Arch 424/524 Advanced Media: Transparent Watercolor Painting for Architects

Instructor: Jim Tice
Credits: 3
Meeting times: Tuesday and Thursday; 4:00 – 5:50
Prerequisite: Architecture Majors; Successful Completion of Arch 423/523

Transparent watercolor is a painting technique that employs the white of the paper surface as an essential aspect of the painting. Either the white of the paper is “reserved,” meaning that it is simply not painted upon and thus left in its pure state, or it is allowed to reflect through one or more layers of watercolor pigments called “washes” achieving a luminosity that is highly valued. This layered, luminous approach can be contrasted with opaque painting methods where the medium is designed to cover the painted surface such as oils, gauche, and acrylics. In these latter methods highlights are APPLIED rather than RESERVED. The transparent watercolor technique is a highly prized method of painting requiring considerable skill that nonetheless has proven to be susceptible to sustained practice.

The transparent method is sometimes called the “purist’s” approach to painting in that applications of whites are discouraged (or strictly forbidden!). It has a long and distinguished history as evident in the work of the English Landscape School (J. M. W. Turner) where it was employed to capture fleeting, atmospheric effects. On the other side of the same coin, a more precise, articulated design tradition is evident in the renderings of the Architectural School of the Beaux-Arts. Here watercolor media was used as a medium for design presentation as well as for documenting and accurately reconstructing historic monuments. Typically these were executed over carefully drafted line work in graphite. Today watercolor media is used both for design development, presentation as well as for recording and observing architectural and landscape subjects.
The primary reason for this course will be to develop transparent watercolor techniques as a design medium for architects and designers to both study and present architectural designs. In addition the course will explore means by which one can observe and document buildings and landscapes with a verisimilitude toward color and light. In the process we will strive to develop what Paul Klee calls the “thinking eye” which implies a knowing, method of observation, documentation and design. Color and light will be the elements that will provide focus for our studies.

The course will be conducted as a series of workshops that will balance between in class studio painting and en plein air or out of door painting, weather permitting. Reviews will occur during most classes as a pin up at the end of the session. Students will be asked to bravely “bare their souls” for the criticism (and praise) of their fellow students and instructor. In addition there will be regular weekly assignments/exercises. Student evaluations for the course will be based on both in class and homework assignments. At the end of the course, students are required to submit a portfolio of their work (originals, no copies). Special consideration, and commendation, will be given to the improvement and growing finesse and accomplishment of student work. It is my intention that the class work will result in a group exhibition.

Subjects to be covered are:
- Basic watercolor techniques: flat wash, graduated wash, variegated wash
- Methods: dry brush, wet on dry, wet on wet
- Presentation techniques
- Field sketching and recording

**MATERIALS**
(a packet will be available at the campus bookstore in late March that includes most of these materials at considerable cost reduction)

This list constitutes a basic working set of materials for your watercolor projects. You are encouraged to expand this as your personal watercolor interests develop.

**Brushes**
- Flat 3/4” (synthetic bristles)
- Round #6, #10

Synthetic round brushes are adequate but natural hair brushes are able to hold more water and come to a sharp point when wet, both of which are highly desirable.

**Brush Holder**
- Inexpensive bamboo roll-up

**Paint**
- M. Graham & Co., 15 ml tubes*
  - Alizarin Crimson
  - Cadmium Red
  - Aureolin Yellow
  - Cadmium Yellow
  - Cobalt Blue
  - Ultramarine Blue
  - Viridian (Green)
- Optional: Cadmium Orange, Yellow Ochre, Burnt Siena, Rose Madder-Genuine

*It is a false economy to use cheaper grades e.g., “student grade” paints have much less ground pigment than professional grade; also inexpensive watercolor pigments are often “fugitive” that is, they fade over time.

**Paper**
- Canson Watercolor Paper Montval, cold pressed, 140 lb. 9”X12”

**Sketch Pad**
- 5”X7” (heavy weight—at least 56 lbs—paper desirable)
This will be used for watercolor sketching and also preparing “thumbnails in preparation for final work
Palette  Inexpensive plastic palette supplemented with plastic sheet or butcher’s enamel tray

Tape  Drafting Tape (NOT masking tape) 3/4”

Painting Surface  Masonite or Gator Board 17”X24”

Water  Container  1/2 gallon plastic bucket for clear wash

Sponge  Common house-hold sponge squares 2 or 3 pieces; smaller natural sponge the size of a golf ball

Pencils  #314 or equal with white eraser and kneaded gray eraser and sharpener

Carrying Kit  Any inexpensive plastic tool box or fabric carry-all with multiple pockets (diaper bags work well)

Lifting/Cleaner  Paper towels, tissues, cotton swabs

Plastic Freezer Bags  Useful to protect your work and keep dry

Water Spray  Small plastic spray device for wetting and re-wetting surfaces

Folding Stool  REI, GI Joe’s and other sports equipment stores have inexpensive stools for under $15

GRADING AND EVALUATIONS

Your grade will be determined as follows:

Quality and timely completion of work during in class exercises and out of class assignments
Your overall progress and improvement as shown by the final portfolio and class review
Your ability to respond to criticism from both instructor and class peer reviews
Your initiative to explore the medium and go beyond the assigned work

REFERENCES

Painting Solutions: House and Buildings, by Hazel Harrison. Studio Vista
Color: In sketching and Rendering, by Guptill. Reinhold
Watercolor School, by Hazel Harrison. Reader’s Digest Association Inc., Pleasantville, NY