig 9 Aureolin and Permanent Rose

If the paint seeps beyond the lines, let it, I know it's tempting to try and push it back, but let the paint merge naturally. By letting the paint escape you will add depth and interest to the next stage.

The tonal value should be overall fairly light. Your aim at this stage is to get as much information onto the paper as possible without any details!

Once the surface begins to dry, STOP leave it alone and let it totally dry before the next stage.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY NEGATIVE PAINTING?



Fig 10



Fig 11

The negative spaces in any subject are the spaces or objects around your subject matter, they are usually dark areas. In fig 10 the negative space is the space behind the figures. Whilst in Fig 11 the negative space is the hedge in front of the house and the foliage at the side of the house. Avoid thinking that negative space is background, this is not always so.

We now need to look for the negative spaces in our painting.

Step 3

Applying our first negative shapes



Fig 12 seeing the negatives.

All of the lightest areas are complete for the moment. You have painted the base colours on all of the flowers and all of the leaves, which are drawn on the layout.

Look at the layout and the photo; we are now going to paint **EVERYTHING BEHIND** what is drawn on the layout. We must now avoid everything on our original drawing. I know it's a difficult concept, as we naturally gravitate to looking at the subject, but try to concentrate on the foliage behind our leaves and flowers.

TIP – If you made a tracing of the line drawing use a soft pencil and shade in everything except the flower heads, leaves and stalks on your tracing paper. Put this beside you as you paint the next stage.

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Using your Classic brush, mix a variety of mid greens on a flat surface. Paint the areas shown on Fig 12 section by section. Looking at your layout make sure you paint neatly up to the edge of the leaves and flowers, drop in various mixes of the greens, as you go along and avoid using the same colour over the entire area or the result will be flat.



Fig 13 Mixing a variety of greens

You should now see the positive shapes lifting off the paper. This is a good time to separate the flower heads; we can do this by creating shadows on the flowers underneath.

Where a flower is in front, and catching the sunshine, the flower behind it in the shade will need to be painted darker. Using the Permanent Rose and a little Winsor Blue separate the petals as shown in fig 14.

Step 4

Building up the dark areas



Fig 14 Introducing the darks

This is the stage where you may not dare to continue! You now need to mix a dark colour, it is very important that the colour is dark enough; otherwise your painting will not have the same depth and impact of mine.

We are now going to avoid more leaves behind the ones you have avoided already. You may find it easier to draw in some leaf and stalk shapes with a soft pencil. Use Fig 15 as an example of where to add foliage to your painting.

The greens you previously painted will now become the leaves behind the ones on the original drawing. It sounds complicated, but once you 'see' it there will be no going back for you! You'll be hooked!

Step 5

Adding the final details.



Fig 15 Added final details

Once the foliage has been developed so that more leaves and stalks are visible, the flower details and leaf shadows can be added.

For the flowers, using a Half Rigger brush gently imply the petal direction using dilute Permanent Rose, add a little of the blue to darken, particularly under the centres.

Simple shadow shapes can be introduced to the leaves by using a Classic brush and varying the mix of our greens.

TIP – Look at the foliage in your garden or park and observe the negative shapes. Once you begin to see them, you will look at foliage very differently.