



Tips & Demos

**Watercolor and Watermedia
painting tips & demonstrations
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Creating Three-Dimensional Form with Value

In order to keep the objects we paint from looking flat, we need to create the illusion of three dimensional shape and form. One of the ways to do this is with value changes from light to dark. Observation helps us decide where the light source is, and how the light hits the objects. Once we know where the lights and darks are, we have some choices as to how to create those value changes in watercolor.



Wet-into-wet (left) and Glazing or Layering (right):

The wet-into-wet sample on the left uses three values of green, beginning with the lightest, then, the middle value is added while the first color is still damp, and finally, the darkest value is added. This gives a “softer” form, and might be used in background objects where sharp focus is not wanted.

In the second sample (on the right) requires a bit more patience, as you must wait for each layer of color to dry completely before adding the next “glaze” or layer of color. As in the first sample, begin with the lightest value of green and establish the entire shape of the object. When this is dry, paint on the middle value where needed, and again wait for this to dry. Finally, add the darkest value to complete the form. This can be fairly detailed if you want it to be, and is useful for foreground or midground objects. If you are in a hurry and can’t wait for things to dry on their own, invest in a small hair dryer which is helpful (especially in humid climates) in drying paint passages in a short amount of time.

It works on manmade objects too...I used the same methods demonstrated above for creating the form of the terra cotta pots. The top right sample was done using the glazing method on dry paper—that is, separate layers of successively darker values were applied to dry paint layers until the form was established.

In the second sample (bottom right), I used a partly wet approach. Look at the bottom of the pot where it “dissolves” into the background, and you’ll see where the paper was still partly wet when another darker value was added. Where you see hard, sharply defined edges between colors, you know the paper was dry because the colors didn’t run or merge together.



The bottom left sample was painted using the “wet-into-wet” approach. It always starts with the lightest, least saturated wash of each color, and ends with the darkest, most saturated washes. And of course, wherever you want definition along the edge of an object, you either have to wait for the paper to dry, or paint very carefully (as I did in this sample) leaving a tiny white unpainted bit of paper showing between one shape and another (in this case between the pot edge and the background color).

