

COLORWAYS

WATERCOLOR ANIMALS

TIPS, TECHNIQUES, AND STEP-BY-STEP LESSONS FOR LEARNING
TO PAINT WHIMSICAL ARTWORK IN VIBRANT WATERCOLOR



SHAUNNA RUSSELL

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TABLE of CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
GETTING STARTED	7
Tools & Materials	8
Watercolor Techniques.....	12
Basic Color Theory.....	18
SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS.....	25
Preparing for a Painting Session	26
STEP-BY-STEP PAINTING PROJECTS	31
Galaxy Whale	32
Peeking Pet With a "Pop" of Color.....	40
Betta Fish in Dark Waters.....	48
Pair of Parakeets in Pastels	56
Puffin.....	62
Bees & Flowers.....	70
Silhouette Animals	78
Unicorn	86
Iridescent Beetle	94
Playful Otter.....	102
Freestyle Elephants.....	110
Colorful Dog	118
ABOUT THE ARTIST.....	127





Introduction

Welcome to *Watercolor Animals*, part of the Colorways series. I have always been drawn to using animals as subject matter for my art. Their playful innocence and majestic beauty consistently inspire me. I love capturing their essence and bringing them to life on paper. In this book, we will explore several approaches to painting animals in watercolor.

Exploring color is one of the aspects I enjoy most about painting. You can create compelling and eye-catching pieces when you're not afraid to add color in a meaningful way. This book is intended to inspire you to give it a try and provides you with the skills to do so successfully.

Whether you have no experience with watercolors or you already love the medium, I hope this book helps you appreciate what can be done with watercolor paint. No formal education is necessary to enjoy making art, and I will encourage you throughout this book to experiment and create your own personal style!

Some common fears when working with watercolor are its permanence and unpredictable nature. In reality, however, nothing about watercolor is very permanent—and there are many tips and tricks to help you use its unpredictability to your advantage. In the pages of this book, I will show you how to control the medium, to an extent, but also how to embrace what you cannot control. The natural variation and unpredictability of the medium is part of its unique beauty!

We'll get started by exploring some of my favorite tools and techniques, as well as basic color theory. Of course, once you know the rules, I encourage you to break them! You will find a total of twelve unique projects, with helpful photos and instructional steps, to help guide you on your watercolor journey. Please don't forget to enjoy the process!

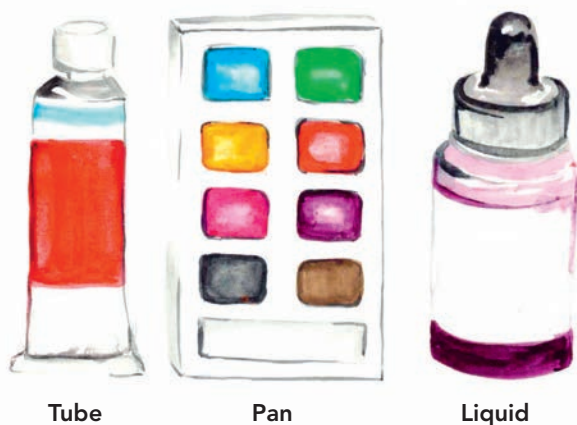




Getting Started

Tools & Materials

One of the most wonderful aspects of watercolor is the variety of tools and materials available. However, at the end of the day, all you really need are paint, water, and a brush, along with some watercolor paper. Let's discuss a few of the essentials to see which ones are right for you.



Tube

Pan

Liquid

PAINT

Watercolors primarily come in two types: tubes and pans. However, there is a wide variety of other formats, including watercolor pencils, sticks, and concentrated liquids. The common thread is that they are all water-soluble and can be diluted and reactivated with water.

Pans are a common favorite for their portability, built-in palette, and low maintenance. You can let them dry and still use them another day. My personal favorite, though, is tube paint. For these you need a separate palette, and depending on how much you use, you may end up wasting some of your paint. However, I have found that I get the best use of concentrated colors with tube paint and liquid watercolors. I tend to stick with a palette of six to eight of my favorite colors combined in an infinite number of ways to create a wide variety. *Student-grade* paints are an economical place to start, but remember that you get what you pay for. Higher-quality paints, or *artist-grade*, are more lightfast and the color will not fade easily.

PAPER

It is important to use a watercolor surface with this medium, and the most popular type is watercolor paper. Hot-pressed watercolor paper is a bit pricier and has a smooth, flat surface. Cold-pressed paper is more commonly used and has a bit more texture. There is a wide variety of products out there, including clay surface, watercolor canvas, and other surfaces, that all behave slightly differently. The important thing is that all of them are created specifically for watercolor paint and will not allow the paint to bleed through the surface.

WATERCOLOR PAPER TEXTURES



Hot-Pressed Paper

This paper has been pressed with heat, which creates a smooth surface. Hot-pressed paper is ideal for fine detail, even washes, and a controlled style. This paper is not especially absorbent, which results in bright colors.



Cold-Pressed Paper

Also referred to as “not” or “medium” paper, cold-pressed sheets are not treated with heat, leaving an irregular surface. This versatile paper is ideal for granular textures and a more painterly style.



Rough Paper

This paper is even rougher than a cold-pressed surface. The deep tooth can leave quite a bit of the paper showing along the edges and within each stroke. It complements an expressive style and drybrush techniques.

BRUSHES



Round Brushes

There is a large variety of watercolor brushes in the marketplace. In this book—and in my professional art career—I regularly use only four types. The *round* brush is my most important and versatile brush. It features a fine tip for adding precise detail but spreads out nicely for covering large areas. I like to have a small round brush (size 1) for adding fine details and a larger round brush (size 5 or 6) so that I can switch between sizes.



Wash Brush

I also must have a wash brush on hand. This type of brush covers large surfaces quickly with either paint or water. You will also notice in this book that I often use a wash brush for drybrushing texture into my paintings.



Angled Flat Brush

Finally, I always have an angled *flat* brush on hand. Similar to the wash brush, I can cover large surfaces—but with more even coverage. Another benefit is the precision of the angled tip. I'm able to easily get into tight corners and edge the watercolor exactly where I want it.

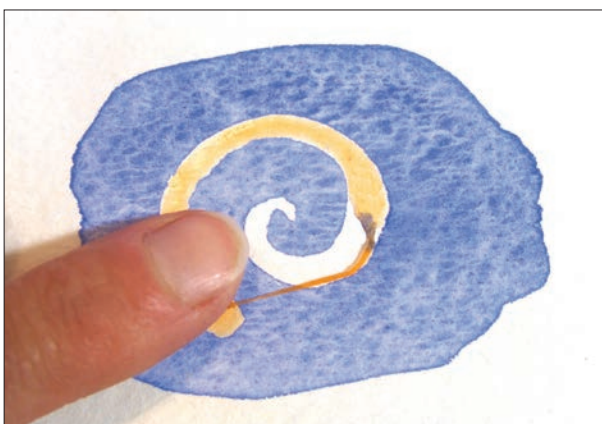
USING MASKING FLUID



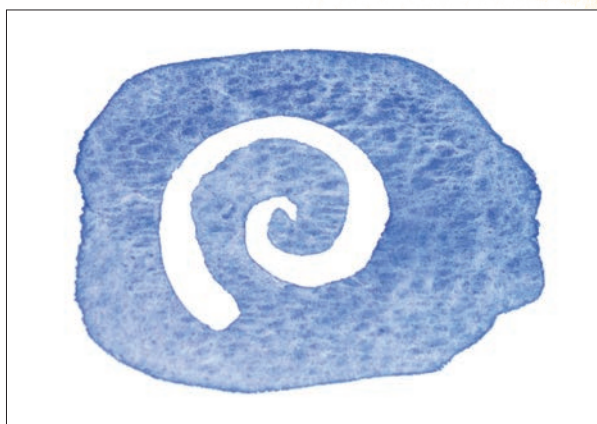
Apply the liquid to the desired areas of your paper using an old paintbrush (small rounds work well).



Eliminate bubbles, which may allow paint to reach the paper. Once dry, paint over the mask.



Allow the paint to dry, and then rub away the mask with a clean finger or rubber cement pickup eraser.



The masking fluid will leave behind clean, crisply preserved areas of white paper.

OTHER MATERIALS

Palette: Use a wellied palette, which has multiple wells for holding your fresh paints and paint mixes. I use a cheap plastic wellied palette that comes with a cover. This helps me save any leftover paint.

Gel Pen: One of my favorite tools for adding small, white details is a white gel pen. These can be found at most art- and office-supply stores. Alternatively, you can use white paint or gouache.

Masking Fluid: Also called "liquid frisket," masking fluid dries into a rubber that protects the white of the paper from absorbing paint and can be removed once the painting is dry (see above).

Water Jars: I use one glass jar of water to rinse my brush and another jar of clean water for creating washes on my paper.

Blow Dryer: While optional, this tool is useful for drying paint quickly and combating warped paper.

Watercolor Techniques

Some basic watercolor techniques are helpful to know as you progress in your art making. Understanding how watercolor behaves and is best utilized is key to your success!

CREATING A WASH

This simple technique is very important for backgrounds and layering color. Watercolor is a transparent medium, which means you can see the background color showing through and that your colors will get more intense with each layer.

To create a wash, load your paintbrush with a mix of water and paint, and work your way down the paper gradually with even horizontal strokes. To fade the color out (a *graded* wash), simply add water instead of more paint as you go. To create an even, flat wash, continue loading up your paintbrush with the initial paint-and-water mixture. Make sure you are using an appropriate-sized brush for the area you are trying to cover.



Flat Wash



Graded Wash

WORKING WET-INTO-WET

My very favorite method of working with watercolor, this technique is exactly how it sounds and is part of the exciting beauty of the medium. While your paint is still wet on the paper, you can go back in with more pigment or a different color. You can also simply allow two adjoining areas to bleed into each other.

Remember that your paint will stay within the wet area on the paper. Throughout this book, I frequently use a clean-water wash on the paper and then add paint into that area, allowing the colors to spread and dry in visually interesting ways. Feel free to go in with a paintbrush and manipulate the paints as you like. Just remember that the more water and paint on the paper, the longer it will take for that area to dry.



WORKING WET-ON-DRY

This technique is also exactly how it sounds: wet paint on a dry surface. The surface can be clean paper or previously painted and dry areas. This is helpful when your colors have dried too light and you want to go back in and “charge” the colors with another layer of paint.

I like to start with lots of wet-into-wet, keeping the painting very loose. Then I come back in after the paint has dried and deepen the shadows and add details using the wet-on-dry technique.





The first phase involves loose wet-into-wet colors.



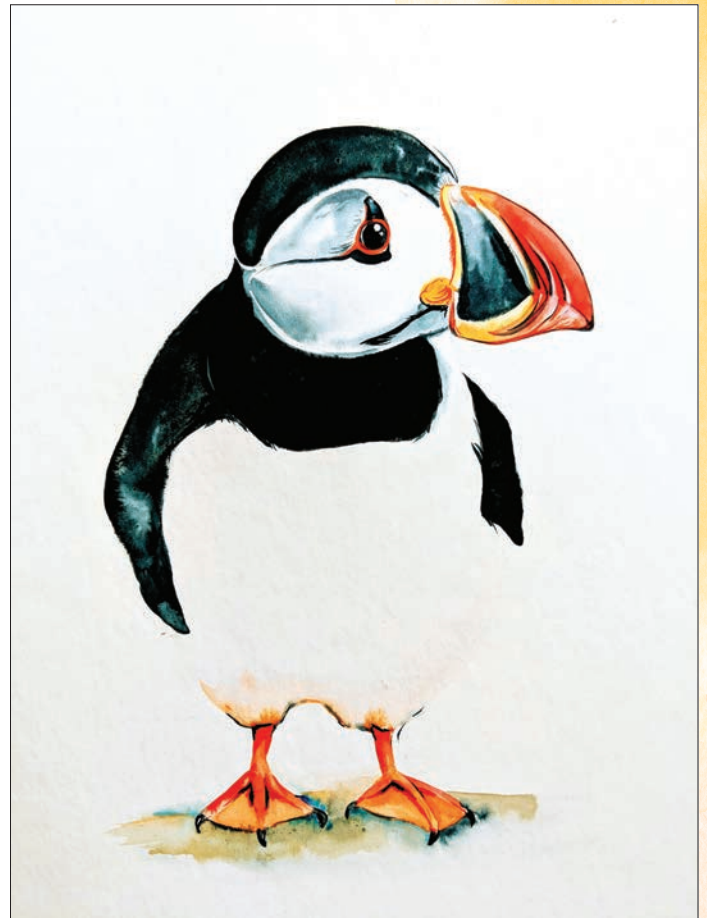
The wet-on-dry technique is then used to add shadows and details.

ADDING WHITE

One of the interesting challenges of watercolor is that, traditionally, watercolor artists only use the white of the paper for white or light areas—not white paint. Since watercolor is transparent, there is no “white” watercolor. Instead, you work from lighter layers on the bottom and build up to the darker. This is opposite of other traditional paint media, such as oil paint, where you typically add lighter, opaque colors on top of darker base layers.

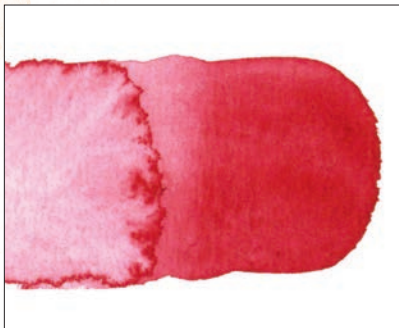
Today, however, there are lots of tools available to make this aspect of working in watercolor less difficult, including some that I mention in “Tools and Materials” (page 11). It’s OK to use nontraditional tools to make a stunning piece of art! That’s why I like to have a gel pen, opaque white paint (either gouache or acrylic), and masking fluid on hand. However, personal preferences aside, all you really need are the white of the paper and a steady hand.

This puffin painting is a simple example of preserving the white of the paper. I utilized the white paper as negative space to create a dynamic piece, leaving the white areas of the bird mostly free of paint.

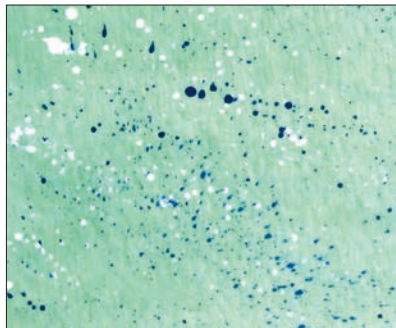


I used both masking fluid and a white gel pen to create the bubbles in this piece. Before applying paint to the paper, I painted the bubbles with masking fluid to preserve the white paper. Then I was able to paint freely to create the dark background and colorful fish. At the end of the process, I pulled up the masking fluid and used a white gel pen to define the bubbles further.

OTHER WATERCOLOR TECHNIQUES



Backruns Backruns, or “blooms,” create interest within washes by leaving behind flower-shaped edges where a wet wash meets a damp wash. First stroke a wash onto your paper. Let the wash settle for a minute or so, and then stroke another wash within (or add a drop of pure water).



Spattering First cover any area you don’t want to spatter with a sheet of paper. Load your brush with a wet wash and tap the brush over a finger to fling droplets of paint onto the paper. You can also load your brush and then run the tip of a finger over the bristles to create a spray.

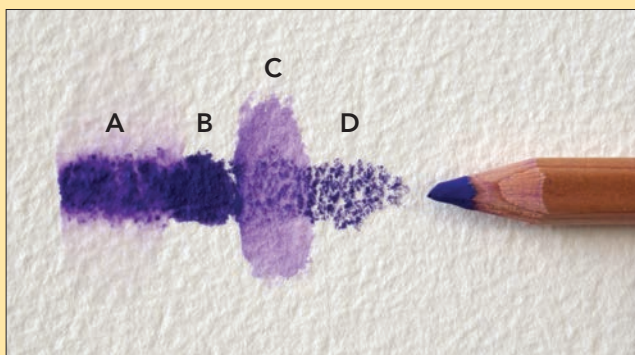


Tilting To pull colors into each other, apply two washes side by side and tilt the paper while wet so one flows into the next. This creates interesting drips and irregular edges.



Drybrushing Load your brush with a strong mix of paint, and then dab the hairs on a paper towel to remove excess moisture. Drag the bristles lightly over the paper so that tooth catches the paint and creates a coarse texture.

WORKING WITH WATERCOLOR PENCILS



You can apply watercolor pencil in several ways. Shown here is pencil applied over wet paper (A), wet pencil tip over dry paper (B), pencil applied over dry paper followed by strokes of a wet brush (C), and pencil over dry paper (D).

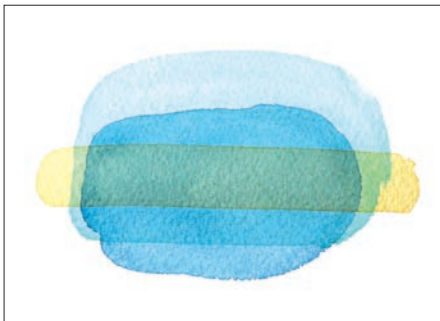
MIXING WATERCOLORS

There are three basic ways to mix watercolors: on a palette, through glazing, and on the paper. Regardless of your method, remember to limit the number of pigments you mix together; stick with two to three colors.



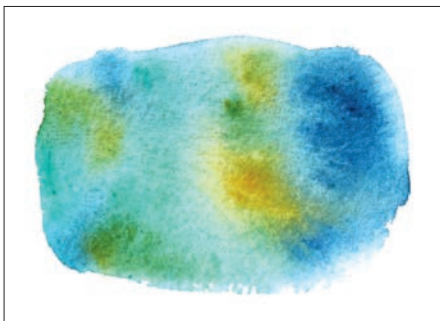
Mixing on a Palette

Mixing watercolors on a palette gives you good control over the hue of the mix. It results in a flat, even color.



Mixing through Glazing

Mixing watercolors through glazing involves applying a thin layer of wash over an existing layer of dry color. The transparency of watercolor allows the pigments to mix optically to create complex, luminous color. In this example, viridian was applied first, followed by a glaze of phthalo blue, followed by a glaze of yellow ochre.



Mixing on Paper

Mixing watercolors directly on paper produces fresh results. This approach allows the pigments to retain some of their individual characteristic. It also calls for a bit of spontaneity. In this example, three colors have been dropped into the clear wash on the paper, allowing them to mingle. (You can even tilt the paper a bit to encourage flow.)

When mixing on paper, you can push around the paint a bit. However, avoid overmixing, which can dull the colors and stifle the natural flow and settling of the paint.

Basic Color Theory

If you are anything like me, memorizing rules about color will be your least favorite part of creating art. That said, knowing some basic color principles can help you create an eye-catching color palette for each new painting. You may not always follow the rules, but it helps to know them before you decide whether to break them!

THE COLOR WHEEL

Remember the color wheel from elementary-school art class? Turns out it's a helpful tool for understanding how colors complement each other and blend. The primary colors are red, blue, and yellow. These are the most basic colors and cannot be mixed from other colors.

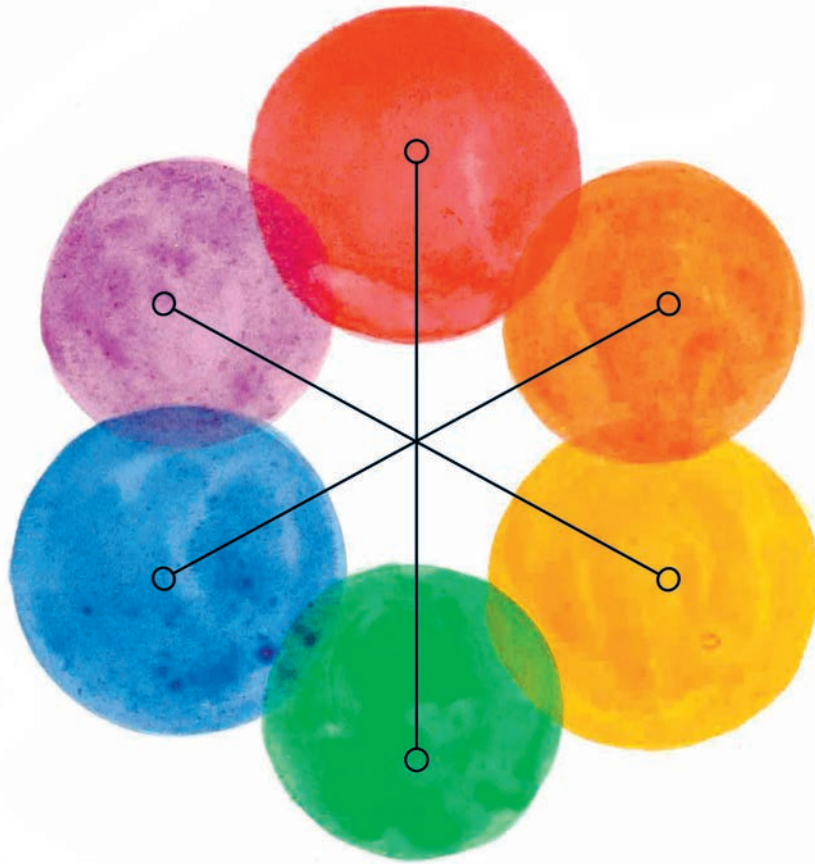
In between these three, you'll see the secondary colors: orange, green, and violet. These colors are created by mixing two of the primary colors. Red and blue make violet, blue and yellow make green, and red and yellow make orange.

Even more colors exist between the primary and secondary colors. These are the tertiary colors. By mixing a primary and secondary, you create a tertiary color. The tertiary colors are red-orange, yellow-orange, yellow-green, blue-green, blue-violet, and red-violet.



COMPLEMENTARY COLORS

The colors that lie directly across from each other on the color wheel are complementary colors. This means that they visually complement each other well. Used together in an artwork, each complementary color makes the other "pop." The complementary colors are: red and green, blue and orange, and yellow and violet.

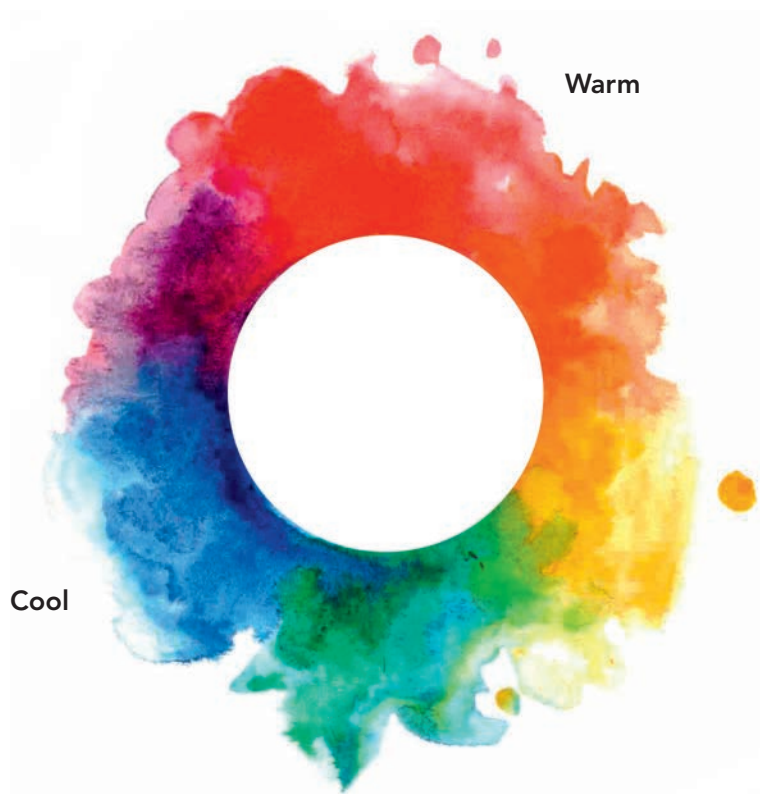


Colors that complement each other don't necessarily work well together when wet. For example, if you are transitioning from yellow to purple while your watercolors are still wet, the colors will blend to create a muddy brown. To avoid this, either wait until one color has dried, or transition to a neighboring color on your color wheel first and then transition to the complementary color.

COLOR TEMPERATURE

When looking at the color wheel, you might notice that there is a warmer side and a cooler side. These are exactly how they sound. When I think of cool colors, I imagine the blues and purples of winter snow scenes. Conversely, when I think of warmer colors, I imagine the reds and oranges of a warm desert scene. In my paintings, I use warmer colors to express light or highlighted areas and cooler tones for darker shadows.

But colors go even further than a simple warm or cool side. Take a “cool” color like blue. You can have a blue tone that’s on the warmer side or the cooler side. For instance, blue-violet is warmer than blue-green.



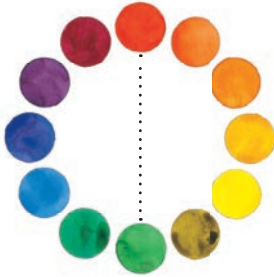
The best way to learn which colors work together is to experiment with mixing colors for yourself. Most importantly, it must look good to you.

UNDERTONES

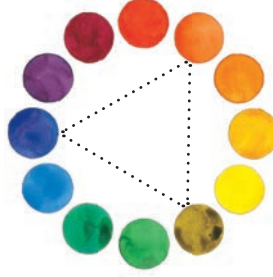
Speaking of variations in color, sometimes it is helpful to know a color’s undertone. When two colors have similar undertones, they will mix well into a vibrant color. If the undertones are different, they are more likely to mix into an earthy tone. I encourage you to make your own color chart showing how your colors mix together. This is a great reference tool.

COLOR SCHEMES

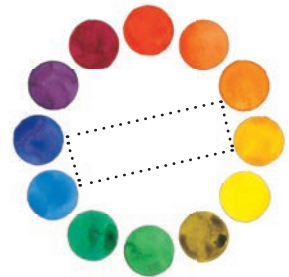
Choosing and applying a *color scheme* (or a selection of related colors) in your painting can help you achieve unity, harmony, or dynamic contrasts. This page showcases a variety of common color combinations. Explore these different schemes to familiarize yourself with the nature of color relationships and to practice mixing colors.



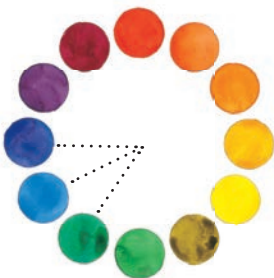
Complementary Remember that complementary colors are opposite each other on the color wheel. When placed adjacent to each other in a painting, complements make each other appear brighter. When mixed, they have the opposite effect, neutralizing (or graying) each other.



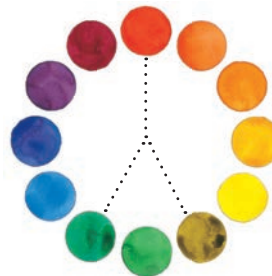
Triadic This scheme consists of three colors that form an equilateral triangle on the color wheel. An example of this would be blue-violet, red-orange, and yellow-green (shown above).



Tetradic Four colors that form a square or a rectangle on the color wheel create a tetradic color scheme. This color scheme includes two pairs of complementary colors, such as orange and blue and yellow-orange and blue-violet (shown above). This is also known as a “double-complementary” color scheme.



Analogous Analogous colors are adjacent (or close) to each other on the color wheel. Analogous color schemes are good for creating unity within a painting because the colors are already related. You can do a tight analogous scheme (a very small range of colors) or a loose analogous scheme (a larger range of related colors). Examples of tight analogous color schemes would be red, red-orange, and orange; or blue-violet, blue, and blue-green (shown at left). A loose analogous scheme would be blue, violet, and red.



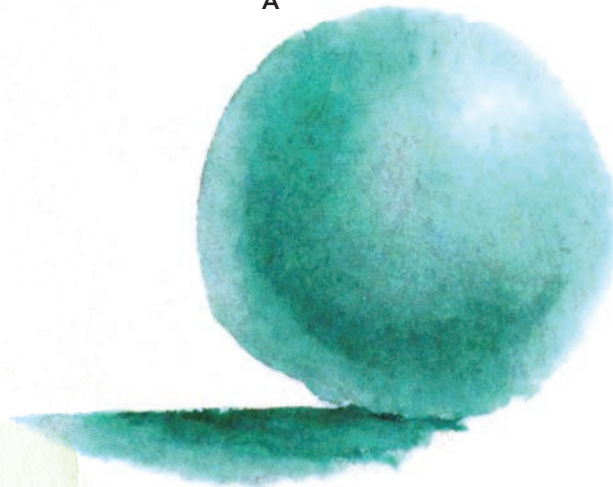
Split-Complementary This scheme includes a main color and a color on each side of its complementary color. An example of this (shown at left) would be red, yellow-green, and blue-green.

VALUE

The word “value” refers to how light or dark a color is. One of the unique things about watercolor paint is that a lighter value can be created with the addition of more water. You can create a range of tones from a single color, simply by adjusting the amount of water in the mix. It’s helpful to note that each color on the color wheel has a value relative to the others. For example, yellow is the lightest color, and violet is the darkest.

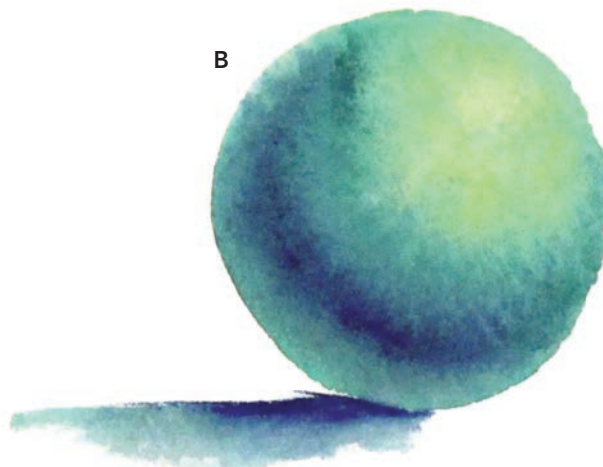


A



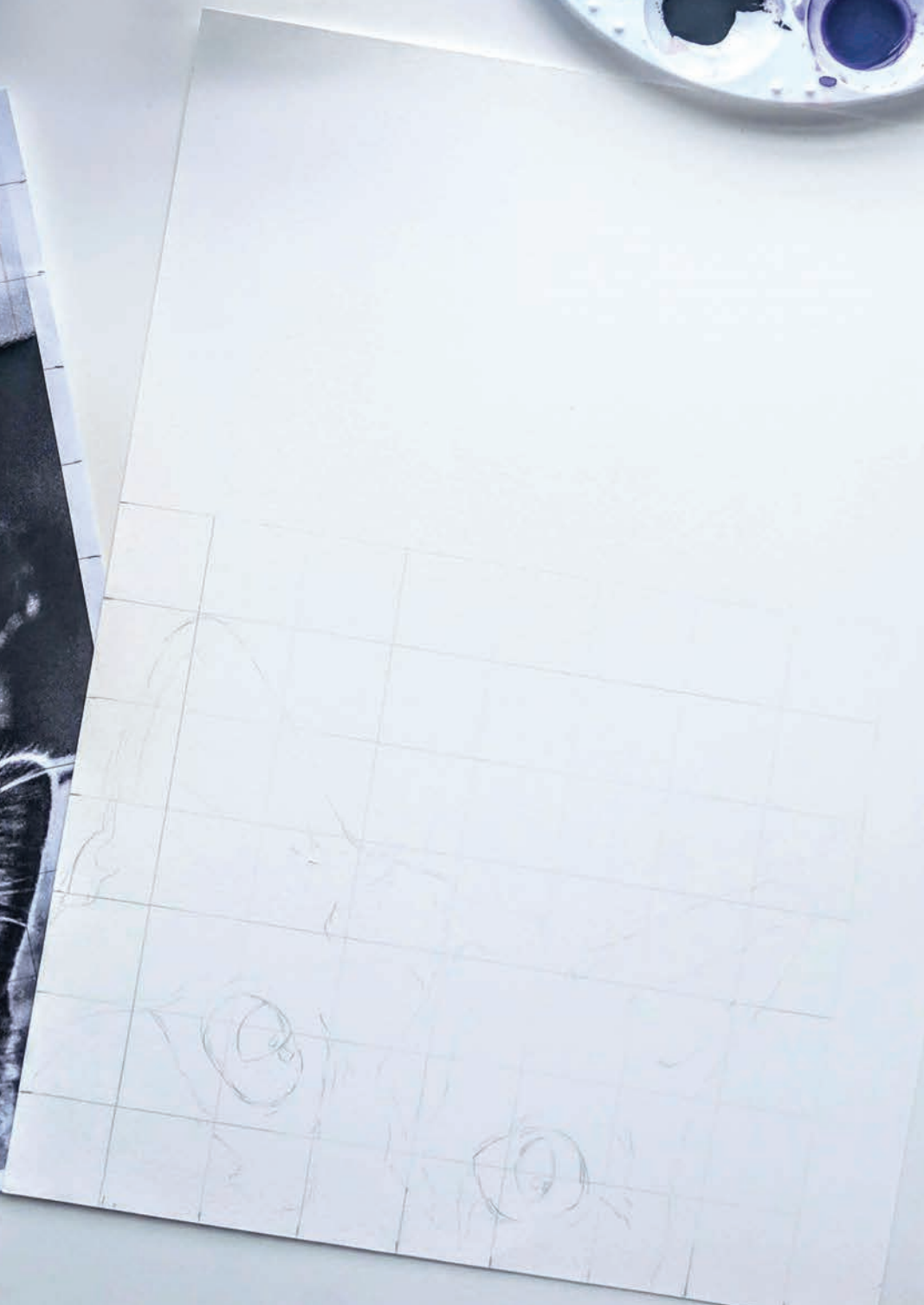
Because you can change the value of watercolor by diluting the paint with water, you can suggest form with a single color such as viridian (A), making watercolor great for quick sketches. However, you can also achieve more dramatic and colorful results by dropping in colors to enhance the lights and shadows, such as lemon yellow and phthalo blue dropped into viridian (B).

B



Understanding value allows you to break the rules of color and still create a “realistic” work of art. If the lights and darks are right, both in terms of location within the artwork as well as in relation to one another, it doesn’t matter which colors you choose. Just take a look at the artwork shown here. There’s nothing “realistic” about the coloring of these elephants. But the imaginative color application works because the values are right, as you can see in the grayscale version.







Setting Yourself Up for Success

Preparing for a Painting Session



A lot of rules can feel overwhelming, so just remember that this is about enjoying yourself during the process. I encourage you to play and experiment along the way with techniques and colors. You may even surprise yourself!

Natural light is your friend. If you are not blessed with your own studio space, that's OK—you can do just as well at a kitchen table or in your living room. Just make sure you have good natural lighting.

FINDING SOURCE PHOTOS



Since most of us are not professional photographers, you will probably need to rely heavily on the Internet, personal photos of your pets, or a friend's photos. If you are looking for pictures online, there are a plenty of royalty-free stock photography sites out there that are filled with generous photographers and images of almost any animal you can think of.

For the projects that feature your own pets, this is a no-brainer. Smartphones equipped with high-resolution cameras, combined with natural light, makes for a winning combination. If you have a friend who takes photos that you would like to use, respectfully ask their permission first!

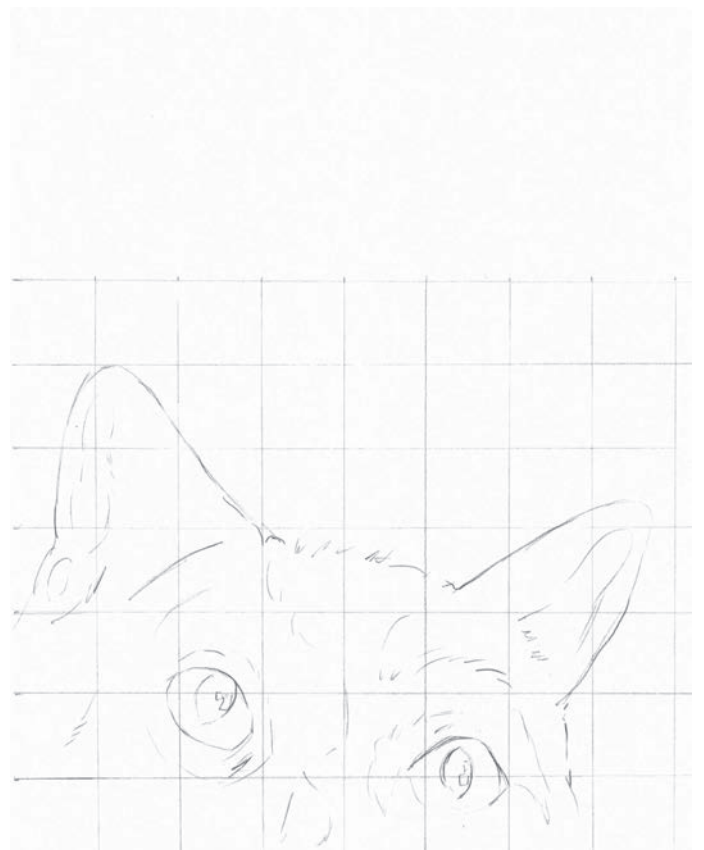
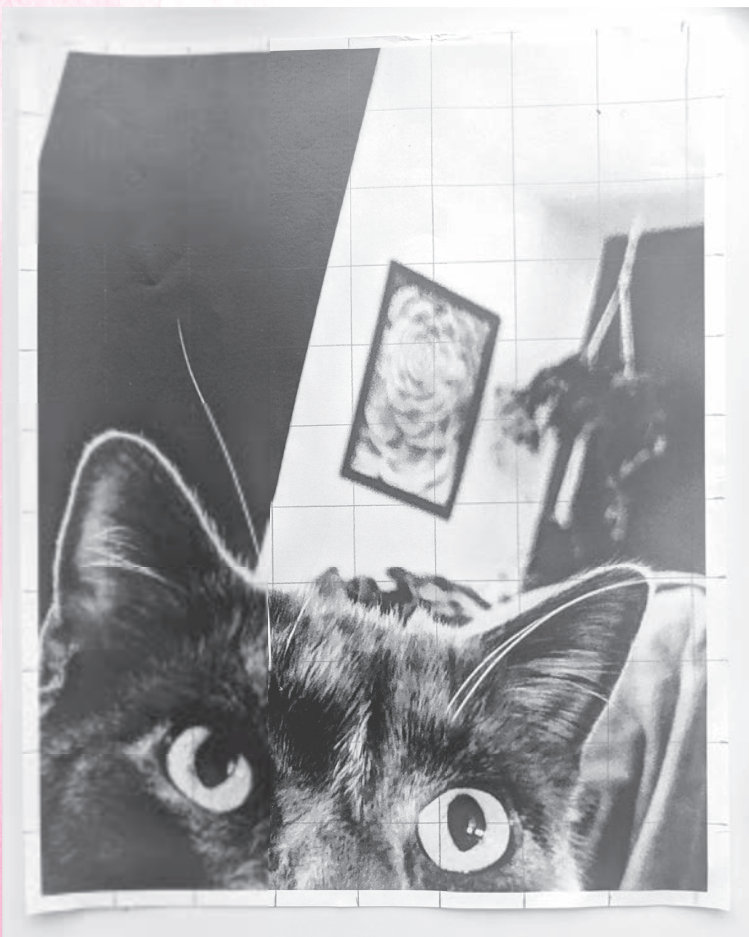
COMBINING REFERENCES

You may find that you need to work from more than one photograph to create the masterpiece you have in mind. One of the great things about making art is that you can take artistic license to make changes or additions to a reference image or images. For example, if you want to paint a lovely scene of a hummingbird feeding from a honeysuckle bush, you may need a couple of hummingbird images and a couple of images of honeysuckle flowers so that you can create a pleasing composition that incorporates all the elements you want to include.

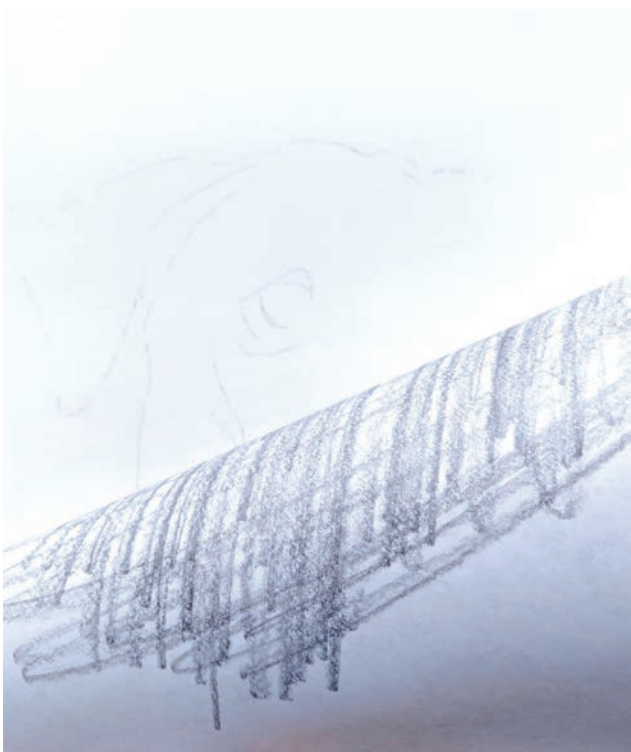
SKETCHING

I often sketch freehand, but for accuracy's sake, I also use the techniques outlined here. Remember that unless you're attempting to paint a specific animal and capture its unique personality, it's OK if the artwork is not precisely accurate to the source photo. Do what makes you feel most comfortable.

One of the most common sketching techniques is to use a grid, as shown in the "Peeking Pet with a Pop of Color" project on pages 40-47. For this technique, you need a printed photo and will transfer it at the exact same size (1:1 ratio) onto your watercolor paper. Simply draw an even grid on the photograph—I used 1-inch spacing—and then draw the same grid on your paper and do your best to sketch it out, drawing only what you see in each box, one at a time. You can also scale up the size depending how large your surface is. For instance, you can scale up from a 1-inch grid to 4-inch spacing for your painting (1:4 ratio).



Alternatively, you can also use tracing paper, projectors, and many other tools for tracing and sketching. One of my personal favorites when I first got into art was the transfer technique. For this technique, cover the back of the printed reference with a layer of graphite pencil. Then place the paper, graphite-side down, on top of the watercolor paper, and trace the outline of the subject. The pressure from your pencil will transfer the graphite to the watercolor paper underneath, creating a light sketch for you to work from.



Now, let's get started on these projects! Feel free to skip around to find a project at your level or the one that speaks to you the most. If you like, challenge yourself to complete all twelve. Just remember to enjoy yourself and the process! For more tips and tricks, you can find me on Instagram and Facebook @weekdaybest.





Step-by-Step Painting Projects

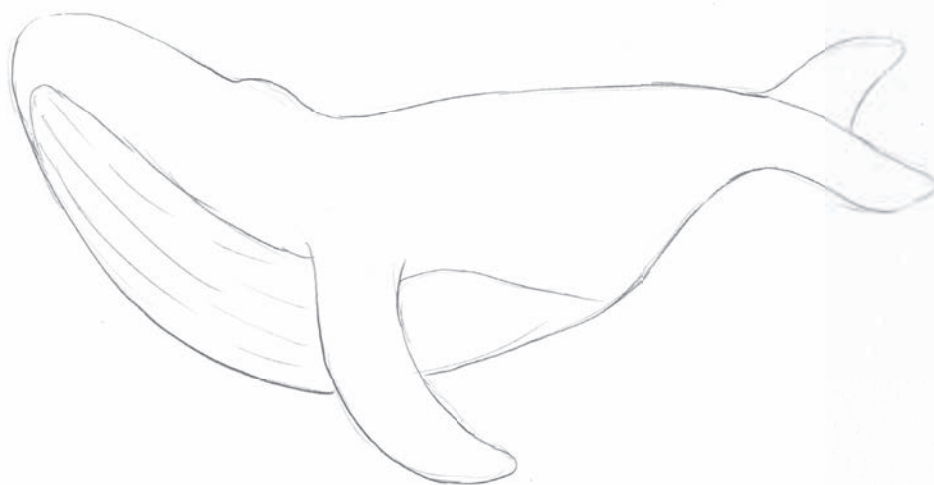
Galaxy Whale

For this project, we'll use fun techniques that allow us to experiment with colors to see how watercolor moves and blends to mimic the seemingly random colors that the universe has to offer.

I chose five of my favorite colors that are rich in pigment: phthalo blue, chrome yellow, vermilion hue (red), ultramarine red violet, and quinacridone magenta—also known as blue, yellow, red, purple, and pink! With just these five colors, you can create a tiny universe.

You might choose to use liquid frisket (see page 11) to block out the white areas, or you can add white sections later using white gouache or a white gel pen. The important thing is to allow the colors to blend naturally, and don't be afraid to embrace the chaos!





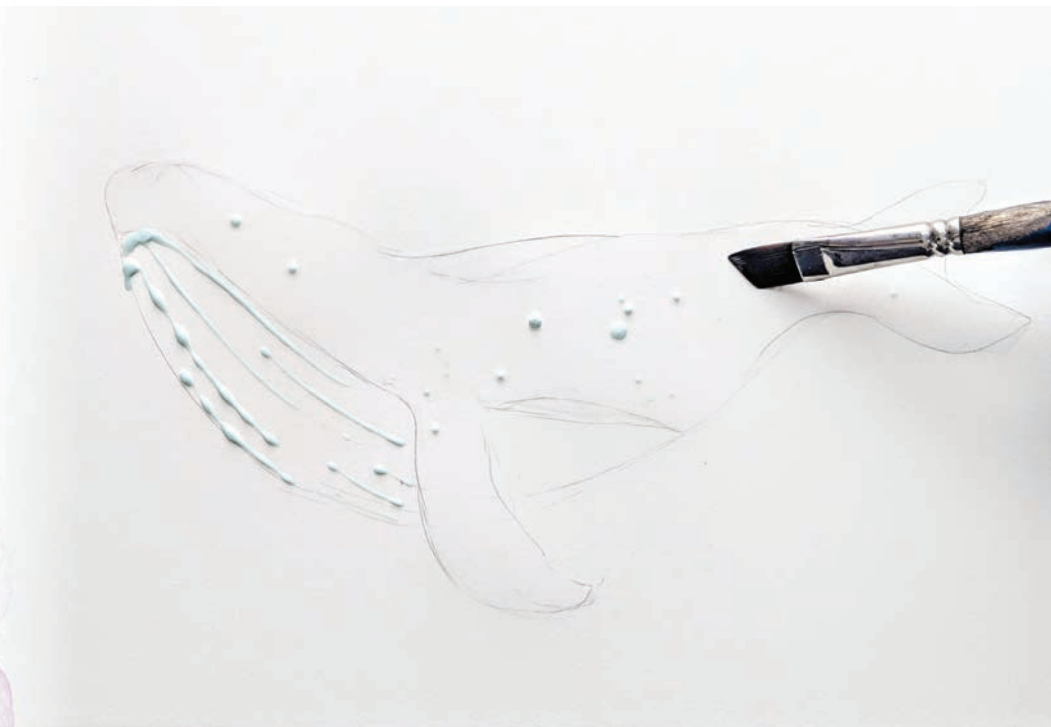
1

Sketch the whale's silhouette, either freehand or using one of the methods in the sketching section (pages 28-29). Before starting, I suggest looking at some galaxy photos for inspiration. I like to pull up a few photos on a tablet or laptop and keep it nearby for reference.



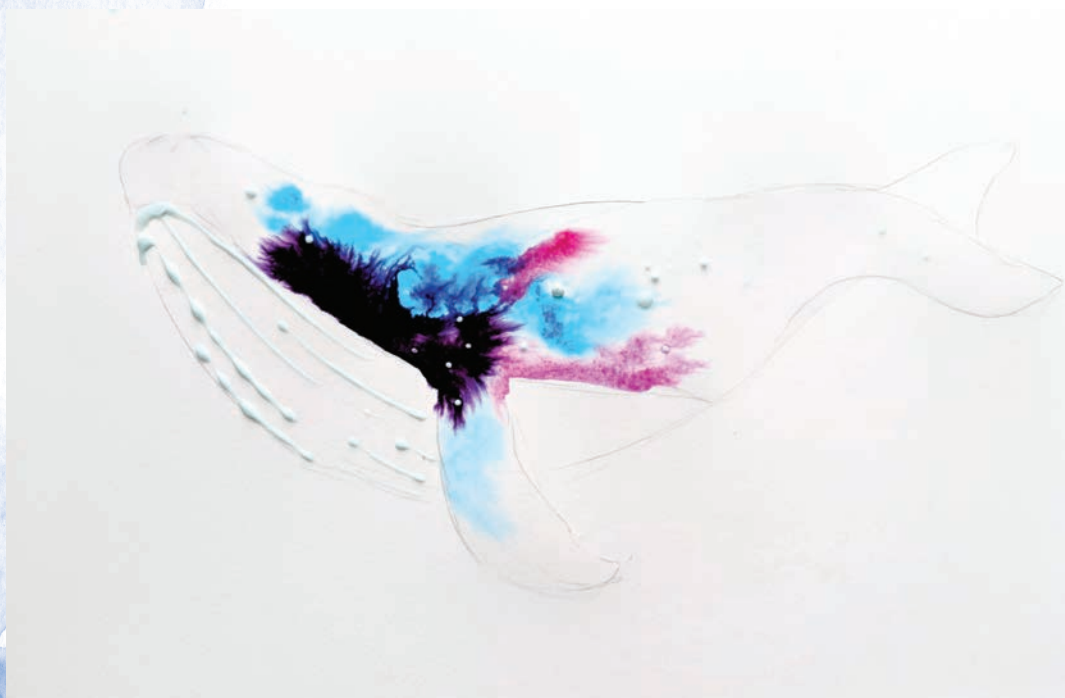
2

If you've decided to use liquid frisket to protect the white areas, such as the stars, apply it now. Let the frisket dry before moving on.



3

The most important step is to start with clean water on the paper. You want the paper evenly wet and shiny, but not so wet that the water pools. Remember: too much water can buckle even the best watercolor paper. To avoid this, add water quickly and start working before it dries. This technique is called wet-into-wet (see page 13).



4

Let's play! I like to start with deep purple for the darkest sections of space. Soak your paintbrush with concentrated watercolor and touch it to the wet surface. Observe how the paint travels through the water. Dot paint around your paper where you see fit. Keep in mind that watercolors always dry lighter, so don't be afraid to add lots of pigment!



5

Add additional colors until the surface of the whale is covered with vibrant color.





6

Use a clean brush to drag the pigments into each other. Try not to overwork it, or you may eliminate the natural texture of watercolor.

This step is optional, but I like to use a hair dryer, set on low, to dry the paper if it starts to warp. The fibers will reshrink and the paper will flatten out. Make sure it isn't cool to the touch; that indicates there is still moisture in the paper.

7

Once the background has dried, use a smaller round brush to add some finer details. In this case, I add random trails of color and texture.





8

Remove the frisket when the paper is completely dry, gently rubbing it away with a clean finger. When all of the frisket is gone, you are ready to start working on the stars.



9

Add detail to your stars. If you didn't use frisket to establish the white areas, now is the time to fill your paintbrush with white gouache. Make sure the paintbrush is soaked but not dripping. Gently tap your brush against another clean brush over the paper, and watch the white drops create more stars in your universe. You can also use a white gel pen, but it takes more time and patience.





If there are areas of your painting where you do not want splattered paint, lay pieces of scrap paper over those sections to protect them.

Peeking Pet with a "Pop" of Color

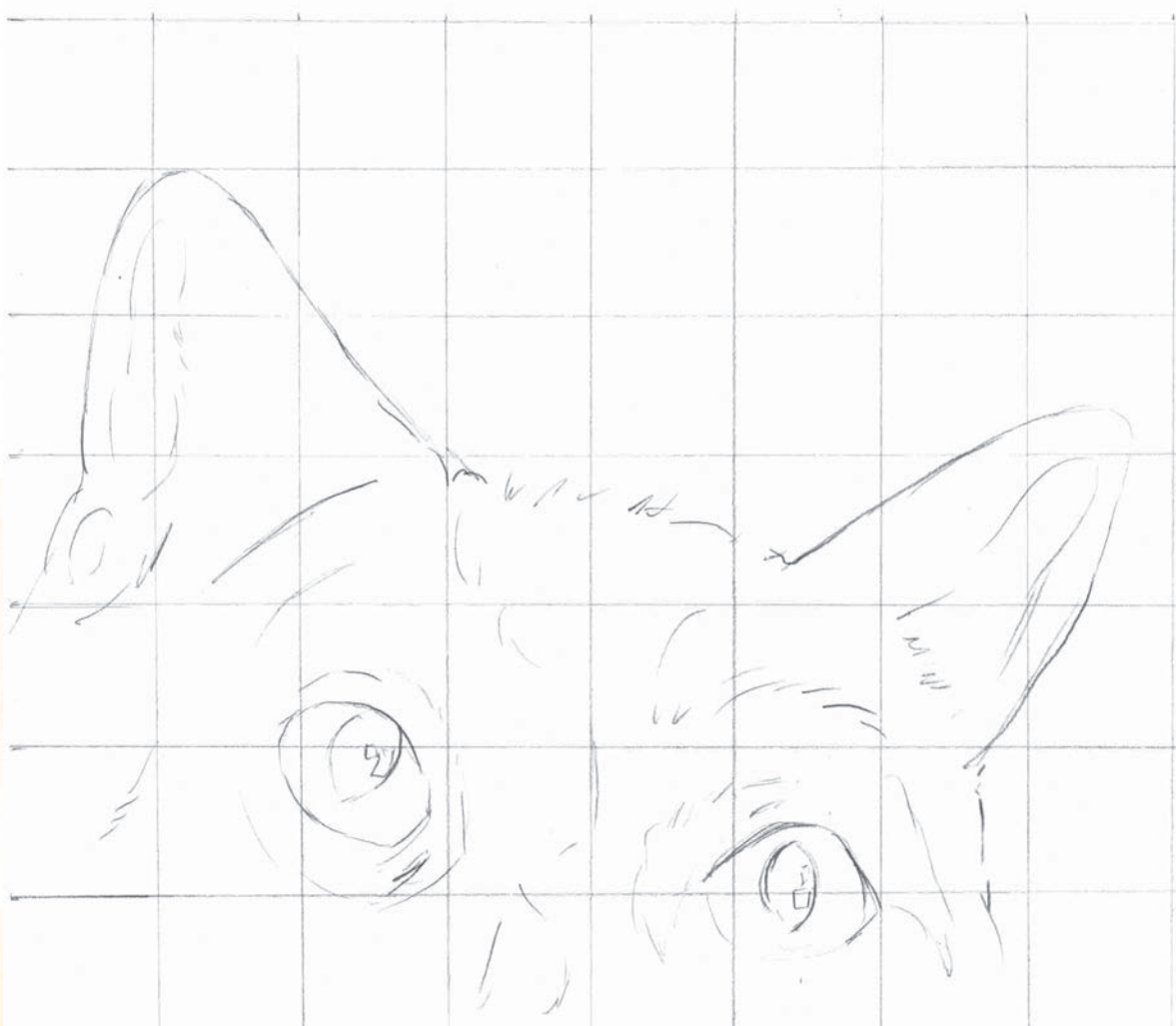
This stylized black-and-white pet portrait plays with white space and just a "pop" of color to catch the eye. In this painting, your pet—or other animal—peeks in from outside the frame. We will mainly be working with black watercolor, and the white paper will serve as the gray tones. A gel pen or white paint will help create the fine details. Let's get started!





1

I used photo-editing software to crop a photo of my cat, Fluffy, showing only the top half, and printed it in black and white to make it easier to see the gray tones. As shown here, you can sketch your pet or other animal using the grid method. Simply use a ruler and a pencil to draw the same number of evenly spaced lines horizontally and vertically across both your reference and your watercolor paper. Then sketch what you see in each square of your reference in the corresponding square on your watercolor paper.



2

While sketching, feel free to experiment with the layout and find a fun angle that you like.



3

Load a large round brush with watered-down black paint. Identify the lightest areas—you are only laying down undertones in this step. Start laying down the lighter sections on dry paper. You don't have to be too careful in this step, since you will layer in darker tones and details later. Keep it loose!

4

Add some darker washes, or more concentrated watercolor pigment. Again, you don't have to be very specific in this first layer. At this point, you're just adding general areas of light and dark; you can add details later. Keeping it loose will help achieve that natural watercolor texture, so try not to overwork it. Focus on the fur, and save the eyes for later.



5

Once the first layer has dried, it's time to add some detail. During this step, you can glaze over areas that are not yet dark enough. I dip just the end of a bristly wash brush into concentrated black watercolor and use it to create the effect of fur. A fan brush will do the same thing, but with more uniformity in each brushstroke.



6

Use the brush to add fur texture until you're happy with the look. Notice how the addition of more layers gives the painting depth. Then add color to the eyes. I like to exaggerate colors, and doing so on the eyes will really make them stand out. Use clean water to wet the area before applying paint. Then, using a small round brush, dab color onto the wet surface.





7

Repeat for the other eye. Once dry, go ahead and paint the black center of the eye with concentrated black watercolor. Be sure to leave some flecks of white to make the eyes look more reflective and realistic.



8

I like to add a bit of color around the edge of the animal. This gives the effect of backlighting, and you can use that same color to draw the whiskers if you'd like. Here you can see how I follow the line of the cat's head and ear, starting on the left, with orange paint.

9

Finish the outline, and let the paint dry. Add specks of color in the eyes to give them more dimension—I use concentrated green and orange paint. Then go back through the portrait with a white gel pen or gouache paint to add highlights and white strands of fur. Try to imitate the fur's random direction of growth. When you're happy with the portrait, allow all the paint and ink to thoroughly dry before gently erasing any visible pencil gridlines.



Use a repeating color to bring cohesion to your painting. In this portrait, I used orange in the eyes, the outline, and the long whiskers to both unify the artwork and add that bright pop of color!



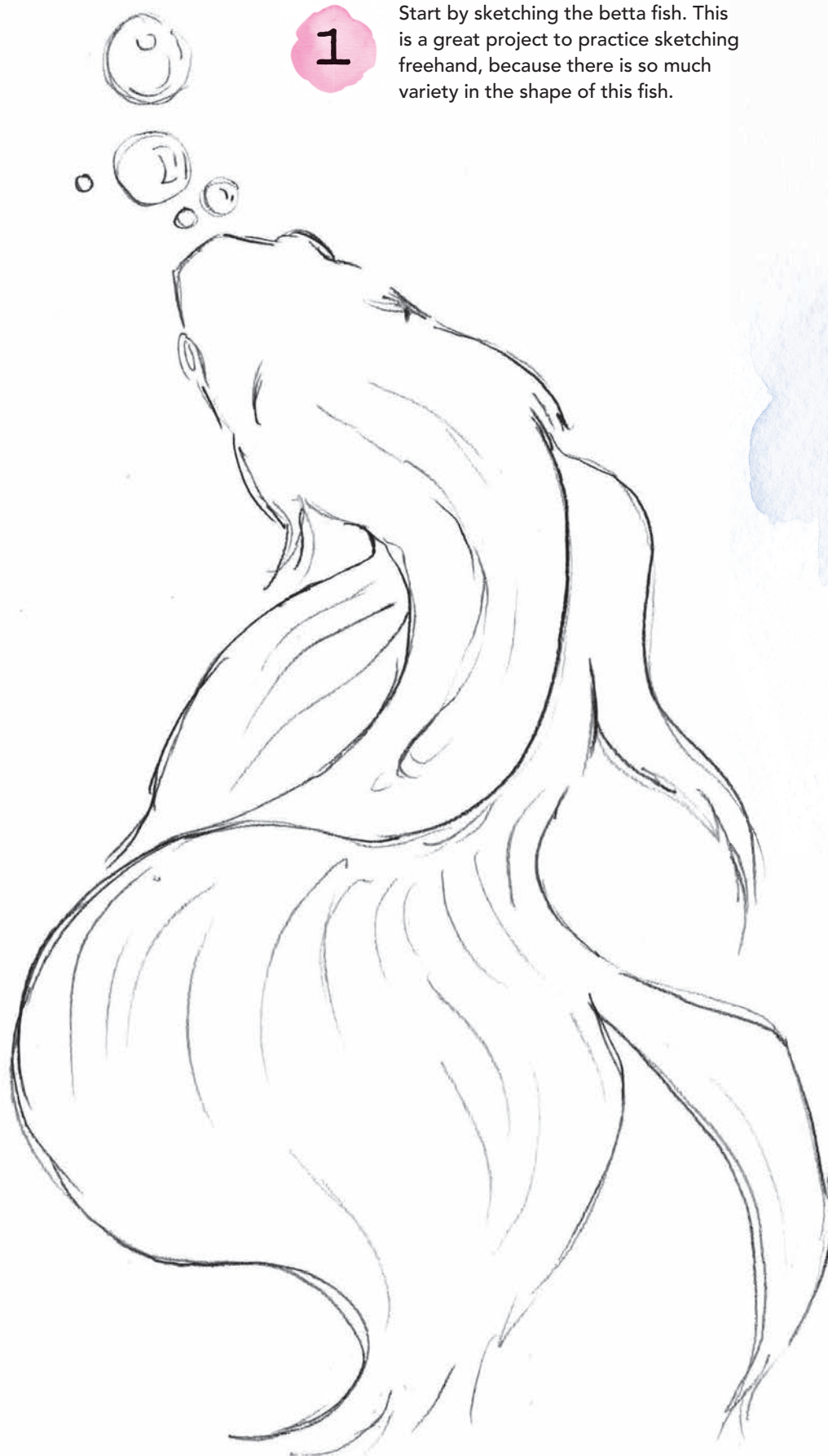
Betta Fish in Dark Waters

Let's try working on a simple background, contrasted with just the few vibrant colors of a betta fish. In this project, we'll start by creating the dark and textured background. There are many beautiful and vibrant fish that you can use as a reference. You can follow along with me if you like, or you can choose your own photo to work from—a koi or goldfish would make a nice alternative.



1

Start by sketching the betta fish. This is a great project to practice sketching freehand, because there is so much variety in the shape of this fish.



2

Use liquid frisket to create a few bubbles coming out of the fish's mouth, or add the bubbles later with white paint.

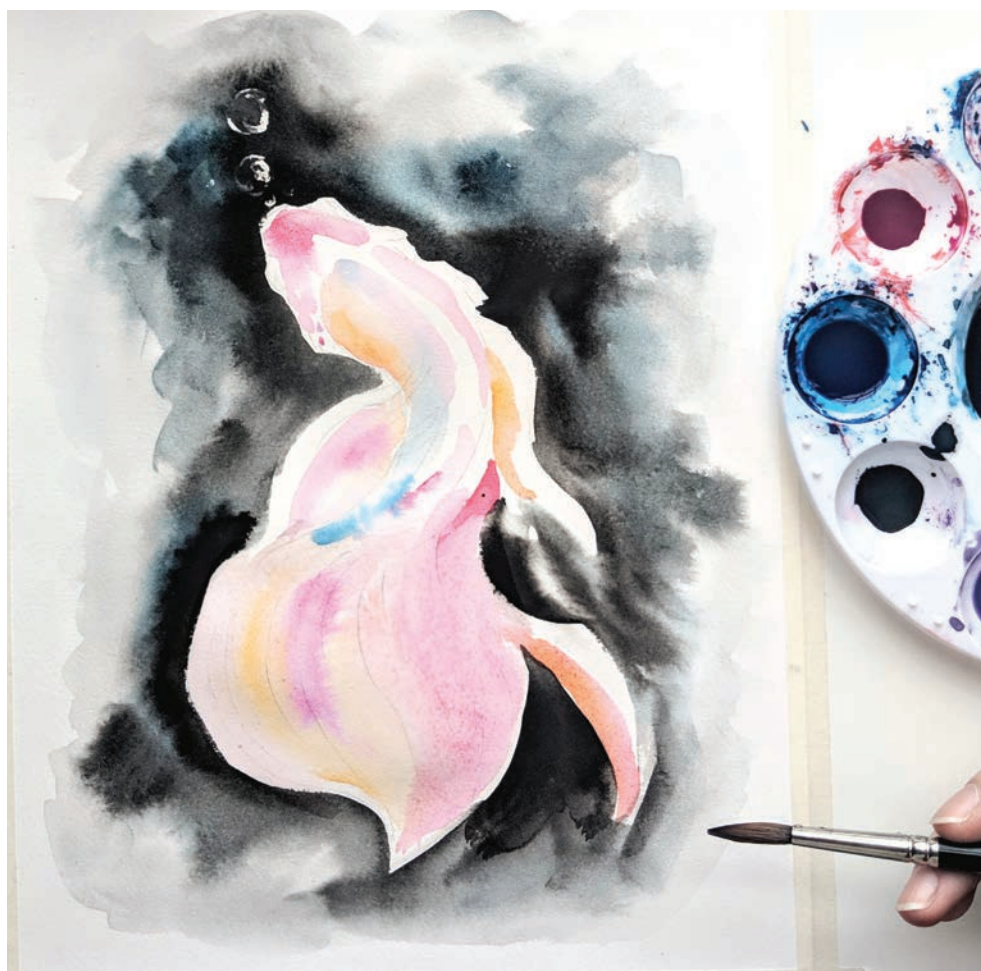


3

Brush on clean water, starting at the outline of the fish and working out toward the paper's edges. You can brush the water as far as you'd like. Remember to apply enough water for the paper to be shiny, but not pooling. You can add more water to any areas that absorb it too quickly. I'm using an angled brush, which gives me broad coverage and a nice edge to my brushstrokes.

4

Use one or more dark colors for the water. I use carbon black and Payne's gray. Starting at the edge of the sketch and working your way out, add concentrated watercolors by touching your loaded brush to the wet surface. Keep adding paint, and allow it to move and blend naturally to create lots of texture. Remember: watercolor paints always dry a shade lighter. Use a hair dryer on a low setting to flatten any warping in the paper while the background is still damp.



5

Once your dark background dries, it's time to start adding pastel washes to the fish's body. First, identify the lightest areas of the fish. They may look white at first glance, but most likely they are very light tones of color. I use very watered-down pink, yellow, and blue for the undertones.

This is an easy stage, so you can stay loose. There's plenty of room for error! We will layer in darker shades and details later.

6

Once the undertones are dry, wet down any areas of the fish where you want to add some deeper tones. Using more concentrated watercolor on your brush, start gently painting those areas you want to darken.





7

Repeat this process until you start to see the depth and deep colors that you desire.

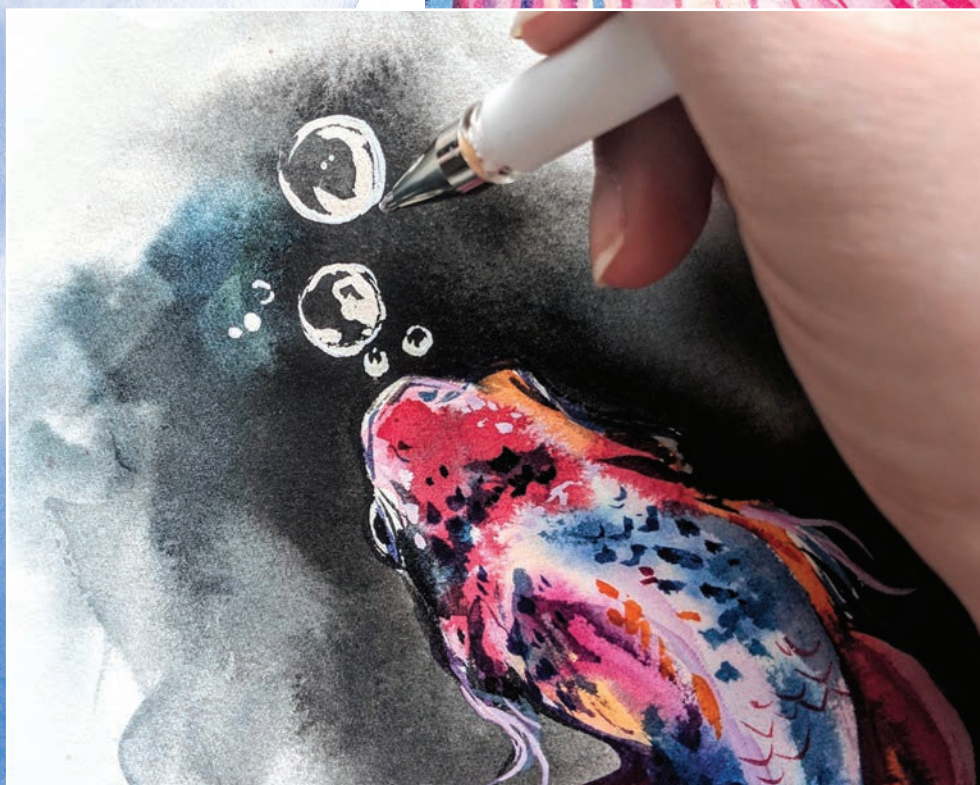
8

Don't worry if the colors spread too quickly. You can go in with a clean paper towel and gently dab at the areas that need to be lightened up. Of course, be sure to do this while the area is still wet!



9

Once you are happy with the shape and tones of your fish, it's time to add detail. I add some texture on the scales and lines on the fins with a very small round brush. I even like to drag the side of the brush to create more random texture.



10

Remove the frisket, and then use a white gel pen to add small details throughout: some reflection, fine detail to the tips of the fins, and perhaps a sparkle on the betta fish's eye. These little details make the painting look more complete.



Pair of Parakeets in Pastels

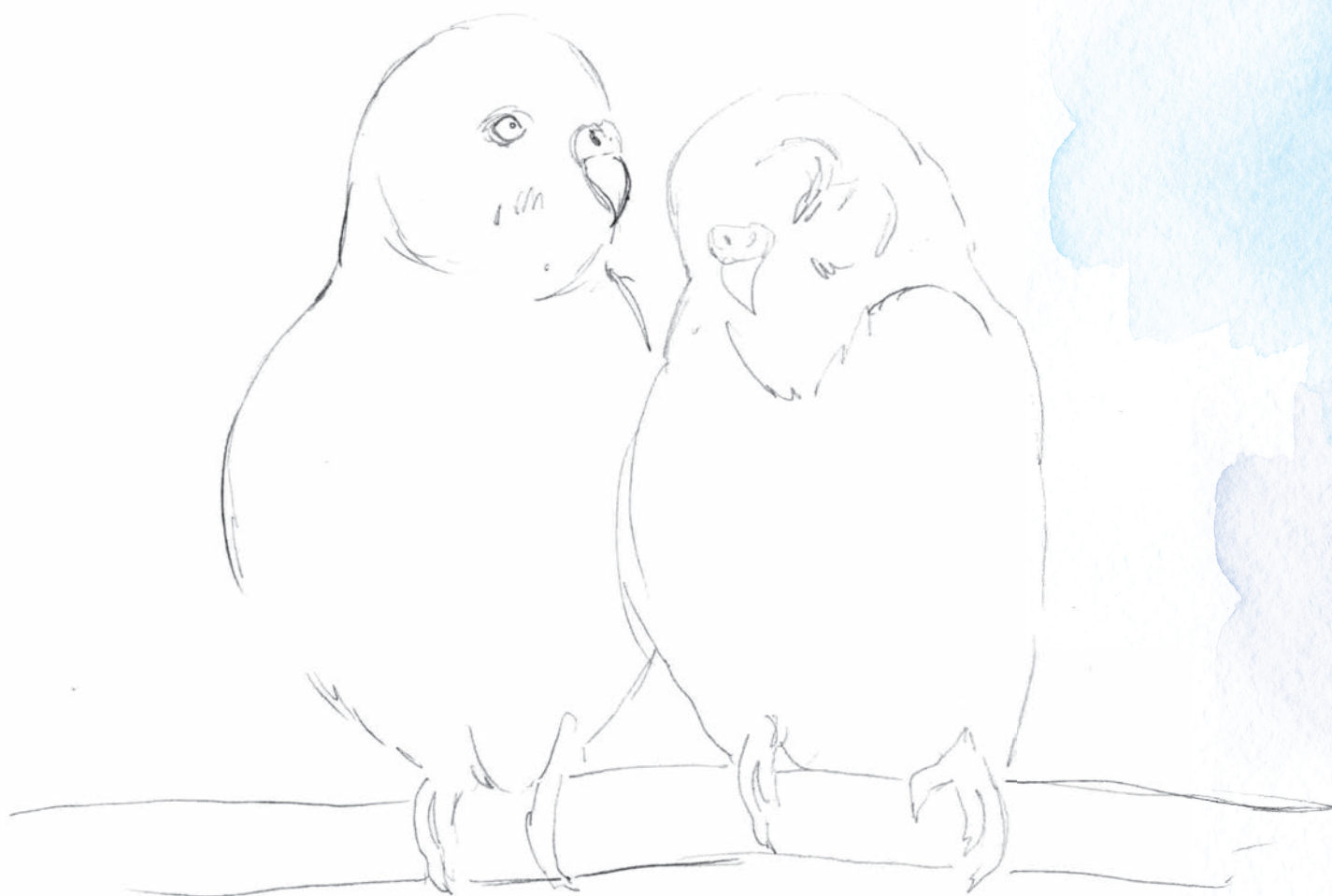
Birds are such a wonderful subject. The combination of their soft texture and naturally beautiful coloring makes for a great painting. I chose to work with parakeets for this painting because of their pretty pastel colors. We will work with light washes of color to achieve soft pastels against the white of the paper.

Fortunately, there are many sources of inspiration for this common but beautiful bird. I chose two separate source photos to work from and created a composition of the birds snuggled up together.



1

This is an easy project to freehand sketch because of the birds' simple shapes. However, you can use any of the sketching methods previously discussed if you prefer.



2

Start by painting the perch. Even though the wood might be considered simply "brown," I mix burnt sienna loosely with chrome yellow, and go back in while it is still wet to add some splotches of red and black for shading. This does not have to be exact!



3

Starting with one of the birds, apply a light wash of clean water. While the area is still wet, add light washes of color. You don't want the color to be too concentrated, so keep your application light. You can always add more color and layers later.



4

To avoid harsh color transitions, add yellow to the head area while the blue paint is still wet. Don't worry if some of the colors start to bleed together—these are complementary colors and will blend well, making the color transition look natural. If any color starts to spread too much, lightly dab the area with a clean paper towel.

While the paint is still damp, you can add a little more color to the darker or shaded areas of the parakeet. Let the paint dry before adding more detail.



5

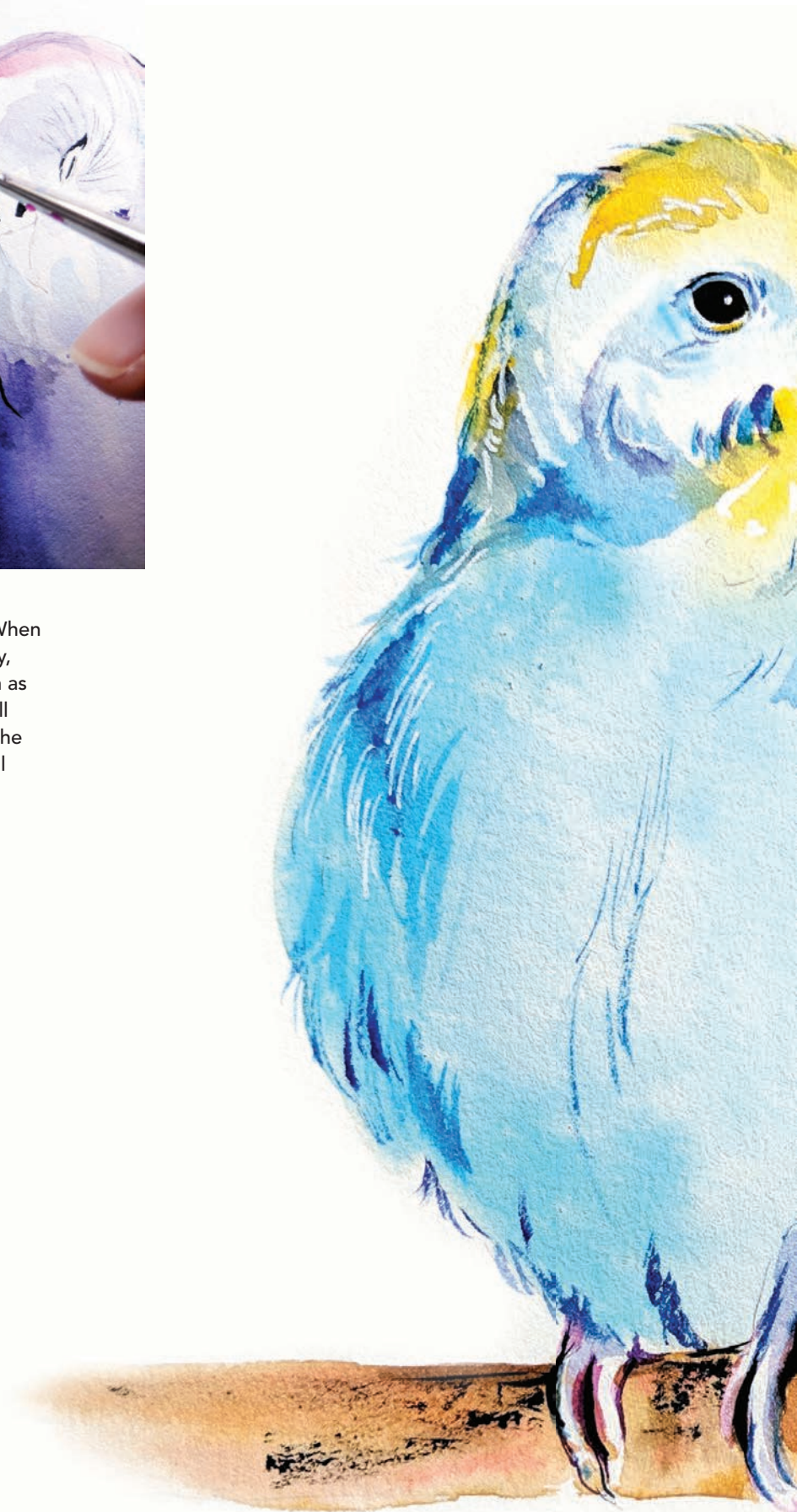
Repeat these steps for the next parakeet, using the colors of your choosing—I use purple and pink. Notice how I left this bird's head untouched. This parakeet has a mostly white head, and I represent that by leaving the white of the paper for this area.

While the body is drying, you can move on to the feet. Paint the feet of both birds using the wet-on-dry technique. Shade around the birds' toes to create depth on the perch.



6

Now comes my favorite part: details! When the largest areas of the subjects are dry, you can start adding small details, such as the eyes and beaks. I always use a small dot or two of white in the eye to give the impression of light reflection. This small detail makes the subject look alive!



7

Now look at the feathers and notice the direction in which they lay. Using a small round brush, go in and add light lines that create the effect of these feathers. You may even want to add some white highlights to the feathers. This always adds depth and is a favorite technique of mine to make subjects look real!



Dee Runkle 119

Puffin

Somewhere between a duck and a penguin is the striking and unique puffin. For this project we'll focus on using the white of the paper as negative space to paint this beautiful animal and create a visually interesting piece.

Feel free to take artistic liberty by adding as much or as little detail as you like! The minimal and high-contrast colors are sure to catch the eye of the viewers.



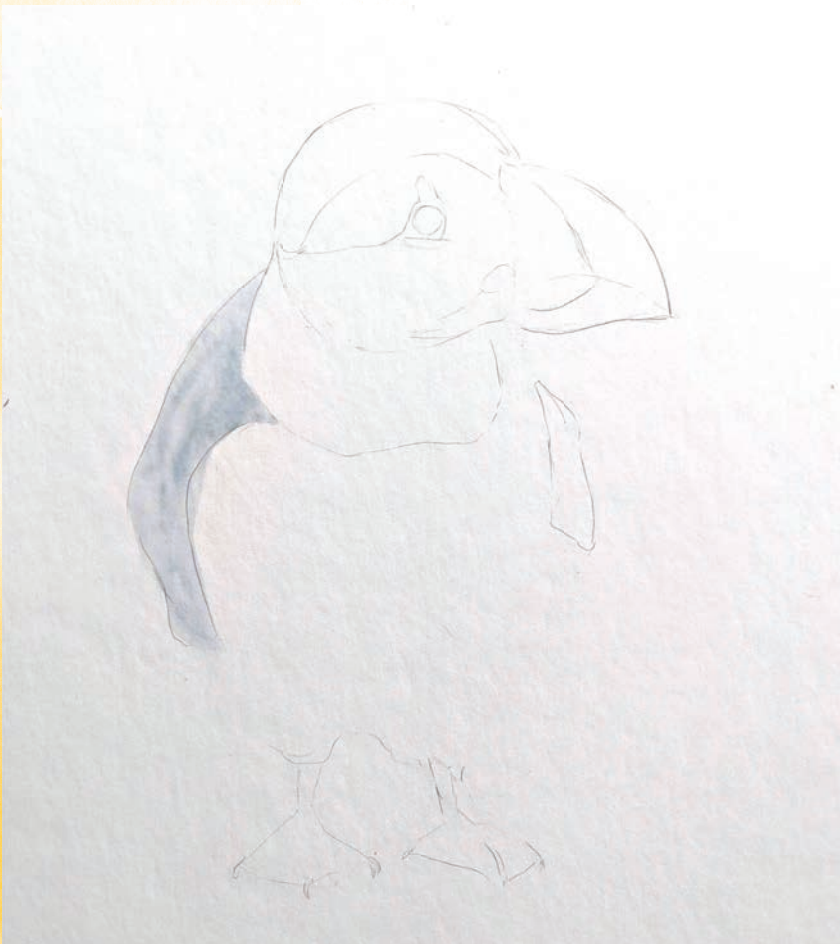
1

There are plenty of royalty-free source images for this unique creature available online. Sketch the puffin on watercolor paper or board. I'm using cold-pressed watercolor board. I like to work on watercolor board because you don't have to tape the edges of the paper down or worry about the paper warping.



2

Go into your sketch and erase the pencil marks in the white areas of the puffin. The goal for this painting is to allow the white of the puffin's body to blend with the white of the paper. (Take a peek at the finished illustration on page 69 to see what I mean.)



3

You will mostly use black here. Add a wash of water to the black areas of the puffin.

4

Then, using the wet-into-wet technique, add concentrated black and allow it to spread naturally through the wet area.



5

As you work to fill the black areas, make sure the paint goes all the way to the edges of the puffin.



6

Once the black areas are filled in, apply soft orange on the bottom of the body to suggest the reflection on the feathers from the feet. Just a tiny bit of color will do it!

Paint the puffin's feet with a yellow-orange wash, and then use darker red to create shadows in the darker areas of the feet.



7

Use black paint to add the claws and the darkest areas of shadow between the toes of the webbed feet.





8

Once the feet have dried, you may want to create some ground for him to stand on. While I tend to leave my backgrounds minimal, you also don't want the subjects to look like they're floating in midair! Simply wash in some natural colors and shading around the feet. The darkest areas should be right around the edges of the feet.



9

I tend to leave the face for last. The patterns in the beak may prove the most challenging part of this painting. Remember to add the lighter layers first, and leave the white of the paper for the highlights. Then use a small round brush for the darker streaks.

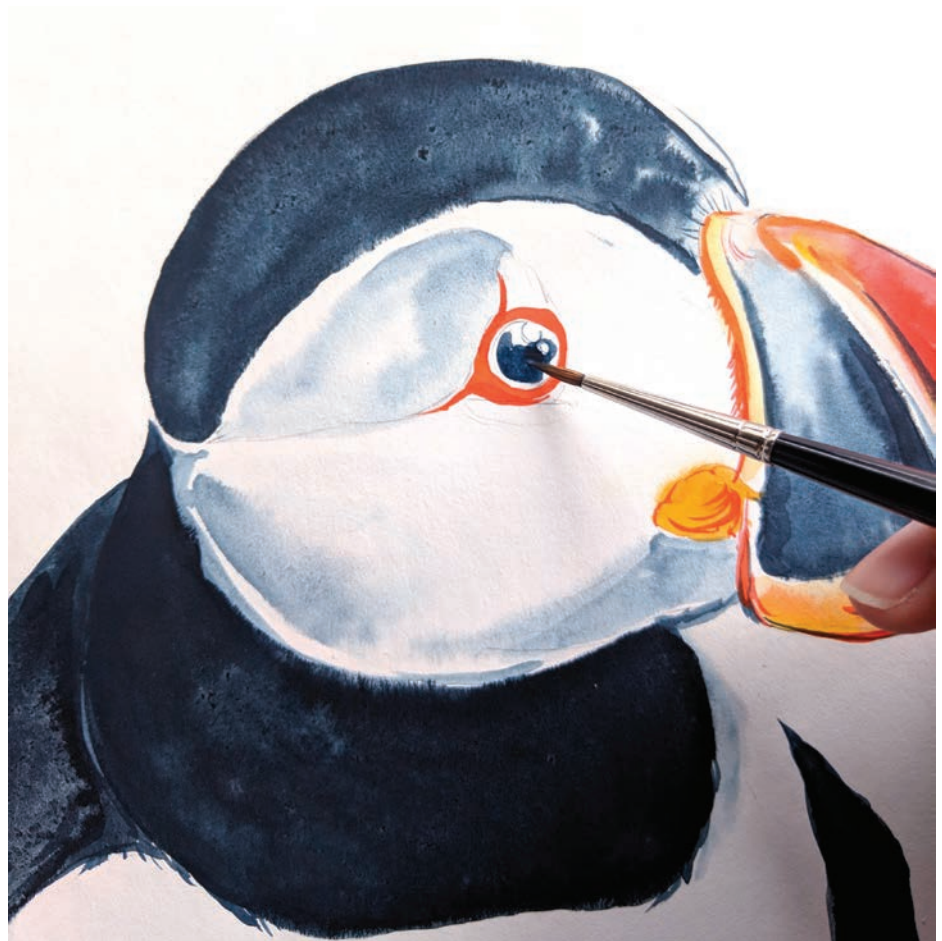
10

Use a little bit of black mixed with water to paint the gray shadows on the face.



11

Finally, paint the eyes, leaving little flecks of white for reflections.



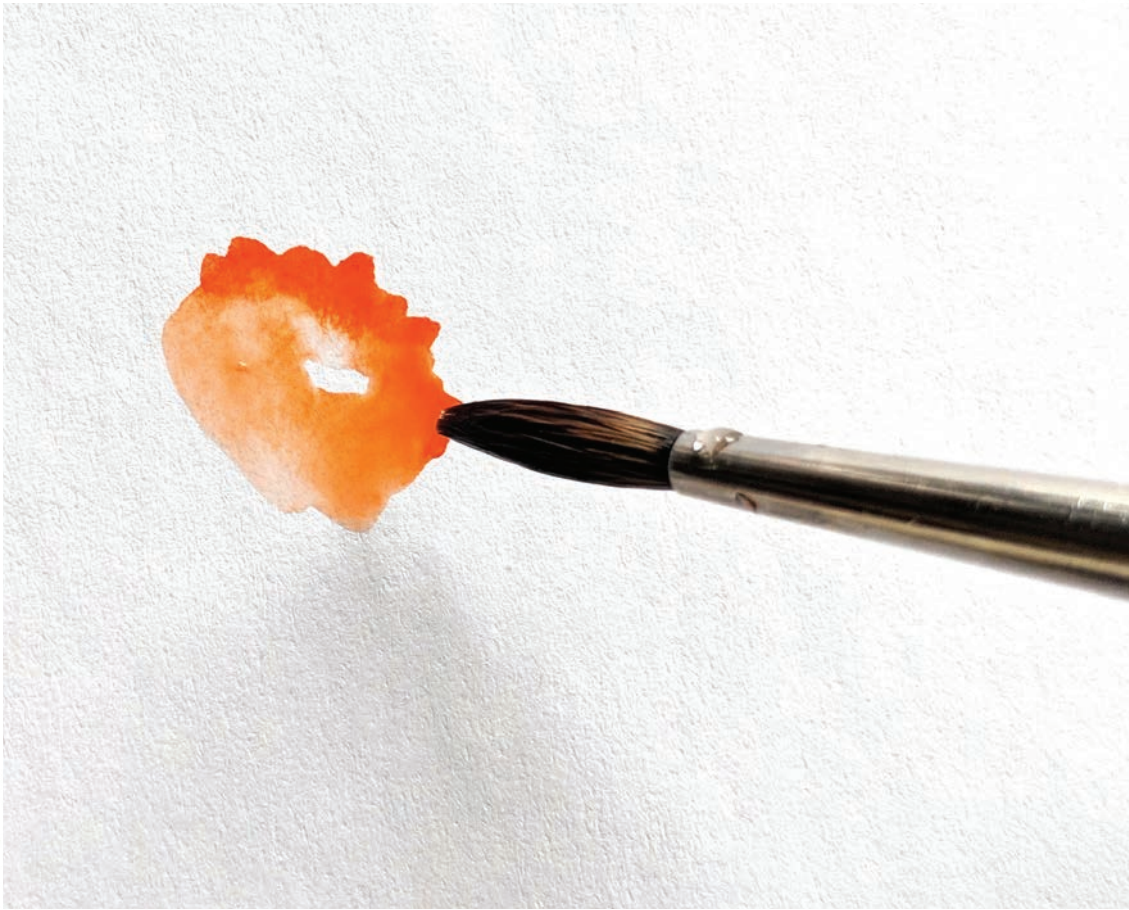


Bees & Flowers

Let's paint bees! There is a lot of beauty in these tiny but strong creatures. I'll show you how to paint these insects simply and loosely to achieve the effect of tiny details without spending a lot of time on them.

We'll also add flowers as an easy and simple embellishment to complete the scene. If you would like a soft background, I encourage you to do this first using a wash. If you are comfortable leaving the background white like me, let's start with the flowers!





1

Flowers are a nice addition that don't require a lot of details. I mostly choose to work with buttercups and coneflowers for reference. For the coneflowers, start with an orange center, leaving a fleck or two of white.

2

Add a darker color, like violet or blue, at the bottom. While the center is still wet, pull the petals down with clean water and let the colors bleed into the petals.



3

As you create the flowers, use color variation so that the flowers don't all look the same.



4

Keep the flowers very loose—a single large brushstroke can paint a whole petal. Add depth by including more concentrated tones at the edges of the petals.





5

Once the flowers are painted, you can add stems and leaves in the background. For the leaves, simply use the single stroke of a large round brush, pulling away from the stem.

6

Sketch the bees after painting the flowers and allowing them to dry. This way you can place bees around and even on your flowers.

The beauty of these watercolor bees is that you can keep the paint loose and complete the look with some tiny details. First, wash the area of the bee body with light yellow and orange watercolor, making sure to leave a few spots of paper untouched for white highlights.

8

While the paint is still wet, go back in with concentrated black watercolor and dab in the black areas of the bees. This creates the effect of a black-and-yellow pattern, without having to paint distinctive stripes.

You can paint the legs and antennae while the body is still wet. Adding small details like tiny hairs on the legs and texture on the wings will make them seem more realistic. Just a few strokes can give the illusion of a lot of detail. Don't forget to define the eye!



Watercolor is a fluid medium. Not all of your bees will look the same, and that's fine. Variation will add energy and life to your artwork. Allow the paint application to be loose, and vary the amount of black paint versus yellow paint in your bees.



9

Repeat the bee-painting steps to create more bees, working in different sizes and angles. As you can see, I even place a couple of bees on my flowers.





Silhouette Animals

The simple silhouette style of art allows for lots of creativity in color and technique, without having to worry about many details in your artwork. You can trace the outline of your animal onto the paper to make it even easier.

I suggest working with a photo of your chosen animal that shows a distinct outline or profile. You can paint the full body of the animal or even just the bust. We'll go into detail on how to create an even wash, but I encourage you to experiment with your colors and textures!





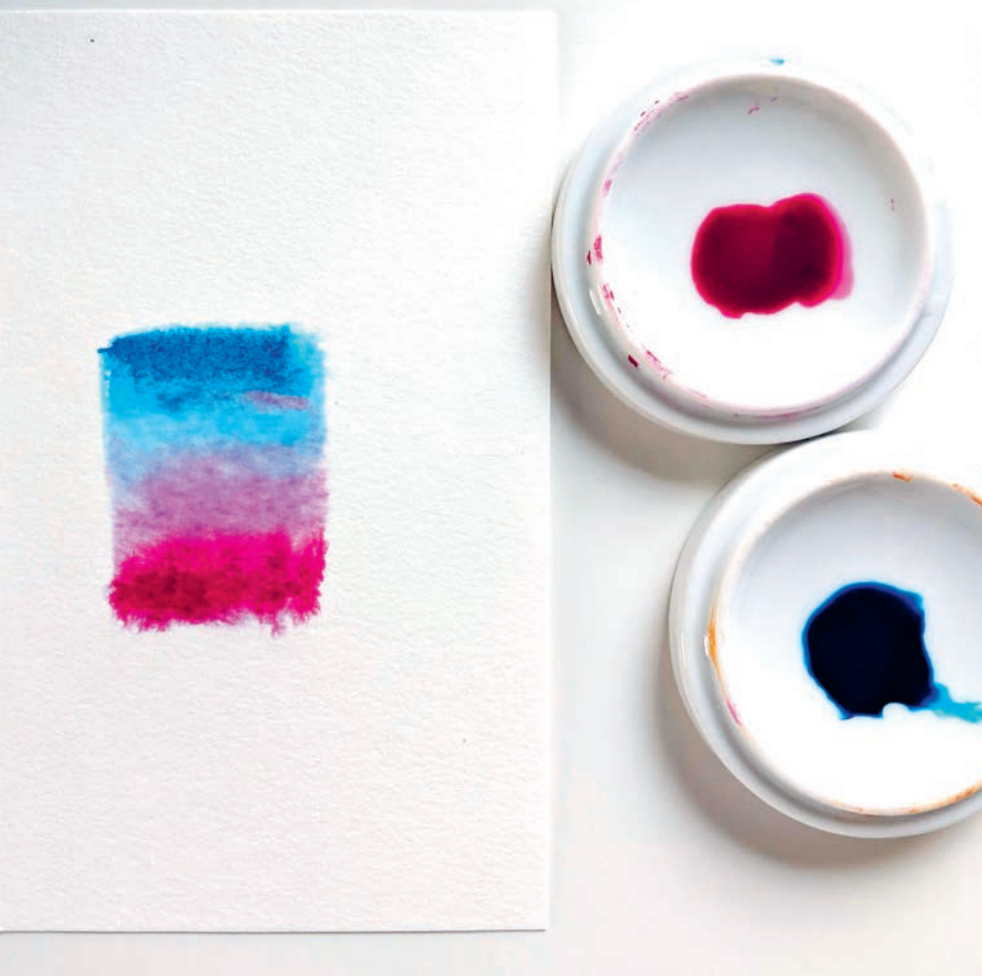
1

Sketch your subject. If you're a beginner, it may be easiest to use tracing paper, but you can use any of the sketching techniques discussed on pages 28-29. Prop your painting at an angle to allow the paint to flow downward—about 45 degrees is ideal.



2

Test a few colors on a scrap of watercolor paper to make sure the colors mix well together. I've chosen blue, yellow, and magenta, a combination I use often. Note that you must have your paint ready before starting the process, since you will be working quickly. I recommend filling a few wells in your palette with a paint-and-water combination you like.



3

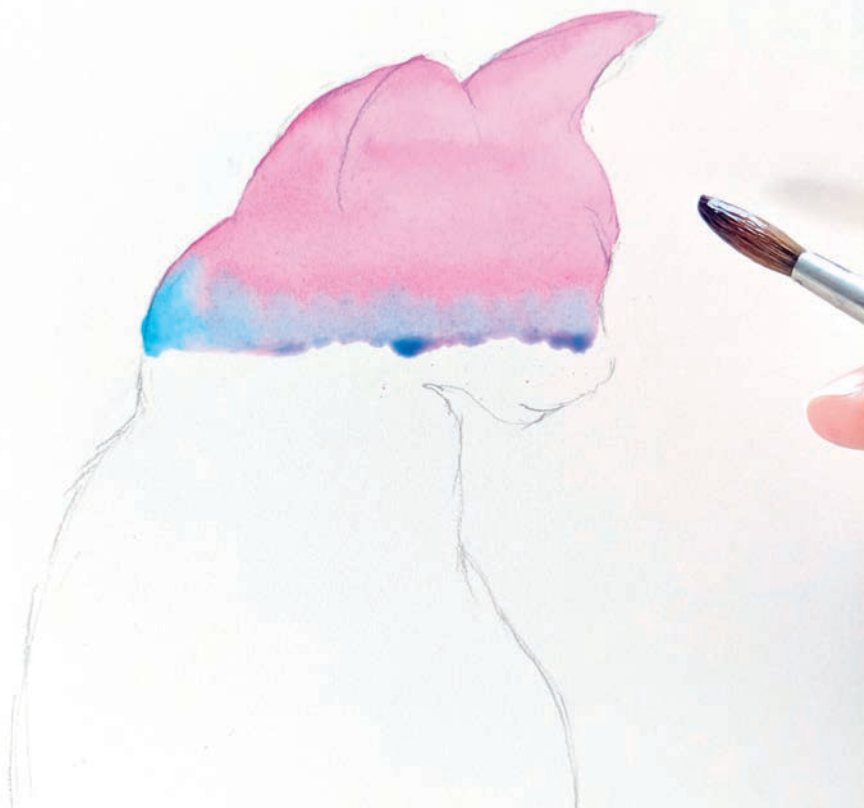
Start at the top of your silhouette with a loaded paintbrush. You want to maintain a wet edge so that the paint line doesn't dry and you can continue to blend downward. This means the bottom edge of your paint is beading but not dripping—a delicate balance! If the edge of your paint dries, it will result in an uneven wash.



4

Try to maintain even, side-to-side brushstrokes as you add paint to the silhouette.

You can add more clean water to lighten the color gradient as you work your way down.



5

If you are working with more than one color for your painting, like me, start blending in another color while the paint is wet.

6

Continue blending your colors until you reach the bottom of the silhouette.



7

If there's a small pool of paint at the bottom of your silhouette, like the one in my artwork, you can lightly touch a paper towel to it to absorb excess paint.



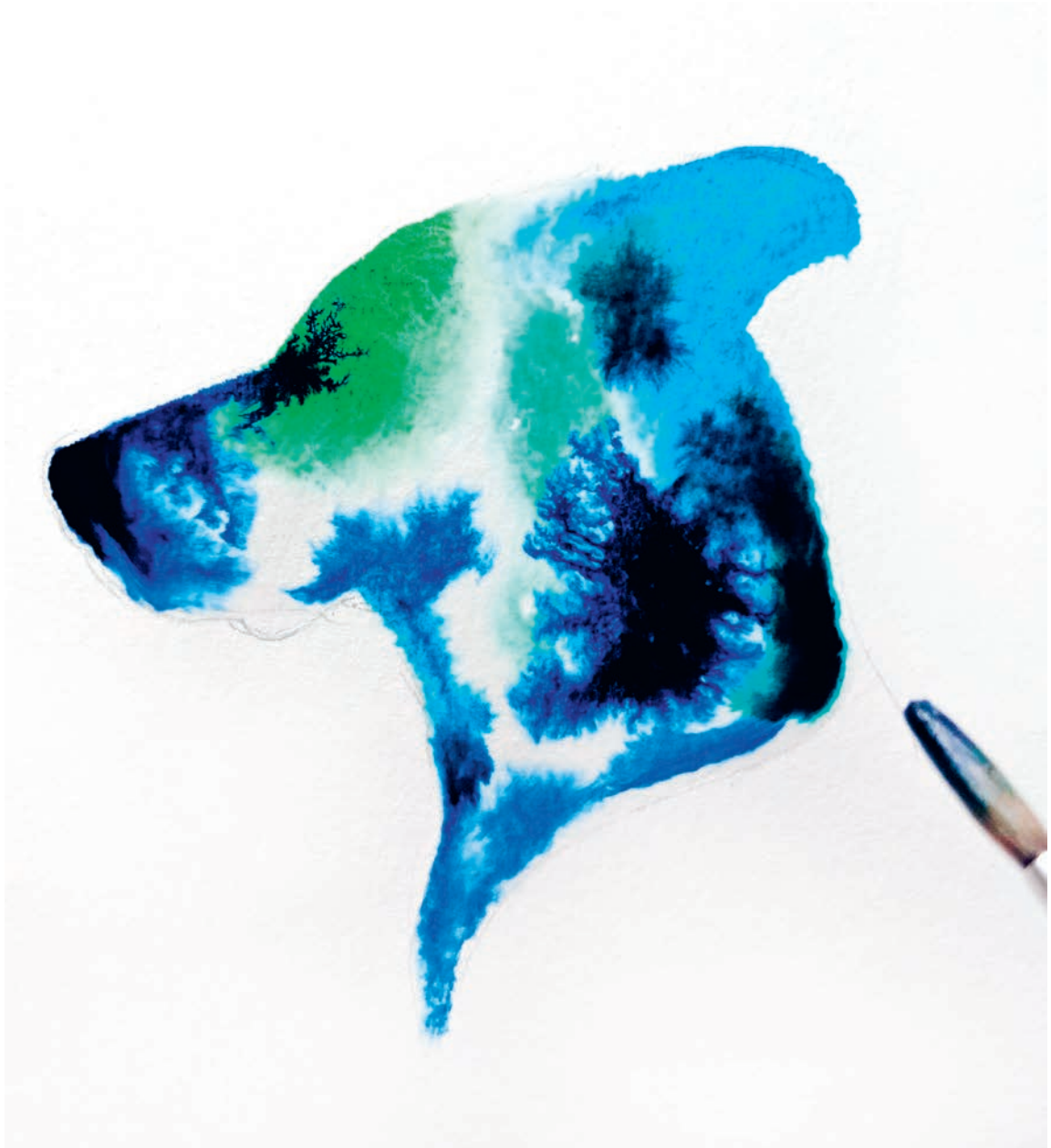
8

If you are happy with your colors, you're done! But if you would like the coloring to be more intense, repeat steps 3 to 7 on top of your initial wash to darken the pigment.



ALTERNATIVE TECHNIQUES

If you prefer, you can keep your painting flat on your work surface, and let the colors mix randomly using a wet-into-wet wash.



Another option is to just use one color for a more traditional silhouette, like the black dog profile shown here. Try all three methods, and see which you prefer!



Unicorn

This painting is for all the artists out there who are forever young at heart! The challenges we will focus on in this project include painting a white animal and adding imaginary features and colors.

I recommend starting with a source image of a white horse.

A close-up of the head will allow you to include lots of detail in your unicorn's features.



1

Once you have found a horse image that you like, sketch it out. Don't forget to sketch the horn. Since this is imaginary, there are lots of ways you can sketch it. I've chosen a twisted pattern similar to a narwhal tusk and surround it with hair.



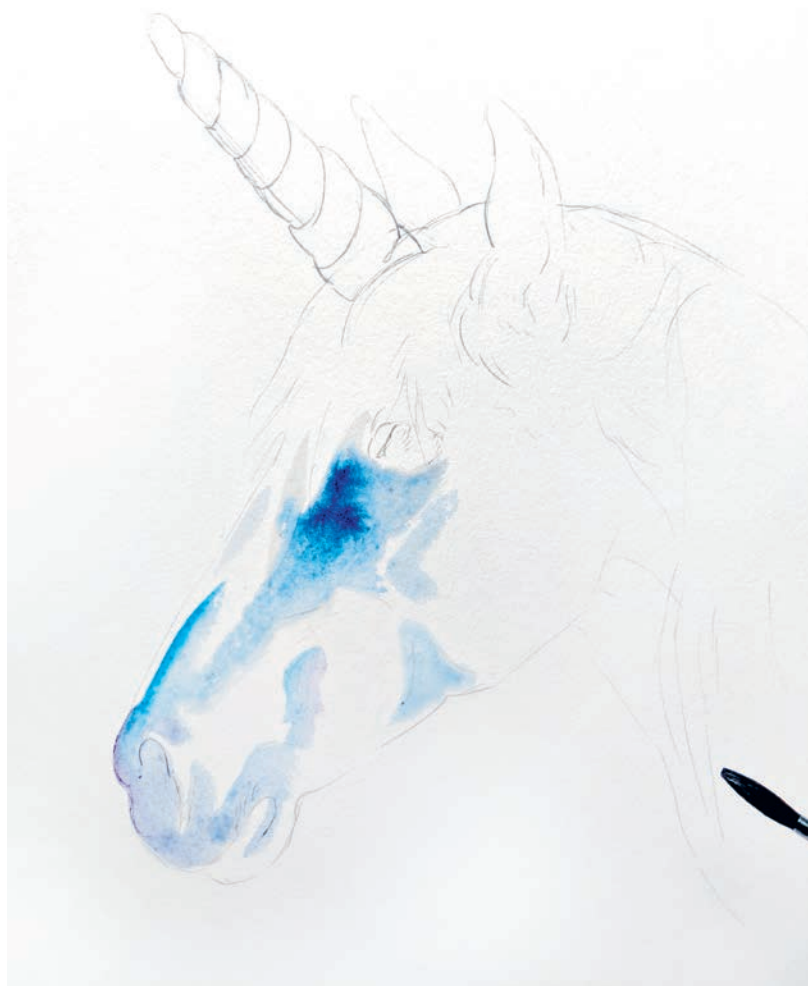
2

The key to painting or drawing a white animal is to let lots of the white paper show through. I begin with the areas featuring the most obvious shadows.



3

If you're nervous about adding too much color too quickly, just add some pools of water and dab in the paint little by little. You can also mask off the whitest areas or details with masking fluid if you prefer.



4

Continue adding pigment to darken the shadows. For my unicorn, I darken the shadows around the eye, nose, and mouth.



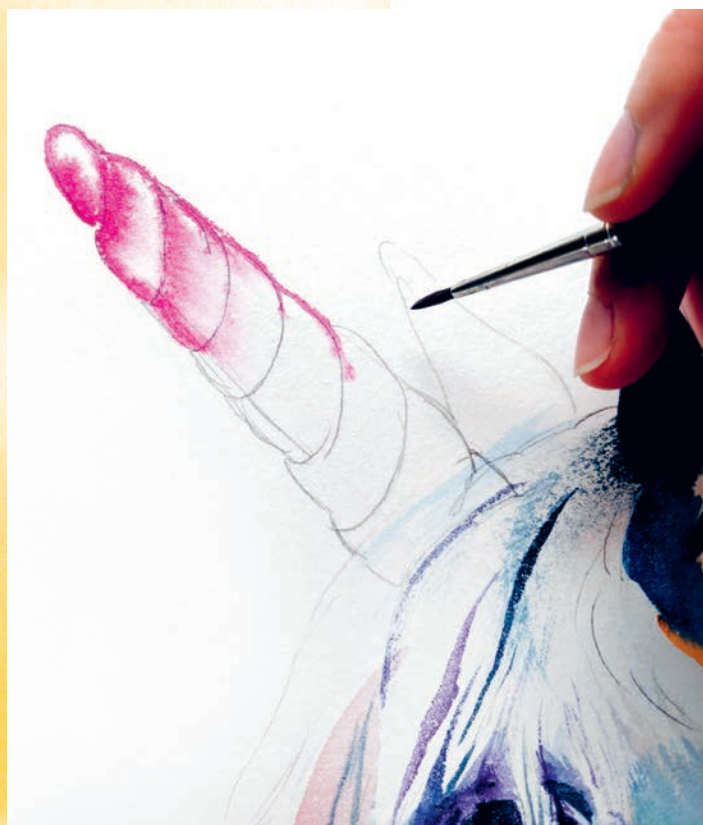
5

Working mostly with blues, grays, and purple, I continue to shade in small areas at a time.



6

Use the drybrush technique, adding just a little bit of paint to a dry round brush or a bristly mop brush, to add some random texture to the unicorn. This mimics the hairs and natural texture and can also help blend the edges of the shadow areas. You can also lightly drag the side of the brush bristles on the paper for a more random appearance.



7

Since unicorns are imaginary anyway, I decide I want my unicorn horn to be pink! What color will you paint yours? Wash the whole horn with clean water and load your brush with concentrated color. Go along the edges and seams of the horn with the brush.



8

Add shading along the shadow edge and bottom of the horn with a darker color, like purple. When the area is dry, go back and darken the lines to create depth.

Then move on to the hair. Hair is tricky in watercolor. I like to start by painting shadows in the direction of the hair growth. Layers are important for naturalness. Paint the hair with a wash of your preferred color. Try to leave light and white areas as highlights.

Try not to overthink this step. Even if the hair doesn't look exactly right, you can add detail once it is dry to complete the look. This may be as simple as adding a few random strands of hair with paint and white flecks of light with white paint.



9

Use a white gel pen to add delicate details to the eyes, such as highlights and eyelashes. You can also add wispy white hairs that fall over the eye and face, as I have done here.

10

Go back in and add paint in any areas where you would like to have more color, such as a section of hair or a shadow. Use the white gel pen to add any additional white details, like hairs coming out of the ear.

I add bright color to outline the unicorn's ears and back of the head, with delicate washes of color for the mane. I also add a patch of rainbow-colored chin hairs! I always walk away from a painting for a little bit and come back to view it later with fresh eyes to look for anything that needs adjustment.



11

Just for fun, I use metallic gold watercolor on the top of the horn to add a little sparkle. I encourage you to experiment with lots of watercolor brands and products—there are many fun options available!



Iridescent Beetle

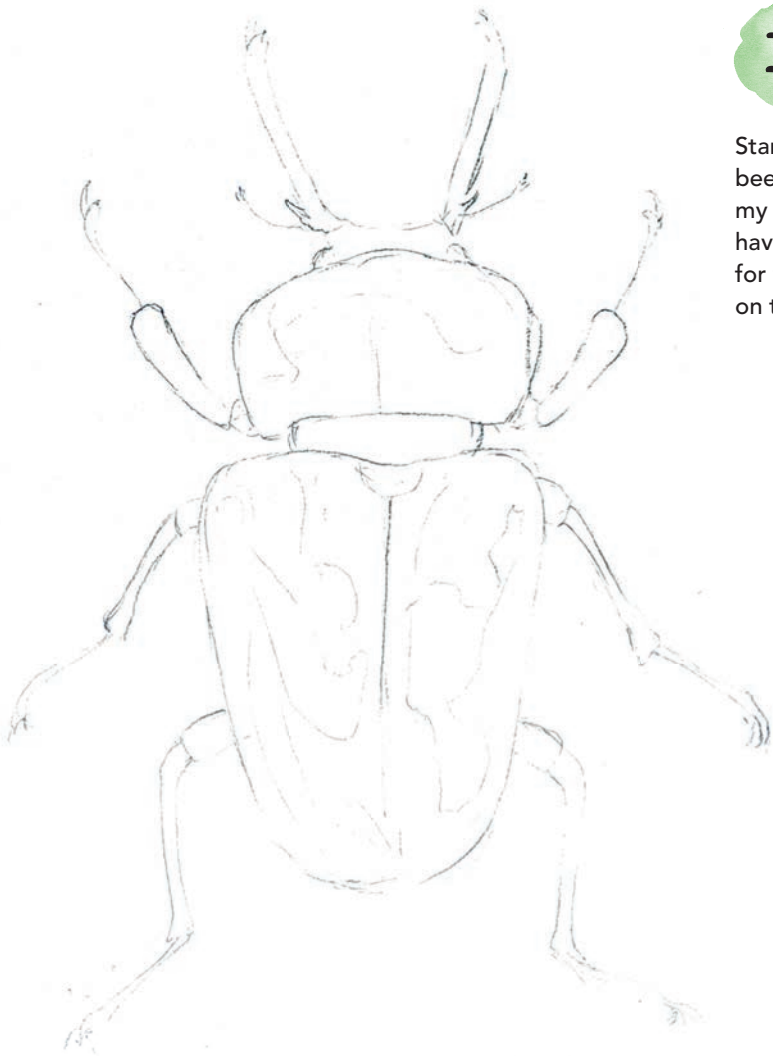
Do you think bugs are beautiful too? This project explores how to paint something that is “shiny” using watercolor paints. This may seem like a difficult feat, but by using a combination of light and dark colors, you too can create a beautiful, colorful beetle!

The beetle in this tutorial is a rainbow stag beetle. For reference, I collected a few photos to get the colors and iridescence right. It's fine to use features from more than one source image—just plan ahead to determine which features you'll pull from each reference photo.



1

Start by making a sketch of the beetle on watercolor paper. In my sketch, you can see how I have also sketched guidelines for where I will apply the color on the shiny back and head.



2

After sketching, I encourage you to start with a small and manageable area. A painting can quickly become overwhelming otherwise. Wash the chosen area with clean water first. Be careful not to wet down any areas that you want to remain white, such as the top area I've marked on the beetle's head.



3

While the area is wet, start adding in color. I recommend starting with the lighter colors first.



If the colors bleed too quickly or spread where you don't want them, simply dab the area with a clean paper towel. This will absorb the water and paint and prevent the colors from further spreading.



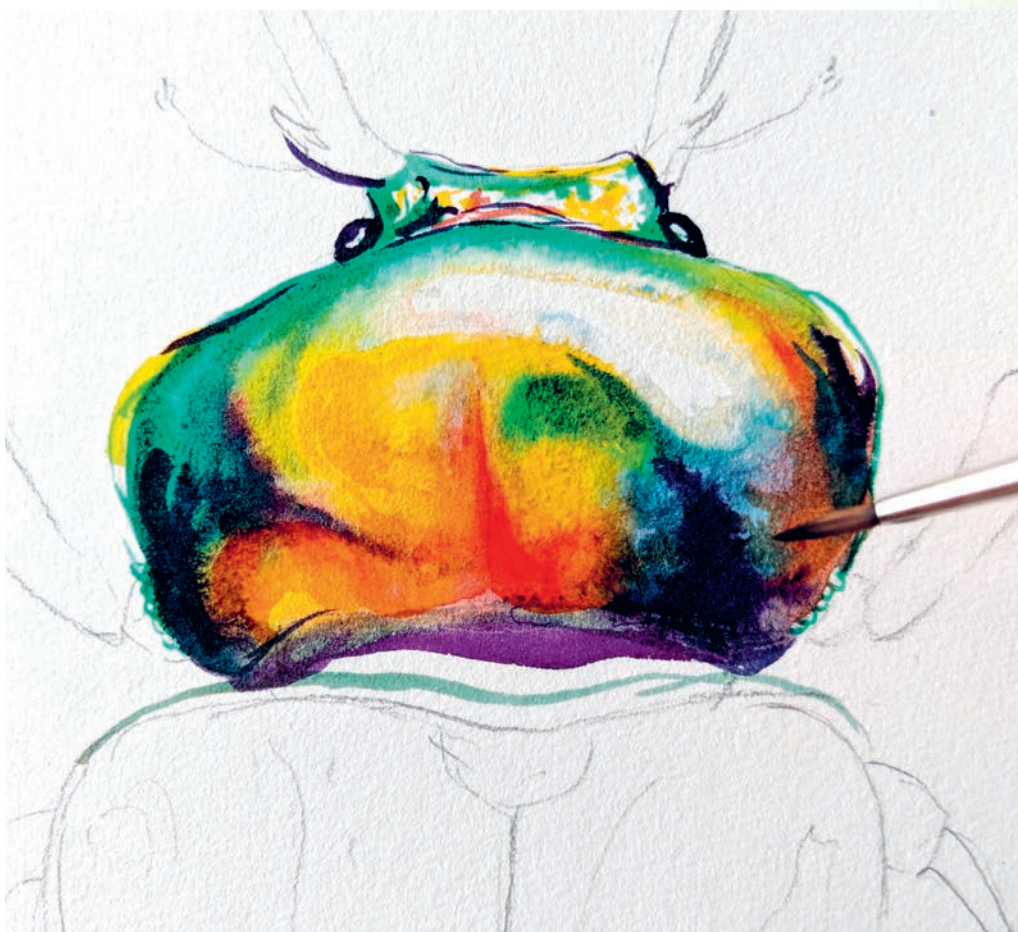
4

Paint quickly! While the area is still wet with paint, add more color where you see fit, dabbing it in a little at a time. Let the colors flow and blend naturally. It doesn't have to be exact. You can always add more color later.



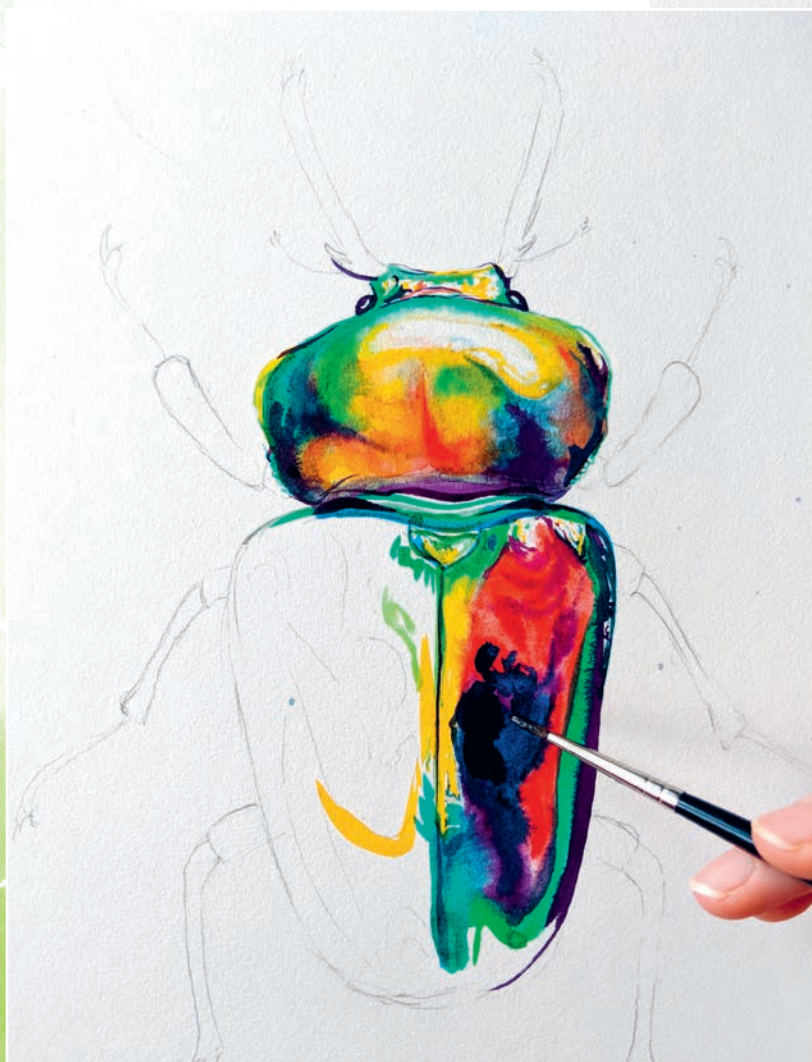
5

Once the area you are working on is dry, you can modify the tones by glazing in more colors. This means that you add another layer of water and pigment where you would like the colors to look richer or more intense. I like to make nice dark shadows to increase the depth.



6

Once you are satisfied with an area, move on to another section of your bug. To avoid feeling overwhelmed, try to focus on the blobs of color and seemingly random detail. Once the painting is done, these elements play together to make a complete picture that looks logical to the viewer's eyes.



7

Use the same method and techniques described in steps 2 through 5, adding color to the wet paper, and then glazing areas of shadow or more intense color after the initial wash dries.



8

How do you paint something so that it appears shiny? With lots of contrast! Shiny objects reflect light, and that can be translated into a painting with flecks of white, or leaving areas of the paper white. Contrast these white reflections with deep shadows. The darker the shadows, the brighter the highlights appear.

9

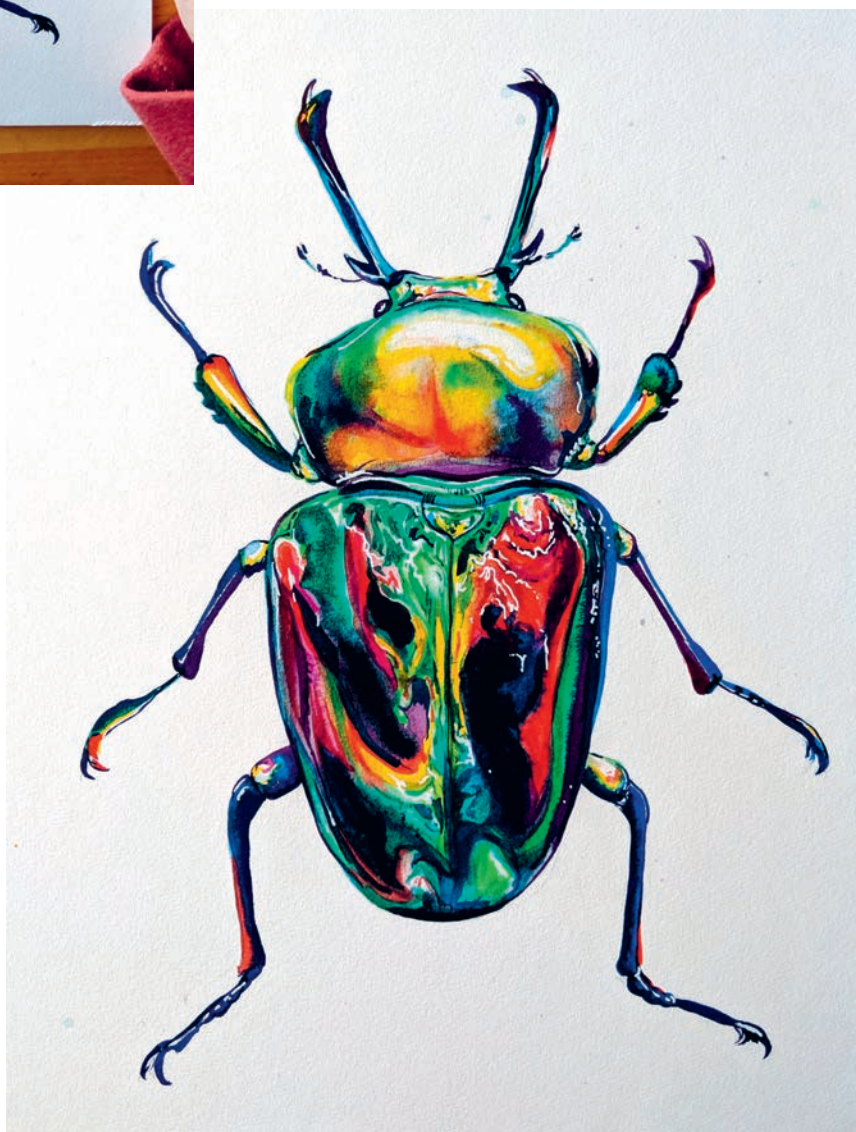
Once the body is painted, add additional details and specks of light with a white gel pen or paint. These tiny details go a long way!





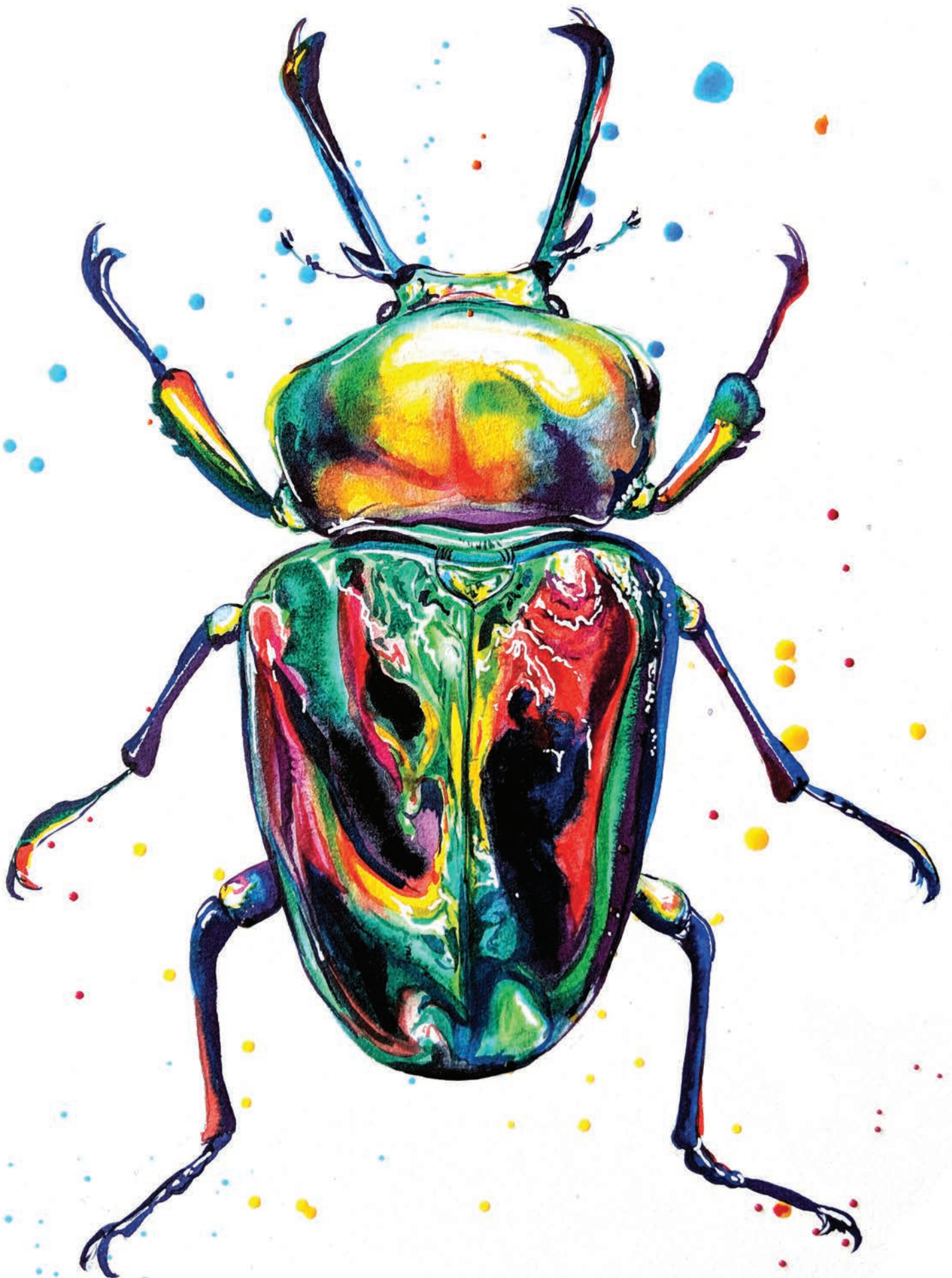
10

Add the legs and antennae. Even though there are fewer shiny areas on the legs and antennae, I make sure to leave some white highlights. I like to exaggerate any colors I see and make them more intense in my painting.



11

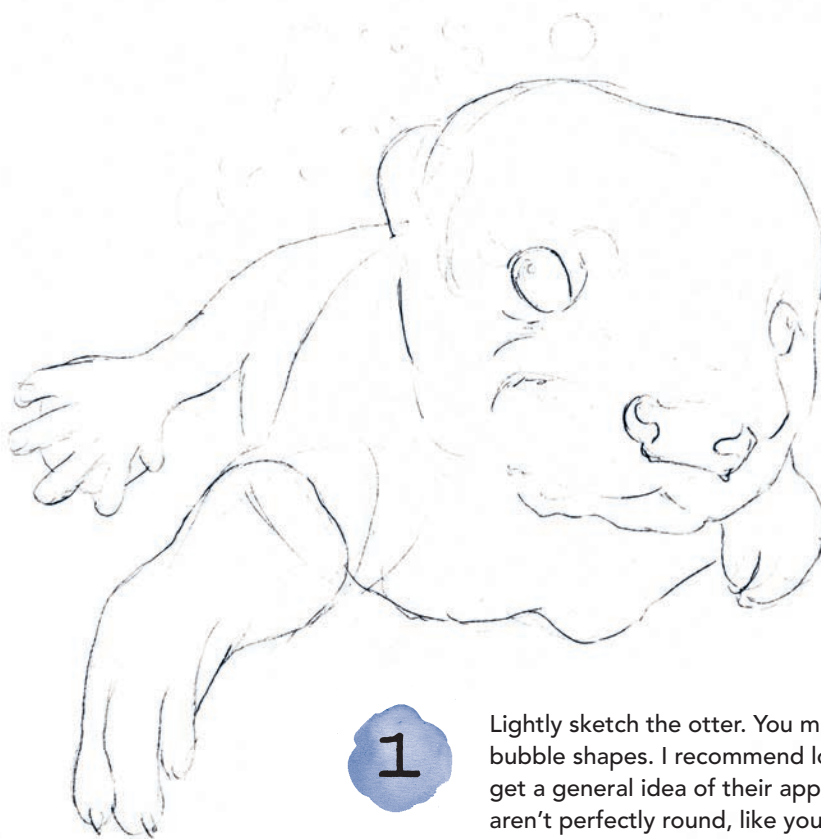
You are done! If you are feeling creative, load your paintbrush with paint and water and scatter lots of colorful drops all over the finished piece. You can achieve this best by tapping your loaded brush against a pencil or another paintbrush so that the paint flies off in a random way.



Playful Otter

Sometimes challenging yourself means limiting your colors! In this project, we'll accomplish every tone in the painting using only three colors. These three colors can be blended together to make lots of tones, all in a triadic color palette. We'll also explore how to paint a water background and bubbles.





1

Lightly sketch the otter. You may also want to sketch in some bubble shapes. I recommend looking at photos of bubbles to get a general idea of their appearance. As you will see, they aren't perfectly round, like you may imagine.

When you're happy with the sketch, tape the edges of your paper, not to only prevent a mess, but also to create a nice edge around your artwork.



2

Use masking fluid to protect some of the white highlights in the bubbles. This is important because you will be painting the entire surrounding area.

3

Start with the background. Wet the entire area of the paper surrounding the otter to create the water in which the otter is swimming. Try not to add too much water on the surface of your paper; you want it to be shiny but not pooling. You are bound to experience some warping, whether your paper is stretched or not, so keep a hair dryer nearby to combat this.



4

Add a light wash of blue to the wet background area. Let this first layer dry and add additional layers of paint as needed. While your wash is still wet, use a stiff-bristled brush to add streaks of yellow and give the impression of light leaking through the water. I add a couple of blue streaks as well.



5

Next, start by wetting a small and manageable area of the otter, like the foot. As a rule of thumb, you can use blue for the darkest tones, pink/magenta for the midtones, and yellow for the lightest areas.



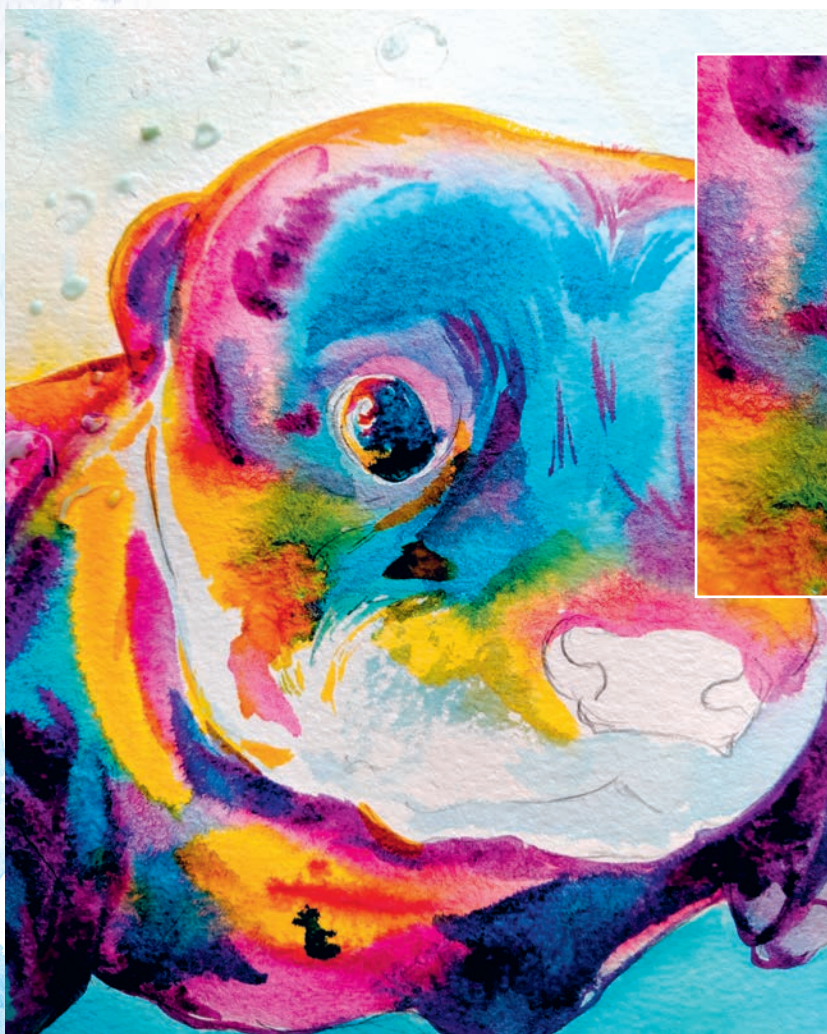
6

Continue to work your way around the otter, choosing small areas in which to work. Wet each area so the paper is shiny but the water isn't pooling, and then drop in your dark, middle, and light tones.



7

Create depth by adding pigment into the darkest shadows.



8

Now for details! Paint the eye by including all three colors, lightly blended, and leaving some flecks of white (see inset). Once the area is dry, go back and paint the darkest areas of the pupil and the outline of the eye.



9

Add additional details, like the fur texture. You can accomplish this with a small round brush with a fine tip. For larger areas, drybrush in the direction of the fur growth to suggest the furry texture.



10

Finally, use white to draw lots of whiskers. You can also go back in and use the white for any other highlights in the otter's fur.





11

Remove the frisket from the bubbles to expose the white paper underneath. Since the sun would come in from the top, I use yellow to add shape to the tops of the bubbles and blue on the bottoms.

Freestyle Elephants

This painting style is not for the faint of heart. But when you put it all together there is something very compelling about mixing lots of colors in a loose and messy way. This is a more advanced project for those who are comfortable breaking the rules of watercolor!

I suggest picking a handful of vibrant colors to use. As you can see from my final painting, five colors can result in many colorful combinations while still keeping things simple.

You'll also need opaque white paint or a white pen. Let's get started!



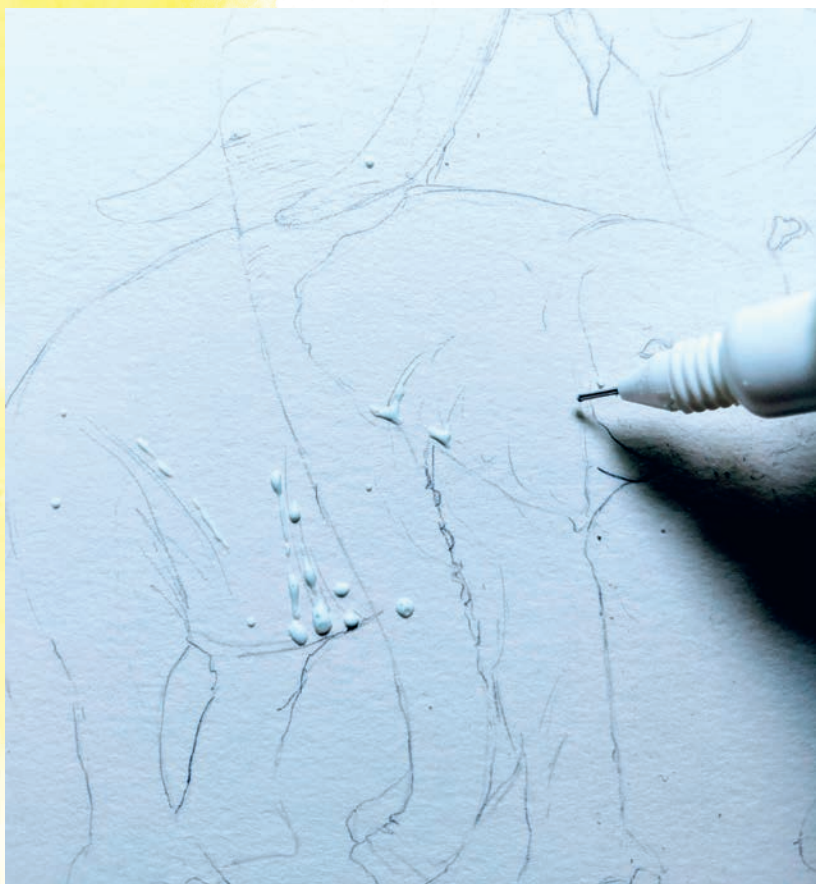


1

Sketch the elephants using one of the methods discussed on pages 28-29. Pick about five colors to work with, and use scrap paper to determine which colors blend together the best. Keep complementary colors like yellow and purple separate. Even though they are complementary, they mix to a muddy brown!

2

Start by using masking fluid on some larger areas that you want to keep white. A trick I like to use is looking at my source images in black and white, so the tones and values are easier to see. This also gives me the opportunity to use my imagination with colors.



3

Choose a small section of the painting to start with and wet the paper in that area with clean water. This keeps the paint confined to manageable sections. I start on the trunk of the larger elephant, and drop in blue paint.





4

Still working in the wet trunk area, I blend in magenta and then yellow, letting the colors mingle.

5

While the paint is still wet, extend the painted area, little by little, adding more clean water and pigment to the page.



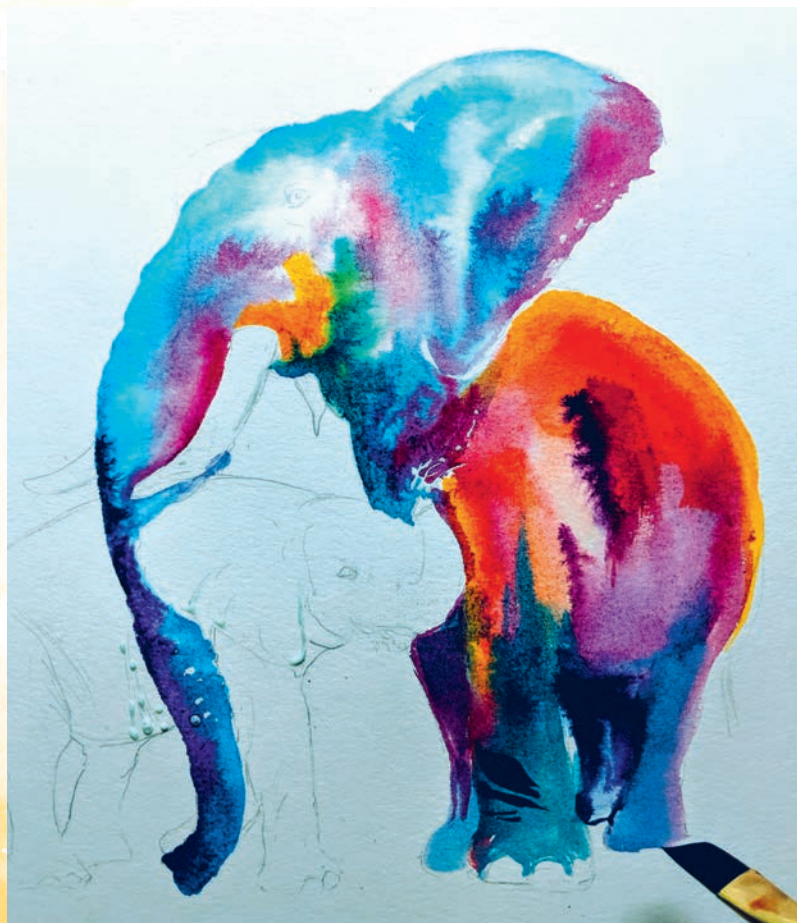
6

At this stage, keep your paints loose! Watercolor is best expressed in layers for detail and vibrancy, so this is just a rough foundation for your piece as the bottommost layer of colors. Don't overthink it.



7

Keep adding sections of color and blending them. For darker tones, I like to use richer colors, such as blue and purple. For lighter or highlighted areas, I use yellow and red. But this is not a hard-and-fast rule—I encourage you to experiment!



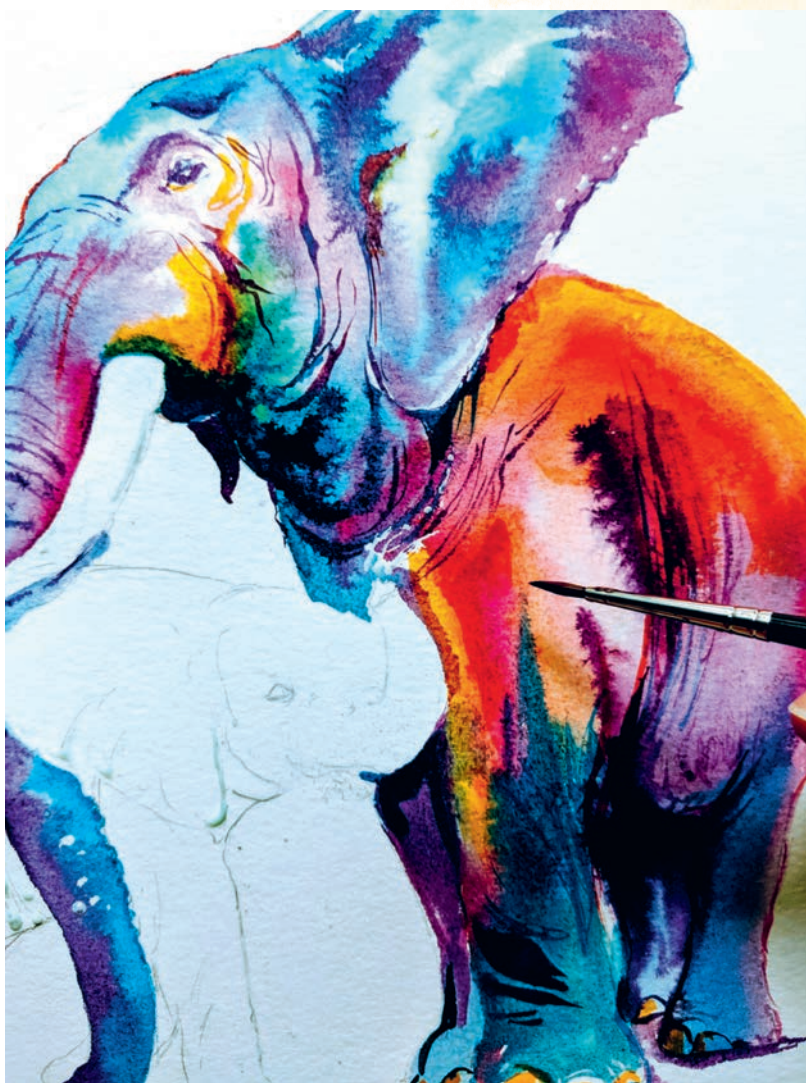
8

While your paints are still wet, add some deep, concentrated pigments to any shadowed areas of the elephant. I like to tell my students to "draw the blobs." It makes sense to the eye once the painting is finished. In areas that are already dry, you can still add some shadows.



9

Start adding some details and texture with your darker tones. Elephants have a lot of texture and wrinkles in their skin.





10

If you have a second subject in your painting, like this baby elephant, repeat the previous steps to fill the animal with color.



11

Since elephants feature so much detail in their skin, a great technique is to drybrush some texture on the skin. This gives the illusion of a lot of fine detail, simply by applying pigments with a dry paintbrush on dry paper. Allow the surface of your painting to be mostly dry before drybrushing to accomplish this.



12

Add finishing details. Make sure the areas of dark shadows, wrinkles, and fine details around the eyes are all well-defined. Then use your white paint or gel pen to add highlights and some separation between your subjects. Don't forget to remove any masking fluid, and you're done!

Colorful Dog

You've made it to the most challenging project yet. I hope everything you've learned up to this point will help you create your own colorful, splashy animal portrait. As I have mentioned often in this book, experimentation is so important for finding your own style. Don't feel like you need to copy my portrait exactly—this book is meant to take you outside your comfort zone and grow as an artist. Everyone's art will look different!

The dark background is optional. If you would prefer white or some other color, feel free! I am working on a clay surface here, but this project also works well on any other watercolor surface.





1

Start by choosing your colors and getting your workspace set up so you can easily see your reference image as you work. Then sketch your portrait.



2

First, you'll create the background. Start by outlining your subject. Coming in with black tends to make the edges of the subject look harsher, so I soften the outline with red.

3

Cover the rest of the background in black. This might take a couple of coats and a lot of paint.



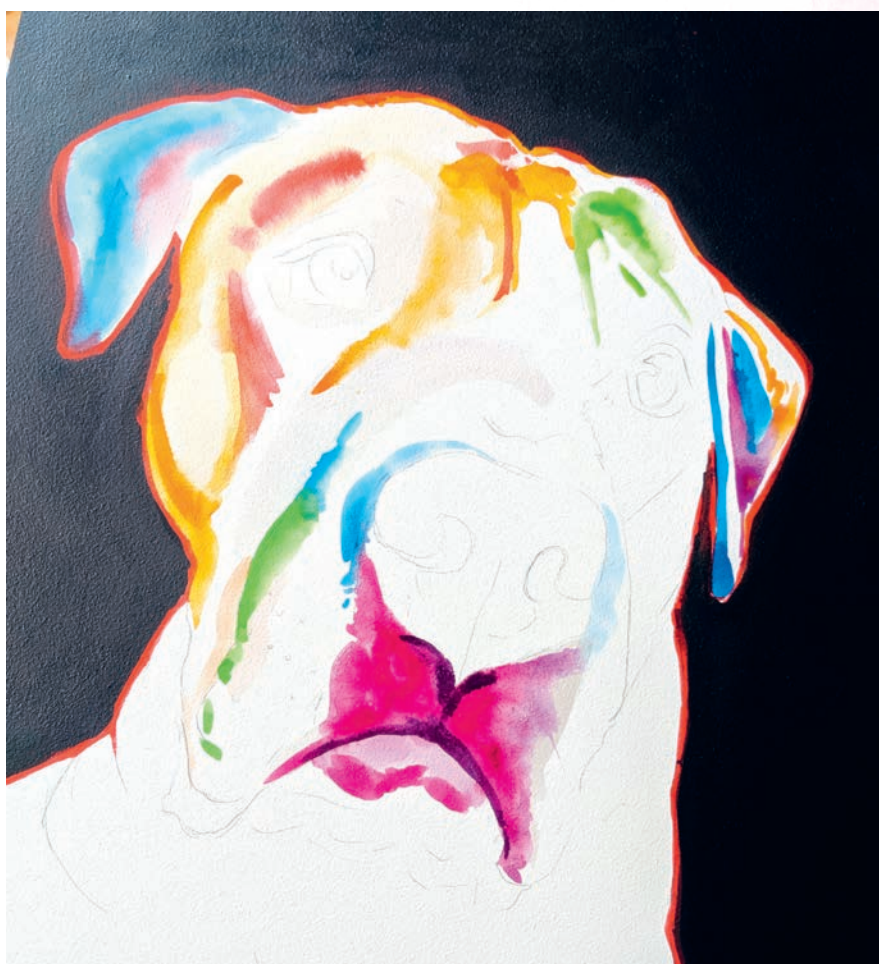


4

Since my dog is mostly yellow, I'm using a lot of warm tones in my painting. Remember to work with small, manageable sections of light and dark to create basic shapes and depth.

5

Continue to work in small areas at a time. Don't worry about the details yet. One of my favorite methods for letting colors blend is painting adjacent "blobs" and using water to connect the areas while they are still wet.



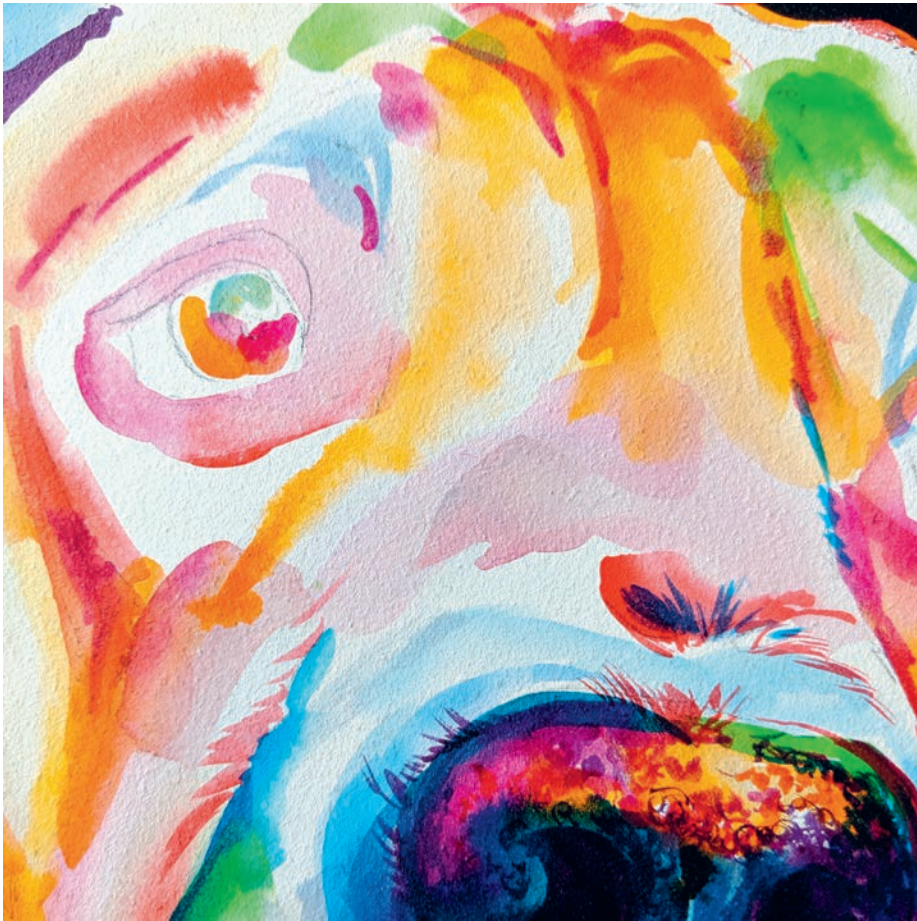
6

The nose is my favorite part of dog paintings. There's so much texture! Feel free to add lots of color and dots.



7

Use a deep, concentrated color like purple for the nostrils. I also use purple to add depth in the crease of the nose. Later, we'll come back in to add some white flecks when the paint is dry.



8

Next, paint the eyes. I use a yellow base, transitioning into magenta and then blue.

9

Once the first layer dries, draw the darker shapes in the eye with deep purple, or even black.





10

Continue building on the shape of the dog's face by adding depth with shadows and highlights. If you find awkward transitions between areas, cover them by adding fur texture! Take note of the direction of the fur growth in the area that you are working on, and add quick swipes of a bristly paintbrush, such as a mop brush, as shown. These layers will create lots of depth and texture.

11

Don't forget the whiskers! Go over the top of your painting and paint the whiskers in your chosen color. This is an important finishing step. I also use white to add lots of tiny hairs around the mouth, as well as the top of his head. These small details work wonders for a painting.





Congratulations on making it to the end of this book. Whether you skipped through some projects or your first attempts didn't turn out how you had hoped, keep at it, and you will be on your way to improving your watercolor technique and finding your own personal style!

About the Artist



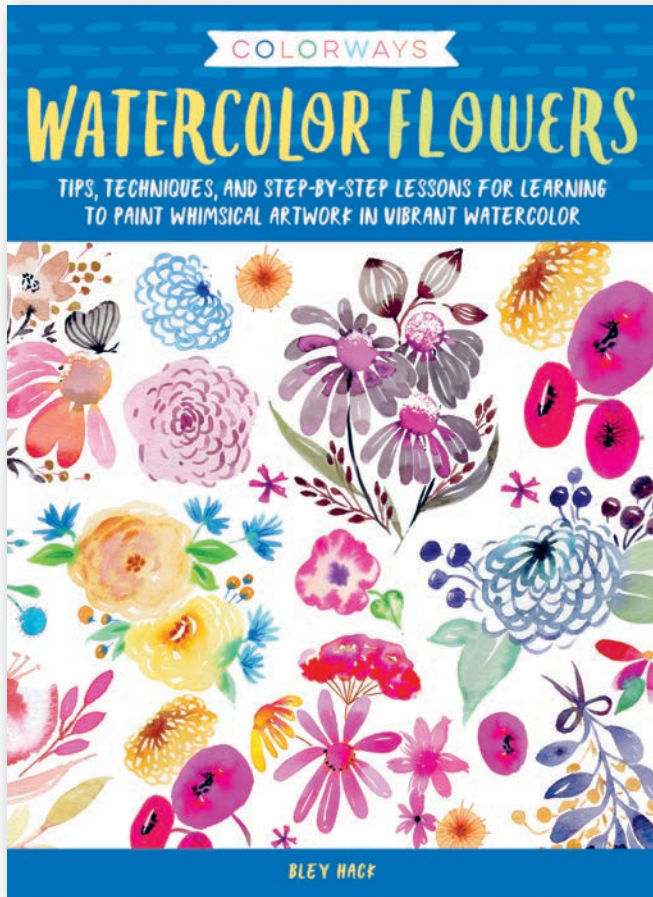
Shaunna Russell is a watercolor artist well-known for her signature style and subject matter.

Seemingly chaotic drips and splashes of bright colors stand in sharp contrast to brilliant white backgrounds and combine to vividly capture the spirit and character of her subjects. Animals of all sorts inspire Shaunna's work, but she's best known for her pet portraits.

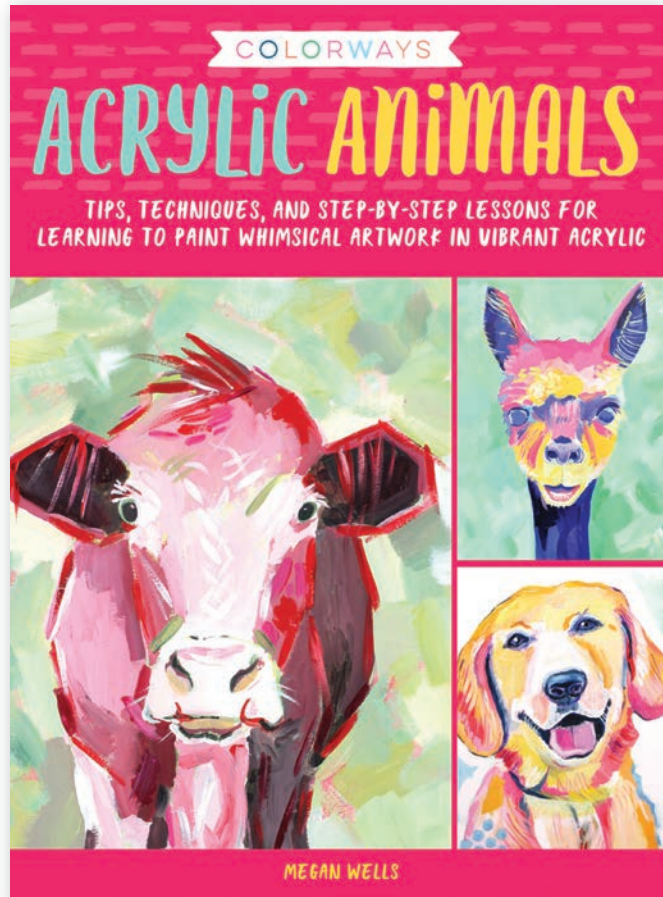
Shaunna began doing professional portrait work in 2013 and quickly found a following among fellow animal lovers online. Since then, Shaunna has been privileged to produce commissioned portraits in her signature style for thousands of pet owners and animal lovers around the world. She lives in Buffalo, New York.

To view more of Shaunna's work, visit www.shaunnarussell.com.

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