
Watercolor Painting in the Garden with Yao Cheng

Chapter 1 - Watercolor Painting in the Garden

Overview

(playful music) - We're out in Golden Gate Park today and I encourage you, whenever the weather is nice, to go outdoors and take your watercolor skills outside and try painting from real life. Painting outdoors requires you to stay looser, more abstract. Being more in the moment with your subject matters. If this is something you don't feel totally comfortable with because you're new to painting with watercolor or new to painting in general, I encourage you to take my Intro to Watercolor class first to get some more tools and techniques of how to paint under your belt before you venture outside. We'll paint a few different environments. One where we're just focusing on one tree or one element to build up on some skills. And then we're going to be doing some landscape overview paintings. And finally, we'll do a profile. Being able to go outside and paint is a great opportunity to be fully immersed in your environment where you get to feel the wind, the breeze, the smells of the flowers, and hear all the birds chirping. All of that really feeds and informs the painting that you're creating. So that's what I love about being able to go outdoors.

Materials

- As far as supplies go, you don't need very much. I like to travel light. But a few essential things. One is a watercolor sketchbook. This one has a pretty nice size weight. It's 140 pounds. It's nice to have a thick watercolor paper when you're outside just because the wind won't be flopping it around and I like a spiral-bound sketchbook because it lies flat and I can tear out pages as I go. For my palette, I have the same one that I always use starting with the purple, this is a violet, permanent magenta, this one, these two are both opera rose. Going down to the reds, these two are scarlet lake. These are all Winsor Newton professional grade pigments. This is an orange, a yellow deep, a Winsor yellow, lemon yellow. Here are some browns here. This is a burnt umber and a sienna. This is a Hooker's green, permanent sap green, this is a turquoise cobalt, a manganese blue, ultramarine blue, and then a black. The other important thing to keep in mind is to have a foldable palette with you. That way it's travel friendly, you can open and close it and the colors that I have are the go-to colors for myself, but you can use any basic color set that you want. These are just the ones that I'm comfortable with and I may not even necessarily use all of them for this class. This is my collection of brushes that I use for everything, but for this class I will probably only use a couple. Here is a Princeton Art and Brush Neptune. It is in a size eight round. This is the Velvet Touch series in a size four and a size 10 round and then my favorite series of theirs is the 4050R. This is a size six and 16 round. The other supplies you'll need is a jar of water, I like a plastic jar with a lid because it's light and it's transportable, some paper towels and a chair and a little table if you have it. If not, you can always sit on a bench or even on the ground. Really like whatever's available works great. If it's super sunny outside, you probably will also want to have a hat and a pair of sunglasses.

Landscape Paintings

Tree Study No 1

- To start off, let's choose one or two trees to paint. We're gonna single them out, study them,

before we move on to a more complex landscape. So where I'm sitting, I'm thinking something tall like this tall eucalyptus tree right here. And then a bushier, shorter one for variety, and I can get a sense of scale and different types of textures that I'll be using. Starting with the trunk of the tree. Now notice how I don't sketch with pencil beforehand. If you're more comfortable with that, definitely go for it. The reason why I don't is because I like to improvise as I go, and be surprised by what I'm painting. It often informs me of what I wanna paint next, or what I'm painting at the time. This is a size 16. I like this one because it has a really pointy tip. It allows me to create really detailed work, or do branches like I'm doing right now. But I can also press down quite a bit and get fatty, or wider leaves. Using a permanent sap green here. I'm intentionally not focusing on details too much. I'm more concerned about the overall shape of the tree. So because we're out in the elements, if you will, the drying time is a lot faster. So one, if you want all the blends to happen, you'll need to move at a faster rate. Or you can use it to your advantage and start layering with it. The other thing that I'm doing is I'm constantly looking back at my subject. I'm picking out certain, maybe it's an area of the foliage that I wanna focus on. I'm not taking it, I'm not trying to get the photorealistic aspect of it, because again, everything is moving. There's breeze going through, so I can't focus completely on just one area. But I am constantly looking back for reference. I'm dabbing lightly in some areas, particularly towards the outer part of the tree because that's where it fades more in the background, so I get a little more perspective. This tree in particular have a lot of clusters in certain areas, so I'm trying to get that characteristic. I actually love painting outside also, because it's a very abstract way of depicting nature. Because it forces you to not be able to focus on details so much. You can be super gestural. Some leaves are behind and some leaves are in front. I'm keeping that in mind. Can also make it up. Use your artistic license. I'm painting this one as a study, so gonna move pretty quickly here. It's just to get an idea of the types of strokes I'll be using, how heavy I wanna press with my brush, the overall shape of the tree, the lighting that I'm working with. So don't feel like you have to dwell too much on any one piece. Adding just a little bit of detail in the trunk. Perhaps a little bit of foliage. The brown that I picked up was a burnt umber. Adding some foliage at the bottom just for reference. Oh. Can work with that. Not a problem. You can use your brush strokes to depict the different types of foliage. Seems like what I'm looking at in the back, there's some that are longer and thinner, not as bushy. Alright, let's move on to the next one.

Tree Study No 2

- Let's move on to another single tree where the shape is a little bit different, the leaves are a little bit bushier, and let's do a little bit more of a study before we move on to an actual landscape. I'll be looking at this tree here. I like the shape of it. It's rounder. It's got a lot of foliage. And the foliage themselves have some light greens with some dark greens, so I think there's a lot of texture to play with here. Picking up my sienna for a super dark trunk. I know even though I can't always see it, I know that there's branches behind. So I'm gonna create a few really quickly. Partly for reference for me, but partly so you can see it in the actual painting. Moving really quickly here because I want some of the leaves to blend with the branches. These leaves seem to have little bit of a droop, so I'm using more of the side of my brush. This is the permanent sap green here. Gonna pick up some lemon yellow to get some highlights that are showing up. Maybe a little more lemon yellow. Keeping your sketchbook flat, because you don't want the colors to move around in a way that you don't want. Now I'm using the Hooker's green with brown to get some of the dark areas. So it's really windy outside and my page flipped, and it caused this trickle of green that I probably don't want. But that's fine as long as it's wet. I'm gonna use a clean brush, dip it in water, and I'm just gonna

scrub it away with a clean brush with tons of water. Make sure you can really be aggressive with this, especially if you're using a nice thickness and quality of paper. You can really get into the tooth of the paper. See how that just disappeared? It's magic. Alright, going back to the dark greens. With Hooker's green and a little bit of burnt sienna, I'm mapping out where the darkest areas are and where the lightest areas are first. Gives me a sense of the range of colors that I'll be working with. It's my way of planning, because I don't sketch ahead of time. So. Really quickly, very broadly using the same type of strokes on the side of my brush. Woops. Going back to more of a medium green now with the sap green. Maybe a little bit darker. I want to eventually vary how the size of the strokes I'm making. So as I move to the outer areas, I'm gonna be making smaller strokes. Again, it's to depict that these are further away. Going back with my sienna, adding in a few more branches here and there. Alright. Finishing this off with some grass at the bottom. Again, for reference. Now you don't have to do this. You can leave it where it is now. I like to add a little bit so it's not like it's just floating somewhere. It grounds it a little bit more. Also grass is just really fun to paint, because you can be, again, it's just a wash. And that's our second tree.

Landscapes with architecture

- All right, let's move onto a actual landscape now. So, a few things that we should keep in mind: one is that we're not gonna paint everything like we did with the single trees. So we first need to, because we're not sketching ahead of time, we just need to do some planning in our head. I like to pick out one focus point that I know I'm really inspired by and excited to paint, and that will be my main focus point. So we're gonna create a little bit of a hierarchy of what we're gonna paint. We're gonna also be thinking in terms of the hierarchy, in terms of thinking about what's in the foreground versus what's in the background. From where I'm sitting, I'm most interested in capturing the silver bluish looking tree that's kind of hanging down like a willow tree. So that's gonna be my main focus. I also love that there's a lot of variety happening here in terms of height and also color. So I know there's a couple in the front, like this tree with the picnic tables underneath that I want to definitely be in the foreground. I know I want a little bit of the grass, but I also want a little bit of the few bushes in the front but also a couple of the taller trees in the back for reference and for more of a dimensional piece. I know that's a lot information, but as we paint through it, you'll be able to refine of what you actually want to focus on more. But that's the general idea of what I want to create. I like to always start with the focal point. We're starting with the silvery tree first, leaving a little bit of space at the bottom for grass that I will be painting later. This is the sienna. Brown. Wanna get this arc of the tree. It's beautiful character of this particular tree. Rinsing out my brush. So depending on where your focal point is, I encourage you to start there, so that could be in your foreground or it could be in your background. For me, it's in my foreground, so that's where I'm beginning. So this tree has a little bit of blue. It's creating this silver, it's like a little bit purpley blue. It's gonna be interesting. Whoop, page flip. That's okay. We'll just dab that away. Oh, pretty. I like that. I like that it has a fall to it, so, the drapiness is really pretty. Adding a little bit of purple, not too much. But just a little bit of warmth. Going back with the branches in a burnt amber. Whoa, you guys, this is so pretty. Getting very excited. Okay, so using a permanent sap green, now let's get some of the green leaves in there. I'll use a darker green to get where the darker tones are gonna be. I know I'm moving really quickly here, but if you feel more comfortable going at a slower pace, definitely do so. I just am more fluent in painting this way, so I'm able to go at a faster pace. Using the very tip of my brush to get the more detail areas. It's definitely challenging, but it's a good challenge that everything is moving and I can't focus on any one area. It's a good way to build your skills, your skill

level and also your confidence in creating your piece because you are having to make it up as you go and... Adding a little bit of the permanent magenta now to my brush just to bring in a little bit of warmth, just ever so slightly. (dog barks) Just like little hints of it in places. Not too much. Back with the... Sepia and the lighter brown. Just for a few more branches here and there. So as you can see, I got a little too excited about this tree, so it's taking up a lot of the space that I originally had planned out for other pieces that I wanted to capture, but that's perfectly okay. I'll still be able to add in the shorter bushes out in front. You know, and I can move things around. So this may not be as close to the tree as it is in real life but it doesn't really matter. Cuz no one's going to be looking back at this. And that's not really the point anyway. This is your interpretation. There's a red one that's really pretty behind this tree. I'll just get a little bit of that. I can still grab this taller tree up here, but I might, see now, I'm making judgment calls, do I want another tree, and how tall do I wanna make it? So I probably want a shorter tree now, just for some height differentiation and create more visual interest. Going to the permanent sap green and a little bit of lemon yellow. This is a size 16. I'm only using one brush here, so I'm going very quickly, so it's just easier to just stick with one. I actually like how gestural this one is, so I might not add as much detail as I would in other ones. And then, balancing that out on the left side, because we're really thinking about composition here. Add one in the very back. Also this gives a little bit of a height differentiation. I always feel like Bob Ross, I always hear him. Channeling Bob Ross when I'm painting outdoors or painting landscapes. But this one is gonna be a darker tree. A lot of the sepia in the hooker's green. These leaves are much more horizontal, so I'm just getting that characteristic. Just one darker guy for contrast. And a super fast broad stroke of grass. A little bit of the light brown. So I chose to leave some stuff out because I didn't wanna lose too much of what I have already. I wanted a little bit of space so that each piece can breathe on its own. For example, I only painted a couple of the bushes, not as many as what I actually see in real life, because I didn't wanna overwhelm what is happening already and lose the things that I feel really strongly about in this piece. Because we paint these really quickly, feel free to make multiple versions and those could be your sketches. Feel free to combine different motifs together like different trees, put them together, take them apart, leaving some stuff out, putting other things in. Or even come back during different times of the day when the lighting has changed, that can also inform your work. Painting outside is a great way to hone your skills, so keep it loose, keep it simple, don't overthink it, cuz you can always make more than one version. And just have fun and enjoy being in nature.

Floral Studies

Painting in the rose garden

- I'm sitting in a rose garden and this cluster of roses is really great because not only do we have a variety of colors to play with but we also have a lot of different heights that will make our painting really interesting. I'm choosing to paint what's in front of me first. So that's going to be the focus of my piece. And I might add a couple of the tall trees in the background just for reference and perspective. And I will be using two brushes for this piece. Both of them are rounds in a size 16 and a size six. Mixing my sap green with the hooker's green. A little bit of brown. Being really quick with my brushstrokes. Painting some roses now. I'm drawing on memory of roses that I painted before for shape as well as looking at what's right in front of me. Really trying to focus on the height differentiation and paying attention that some of these shorter roses that I see in front of me, I'm

going to make them much closer together. So that they differentiate from the taller ones in the middle. Going back and adding in some stems. Those yellow marigolds in front of me... I think they're called marigolds. Yellow, orange, they're really pretty. I want to make sure I get some of those in there. I feel like whenever I'm painting outdoors it's a lot more impressionistic just because again it's more abstract, more fluid more expressive. It really is about taking your own take on what's in front of you and how you're interpreting what you're seeing. Adding some of the turquoise. Few last-minute leave details that are smaller again for perspective. A few small leaves. That's what I'm doing right now for perspective. Alright. Zooming out a little bit and let's get some of the background trees. Going to my number 16 brush. Picking up a little bit of black with my brown. Just get some tree trunks in there. Want this actually kind of light and washed out because I don't want it to be the focal point. It's just... It's just enough detail to... For people understand what's going on but it's not going to take away. I don't want to take away from this lovely bush of roses that we've created. Some of the colors are going to be a little bit softer, a little bit more washed out. Putting in a few last branches, maybe just the last cluster of leaves right there. Now I want to bridge the two so add a little bit of grass in between. Nothing really crazy again because it's just for background. Maybe a little bit of texture to suggest grass. I'm going to let this dry and enjoy this lovely afternoon view.

Close up flower study

- Now we're gonna go as close as possible and study two individual roses and try and paint all the petals on the roses. I'll be working with one brush, the number 16 round. Since we're super close up, or up close, I wanna get the thorns. Details. These tips, these thorn tips are a little bit red. I wanna get that color in there. I'm painting this rose from the center out, using auport rose, and then fading it out to a scarlet lake for the outer petals. I'll blend with water as I go to lighten the petals. I'm pressing my brush down for thicker strokes and being super light with the tip for thinner strokes. Adding in some larger leaves, as well as smaller leaves. I'm referencing some but not always, like these leaves were added, by myself, not looking at anything, just for compositional purposes. Let's create one bud. Actually with our number six. Painting outside is actually how I first learned watercolor and I remember feeling a little uncomfortable, because you're in the elements, and there's so many variables, but I feel like the more that you practice, the more that you go outside and try it for yourself, the better you will become. And it really does inform you and make you a much better artist in the end.