Watercolor Silhouette with Christine Schmidt

Chapter 1 - Introduction
Overview
I love messing around with watercolor. There aren't any right or wrong answers. It's just a good time to experiment. Today I'm going to show you how to use some watercolor techniques to make colored sheets. And we're going to take those sheets and make a fail-proof silhouette from a photo. And you're going to customize it with a little traceable alphabet.

Chapter 2 - Materials
Materials
Alright. Let's dive in. I'm gonna go over the materials that you need for this project. So we're going to make an abstract watercolor sheet. So we'll need some 11 by 15 watercolor paper. This is just 90 pound, student grade, cold pressed paper. Nothing fancy. Tracing paper, pencil, a photo. I'll talk more about that a little bit later. A downloadable template, cutting mat, X-ACTO knife, paper towel, some water, assorted brushes, also a pallet knife, and some inks. So we've got watercolor paint, wash, and acrylic. So you could use a combination of those or just one of them. Whatever you like. Whatever you got on hand. So this is a student grade watercolor paint. And the pigment isn't as rich, so oftentimes if I'm using these, I'll punch up the colors with some bright acrylics.

Chapter 3 - Create Watercolor
Watercolor
We are going to do a lot of different techniques on one sheet to kind of build up texture and to give it good dimension. So I'm going to pour a little bit of water into my palette. You're going to start with a wash. I'm going to add a little acrylic to this, kind of mix it up. I'm using a stencil brush. I don't really have a lot of fancy watercolor brushes, but this does just fine. So we want a lot of wet paint on there. And I'm going to take my paper towel and kind of go around it here. So now I have a good layer on there, a good place to start. I want to add some more of this blue and I'm really going to take advantage of these bristles here to give it a little texture. So this is called dry brushing. So we're seeing different gradients here. Just have fun, play around. All right, I think I've had it with the blue. Actually, I'm going to take a little bit of this down. I'm just using my paper towel to kind of smudge those dry brush strokes. I just want lot of different textures on there. I think I want to go for a green. So I'm actually going to take a little bit of blue, just darker, and let's see, I only have watercolor yellow. It's OK to mix and match these guys. Gouache is basically just opaque watercolor ink and they both mix in water, so we're good. I'm mixing a green here. Because our sheet is blue I kind of wanted a color that was related to blue. If I was going to do maybe orange or something like that it would just turn to brown, which I'm not really in to. So I didn't totally mix all the blue in there so you can see these little streaks, and I actually really dig that. But I'm going to take some of this down a little bit. So I'm just going to dab. I think I need a little pink. Doing a little boy's silhouette, but I think there are no rules. So I'm just going to use my knife here to make different marks. I'm using the acrylic. And I like how it's popping on this kind of neutral surface. So I'm kind of smearing it to get different looks here. Hmm, yeah, I like that. Yo know, the paper is white and we covered it up so I'm going to add a little bit of white gouache in there. And my palette knife is dirty and my brushes are dirty, so whatever, I'm just going to use my fingers. So you could wait for these layers to

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dry if you like, but I just go at it. I'm liking the white, but it needs something. I'm going to clean up this brush and I'm going to use some of the blue gouache that we mixed for the green to do a paint splatter. I'm just taking my stencil brush and I'm just flicking the bristles of the loaded brush. It get's a little messy so don't wear your ball gown. OK, I think that's a wrap. We just need for this baby to dry and then we'll get to cutting out the silhouette.

Chapter 4 - Create Silhouette

Trace silhouette

For the silhouette we need a photo. This is my pal [? Aero. ?] He's adorable. This is really just a camera phone pic. You can see he's standing in front of a white background. You just need a contrasting background. He's facing forward, so we can see his crisp little profile there. And the photo is taken at eye level, which is very important. Once you have your photo taken you just want to print it out to whatever size you like. I printed this out on 8 1/2 by 11 paper. My tracing paper is actually 9 by 12. So it's a little bit bigger. We're going to start slowly following his features there. And you really need to be accurate. So take your time. Sometimes when I've done silhouettes of myself I kind of like shave off a double chin or take my nose down a little bit, whatever I'm feeling insecure about that day. But you really need accuracy. Because otherwise it just doesn't look like you. And his hair is such an interesting little texture. I'm going to try and capture it. It's really a distinctive feature of this little guy. In drawing 101 they tell you draw what you actually see not what you think you see. It's important to keep that in mind when you're doing something like this. Because otherwise you would just think, oh round head. But there are actually so many more contours. Mom sent this photo to me right after he got a haircut. So it's super spiky. I'm going to go down his neck a little bit. And I'm going to give him a little swoop here. I think it's nice to have a little bit of the shape down here to kind of counteract the giant head-ness of this portion. OK, this little handsome gent is named [? Aero, ?] so I'm going to add an A. This is the template that you download from the website. I'm going to lay my tracing paper over the template. And I'm going to move around and see exactly where I like this A. I think I like it kind of near the back of his head. And I'm going to trace the A shape. I cut out a whole alphabet with the numbers for you guys. And you'll see there aren't any negative space in the A. So the shape is complete. I traced these at the same time. So we transfer them all at once. You can do initials, or names, anything you like. You could also enlarge or shrink down this template to any size that you like. Now we're ready to transfer this to our dried watercolor sheet.

Transfer silhouette

Before we transfer our silhouette, let's look at these other pages I've made. With the same color palette, you can actually get a lot of different looks. These are a mixture of watercolor with a bright acrylic on top. Here is the sheet we just made. This is acrylic with some dry brush, and this is a series of washes with watercolor. If your paper is really bendy, you can actually iron it. Or you could dry it between two books. You could wet it again and dry it so it would be flat. I'm just going to look at my silhouette on these different sheets. Kind of like an audition. This is the one-- you know what? Let's actually go with this one. And I'm just going to rotate it to kind of see where I would like the silhouette to lay. We're actually going to transfer it on the opposite side, but I'm going to keep this orientation. It was just about like that. And so the graphite from the tracing paper is face down touching the watercolor paper. So I'm just going to take the side of my thumbnail and rub it to transfer the graphite from the tracing paper to the back of the watercolor paper. If you have a bone

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folder, you could use that. But I think this works just fine. It's nice to have heavy pencil marks so there's more graphite to transfer. Make sure you go over your letter here. And you always want to keep one hand on the sheet so it stabilizes the tracing paper and it's not moving around, because we need a very accurate silhouette here. I'm just going to take a peek to make sure it's transferring. Yep, we're good there. Slowly moving around. You could also use the eraser end of a pencil for the pressure. OK. We are good. I'm going to pick up the other side just to make sure. We are good. If your pencil marks are too light, and they aren't transferring, just go over them again with pencil. Lay it back down and align it. A pretty fail proof method, here. OK. We are good. And now we are ready to cut out the silhouette.

Cut silhouette

Before you start cutting, you really need to make sure you got a fresh blade in there. A dull blade will drive you crazy. And it'll actually tear the paper. So I've laid this on the cutting mat. If you don't have a cutting mat, you could actually just use the back of a sketch book, that chip board. Just don't do it on your nice table. You can really start anywhere. I'm just going start on the top of the head here. Making some tiny cuts. My friend said that most silhouettes and cameos have a right facing profile because most stone carvers or silhouette artists are right handed. And it's easier to carve on the side that's closer to you. There we go. The hair's got some bangs now. Now, when you want to make curved lines, sometimes it's easier to move your body. And sometimes it's just easier to move the page. I'm just going very slowly here. This is really the most important part. So I'm just taking my time. I'm rotating the sheet. Make sure your blade is straight. Don't want to move the blade around at different angles, because that will actually start to tear the paper. You could just as easily do this with colored construction paper. But I think the abstract watercolor adds a really interesting dimension. So watercolor paper is made of cotton. And that is good for two reasons. The cotton fibers are actually a little bit longer. So the paper is stronger than paper made from wood cellulose, like normal paper. And also cotton is naturally lignin free. And lignin is the acidic compounded that ages paper quickly. So this guy will last forever. Very cool. If you've got a girl, you could do a pony tail, or a guy, pony tail, bow in the hair. It could wear an interesting collar to kind of give interesting contours to the silhouette. A lot of flexibility there. OK. Now, I'm just going to go in where it didn't quite cut through. I'm going from this side. I had so many tiny cuts there, that I'm just going to clean these guys up a little bit. I don't want to rip the paper. Working slowly. Little trim there. Looks good. Now to cut out the letter. So I've cut this line already. And I don't want to tear the paper, so I'm holding this point. There we go. Boom. Let's see how he looks on white. I'm going to frame this for my friends who are the proud parents of this little guy. I'm just going to use some double sided tape, because it will be behind glass. You could also use a spray adhesive or PVA glue, which is acid free. But this works just fine. OK, this guy's ready for a frame. You can see these other silhouettes I made. This is my favorite. This is my daughter, Emmy. Her initials are E-J-G. And you can see I actually went right down to the line here. I couldn't do that with the A, because if I'd gone down to the line with the A, I would have lost this important little feature. And it would just look like a triangle. OK, here's me. I gave myself really nice eyelashes. But I opted for no name. Don't like people? Maybe you don't like babies. Maybe you like pets. Or are you could also do plants. You could do shoes. Anything that has an interesting silhouette that you covet, you should try it out. This is a really fun way to experiment. You can be really lose with the watercolor. And then you bring some structure into it by making this silhouette that will cherish for ages.

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