

Layering paint

BUILDING WASHES

Watercolors are painted from light to dark and require the whites to be reserved from the outset. Painting transparent washes of individual colors allows you to build them up to create mixes on the paper instead of in a palette. This layering technique produces vibrant watercolors that are unified and harmonious.

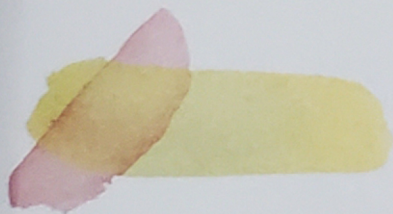
■ Working from light to dark

Layering is one of the most important techniques in watercolor. In general, weaker washes and lighter hues are applied first, with successive stronger layers laid after each one has dried; test the strength of your washes on scrap paper before applying. Each transparent layer will influence the color of the wash laid beneath or on top of it.



First layer

The initial wash (here, yellow ocher) is applied over a large area to unite the light tones. Where needed, leave the paper unpainted to reserve white.



Second layer

Once the first layer is dry, apply a darker color on top. Here, crimson looks warm over the yellow but appears as a cool pink over the reserved white paper.



Third layer

Apply the darkest or strongest color last, after the second layer has completely dried. The darker layer will modify the colors beneath, as cerulean blue does here.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

The first layer is important in quickly uniting all the light tones. There is no need to preserve edges, as the painting will derive its forms from additional colors and tonal values that are overlaid.

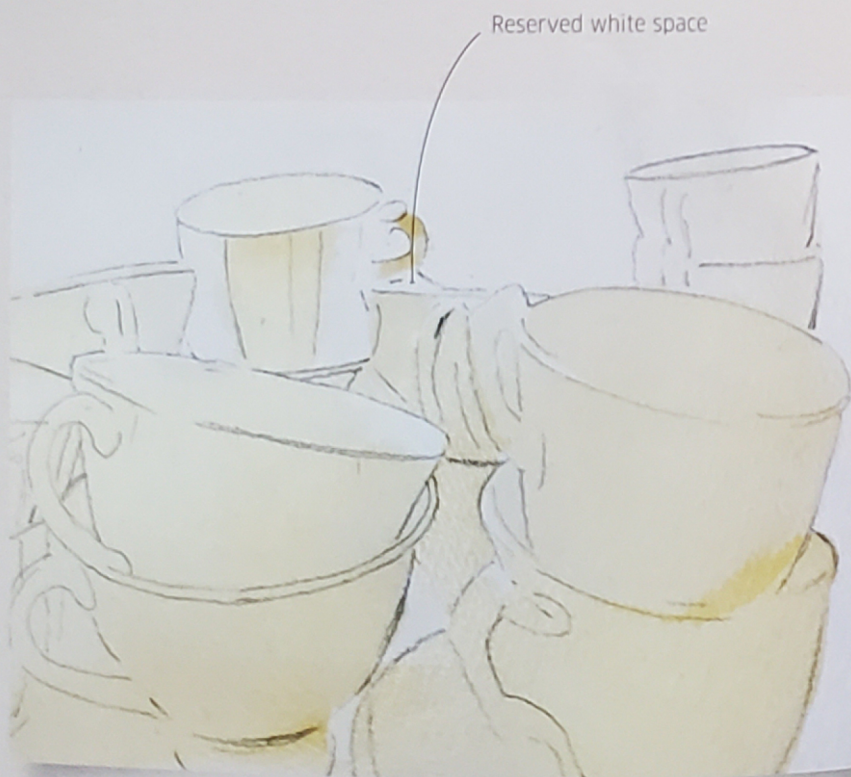
You will need



- No. 14 and no. 8 soft-hair round brushes
- 11 x 15 in (28 x 38 cm) cold press 140 lb (300 gsm) watercolor paper

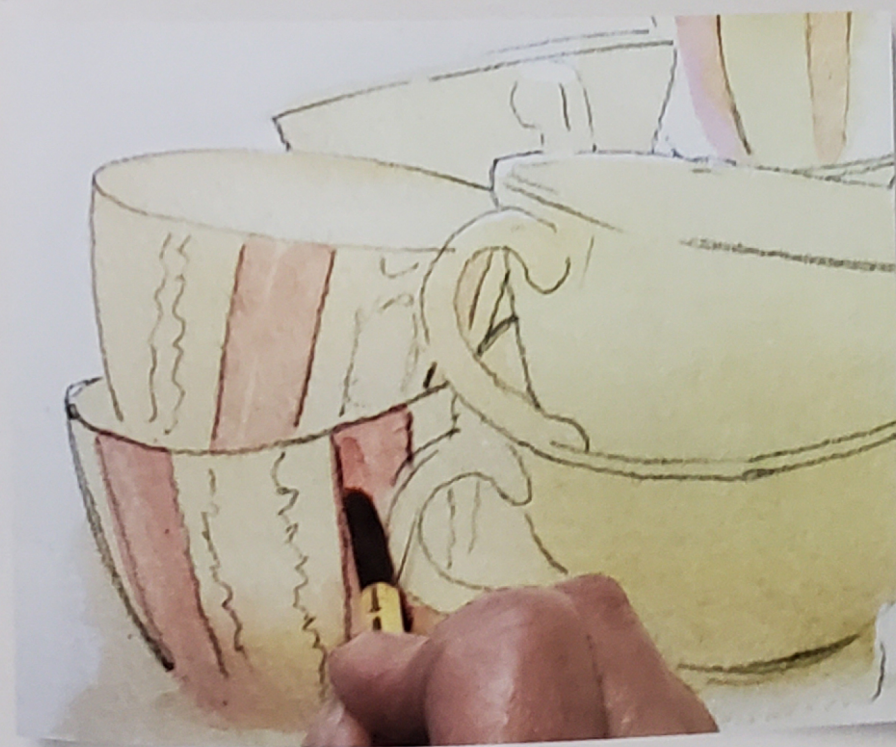


Stacked teacups



1 Apply a unifying wash

First make a pencil drawing of the cups, taking care to describe the shapes accurately. Once you are satisfied that they are correct, paint them with a wash of yellow ocher to unify them, reserving small white areas of unpainted paper as highlights.



2 Add a second color

Painting the lightest colors first, lay down a wash of alizarin crimson. This will give warmth to the shadow areas and appear cool pink on the reserved white paper. Paint the pink stripes on the cups, using stronger color on those in the foreground.



3 Layer with blue

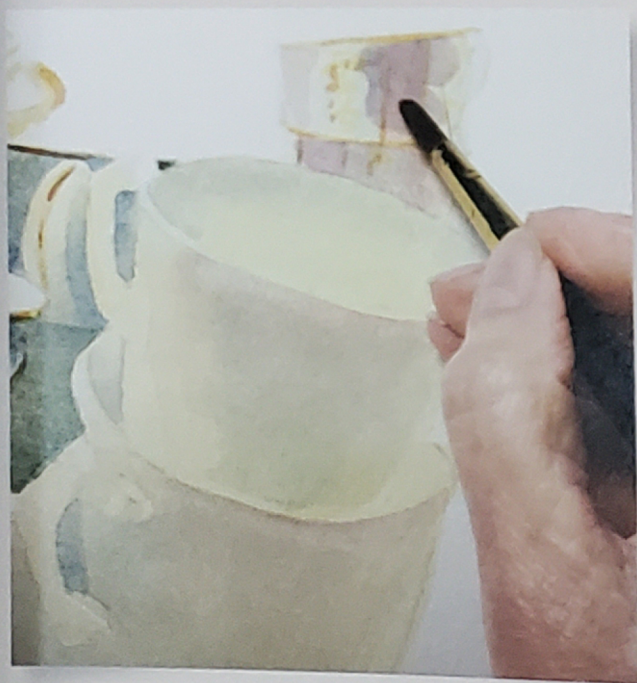
When the paper has dried, mix a wash of cerulean blue and layer it over the top of the yellow and pink mix, allowing the underlayer to show through here and there. This creates a turquoise color over the yellow ochre and neutralizes the warmer crimson areas.

Stronger color for rims



4 Use stronger color for details

Once the paint is completely dry, erase the pencil drawing. Using stronger mixes to cover the washes, put in cadmium red, cadmium yellow, and burnt sienna for the gold rims and details.



5 Add complementary colors

Layering a complementary hue keeps the colors lively. Mix a lilac from crimson and cerulean and use it in shadows to complement the ocher wash. Cover the turquoise mixes with cadmium red.



“Even in subtle layers, complementary colors give extra liveliness to a painting.”



Layers of contrasting color provide depth and complexity

6 The final layer
With a mix of burnt umber, alizarin crimson, and ultramarine, paint the shadows as the last layer to define and separate the shapes of the teacups, creating detail and focus.

