

# Mixed Media Watercolor

## Week 3

### Watercolor on Gessoed Paper

Watercolor on gessoed paper behaves quite differently than it does on watercolor paper. Acrylic gesso is a ground typically used to seal canvas in preparation for painting with acrylics or oils. When used on paper, it effectively seals the paper surface so that the watercolor can no longer penetrate the paper fibers. Instead, the pigments “stain” the gesso, puddle on the surface creating interesting paint qualities, and emphasize any texturing that has been done to the gesso before it dried.

The ability to texture the ground affords the artist a wide range of possibilities for imagery. You can press almost anything into gesso and when it's removed it will leave an imprint behind.

You can begin with a specific idea or subject in mind, and texture the gesso to complement and reinforce your idea, or you can randomly texture the surface just to give it visual interest as the paint is applied. Both of the examples shown here began with a subject in mind and the gesso was used to help define and enrich the subject matter. In the example of the yucca (below, left), I selectively applied and textured the gesso, leaving some parts of the paper exposed. When you leave some paper un-gessoed, it will accept paint normally, allowing it to be much more intensely saturated. Keep this in mind for your main area of focus/interest. Harriet Kasinski's piece is gessoed over the entire paper surface.



*Bird's Nest by Harriet Kazinski  
watercolor on gessoed board, image 20" x 15"*

Because the paper surface is sealed by the gesso, you can stain and wipe back (to white or nearly white gesso) many times until you get the look you want. Different pigments will stain the gesso in varying degrees, so you will have to do some experimenting.

Exercises for practice:

You will need these materials:

- 140lb watercolor paper
- a small bottle of acrylic gesso (Liquitex makes an 8oz. bottle, available through arts & crafts stores).
- tools for texturing (sticks, wire or nails, combs, pieces of matboard, leaves, fabric, bubble or

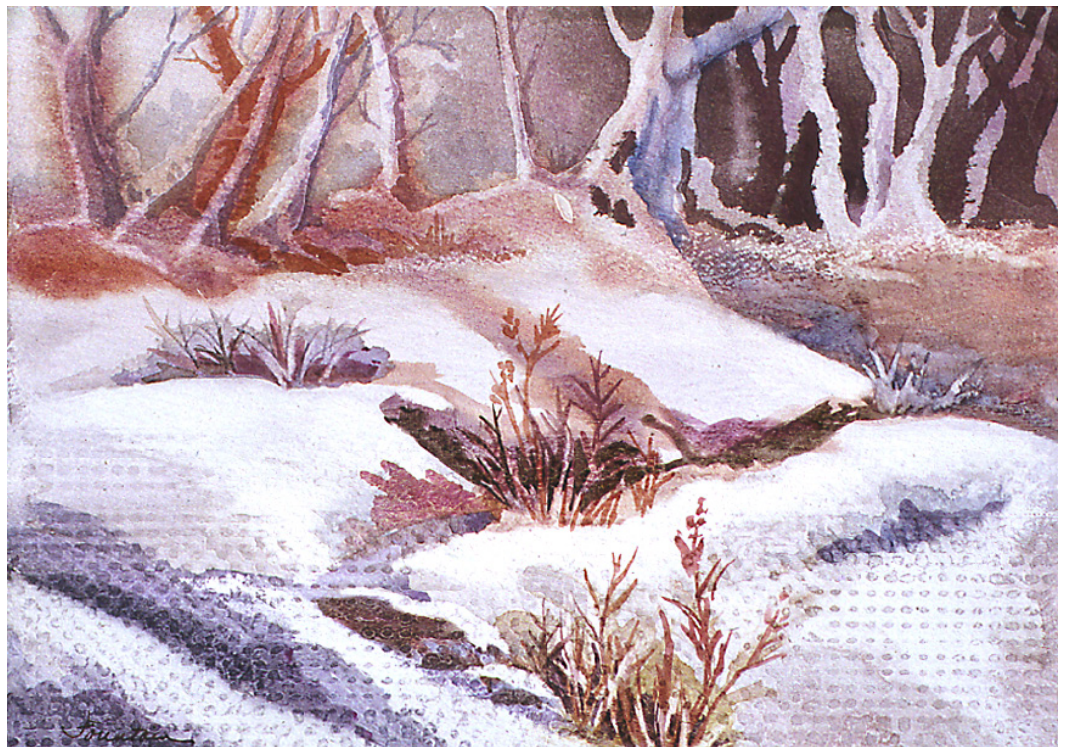
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plastic wrap, pieces of sponge, etc. - anything with  
*Watercolor on Gessoed Paper*

texture or that you can use to create texture will work.

- a plastic garbage bag spread out to put your gessoed papers on while they dry
- disposable plastic gloves if you don't want to get gesso all over your hands
- disposable picnic plate (for the gesso).

Prepare two small (eighth sheet or quarter sheet) sample pieces of watercolor paper, one where the entire surface is gessoed/textured randomly, and one where you have an idea in mind and gesso/texture selective parts of the paper. Let the gesso dry (you can use a hairdryer to speed up the process) and then paint the samples.



*"First Snow", watercolor on gessoed and textured paper; by Ellen Fountain. 11" x 15" image.*

*I put gesso all over the surface of this paper, thinner at the top and more thickly at the bottom. I pressed a paper towel into the gesso in the bottom area, and scraped in some weeds and grass, then let the gesso dry. I then used negative and positive painting with watercolor to pull out the tree shapes, and shadow areas that form the snow banks. A little linear brushwork finished up the weeds and grass.*