



CHAPTER ONE

GETTING STARTED

GATHERING MATERIALS

Box of Watercolors

Now that you're ready to begin the first thing you will need is your art supplies. A Suggested Material's List is included at the end of this chapter. Look it over before you go to the art store. See what you may already have or can substitute. If you determine this ahead of time, and know exactly what you want to buy, you won't make the mistake of just handing the list to the salesperson and ending up with either a very big bill or things you may not need immediately. When you do start purchasing your supplies, buy the best that you can afford within your budget. Don't get carried away buying all kinds of fancy equipment and supplies, it isn't necessary. Do what you can in order to get started. That's the important thing. Improvise if you have to. That's why some people choose to begin with a ready-

made inexpensive palette of cake watercolors. They find it less intimidating and using these palettes reminds them of painting as a child. If you would prefer to do that, just to give this process a try before you invest in a lot of supplies, I would recommend a small box of Prang Watercolors. It comes with an inexpensive brush which you could use temporarily, but only temporarily, because a good brush is essential. If you do choose the cake color palette, then for now, you can skip to the paragraph on watercolor paper.

Watercolor Pigments

Buy the best quality watercolor pigments you can afford. Once you've graduated from the watercolor cakes, pigments in tubes are preferred and they come in student grade and artist grade quality, the student grade being much less expensive. I started with student grade and eventually moved to artist grade and use several different brands depending on the colors. Student grade

is very good paint to begin with. Remember, tube colors can last a long time and go a long way as you only use a little bit each session. Choose the basic colors you like, and add more later when you wish to expand your color palette.

Check the permanence rating on the tubes and get the ones with the best ratings, so the colors won't fade. Shopping for new colors is fun, especially real bright colors, which, when mixed with other colors, can give you interesting variations and really make the colors snap. I use black and white very sparingly. I use white to make a pastel shade, but I never paint with white straight from the tube. Rarely will I use black straight from the tube, and then only a small bit to "gray" a color.

Choose colors you like. I rarely pick a color I don't like to paint with because I am very careful to get shades which resonate with me. There are lots and lots of shades of every color. Find the ones you like, ones that make you excited about painting. One student came to class with colors she had hurriedly picked up the night before. But when she got to class and began painting with them, she couldn't stand the shades she had picked. That made it hard for her to enjoy painting. It taught me a lesson, too. Buy colors which express who you are!

Watercolor Palette

If you use tube pigments you'll need a palette for the paint. I use a small, portable, rectangular, plastic white palette with plenty of small wells for pigment and bigger spaces for mixing. It has a hinged lid so that I can close it and carry it to class in my art box. You will be squeezing the tube paint into the small wells. After your painting session don't wash away this pigment, allow it to dry and save it for the next session. The dry paint is activated by simply adding a drop or two of water to it. The palette should also have larger spaces for mixing colors, and these spaces are cleaned up after your painting session.

Brushes

Just to get started you can begin with only one brush, the size 6 round. When you find you need a smaller brush for details, get a size 2 round. For bigger washes add a size 12 round. A good, sturdy synthetic brush for beginners is the Winsor Newton Series 233. I have used these brushes myself as I find I wear out expensive natural brushes too quickly in this particular kind of work. Don't skimp on brushes. A good brush is vital. Make sure the brush is called a watercolor brush, has a short handle and the bristles come to a point when wet (try it out with water in the store.) Good brushes will have a seamless ferrel (the part that holds the bristles.) Take good care of your brushes so they will last. *Don't leave them sitting in water.* Wash them after each session with a little mild soap and water. When you store them, bring the bristles to a point to dry, so they won't bend.

Watercolor Paper

Good paper is also essential. Don't skimp here either. The Strathmore 300 or 400 Series, 11"x15," is the best inexpensive pad I've found. I don't recommend any lighter weight paper than this 130 or 140 lb as it wrinkles and buckles too much. When I paint larger mandalas than this size, I buy large sheets of Arches watercolor paper, either cold pressed or hot pressed (smooth), and cut them down to the size I want. (Many of my mandalas are 15"x15".) But, I have used lots of the Strathmore 140 lb watercolor pads, painting with the paper removed from the pad. (Gummed binding is easier to remove from the pad than wire binding.) There is one exception to this. When on a trip or vacation I take along a smaller wire-bound 9"x12" Strathmore watercolor pad. I leave the paper in the pad (which creates a hard surface for me to work on) and paint smaller mandalas. These have become journals of the inner experiences of my travels and a way to bring the energy home.

Other Supplies

The other supplies are self-explanatory. You will want a hard enough pencil so that if you draw, the lines are light enough to erase, should you make a “mistake,” and also light enough not to show too much under the watercolor washes. The Magic Rub eraser is great for that and does not damage the watercolor paper if erasing is done lightly. The gold and silver inks or felt pens are fun to have to play with, and everyone seems to love using the gold ink in their mandalas. Add other supplies you find interesting and fun.

THE WATERCOLOR WASHES

Let’s get started by practicing four basic watercolor washes. And the important word here is PRACTICE. We are only playing and practicing

right now. Get out all of your supplies. Fill your water jar with clean water. Grab a couple of paper towels. Lay out a sheet of watercolor paper—if it’s in a pad, tear it out. Activate your dry watercolors by adding a drop or two of water to each color. If you are using tube watercolors, squeeze out a blob of paint of each color into your palette wells. I start with white at one end, black at the other and graduate the colors in between from light to dark. Draw a circle in the center of your paper with your compass. (We’ll use this circle after we practice the washes.) We will be practicing the four washes around the circle, one along each side of the paper, so give yourself enough room outside of the circle. See the *Diagram of Four Watercolor Washes* below which show examples of the four basic washes.

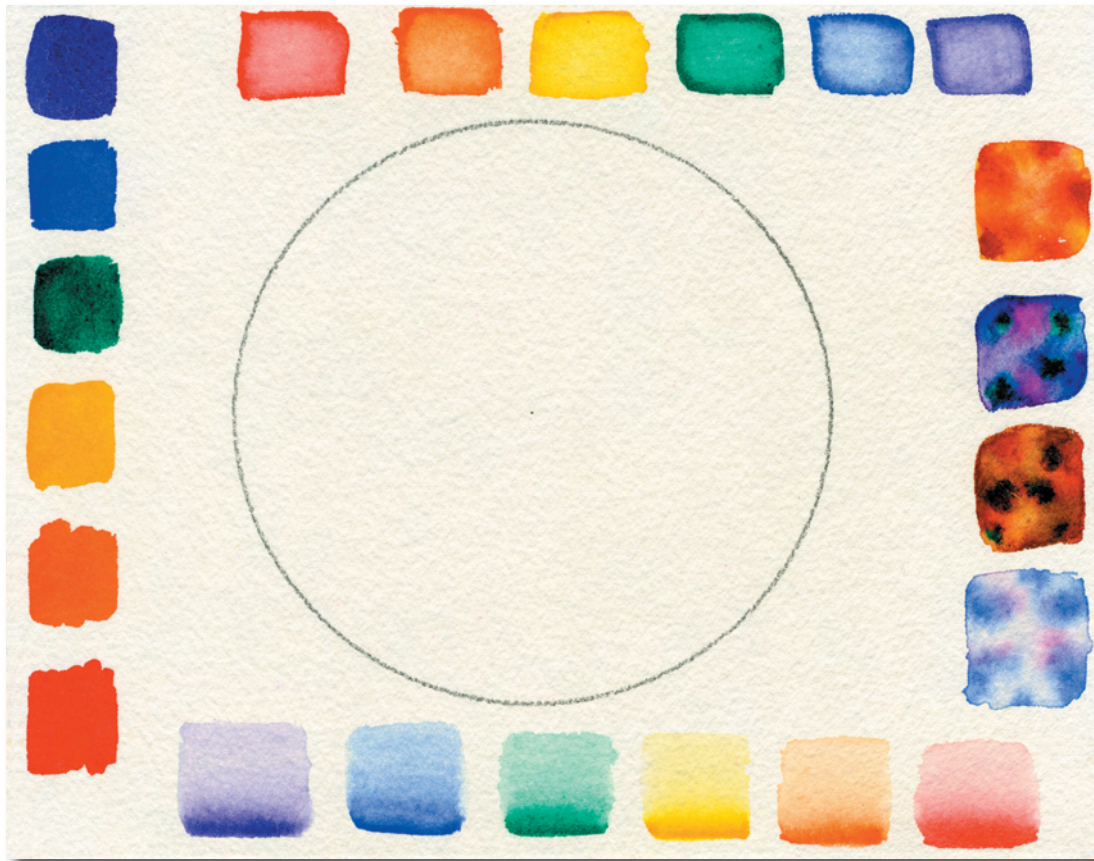


Diagram of Four Watercolor Washes (clockwise from the top): Lift, Irregular, Gradated, and Flat

Flat Wash

We'll practice "flat" washes first. A "wash" is a thin, watery layer of paint applied with even, continuous strokes. We're going to make a square practice wash of each color across the top of your paper. I usually start with red and paint colors in the order they appear in a rainbow. Dampen your brush in the water, and lift a bit of red pigment from the paint well to a mixing space. Add a little bit of water and mix the paint and water until you have a nice even mix of red pigment and water—neither too thick nor thin. This will take time and practice for you to get the feel of this.

At the top left of the paper make a square about an inch wide or so, by moving the brush at an angle horizontally back and forth continuously until it makes a smooth, even square wash. See the diagram on the previous page. The idea is to get a flat, even surface. The more you go over it, the more unwanted streaks and spots will occur. Remember this is a practice. Streaks and spots are normal for watercolor, so don't panic if they happen. So, now practice a square wash with each of your other five basic colors—orange, yellow, green, blue and violet. If you want to be more creative with this, make other shapes, and use other colors. There are no rules here, so just go ahead, get started and have fun. Wash your brush out in your water jar after each color you use. When your water turns brown get clean water! Clean water is essential.

*Lift*

Let's practice the "lift" technique with a row of squares along a different side of your paper. Rotate your paper so you are working along the top. In the *Diagram of Four Watercolor Washes* the lift squares are along the top side of the paper. Start by making a flat wash as you did with the previous wash. This time, however, after making

the wash, immediately rinse the color from your brush in your jar of water, leaving your brush with a small amount of water in it. In the middle of the flat wash which you just laid down, drop the water from your brush. Now dry your brush by dabbing it on a piece of paper towel. Go back and lift the color out of the middle of the flat wash where you dropped the water with your brush. Pick up the watery paint with the brush, wiping it on the paper towel. Do this over and over until you've lifted an area out of the middle of the square. It will be lighter than the surrounding darker color. If you wanted to do this even more quickly, dab the middle of your flat wash square lightly with a soft tissue. This should lift the color out immediately. What you have created with a lift is the effect of light coming through your square. Practice with all your colors as shown.

*Gradated Wash*

Rotate your paper again so that you are working along the top side. With a clean brush full of a little water, let's practice the "gradated wash." In the diagram this wash is along the bottom of the paper. In this row of washes, paint a square that is just clear water, but not too much water. Then, get some color in your brush and drag the brush along the top of the wet square in a line. Quickly wash the pigment out your brush. With a clean and slightly damp brush, touch the edge of the stroke you've just made and draw the color down the wet surface by moving the brush back and forth horizontally across the wet square. What you should have is an area of color which graduates or "gradates" from dark to light, from top to bottom. This takes a lot of practice and "feel" for how much water and pigment to use. Be patient with yourself. Practice with your other colors. This wash is called a "wet-on-wet" gradated wash because you wet your paper first. It can also be done on dry paper. Apply a line of color at the top of a dry square. Wash

the pigment from your brush. Now drag down, or stroke back and forth, a wash of color by touching the edge of the stroke you just applied, with your clean, damp brush. Use whichever wash works best for you. I'm a big fan of wet-on-wet washes, they just seem to work best for me.

Irregular Wash



Again, turn your paper so you are working along the top side. On the fourth side of your paper, let's try my favorite, the "irregular" wash. This is also a wet-on-wet technique. Start as you did with the wet-on-wet gradated wash, by making a square wet wash with no pigment. While the square is still wet, drop any color of pigment on it with your brush, wherever you wish, and let the color run or flow randomly. Rinse the first color out of your brush and get a different color on your brush. Dot that color on another area of the wet square, letting that color run or "bleed" into the first color. Dot another color or colors into the square if you want. Try picking your paper up and tilting it so the colors run together. Or, drip a small drop of clear water onto the square making the colors run, bleed or "puddle" even more. I can sit and play with wet-on-wet areas in my paintings almost endlessly, adding more pigment, then water, then lifting out color in other areas, and repeating it all again. It is delicate though, and you have to learn to get a feel for how much, or how little, water and pigment to use. Don't "scrub" on it, or you'll have a mess. Although, "messes" are a good way to learn and experiment, so drip

away. There are no mistakes. If you add too many colors together you will get brown, and it can look muddy. That seems to be a common fear. Notice what gives you mud, and then use it when you need mud! Otherwise, use less water and less pigment and see what happens. Experiment and watch how the watercolor will stay within the wet square you made—the watercolor will only go into the wet areas.

Sky Effects (Wet-on-Wet Irregular Wash)



I use a wet-on-wet, irregular wash technique for the sky-like effects I frequently use in my work. First, I mix up a good amount of sky blue in a big mixing space. This I do by adding a dot or two of blue to the several drops of white, mixing it together and diluting it with a bit of water. I check to see that I have mixed enough color to adequately cover the area I'm going to paint. Next I wet the entire area I want to paint sky blue. I then randomly drop the sky blue color I've mixed on the wet surface. I play with it by adding drops of clear water to some white areas to make "clouds" and lifting color out of other areas. This is the only way you can get white in transparent watercolor, by letting the white of the paper show through. I then add more of the sky blue mixture to yet other areas. I repeat this over and over until I get the desired effect of interesting patterns of sky (the sky blue color I mixed) and clouds (the white of the paper.) This is really fun. I have spent many hours creating skies. This is like a meditation for me.