

Watercolor Still Life

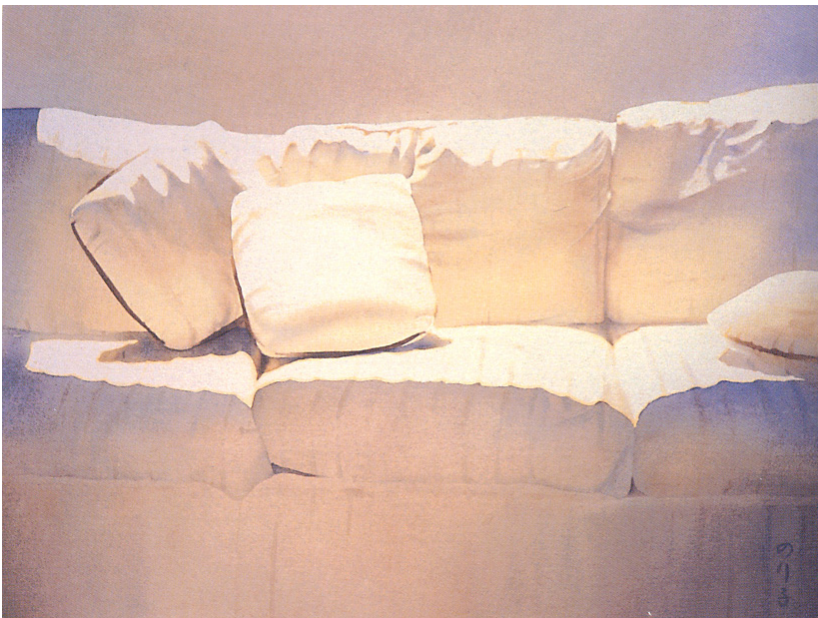
Session 2: Washes & Edges, Negative Painting, Wet-on-Dry vs. Wet-on-Wet or Damp

Washes are the Base of Watercolor

Watercolor artists usually use washes for some or all of their painting. What distinguishes a wash from a brushstroke is usually size, and the part of the brush you use to make it (the side more than the point or chisel edge). We use washes generally to fill in larger shapes and areas. Brushwork aka mark-making is usually for smaller more linear details/textures.

What type of washes and how you use them is up to you. Some artists use only washes to create their paintings, and others use only brushwork/mark-making. Most of us use some of each.

Washes can be flat (even-toned), graduated or graded (change gradually in value, hue or intensity) or wet-into-wet.



Noriko Hasigawa, *White on White*, watercolor, 22" x 30"

In the painting shown at left by Noriko Hasigawa, nearly the entire painting is constructed of washes, with just the faintest soft linework done in the fabric. Using a variety of warm and cool “grays”, yellows and the white of the paper, she effectively captures the feeling of bright sunlight. Some of the large wash areas (like the shadow across the front of the couch) are done wet-into-wet - altering the color from warm to cool.

Controlling edges is critical to using washes well. Sometimes you want one hard edge and yet the other side of the shape needs to be soft edged. You can do this one of two ways - either wet your paper with clean water slightly beyond the area where you want the soft edge. Begin with your color on dry paper and pull the color into the dampened area. It will soften up on that side. Another approach is to paint your

color, then very quickly rinse, blot and use a slightly dampened brush to “feather” one edge of your paint to soften the edge.

Using hard/soft edge changes in concert with negative painting gives you the control you need to create almost any effect - losing edges here and making them hard and defined there.





Assignment:

Use the same subject you worked from in Session 1, or set up a new still life to work from. Wet your paper all over (front and back if you are working on loose paper). While the paper is wet, drop in colors in their approximate position. Remember to use more pigment, as the paper is already wet and will dilute your colors. Continue to drop in paint and loosely define shapes until the paper starts to lose its shine, then STOP.

Let this underpainting dry completely (use the hairdryer if you wish). Then use glazing and negative painting to pull out some shapes and define some hard edges. (image below)



These three images show some of the steps in my painting of the still life setup shown above. Once the wet-in-wet underpainting (top image) was dry, I continued to glaze color, both positively and negatively to refine some shapes, and define some edges, leaving some very soft. The image at left shows some positive shape glazing (the pears, bottom of the golden yellow saucer, and a couple of the red flower blossoms.) In the bottom image, you see a closeup of some of the areas where I used negative painting to pull out some stems and bottom edges of flowers and create leaf shapes.

If you're used to painting everything with a hard, defined edge, this approach can "loosen up" your paintings.





Cyclamen and Pears, watercolor on paper by Ellen A. Fountain, © 2007, image 15 x 11 inches, private collection.

Not defining every single edge of every shape leaves something for the viewer to complete. I like the variety of soft and hard, intense color and softer, less vibrant hues. Finally, the placement of the pinks and reds form a triad, pulling your eye around the composition.