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

Instructor: Jim Tice
Credits: 3
Meeting times: Tuesday and Thursday; 4:00 – 5:50
Location: 141 Lawrence
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 and distinguishes this medium from others. This 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 over time.

The transparent method is sometimes called the “purist’s” approach to painting in that applications of white 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 and the more precise, articulated design tradition of the Beaux-Arts, where watercolor was used as a medium for design presentation and for documenting and accurately reconstructing historic monuments.

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 exercises for the duration of term and the class and homework assignments. Students are required to submit a portfolio of the term’s work. Special consideration, and commendation, will be given to the improvement and growing finesse and accomplishment of student work. It is hoped that the class work will result in a group exhibition.

Subjects that will be covered are:
- Basic watercolor techniques: flat wash, graduated wash, variegated washes
- 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 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”
- Round #8 and Round #1

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

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

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

**Sketch Pad**
- 5”X7” (heavy weight desirable)

**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
- smaller plastic container for mixing (use clear or white containers so as to see colors clearly)

**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  Useful to protect your work and keep dry
Bags

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

*Cheaper and “student grade” watercolors typically short change the pigment context making it less intense; cheaper watercolors can also have negative side effects in that they are “fugitive” or not long lasting, meaning they fade over time. The color blue is particularly vulnerable.

** Good quality paper is essential. The Canson Montval is an excellent surface that can take considerable abuse with “scrubbing out” paint and reworking which is a highly useful technique. Also it absorbs the paint in a uniform manner but not so quickly that it is difficult to work with, especially using multiple washes.

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 do more than 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