# 10 Step-By-Step
# Watercolor Tutorials

## Yong Chen

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# 10 Step-By-Step
# **Watercolor Tutorials**

## Yong Chen

# Yong's Story

When I was four years old, my father brought me to an artist's house and I was amazed by his beautiful drawings, oil paintings, and sculptures. It motivated me to start drawing every day, and I went back to the artist's house every week for new assignments, new homework.

Later, I dreamed about becoming an artist myself, but at that time, I was not clear what that even meant. I had so little experience. What exactly is an artist? I just knew that it was something that I was really attracted to. It was something I really wanted to be. This dream was the part of my life that made me want to draw and paint every day, and I started teaching art to other people around me.

Hello, I'm Yong Chen. I'm an artist. I'm an illustrator. I'm an art professor. Being able to identify directions for each of your students is a huge challenge. Every student is at a different stage of their life.

For some of them, they don't even know what they want; what should be their direction. Being a professor, we are able to share with them our own experience and point them in the right direction so that they don't have to spend another few years wandering around, trying to figure it out on their own.

With your own experience and knowledge, you know what steps they need to take to become what they can be, what they want to be.

They will come to you. They will sit down and listen to you, and they will work with you. They go through a journey to define their own direction and become a happy person. If you feel good and you're doing the things that you like to do every day, that's all that matters.

These days my students come from different cultural backgrounds. They come from different places, different countries. They have different beliefs. But we all share something in common: an appreciation for art. Twenty years ago, I couldn't imagine that could happen because at that time, the only people I could help were the people next to me – because of my work schedule, because of limited time, because of my geographical location.

In many parts of the world, people can't get to a city. They don't know who could teach them. They don't have access to an art school. If someone loved to draw and paint, how could they see their progress year by year? Without a teacher and a community, chances are they would drop it, even as they experience regret and feel a disquieting dissatisfaction at having done so.

Now, because of the advancements in technology, those people and others like them can put the time into it and get to see real progress every week, every month. They can post their artwork to share with everyone in a global art community. And they're passionate about helping other people.

There is no such thing as an end to studying art. In fact, the time came when my motivation was no longer to be just a good painter. It was more than that. I wanted the whole world to enjoy the love of painting.

If I went back in time and started over again, I'd probably still be who I am today. The only difference is I lived more places, I worked more jobs, and I met more people.

There is really no difference in what I was when I was twenty years old. It is no different from what I was when I was thirty. I think I am meant to continuously help other people and to share my love of art with them.

# Materials I Use in Painting Watercolors

I desire to make watercolor painting as simple as I possibly can. Therefore, I limit both my palette and my brushes.

My palette has just three primary colors – Winsor Yellow, Winsor Red, and Winsor Blue: Green Shade. I have found these paints are a good balance between a warm and a cool hue for each color. I mix these primaries to create the other colors I need. For example, mixing yellow, red and a little bit of blue makes different shades of brown. Infrequently, I will add Winsor Blue: Red Shade when I wish to create as a clear purple color.

The two brushes I use are available through www.enjoyingart.com/brushes. The first is a 1-inch, goat hair flat brush. I use this to cover large areas, for lifting, for softening edges, and for blending. The second is a high-quality calligraphy brush, also made of goat hair, which I use for painting details and other fine brush work.

For my watercolors, I use Arches cold-pressed, 140-pound, 100% cotton paper. It is sold as a pad or a block. The block is more expensive, but because three side are glued together, it can be easier to use as it tends to remain flat while you paint. If you use paper from a pad, you can use artist's tape to secure the paper to your work surface.

# Contents

# Painting A Yellow Apple



## Preparation

Materials used:

- 1" goat-hair brush and goat-hair calligraphy brush which can be obtained here: [www.enjoyingart.com/brushes](www.enjoyingart.com/brushes)
- 9" x 12" Arches cold-press watercolor block 140 lb, 100% cotton
- HB pencil
- watercolor paint: Winsor Yellow, Winsor Red, and Winsor Blue: Green Shade
- water to clean the brushes and for making lighter colors
- a green apple



## The Rough Sketch

In this demonstration, I show you how to use the different values of colors to make an apple appear three-dimensional. (Definition: the value of a color is the lightness and darkness of the color.)

Place the apple on the table with the light source coming strongly from one side. The apple will then have areas of highlight, mid-light and shadow, and there will be light reflected back from the surface of the table onto the apple, as well as a shadow being cast by the apple onto the table.

First, I sketch the apple and its shadow, using an HB pencil, drawing very lightly. When I sketch, I use straight lines rather than curves and keep the form very simple. This as the first step in the entire creation. I will be building three-dimensionality in the form using different values made by painting colors layer by layer.

## First Layer of Color

I use the white of the paper as the surface of the table. Using my 1" flat brush, I mix the yellow with water and apply a light wash of the yellow to the lighter side of the apple. Then, I mix a light brown using yellow, red, and a touch of blue with a similar amount of water and apply it to the dark side of the apple. I let this dry completely before continuing.

## Second Layer of Color

When the first layer is dry, I mix a cool grey color, again using all three primaries. Adding more blue color to my mix will make the color appear cooler – less brown and more grey. I use this to paint the apple's shadow on the surface of the table. I hold my brush sideways, so that the brush-tip (with its heavier load of paint) is touching the side of the shadow nearest me. The shadow nearest to me should be darker, then fade gently to a lighter value as it goes away from me. Then, I mix a green color (yellow and blue) and apply it onto the light area of the apple. I am careful not to let these new colors touch each other or the colors will mix together because they are still wet. Again, I let everything dry completely. If your paper feels cold to the touch, it is still in the process of drying.

## Building Up Values

When the painting is dry, still using the 1" flat brush, I apply another green color wash to the dark side of the yellow apple and in the hollow where the stem is attached.

As you can see, I leave some areas of the apple untouched. These areas will be saved for the highlights. At this step, it is important to keep my mind on the overall look. To keep everything alive. Each step has a goal toward building up dimensionality by creating the layers of different values.

### Adding Contrast to the Highlights

Now that I have built up the color values, the apple has more life. In the last step, I use my calligraphy brush to add a touch of the complementary color to the lighter side of the apple. (Definition: Complementary colors are two colors that are positioned opposite each other on the color wheel.) The complementary color to use here is yellow mixed with red, and I will add just a light bit of this to the top of the apple.



### Painting the Reflected Light and Adding the Darkest Color

Using the calligraphy brush, I apply clean water at the bottom of the apple, lifting out some of the paint color and showing that light is being reflected back onto the apple from the surface under and around it. I brush softly and take my time in order not damage the paper's surface. Then using the tip of the calligraphy brush, I paint in the apple stem and its shadow area. The stem is the darkest detail in the painting. I want to make sure it is really, really dark. When you are looking at elements, remember to look at them as part of the bigger areas because the larger areas dictate the feeling of the whole painting.



### Adding Texture

After I am satisfied with the value and color balance of the painting, it is time to add the final touch - texture. If my apple has speckles or other unique details, I use the calligraphy brush to make little dots of brown where the speckles appear and where the surface of the apple has changes in its color. Finally, I sign my name to a beautiful painting of an apple.

# How to Paint a Bagel in Watercolor

In this demonstration, I capture the feel of the soft surface, the beautiful colors in the bread, and the very fine details in the crust.



## Preparation

Materials used:

- 1" goat-hair brush and goat-hair calligraphy brush which can be obtained here: www.enjoyingart.com/brushes
- 9" x 12" Arches cold-press watercolor block 140 lb, 100% cotton
- HB pencil
- watercolor paint: Winsor Yellow, Winsor Red, and Winsor Blue: Green Shade
- water to clean the brushes and for making lighter colors
- a plain bagel



## The Rough Sketch

With an HB pencil, using straight lines, I outline very lightly the most essential elements to the bagel and the shadow area accurately, but loosely. Don't overdo the drawing. Otherwise, we could lose the spontaneity and excitement of the painting process. I can also do my sketch using a light color of paint instead of a pencil.

## First Color for the Bagel

To set the tone of the painting, I use my 1-inch flat brush to mix red with a fairly large amount of water, keeping in mind that a bagel is a three-dimensional object. So, the front of the bagel is closer to us and will be darker.

I brush the watery red over the top 1/3 of the area. Next, I add a little medium brown that I make by mixing yellow, red, and a touch of blue to the tip of the brush and continue to cover most of the remaining area. I add another layer of my brown on the darker areas to begin to define the shadow area. Then let the painting dry. This establishes the basic values of the colors in the bagel.

## The Layering Process

Two things to keep in mind: when you add a new layer, this is to not to repaint the object, but to wash over the first layer in order to enrich the color, much like adding 4+1=5. Sometimes an additional very light coat will make a big difference developing the dimensionality of the object. The second thing to remember is to use a light touch on the brush. Pressing your brush down as you paint the second layer will destroy the first. While the paint is still wet, I work on another step in the process.

## Tightening Up the Values

I add more of the brown to define the shadow area. Now the values and overall color definition are complete. But it is still too early to start on the details. Keep thinking about the balance of the color temperatures over the whole bagel. Make sure you like the value of each of the colors. It is important to take this time to analyze your work. We are creating a piece of art, a watercolor painting, not a copy of the subject.

## Removing Color to Create Details

One of the most important techniques in watercolor painting is lifting color. While the second layer of paint is still wet, I rinse the 1-inch flat brush so it is very clean, and then squeeze most of the water out of it. It should feel just damp. When you squeeze the hair between your fingers, you want to train the brush to develop a very sharp edge at the same time. Now, I use the tip of the brush to lift off some of the paint by moving the brush very slowly and carefully over just one area, rinsing the brush and then forming the sharp edge again frequently. I use this technique wherever I want highlights.

Why paint an area and then partially remove it? It is all about the soft texture effect and creating the bagel's unique bread-like feel.

## Adding a Cast Shadow

I mix a grey-brown by adding a little more blue, and then paint the shadow cast by the bagel on the table. I let the area dry.

This is not the final step of the painting. I focus on the overall impression, the overall color temperature, and the overall values that I have built up, remembering that a bagel has a different surface texture and material from a yellow apple.

## The Final Touches

In the last step, I use a red brown to add more details, defining the creases, the line where the bagel has been sliced, and also deepening the shadow in the center. In this step, I use more water than paint so that the brush will not disturb the previous layers of colors. This step is the most fun – the painting is coming to completion. My painting now looks like the picture I had in my mind before I began my drawing.

# How to Paint Two Bananas and a Red Apple

In this demonstration, I put two objects together adding to the challenge and to the dimensionality to my painting. I first see the setting as one subject and the balance between the items as another subject. Painting a still life is a good way to practice harmonizing the temperature of color and the value (darkness vs. lightness) throughout the painting.

## Preparation

Materials used:

- 1" goat-hair brush and a goat-hair calligraphy brush which can be obtained using this link: www.enjoyingart.com/brushes
- 9" x 12" Arches cold-press watercolor block 140 lb, 100% cotton
- watercolor paint: Winsor Yellow, Winsor Red, and Winsor Blue: Green Shade
- water to clean the brushes and for making lighter colors
- An apple, two bananas and fabric
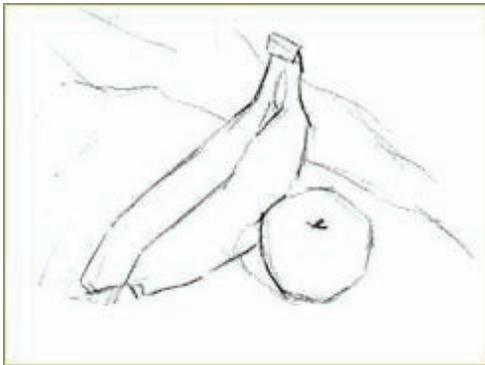
## Determining Placement of Objects and Creating a Rough Sketch

I begin by thinking about where to place the main subjects, and then work out the visual relationships between the apple, the bananas and the tablecloth in terms of size. How much of the painting will be taken up with fruit? How much cloth? I am loose with my sketch until I feel that I have relationships properly represented.

Rather than doing a pencil sketch on the watercolor paper, however, I use a very light paint color to define the composition, or I do it in my mind using my hand and fingers to determine size and position.

## Establishing Color Relationships

When the sketch is complete, I add the first layer of color. For this exercise, I start with the primaries (yellow, red, and blue), and mix other colors using them. Using the 1-inch flat brush described under materials, I apply the first layer of color to each object. When applying color, I begin with the lightest value and move to the darkest. The banana's first layer of color is a light yellow. Then, I mix blue and yellow for the green tones in the banana. I mix red and yellow for reddish-orange highlights on the apple. I mix a little medium brown using yellow, red and a tiny bit of blue for the brown areas on the banana and the stems.

I constantly compare values between each of the objects. Do the colors relate to one another the way I want them to?

## Tone and Detail

After I am satisfied with the color relationships, I use my calligraphy brush to add further detail to the apple, the banana, and the cloth. I am looking for the high and low value points in the composition. The highlights will remain more or less untouched, so, I build to my darkest points in the details. Are the darkest and lightest points established? Is the overall color rich enough? I adjust layers of color to the darker areas until I am satisfied.
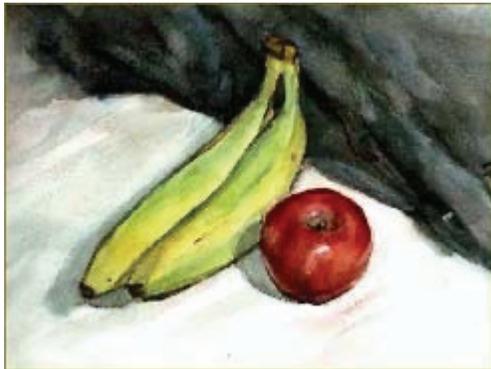
## Correcting and Adding Details

I correct areas where I overpainted using a technique known as "washing." To wash an area that appears dark and "muddy," I load a clean, 1-inch flat brush with water. I then go over those overpainted sections, rinsing frequently, in order to lighten the color.

It is important that at the beginning of the painting process you express yourself freely and only at this point correct your painting. This is when I add extra details as I see them using my calligraphy brush. I constantly squint so that I can compare the color and the value between the bananas and the apple and the background.

## Final Touches

A painting is finished when I am satisfied that it answers these questions. Does it express my impression of the subject? Does it capture a sense of the color and light that I see in front of me? Sometimes it is important to know when to stop painting. Sit back, look at the painting from a distance. Squint your eyes if you need to and then ask yourself: is there anything missing?

# Painting a Still-life of Fruit

## Preparation

Materials used:

- 1" goat-hair brush and a goat-hair calligraphy brush which can be obtained here: www.enjoyingart.com/brushes
- 12x16" Arches cold-press, 140-pound, 100% cotton watercolor block
- Winsor Yellow, Winsor Red, and Winsor Blue: Green Shade
- water to clean the brushes and for making lighter colors
- bananas, mandarin oranges, persimmons, fabric



In painting a still-life or any other subject, I begin by spending time thinking through my concept, the mood I will be creating, the space (include the negative space) used in the painting. Will the painting be hanging over the couch in the living room or take up a small corner of the kitchen? How will my colors work together? The next step is to do drawings or thumbnail sketches to define the overall space and larger shapes of each object in order to make a final determination of the arrangement. Now I am ready to start working on the painting.



## Beginning the Layout of the Painting

I start by blocking in the main shapes; in this case, bananas, mandarin oranges and persimmons. I don't bother drawing with graphite on the watercolor paper. Instead, I use a very light, watery paint to draw. I follow this by putting yellow paint into the area for the bananas. Then I mix several yellow and red hues which I use to define the areas for the mandarin oranges and the two persimmons. As you may have noticed, I leave some large white areas. I will later fill them in with my highlights, shadows, any leaves attached to the fruit, and my background colors.

## Balancing Darks and Lights

Next, I work on the lightest and the darkest areas of the painting. Here, they are in the fabrics used in the background and the foreground. This is to develop the color and value relationships between the major areas and to pursue the harmony of the overall design.

I use the one-inch flat brush to paint the background and the dark shadows in the fabric using a mixture of blue, red and red-brown color. In the light fabric areas, I mixed a yellow-brown and pure yellow with a good amount of water to paint the lighter shadows.

I squint my eyes when I look at the actual still-life setting to avoid getting caught up in the details too early. Instead, I keep my focus on the balance of the major areas of color. Each wash and stroke on the painting needs to work together to bring out the concept and impression that I had developed in my mind at the composition stage. I next work on introducing more colors, heightening values and color balance in the painting.

## Bringing the Subjects to Life

When I have accomplished the overall dark and light values and the color balance, I start to work on the form of the main subjects. In this painting, I started from the bananas, then proceeded to the mandarin oranges on the right, then to the ones on the left, and finally, to the persimmons at the front. I enriched the color of the subjects, defining the light and shadow areas. During this step, I pay close attention to the reflective colors being cast onto the fabric and other fruits. As I develop a richer relationship among the subjects, I adjust the color and value balance to the next level. I avoid staring at a single object for very long because what I am working on is the primary relationship and the balance of all the parts to the whole.

## Proceeding to Details

I continue adding colors to the different areas of the composition, one layer at a time. As I change one element, another would strike me as needing refinement. This becomes a continual process as I match up the watercolor painting to the one in my mind's eye. I work to make the painting more detailed, interesting, and to achieve a certain level of perfection. This is the time to push the painting to fullness. I work on defining the darkest area, the brightest area and other areas in between, to complete creating proper the balance.

# A Color Study of a Home

## Preparation

Materials used:

- 1" goat-hair brush and a goat-hair calligraphy brush which can be obtained using this link: www.enjoyingart.com/brushes
- 11" x 15" Arches cold-press watercolor block 140 lb, 100% cotton
- HB pencil
- watercolor paint: Winsor Yellow, Winsor Red, and Winsor Blue: Green Shade
- water to clean the brushes and for making lighter colors
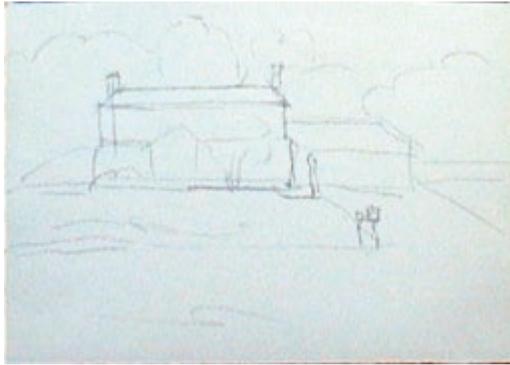


## Drawing

For a color study, I first do a simple drawing on my watercolor paper. This is an experimental process. I am exploring the color and value relationships between the major subjects in the painting. A color study is a process of experimental color composition and value arrangement. It is especially helpful when I need to combine two or more reference pictures for a painting. For example, in a recent watercolor painting commission, my reference pictures were two photos of maple trees, and a photo of a morning scene with a house as the focal point.



## Starting from the Main Object

I start by laying a basic light wash on the house. Then I decide where the clouds in the sky will be and wash the sky area with blue, leaving the space for the clouds untouched.

## Adding Trees

I make the trees in various colors. You might worry that there could be too many different colors, but go ahead and try. I lay in the colors for the trees and then, move away from the background. I don't stay in one area for too long, especially in the beginning stages of a painting.

## Covering the Area in the Front of the House

I mix yellow and blue with a bit of red for a warm green for the front yard grass, then mix more blue for the warm gray of the driveway and the road.

## Adding Darker Colors and a Second Layer to the House

I add darker colors to the trees. I also lightened some areas by lifting off color with a clean 1-inch flat brush that is slightly damp. This gives the trees dimension and depth.

To add a yellow-colored tree in front of the house, I first lift off some color at the right of the house, then work yellow into the area.

## Making Final Adjustments

I increase definition in the painting by introducing the darker lines and shapes. And, to make the area warmer, I add a thin red glaze.

# Creating a Watercolor Portrait of a Home



In the summer of 2001, I was given commissions for watercolor paintings for several houses. I drew on location, exploring composition possibilities, and took many pictures for reference. This stage in my painting process I call the stage of finding excitement and inspiration. Sometimes I did both paintings and color studies in plein air and then completed my final paintings in my studio. The following is an example of my painting process.

## Preparation

Materials used:

- 1" goat-hair brush and a goat-hair calligraphy brush which can be obtained using this link: www.enjoyingart.com/brushes
- 9" x 12" Arches cold-press watercolor pad 140 lb, 100% cotton
- HB pencil
- watercolor paint: Winsor Yellow, Winsor Red, and Winsor Blue: Green Shade
- water to clean the brushes and for making lighter colors



## Drawing on Location

The first step in the process is to visit the house and the people who live in it. After I learn stories of what makes this house special to them, the house becomes a home for me — a home with memories and a home that each family member wants to remember through the painting I am to create. This first step is very important. It helps me to establish an emotional connection with my subject.

## References and Preparation

Next, I make several sketches of the location. I then take digital photos to capture details for reference later when I work in my studio. Using my sketches and digital photos, I make a detailed pencil drawing on watercolor paper. After I finish with the drawing, I mix small paint samples on another sheet of watercolor paper to determine the colors I want to use.

## Painting the Background

To begin the painting, I stretch the paper on a wood board. I use my 1-inch flat brush to wet the upper portion of the paper with pure water for the sky and the tree area on the left. While the area is still wet, I use my calligraphy brush and put some blue paint mixed with some water and paint into the sky area.

I then apply yellow for the tree. Notice that I don't cover the entire area with yellow, but leave some small areas untouched. These are the spaces where the sky shows through the branches.

## First Color Wash on the House

When the sky area is dry, I start painting the front of the house. First, I apply some yellow color to the left side of the house and wash the rest of the wall with a mixture of blue and medium brown which I mix using yellow, red and a touch of blue. For the other side of the house, next to the red maple tree, I start from the upper left corner with yellow and add more and more red towards the lower right corner of the wall.

## Washing the Rest of the Painting

Before I move my attention away from the house, I paint the dormer on the roof. Then I use a mixture of a red-brown and red and wash into the area right under the yellow tree on the left. Then I mix yellow with blue for the grass area.

I work into the bushes around the house and the driveway. Notice, I lay one color next to another so that they will naturally merge into each other. Sometimes I have different colors in the body and the tip of my brush before I lay my brush on the paper to create a special effect.



## Adding Details

I introduce the first layer of color to the green trees and red maple behind and to the right of the house. I paint the window-sidings on the front of the house and the reflection in the window glass on the right side of the wall.

I use a mixture of blue and red to paint the shadows on the driveway and a mixture of blue, yellow and a bit red for the area on the left under the yellow trees. Then I create the shadow on the rooftop with the same color and value.



## The Final Touches for Balance

I proceed to shape and add details to the bushes. Using a thin glaze, I create the details on the ground, the driveway, the trees, the front door area and the siding. I use my clean, damp 1-inch flat brush to lift pigment from the front yard area to create a soft effect for the shadows. Then I use the calligraphy brush to add brown and red dots to the yard and the driveway.

## Videos recommended

Watercolor Painting House in Autumn ▶



Watercolor Painting of a Home ▶

# Watercolor Portrait of a Boy

A child is innocent, tender and sweet. Here is a demonstration of my process of painting a watercolor portrait of a boy based on a photograph.

## Preparation

Materials used:

- 1" goat-hair brush and a goat-hair calligraphy brush. They can be obtained using this link www.enjoyingart.com/brushes
- HB pencil
- 9" x 12" Arches cold-press watercolor block 140 lb, 100% cotton
- watercolor paint: Winsor Yellow, Winsor Red, and Winsor Blue: Green Shade
- water to clean the brushes and for making lighter colors



## The Drawing and First Wash

For a portrait painting, I start with a good pencil drawing. This is the step where I plan the composition, sorting out perspective, relationships, proportion and balance, size and distance. A good drawing is the basis for a successful painting. It can give you confidence and an obvious direction in which to proceed, so, don't shortchange this step. Take as much time as you need.

I use my calligraphy brush to make a light yellow-orange wash starting at the top of the forehead and moving down to the point where the neck meets the shirt. This base wash helps me create a soft, blended base of color for the face. Notice that I leave the areas for the eyes and teeth untouched. Then I introduce a second layer of color to define the shadow side of the face with a wash of medium brown.

## Working on the Balance

Once the paint on the face is mostly dry, I start again from the top with a red brown, and then introduce some of the medium brown onto the forehead. I am still using my calligraphy brush.

When the areas on the head are dry, I establish the shape with a mix of medium brown and red.

I wait to paint the eyes and the mouth. The relationships of the values in the face need to be determined before painting the details. I use yellow to wash into the area of the shirt, mixing yellow with small amounts of the medium brown and blue to define the shadows.

At this point, I add darker value to the painting to further define the form. I start with the hair, move to the eyes, then the corners of the mouth. I mix red and medium brown for the darker areas around the mouth and nose. This is a good time to work on the boy's shirt, adding more details. I gently lift the paint from the area under the chin and add a little yellow color representing the reflected color from the yellow shirt.



## Proceed to the Details

With mostly red and the medium brown, I work into the middle tones. I don't stay working in one area for long. I usually spend 10 seconds here, then 10 seconds there. This is important to keep your attention on the overall painting – to the color temperature and light/dark balance while you work into the smaller areas. Now it's the proper time to do the final touch to the eyes, the mouth and the interior of the ear.

For the background, I use a light wash of blue and another of medium brown on the left side. For the right side, I use yellow and medium brown and a little blue. This will make the background enhance the main subject and complete the portrait painting.

### Videos recommended

Watercolor painting of a boy in Autumn ▶



Watercolor portrait painting a baby boy ▶

# Watercolor Portrait of a Girl

Here is a demonstration of my process of painting a watercolor portrait of a girl based on a photograph.

## Preparation

Materials used:

- 1" goat-hair brush and a goat-hair calligraphy brush which can be obtained using this link: www.enjoyingart.com/brushes
- 9" x 12" Arches cold-press watercolor block 140 lb, 100% cotton
- HB pencil
- watercolor paint: Winsor Yellow, Winsor Red, and Winsor Blue: Green Shade
- water to clean the brushes and for making lighter colors



## The Drawing and First Wash

I start with a light pencil drawing. This is an important part of the painting process and should be given the time it needs both to get proportions right and to make a lovely composition.

I use my calligraphy brush to start the light, slightly pink wash from the top of the forehead and down, leaving the eyes and teeth white. I add more red color to the chin area. By changing the colors for different parts of the face and neck, I create a soft, blended base of color. After waiting a few minutes to let the paper dry, I start painting the garment. Since her top is white, I use light pink and the light brown color for shading.



## Painting the Hair

Once the paint on the face is mostly dry, I start again from the top with a red-brown color, and then introduce a medium brown for the hair on the forehead, still using my calligraphy brush.

Then, I clean and dry the brush until it is just damp and lift off some color from the hair on the forehead. This technique creates a softer and more natural look than leaving these areas white in the first place. Next, I add a thin layer of light red-brown on the face and the hair on both sides, to form greater depth and dimension.

## Painting the Background

The background is an important part of the painting. It should work with the rest of the painting to carry the personality of the subject throughout. With the one-inch flat brush, I apply clean water only to the background area, then start a yellow wash at the top of the paper, changing to blue, then to medium brown for the lower part. While the paper was still wet, I mix red-brown and blue and blend that into the area directly behind the head.

## Adding Dark Colors

At this point, I like to add darker value colors to the face and hair to further define the form. I start with the hair, move to the eyes, the corners of the mouth, then the eyebrow areas. I mix red and medium brown for the areas around the mouth and nose. For the outer portions of the face, I apply a little blue, as these areas reflect cool colors from the surroundings. Finally, I add a darker color to her garment.

### Videos recommended

Portrait Painting of a Young Girl ▶

Portrait Painting in Watercolor

Painting a Girl with easy measurement ▶

# Beginning a Watercolor Portrait



## Project Background

I worked with Linda for many years before she asked me to paint her portrait. Even though we had known each other for a long time, I needed get to know her better to paint her well. I visited with her in her home for several hours, listening to stories, learning about her family, about her background and her life. We talked about how she wished to dress for her portrait and where she would like to sit.

I returned a few days later and began the portrait. I arranged her in different poses, made quick pencil sketches to give me ideas for the composition, and together we chose the best pose. I made a watercolor sketch and took multiple photos of the final pose for reference.

## Preparation

Materials used:

- 1" goat-hair brush and a goat-hair calligraphy brush which can be obtained using this link:
  www.enjoyingart.com/brushes
- 9" x 12" Arches cold-press watercolor block 140 lb, 100% cotton
- HB pencil
- watercolor paint: Winsor Yellow, Winsor Red, and Winsor Blue: Green Shade
- water to clean the brushes and for making lighter colors

## The Pre-Drawing Stage

An artist needs to have the ability to build a strong emotional impression of the subject and then keep this initial impression throughout the entire creative process. This emotional impression gets stronger and stronger with each step in the painting process and shines through in the final artwork.

Before I start the drawing on watercolor paper, I have an image of the final painting in my mind, based on the emotional impression I formed during the interviews with my client.

## The Pencil Drawing

A drawing is usually necessary when a likeness is required. I use an HB pencil to outline the important elements, leaving the pencil marks on when the work is done as part of the total artwork.



## First Wash

Once the drawing is satisfactory, I start the painting from the head, using a thin wash and leave highlighted areas unpainted. I use the 1-inch flat brush for washes and lifting and my Chinese calligraphy brush for details because it is very flexible.



## Working into the Background

As soon as the wash on the head is nearly dry, I mix blue and red with some water and apply the mixture into the area behind the head and shoulders. I work at an easel, about 30° off vertical. Water may run down the paper, but I don't let it worry me.

## Continuing the Preliminary Layer

The first background wash lays down the basic mood of the painting. It is necessary to keep the initial inclusive impression in the front of your mind as you continue the painting process and don't get distracted by the small details! When I want to keep myself from getting into the details, I squint my eyes while looking at the painting. This way, I focus on the overall color values and balance. Now I return to the head and start the second layer. This is the time to focus on defining the shadow side and building the values in the face.

## Working Down to the Garment

I define the shadows of the head, work down to the neck, then add definition to the shirt. A mix of Winsor Red and Winsor Blue: Green Shade are used in another layer of wash on the garment over her right shoulder.

At every moment I am attempting to fulfill my initial conceptual impression of the subject which was formed during our interview. I hold in my mind what I have learned and what I love about the subject. I want to portray the subject in such a way as to express her individuality. Every step moves me closer to the point where the initial concept and my painting meet.

## Continuing to Define the Form

I resume by working on to the hands, the chair, the pants, and then the tree outside the window. Once the front garment area is halfdry (I want part of the color to have been absorbed into the paper), I squeeze the bristles of my 1-inch flat brush until it is just damp, and then use the tip of the brush to lift some color from the highlight and reflective shadow areas. This technique creates soft highlights on the material. By now, I have fine-tuned the values and balance in the painting.

## Preparing for the Details

Now, I return to the head and start the next layer of paints. Using a half-dry calligraphy brush will give more definition and shape to the hair. Even though her hair is white, I don't use white paint. It is more realistic to let the white of the paper show through. Next, I add the skin tones to the face and detail to the nose and lips. I continue working down the neck, onto the hands, and then, work into the background. I add the first layer of paint to the wooden frame of the window in the background. This step was in preparation for the final step of painting Mary's portrait. This is also the last time I adjust the balance and values in the painting.



## Completion

This is the most satisfying step in the painting process. I adjust the tones to the eyelids, the shape of the nose, lips, ear, and hands. Then I add the finishing layer to the wooden frame of the window.

I am happy that the knowledge of Linda that I have gained has been expressed on the paper. More than photos, it conveys everything that I know about her.

### Videos recommended

Watercolor Portrait Painting of a Woman ▶



Watercolor of a woman in red dress ▶

# Bringing a Portrait of a Man to Life

## Preparation

Materials used:
- 1" goat-hair brush and a goat-hair calligraphy brush which can be obtained using this link: www.enjoyingart.com/brushes
- 9" x 12" Arches cold-press watercolor block 140 lb, 100% cotton
- HB pencil
- watercolor paint: Winsor Yellow, Winsor Red, and Winsor Blue: Green Shade
- water to clean the brushes and for making lighter colors

## Project Background

Because of the portrait I did for Linda, I also got to know a lot about her husband, Don, and how they met. After I completed her portrait, I agreed to do a portrait of him as well. Don had been a college professor, but now worked for a computer science research corporation.

Knowing that Don liked to read, I chose his home library for the setting. I did a few preliminary drawings and then decided on the final concept and design for the portrait. I took a number of digital photos for references. Back in the studio, I started the painting process by drawing a likeness of the subject on high-quality watercolor paper.



## Drawing

A drawing is usually necessary when a strong likeness is required. I use an HB pencil to outline the important elements, leaving the pencil marks when the work was done as part of the total artwork. I decided I was going to use a different method from how I painted Linda's portrait to painting Don's portrait.

### Starting from the "Bones"

In Chinese painting, there is a method called "bone comes before flesh." To begin, I apply a thin wash to the face and head, using dark and rough strokes, setting down the value and weight as the base for the painting development. This process is as much internal as external, and when I feel the push from inside, I don't try to hold it, but express it, going with the flow of my feeling. Then, I let the painting dry completely.

### Applying the "Flesh"

After the previous color is stabilized and absorbed, I apply wet colors over the dry strokes. The goal is to quickly shape an impression of the subject onto the paper, starting from a strong and rough painting and then adding richness.

I believe that a painting or any kind of art is a personal statement. It comes straight from the heart. It is emotional. Paint is just the medium the artist uses to communicate with the viewer.

### Balancing the Warm and the Cool

While I give more definition to the subject, I also work on the balance of the warm (red and yellow) and cool (blue) colors. I add pure Winsor Red mixed with water to the chair and, at the same time put pure Winsor Blue: Green Shade on the shirt. Then, I add Winsor Yellow directly to the side of the chair, the pants, and the books.
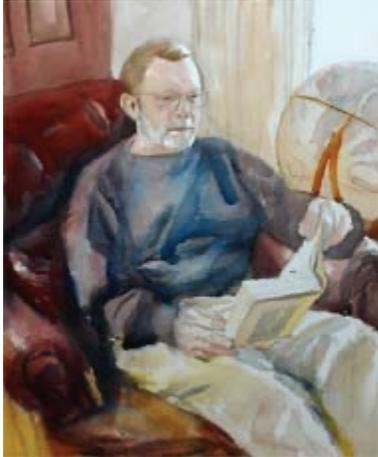
## Finishing the Balance and Strengthening Values

At this stage, there is no need to narrow down my attention to a small area. Instead, I focus on the overall balance and the color values. The wall or anything else in this painting is as important as the eyes or the nose. So, I lay another wash onto the back of the chair, add details to the globe, and give a rough definition to his hair. I keep my attention on the big picture until I am totally satisfied with the painting's overall balance.

There is an emotional balance inside of us. Creativity is the process of expressing the artist's emotional perception. This emotion should show through every stroke, through every wash and in every corner of the painting.
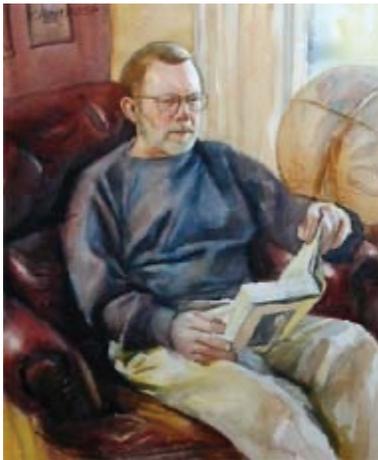


## Adding the Details

Now is the time to add the final details to bring the portrait to life.

Many people may not be able to imagine how a portrait could turn out so beautifully when it started so rough and even "ugly." Every step in the process moves the painting closer to the artist's first emotional impression of the subject. No matter what approach or method you choose to use, the important thing is that you are expressing that personal emotional impression. This impression is always complex, often more than words can describe, but shines through your art. Keep working on your inner discovery at the same time that you are learning new techniques.

### Videos recommended
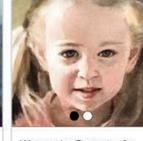
Watercolor Painting of a Man in the Sun ▶
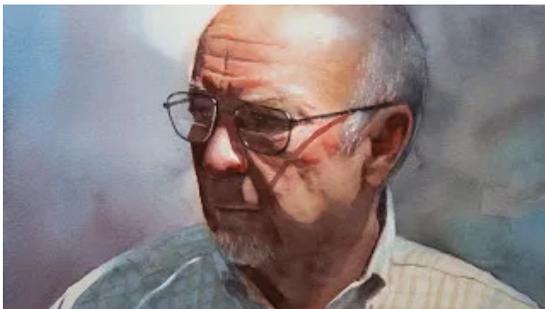


Watercolor lesson of a man in profile view ▶

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