

# Course sample

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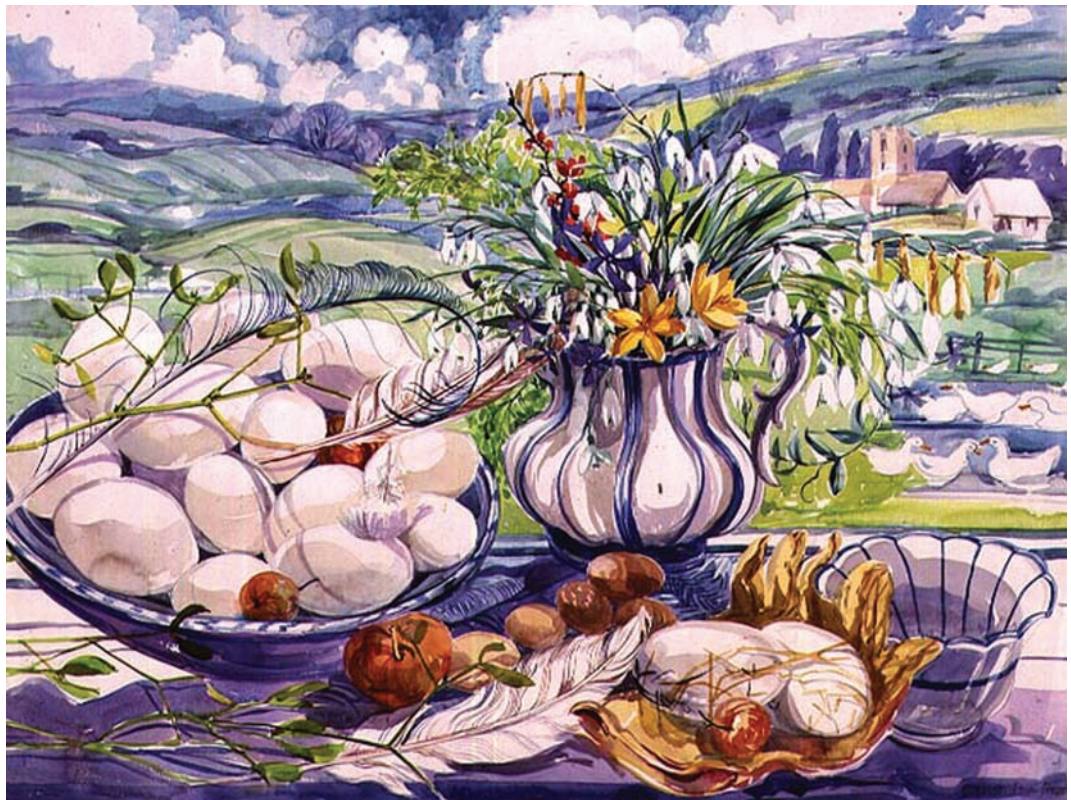
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# Painting 1

# Watercolour



## Level HE4 – 40 CATS

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Front cover  
**Duck Eggs and Spring** Elizabeth Jane Lloyd

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Times are given here as a guideline: you may want to spend a lot more. Your research and writing time to produce a study, time for reflecting on your learning and logging your learning are built into the guideline times below.

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# Introduction

Learning new skills in painting and drawing in any media requires time and practice. It is important to approach a new medium with an open mind and an experimental approach to techniques.

Watercolours have a special place in the development of British (especially landscape) painting as exemplified in the work of four artists Cotman, Cozens, Girtin and Turner. These artists are regarded by many as the greatest practitioners of watercolour painting and it follows that there is an especially English affection for the medium. Watercolours' attraction to both experienced and new artists often lies in their particular association with our immensely atmospheric landscape and the varied weather conditions we experience.

While sometimes considered limited or constricting, watercolours have great versatility and by their nature can create effects in just moments that can capture fleeting sights and experiences with both power and simplicity. Techniques and effects can be learned and certain problems avoided but the aim of this course is for you to develop your own individual means of expression and to avoid the pitfalls of 'rights and wrongs' in the often formulaic approach to watercolour adopted by many books, courses and teachers.

Watercolour has a great tradition and many fine artists for you to study and learn from. The history of watercolour is well worth exploring and a section of the Introductory Course Information booklet is devoted to it. You should explore this further in your own individual research. But try to keep an open mind about what you wish to achieve with this versatile, unique and fluid artists' medium.

**Time:** *You should spend at least 10 hours a week on this course, mostly on practical work. There are also references in the course to research (Research Points). These involve you in looking at paintings to inform your practical work, develop your judgement and your level of achievement as a painter. If you only have 10 spare hours per week, set aside one of those hours for research. If you spend this amount of time each week on the course you should finish it in about 10 months.*

## Course aims

This course will help you to:

- explore the different ways in which watercolours can be used and the effects they can create
- develop your visual awareness and ability to analyse and interpret what you see
- develop your ability to use tone and colour effectively
- develop your experimental capabilities and confidence in the use of watercolours
- increase your knowledge of the history of watercolour painting and significant artists who have used this medium.

By the end of the course you should be able to:

- show through sketchbook studies and completed paintings that you can use watercolours with skill and confidence
- demonstrate through your paintings that you can use colour and tone with skill and imagination and have a sound understanding of pictorial composition
- provide evidence, in your sketchbooks and completed paintings, of your ability to choose appropriate painting subjects, analyse them and select aspects which can be used to create effective paintings
- demonstrate in your sketchbooks and paintings an awareness of the ways in which watercolours can be combined with other materials
- show in sketchbooks and other drawings and studies, a wide range of visual ideas, stretching beyond those suggested in course projects
- show, both through your practical work and in written comments on it, that you are able to evaluate what you do and take appropriate action to remedy perceived problems
- provide evidence in your logbook of a developing knowledge of the history of drawing and painting, particularly watercolour painting of the twentieth century, and show an awareness of the variety of uses to which watercolour can be put.

Watercolour

Part one

Making a start



A page from the Moroccan sketchbook, Meknes Eugène Delacroix

In this part you will build your experience of handling watercolours in different ways and experimenting with other media alongside watercolour. You will be building a portfolio of your experiments, exercises and studies to help you keep an open mind about the possibilities of the medium and to help you to assess your progress at this early stage. While there is no assignment as such for this introductory section you can submit experiments that you feel especially interested in and a piece of work that reflects your progress so far. Your tutor will be able to give you useful informal feedback at this stage.

To start you need to learn to use the basic materials – brushes, paper and paint. Working with new materials poses a challenge to all artists and takes time and patience. Remember as you begin that everything you do will help to build up your knowledge and experience, even the mistakes are important stages in your learning about watercolours and how they behave.

Take time in between the projects to consider what happened during the process of painting and assess how the end result turned out. Write your thoughts in your learning log to record your progress and reflect on how you could improve your technique in the future. Look back at earlier work and assess your progress noting in your learning log any areas that require greater practice.

Try out the projects several times to make the most of your experience. You can try all sorts of things in your sketchbooks which may come in useful later on. Try new colours, unusual brushes, painting over collage or textured paper made from gesso or paste, for example. Be adventurous and explore what watercolours can offer you.



Still Life of Peaches and Figs Paul Cezanne

# Project 1 Mixing and applying watercolour

Before you embark on any further exercises it is worth getting familiar with mixing and handling watercolour. These initial exercises will help you to grasp some basics about loading the brush and controlling the way that you apply the paint.

**Materials:** *It is best to work on watercolour paper but if you have cheap sheets of light absorbent paper you should use this now. You will need a range of brushes but begin with size 6 – 10 and use a single colour each time.*

## Exercise: Loading the brush

In this exercise you will need to concentrate on two things – the mixing of the colour and the amount of paint to apply with the brush to achieve an even effect. These are two important skills in watercolour painting to learn.

Always add the paint (from your tubes or pans) to the water and not the other way round. This gives you control over the strength of the colour in the mixture and ensures it is evenly mixed. If you add water to the paint you cannot always tell how strong your colour will be when you start brushing it on your paper.

Make a small pool of water in your palette using your brush and add a small amount of your chosen colour to the water. Give it a good mix until the pigment has dissolved in the water. Continue to add paint, a little at a time, until you have the desired strength of colour you require. Test the mixture by painting a few patches on a scrap of watercolour paper. Spread the paint thinly to see how light or dark your mixture is. You should not make a puddle of paint but a smooth, thin layer which can dry quickly.

If your mixture is too pale when it dries continue adding paint to your mixture as above. If it is too dark you can dilute it with a little more water but be careful not to add too much at a time – a little goes a long way.

Once the colour is as you want it apply it in the following ways using a large watercolour brush (size 6 or larger):

- Load the brush so that it is dripping with paint. Try to paint a small even patch on your paper. What happens?
- Dry the brush and dip only the tip in the paint and attempt another small patch. Is this easier?
- Load your brush again but this time it should not drip but still hold its point. Paint a small even patch. How does this compare to the two previous attempts?

You should, with practice and time, be able to judge how much paint is on your brush and the effect it will give you.

Too much paint on your brush may result in flooding the painting and will take a long time to dry. This can be resolved if you respond quickly to correct the situation. All you need to do is lightly touch the paint puddle with the tip of a dry brush and allow the paint to soak up into the brush. **Don't** try to move the brush in the puddle – you will get a patchy layer. If the brush is full lift it off the page and dry it and return to the paint to soak up more of the paint. Continue as necessary.

Look at the areas of colour you have painted and assess what you have learned about the handling of watercolour. Make notes in your learning log.



Sunset J M W Turner

## Exercise: Fading tones

Put out one colour from a pan or tube and once again take the colour to the water pool that you've made with your brush. Now make simple marks across your sheet of paper (this could simply be a print of the brush mark). Begin by mixing the strongest deepest shade of your colour with the greatest concentration of pigment but beware of any solid paint in your brush marks. Gradually dilute the paint so that you achieve a graduated sequence of marks. Your sheet should show a gradual fading from the deepest and most saturated tones through to the faintest and most transparent stains.

Try this exercise several times and each time try to control the gradual fading with greater accuracy.

- What happens when the paint dries?
- Does a drier brush make fainter marks?
- Did you notice any progress in controlling the fade?
- At what stage do you need to add more water?

Make sure that you wash your brush carefully before continuing. **You must be meticulous with washing brushes and change your water frequently.** Single colours such as the yellows pollute very easily.

Repeat this exercise with a different contrasting colour. Do you notice any change in how the paint behaves? Some paints leave greater residues as they dry.

Once your exercise sheets have dried out, work over the top of the brush marks that you've made. Repeat the exercise overlapping on some of the dry marks. You could simply turn the paper around to help you focus on your new sequence of fading marks.

Notice the way in which you have achieved tonal variation and how the transparent stains combine to produce new shades of different colours.

Much of the skill involved in watercolour painting concerns both the controlled and accidental combining of transparent layers of colour and allowing the white paper ground to illuminate the colours and provide tonal contrast.

## Exercise: Random marks

In contrast to the last exercise you can make random marks and still assess the effects of tonal variation and colour mixing by layers.

Put down some newspaper to protect your table or floor– this is a messy exercise. You will need a large, at least an A3, sheet of paper.

Load your brush so that it is dripping with paint. Flick this across your paper a few times. Allow this to dry or use a hair dryer to speed things up. What do you notice?

With a thoroughly clean brush repeat the exercise with a contrasting colour. How does the colour mixing vary from the more controlled used of the brush in the previous exercise?

Once dry, using a large wash brush paint a faint but even wash of a third colour across half the sheet of splash marks. What do you notice about your increasingly complex mix of tones and shades of colour?

Less controlled application of watercolour can produce dynamic and exciting effects. Don't be afraid to experiment. Use any of these simple exercises and build on them, making notes as you progress in your learning log.



Blue Monday Dreaming Mark Ari