

The Art of Painting Sea Life in Watercolor

Walter Foster



**Master techniques
for painting
spectacular
sea animals
in watercolor**



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Walter Foster



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The Art of Painting Sea Life in Watercolor





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Herrera

C H A P T E R 1

Introduction

The sea provides some of nature's most picturesque and scenic views, allowing the watercolor artist a great variety of creatures and environments to paint on canvas. This book has been designed with the sea lover and artist in mind, to help you bring both the grand and the everyday creatures of our planet's bodies of water to life beneath your brush. Each chapter features a different talented artist as he or she guides you through step-by-step lessons designed not only to master the medium of watercolor but also to complete a finished painting of your favorite sea-life creatures. From learning which tool is most appropriate for which technique to drawing realistic sketches and achieving the best color wash for each painting, artists of all skill levels will enjoy the projects highlighted in this book. Break out the brushes and paint—let's get started!

Tools & Materials

Paints

Watercolor paints are available in cakes, pans, and tubes. Many artists prefer tube paints because they are fresher and the colors are brighter. It is best to use good-quality paint, but if you are just starting out, it's okay to use less expensive student-grade paint and upgrade to professional grade later. You don't need to have a huge palette of color. You'll find that each of the artists in this book works with his or her own palette of colors, listed at the beginning of each project. You may find you prefer to work with different paints, so don't be afraid to experiment. You'll also want white gouache for touch-ups and highlights.

Brushes

There are many kinds of paintbrushes available, but they can be narrowed down to two types: synthetic and natural hair. Synthetic brushes are usually less expensive than natural ones, but they don't retain water as effectively. Synthetic brushes are great for working with masking fluid. For the projects in this book, you'll want a variety of flat and round brushes in varying sizes, a hake brush, and a rigger brush. Make sure you have one small round detail brush and several synthetic brushes for masking.



Hake This brush is great for laying in backgrounds on very large areas.

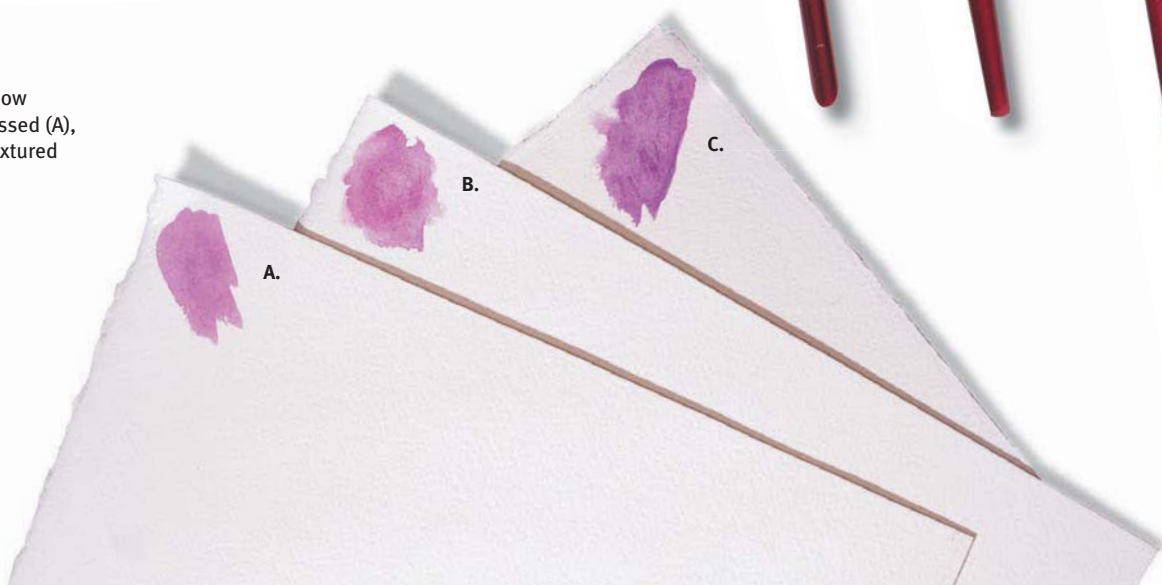


Paper

Watercolor paper comes in a range of textures: hot-pressed, which is smooth; cold-pressed, which has a medium texture; and rough, which has plenty of tooth (raised areas of paper). Watercolor paper also comes in different weights, designated in pounds. The higher the number, the heavier the paper and the less likely it is to warp when you apply water. A popular choice is 300-lb. bright white, cold-pressed watercolor paper. The tough surface of this paper allows you to use mask, as well as use some lifting techniques, without damaging the paper. The 300-lb. weight of the paper allows for a wider time frame to work wet-on-wet before the paper begins to dry.

Watercolor Paper

These three different sheets show how the paint looks on hot-pressed (A), cold-pressed (B), and rough, textured paper (C).



Palette

Palettes come in different materials—plastic, glass, china, wood, and metal—and in various shapes. Plastic is lightweight and less expensive than other materials. All these palettes will clean up easily with soap and water. No matter what style you choose, try to find one with a large, flat area for mixing and creating washes and plenty of wells for holding all your colors.



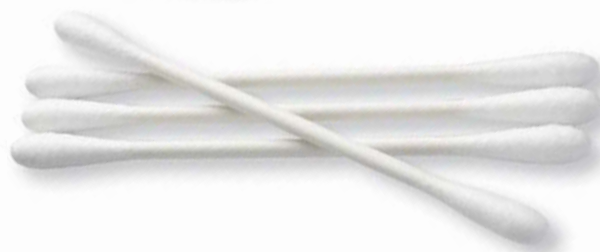
Masking Fluid

Masking fluid, or liquid frisket, is a latex-based substance that can be applied over areas you want to keep white. When dry, the mask repels paint, so you can paint over it without covering the white support underneath. When the paint is dry, gently rub off the mask with masking fluid pickup or an old rag. You can also apply masking fluid over color that is already dry to protect areas from subsequent layers of color.



Additional Materials

A few other items you may want to have on hand are masking tape, tissue, a craft knife, a palette knife, and cotton swabs.

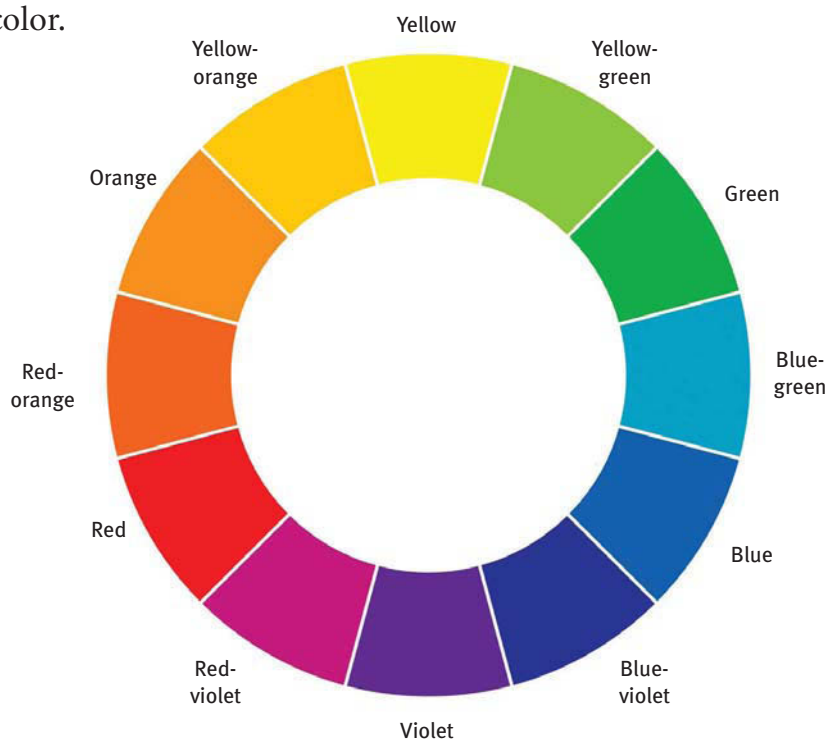


Color Theory

Color can communicate feelings, mood, time of day, seasons, and emotions. Knowing how colors work, and how they work together, is key to refining your ability to communicate using color.

The Color Wheel

A color wheel is a visual representation of colors arranged according to their chromatic relationship. The basic color wheel consists of 12 colors that can be broken down into three different groups: primary colors, secondary colors, and tertiary colors.



CREATING WHEEL REFERENCES

One of the easiest things to create is a 12-color color wheel with just the three primaries: red, yellow, and blue. All colors are derived from these three. Beginners should make a color wheel with both the primaries and secondaries. This can help you understand how to create additional colors, see how colors interact, and see your palette of colors in spectrum order.

Color wheel made with three primaries



Color wheel made with primaries and secondaries



COLOR PALETTE FOR WATERCOLOR

An effective palette of watercolors allows you to mix a wide range of colors while working with a minimal number of pigments. At right is a thorough starter set of 12 colors; feel free to add colors as you see fit.



Artist's Tip

You can mix a variety of vibrant purples using the reds and blues in the above palette, such as ultramarine blue and permanent rose. However, if you'd like to add a violet to your palette, try manganese or cobalt violet, which offer beautiful granulation.

WORKING WITH A LIMITED PALETTE

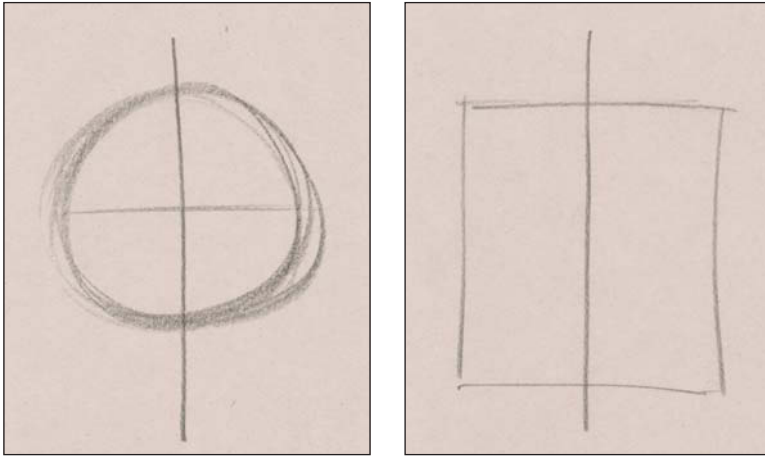
Some artists like to work with an extremely limited number of colors, especially if working on site with travel palettes. Consider working with just the six colors listed at right, which include a warm and a cool version of each primary. With these colors, you can create all the secondaries and an array of neutrals. For the most vibrant secondaries, remember to mix colors that lean toward each other on the color wheel. For example, alizarin crimson mixed with ultramarine blue yields a vibrant purple.

Colors for a Limited Watercolor Palette



Drawing Techniques

While the focus of this book is on painting, it's important to hone your drawing skills so you can set yourself up for a successful painting from the start.

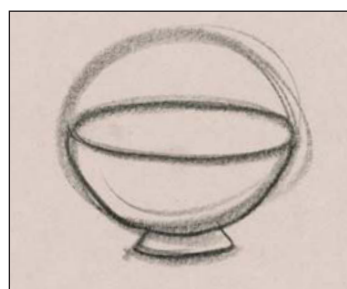
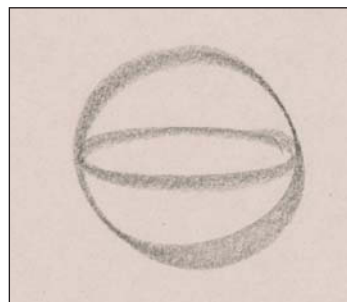
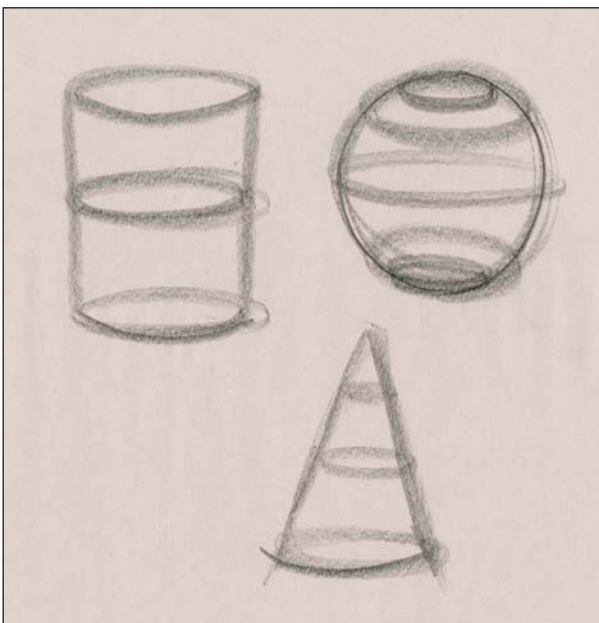
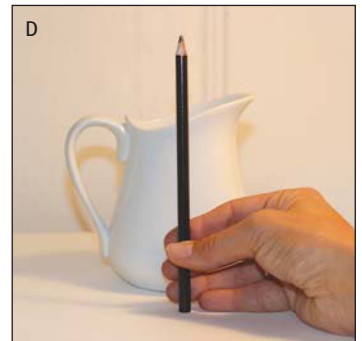
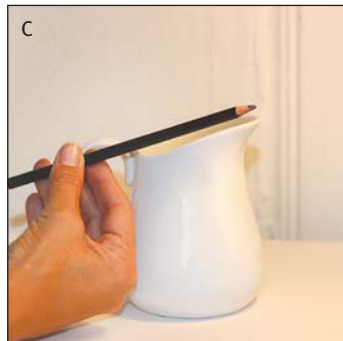
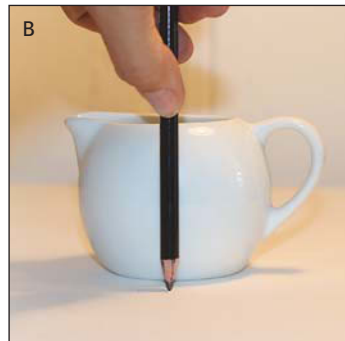
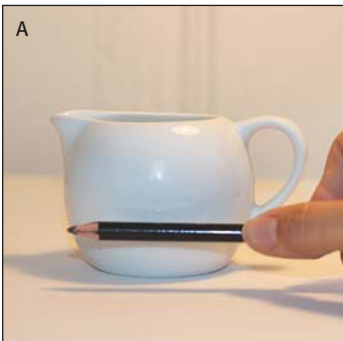


Using a Centerline

Using a centerline when drawing shapes can help you achieve accurate measurements and symmetry. Before sketching a basic shape, draw a vertical and/or horizontal line; then use the guideline to draw your shape, making sure it is equal on both sides. Remember: Drawing straight lines and uniform circles takes practice and time. As you progress as an artist, these basic skills will improve.

Establishing Proportions

To achieve a sense of realism in your work, it's important to establish correct proportions. Using centerlines, as shown above, will provide starter guidelines. From there, you must delineate the shape of the object. To do this accurately, measure the lengths, widths, and angles of your subject. Examine the vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines in your subject and make sure they relate properly to one another in your drawing. You can check proportions and angles by using your pencil as a measuring tool. Use the top of your thumb to mark where the measurement ends on your pencil (A, B), or hold it at an angle to check your angles (C, D).

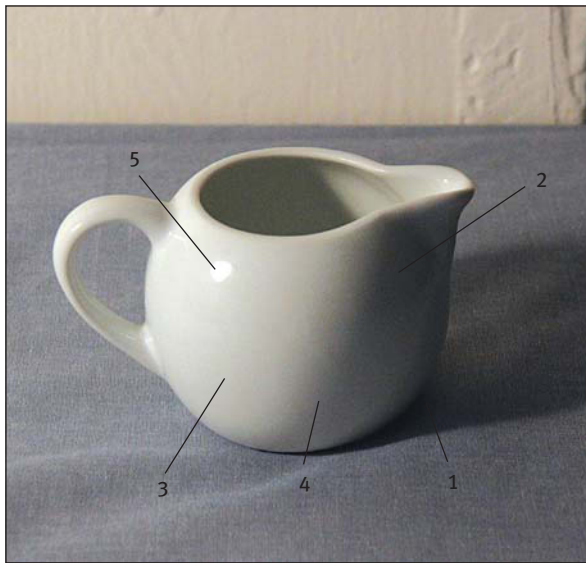
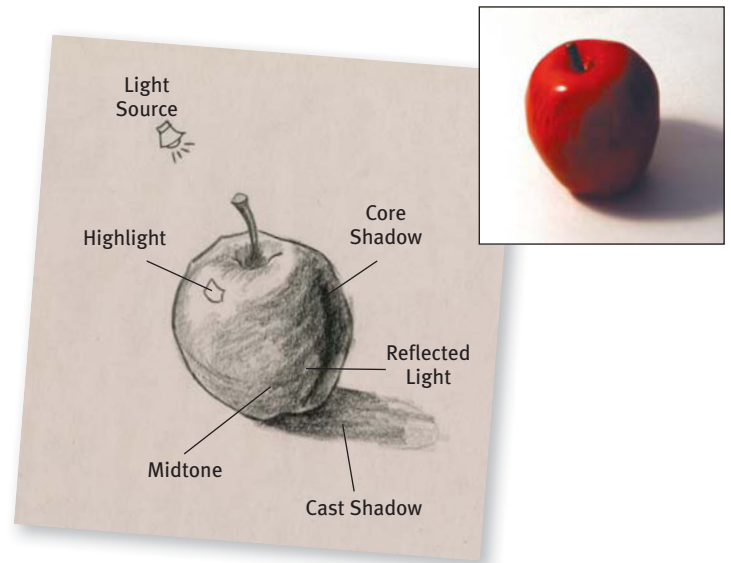


Drawing Through

You can transform basic shapes into forms by “drawing through” them. Imagine the form is transparent, and then suggest the surface of the backside in your sketch. This process will help you acknowledge the volume of your object as you add the surface shadows in later stages. It will also help you understand your object as it relates to its surroundings.

Values & Shadows

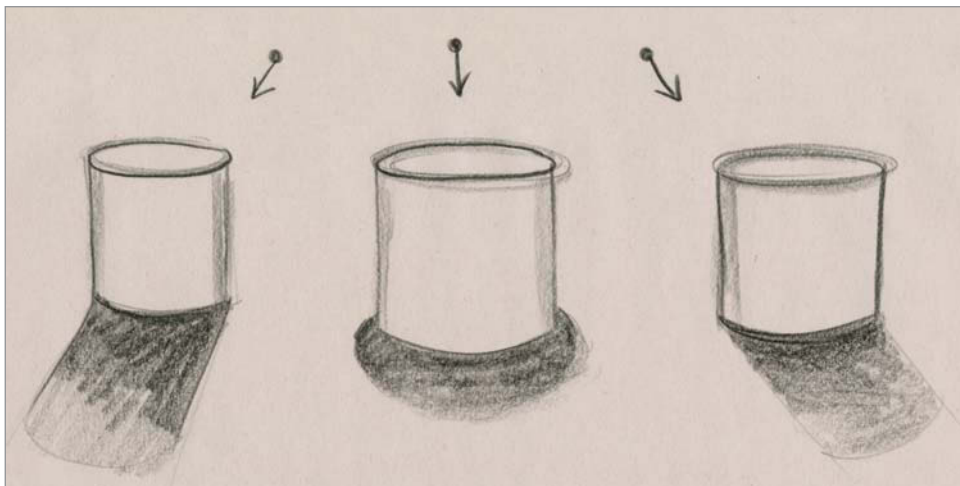
There are five main aspects of value that are used to create the illusion of volume. As mentioned previously, value refers to the tones of lightness and darkness, covering the full range of white through shades of gray to black. The range of lights and darks of an object can change depending on how much light hits the object. With practice, you will develop a keen eye for seeing lights, darks, and the subtle transitions between each value across a form. The five main values to look for on any object are the cast shadow, core shadow, mid-tone, reflected light, and highlight, as illustrated at right.



- 1. Cast Shadow** This is the shadow of the object that is cast upon another surface, such as the table.
- 2. Core Shadow** This refers to the darkest value on the object, which is located on the side opposite the light source.
- 3. Midtone** This middle-range value is located where the surface turns from the light source.
- 4. Reflected Light** This light area within a shadow comes from light that has reflected off of a different surface nearby (most often from the surface on which the object rests). This value depends on the overall values of both surfaces and the strength of the light, but remember that it's always darker than the midtone.
- 5. Highlight** This refers to the area that receives direct light, making it the lightest value on the surface.

Focusing on Cast Shadows

Every object casts a shadow onto the table, chair, or surface that it sits upon (called the "cast shadow" as explained above). The shadow will fall to and under the dark side of the object, away from the light source. Including this shadow is very important both in depicting the illusion of form and in grounding your object, which gives the viewer a sense of weight and space. Note that these shadows are the darkest at the point where they meet the object (often beneath the object) and lighten as they move away from the object. Generally the shadow edge is also sharpest at the base of the object, softening as it moves away from the object.



Painting Techniques

Watercolor's airy and atmospheric qualities set it apart from other painting media. This fluid medium requires a bit of practice to master, but with enough time, you will soon discover how to quickly suggest form and color with just a few brushstrokes. Watercolor is available in tubes, pans, semi-moist pots, and pencils.



WATERCOLOR MATERIALS

Watercolor Surfaces

Watercolor paper, which is treated with sizing to reduce the surface's absorbency, is available in myriad sizes, weights, textures, and format. Secure your paper to a table or board with artist tape or clips and work on a flat surface.



Kolinsky Sable

Watercolor Brushes

Use sable brushes or soft-hair synthetic brushes to work in watercolor. It's a good idea to keep a couple of bristle brushes on hand for textured strokes.

Watercolor Palettes

A range of mixing palettes is available, from simple white plastic to porcelain. Choose one that suits your personal preference.



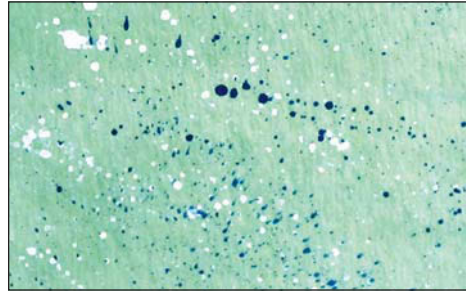
Types of Watercolor

- Tubes contain moist paint that is readily mixable. It only takes a small amount of tube paint to create large washes. Start with a pea-sized amount, add water, and then add more paint if needed.
- Pans, also called cakes, are dry or semi-moist blocks of watercolor. To activate the paint, stroke over the blocks with a wet brush.
- Semi-moist pots are gummy-looking watercolors that are similar to pans. Activate the paint by stroking over the color with a wet brush.
- Watercolor pencils combine the fluid nature of watercolor with the control of pencil drawing. Featuring leads of hard watercolor, they are great for creating fine details or sketching a composition. You can also use them with a wet brush to develop an entire work.

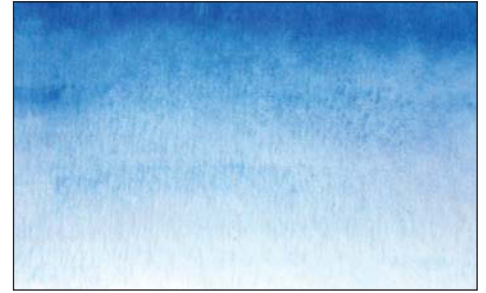
WATERCOLOR TECHNIQUES



Flat Wash A flat wash is a thin layer of paint applied evenly to your paper. First wet the paper, and then load your brush with a mix of watercolor and water. Stroke horizontally across the paper and move from top to bottom, overlapping the strokes as you progress.



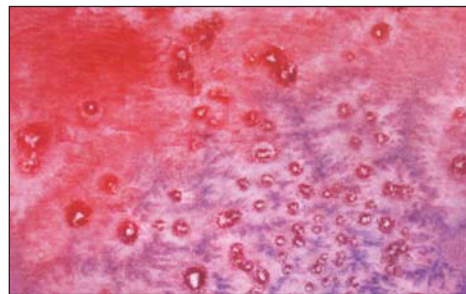
Spattering First cover any area you don't want to spatter with a sheet of paper. Load your brush with a wet wash and tap the brush over a finger to fling droplets of paint onto the paper. You can also load your brush and then run the tip of a finger over the bristles to create a spray.



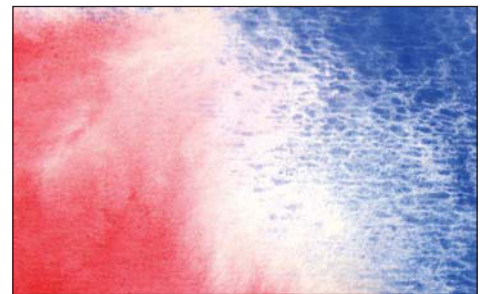
Gradated Wash A gradated (or graduated) wash moves slowly from dark to light. Apply a strong wash of color and stroke in horizontal bands as you move away, adding water to successive strokes.



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.



Using Salt For a mottled texture, sprinkle salt over a wet or damp wash. The salt will absorb the wash to reveal the white of the paper in interesting starlike shapes. The finer the salt crystals, the finer the resulting texture. For a similar but less dramatic effect, simply squirt a spray bottle of water over a damp wash.



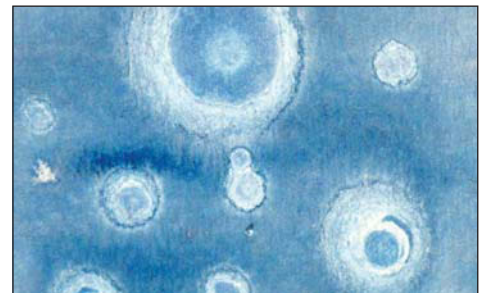
Wet-into-Wet Stroke water over your paper and allow it to soak in. Wet the surface again and wait for the paper to take on a matte sheen; then load your brush with rich color and stroke over your surface. The moisture will grab the pigments and pull them across the paper to create feathery soft blends.



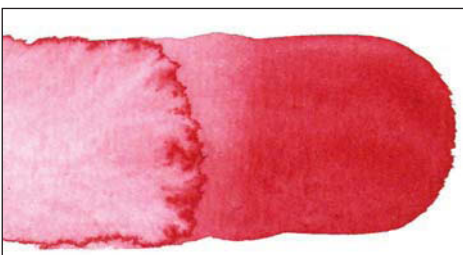
Tilting To pull colors into each other, apply two washes side by side and tilt the paper while wet so one flows into the next. This creates interesting drips and irregular edges.



Applying with a Sponge In addition to creating flat washes, sponges can help you create irregular, mottled areas of color.



Using Alcohol To create interesting circular formations within a wash, use an eyedropper to drop alcohol into a damp wash. Change the sizes of your drops for variation.



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 on another wash (or add a drop of pure water).



C H A P T E R 2

Animal Favorites

with Maury Aaseng

Capturing the beauty of sea life in its natural environment has been a lifelong pursuit of talented watercolor artist Maury Aaseng. In this chapter, learn a variety of painting techniques, including using masking fluid, color washes, color mixing, layering, and blending to create vibrant landscapes both above and beneath the ocean's surface. Join Maury as he paints his favorite wildlife from our planet's vast oceans step by step, including a playful trio of dolphins, a hefty walrus, a pair of busy Atlantic puffins, a curious octopus, and more.

Dolphins

When I turned 11, I experienced the happiest birthday of my life when my dad took me to the zoo to spend a special night next to the bottle-nosed dolphin tank. It is the realization of a childhood dream for me to paint dolphins for this book. I combined three dolphins in a sketch that capture both their mastery of the water and air, where they exercise their amazing acrobatics.

Color Palette

alizarin crimson • burnt sienna • burnt umber
cerulean blue • cobalt blue • cobalt green • indigo
lake red • lemon yellow • turquoise
ultramarine blue • white gouache



Artist's Tip

To help the colors run in the right direction, I like to tilt my art board and enlist the help of gravity.

Step 1 After lightly sketching the dolphins on watercolor paper, I carefully apply masking fluid to the borders of my airborne dolphin and the splashing areas in the surface waters. Once the fluid dries, I paint the top edge of the sky with cerulean blue, letting the pigment run down to the top edge of the surface waves. To deepen this effect, I use a large round brush to dab in more blue at the top edges and let that dilute downward as well. To create the water wash, I paint the entire area directly over the submerged dolphins with a diluted cobalt green mixed with a little turquoise. In the areas to the right of the water, I add lemon yellow and let that run down and to the left, as sunlight shining through the water.

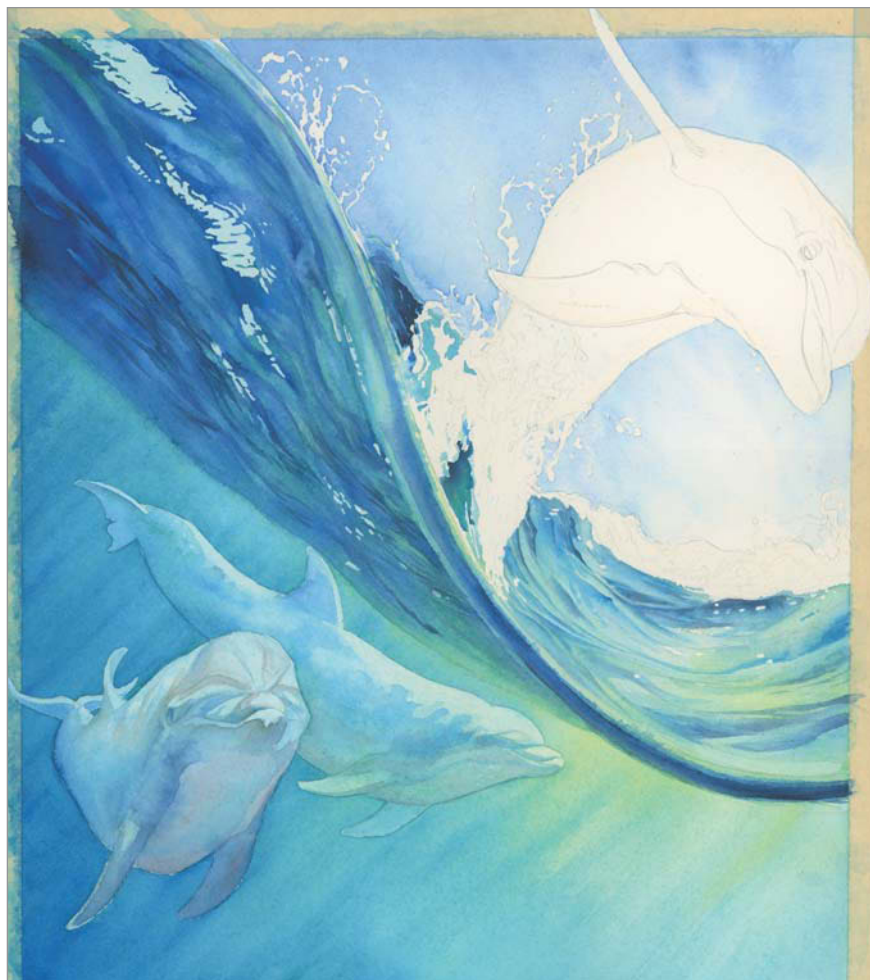


Step 2 I peel away the masking fluid from the previous step. I use masking fluid to outline the dolphins under the surface and block out the highlight areas on the surface and underside of the wave. When the fluid is dry, I repeat the washes from the last step, creating darker blues on the left side and transitioning to lighter greens and yellows as I move to the right. While the wash is still wet, I use a large flat brush to apply watery lemon yellow to the underside of the wave.



Step 3 I lightly brush a thin layer of water over the underside of the waves. Then, with a round pointed brush saturated in ultramarine blue, I create lazy swoops and teardrop shapes that angle downward to the right. As the paper dries, I use a small brush tipped with indigo to paint the darkest shadows in the waves. For the surface waters, I paint only the shadowed ridges and subtle folds in the waves. I use a small, flat brush to paint the hard line of the water's edge, wet-on-dry. I repeat this process with diluted puddles of indigo, ultramarine blue, and cobalt blue to give the surface definition. When dry, I remove all of the masking fluid.

Step 4 For the underwater dolphins, I paint the dolphin further back with a “bluer” color scheme to create the effect of looking at a more distant object through water. I then apply a wash of cobalt blue and cobalt green to the dolphin, running through the middle of the dolphin and up its tail and dorsal fin. I use a diluted green for the underside and introduce a very subtle and watery mixture of indigo and lake red along the jawline and around the flipper. For the foremost dolphin, I use cobalt mixed with some turquoise for the sides and back but then introduce a wider color scheme, including ultramarine blue along the front flippers and in the face, indigo along the underside of the tail, and some red lake and burnt umber up the back and in reflective shapes along the head and jaw.



Step 5 I create deeper shadows in the underwater dolphins with heavily concentrated indigo and use ultramarine blue for my mid-tone shadows. I add lemon yellow along the bottom edge of the dolphins’ backs, mouths, and fins to pick up some of the warm, sunlight color in the waves. I darken some purples along the dolphins’ throats with lake red mixed with blues.

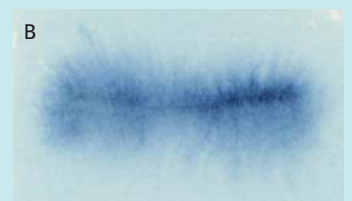


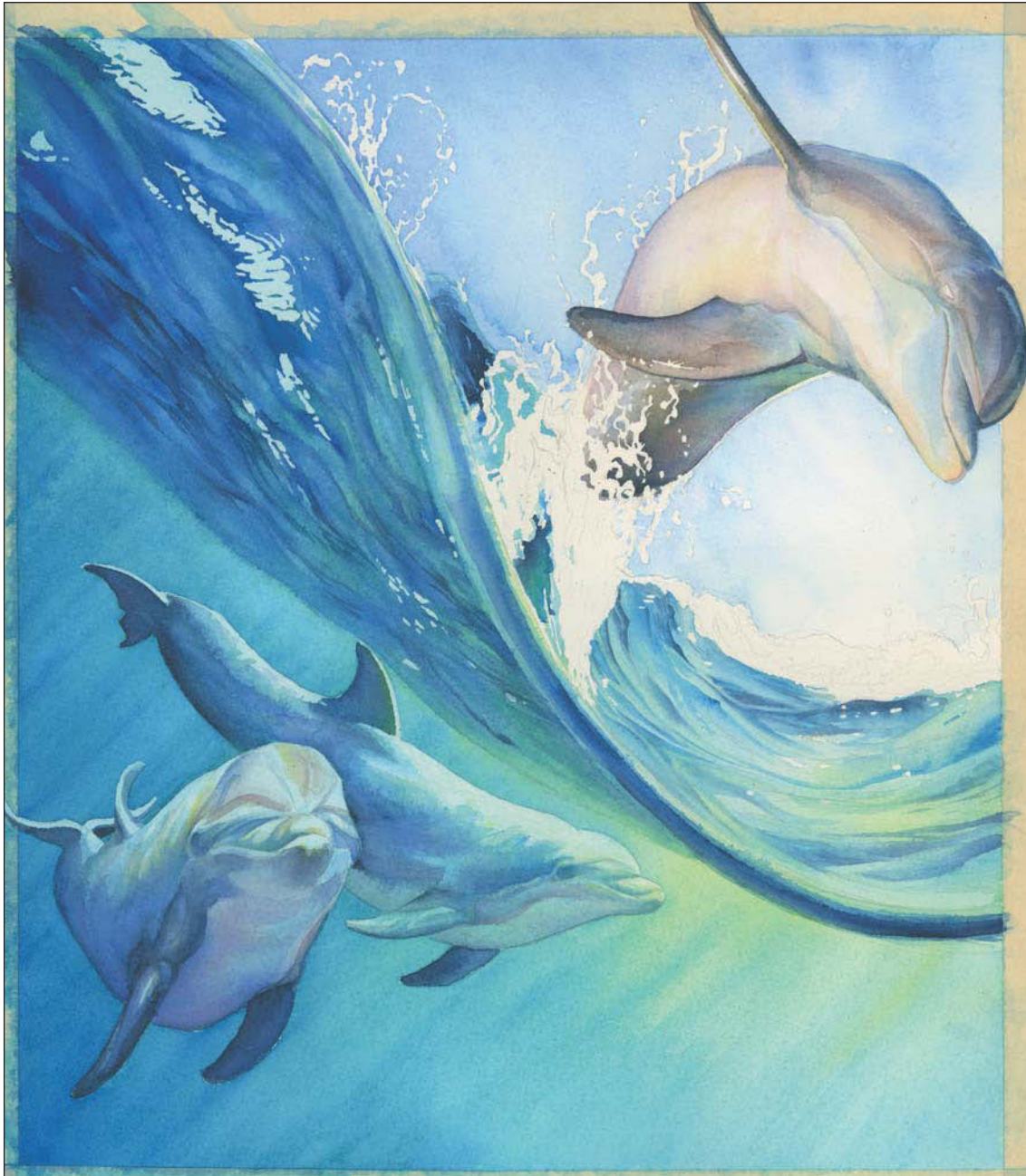


Step 6 To create the leaping dolphin, I first apply masking fluid to the droplets that overlap the animal's form, as well as some skinny areas along the fins where I want to preserve the paper's highlight. Then I wet the entire dolphin shape and add a wash of alizarin crimson, lemon yellow, turquoise, and ultramarine blue. This step is about painting all the light values in the dolphin; although you don't want to over-paint, simply leaving an area white will miss out on the depth you can create with subtle color tones.

Artist's Tip

Fading out watercolor pigment can be achieved by running a clean, wet brush along the underside of the pigment (A) or by painting into a pre-wet area and letting the paint run outward and into it (B). Both offer ways to create deeper, softer values.

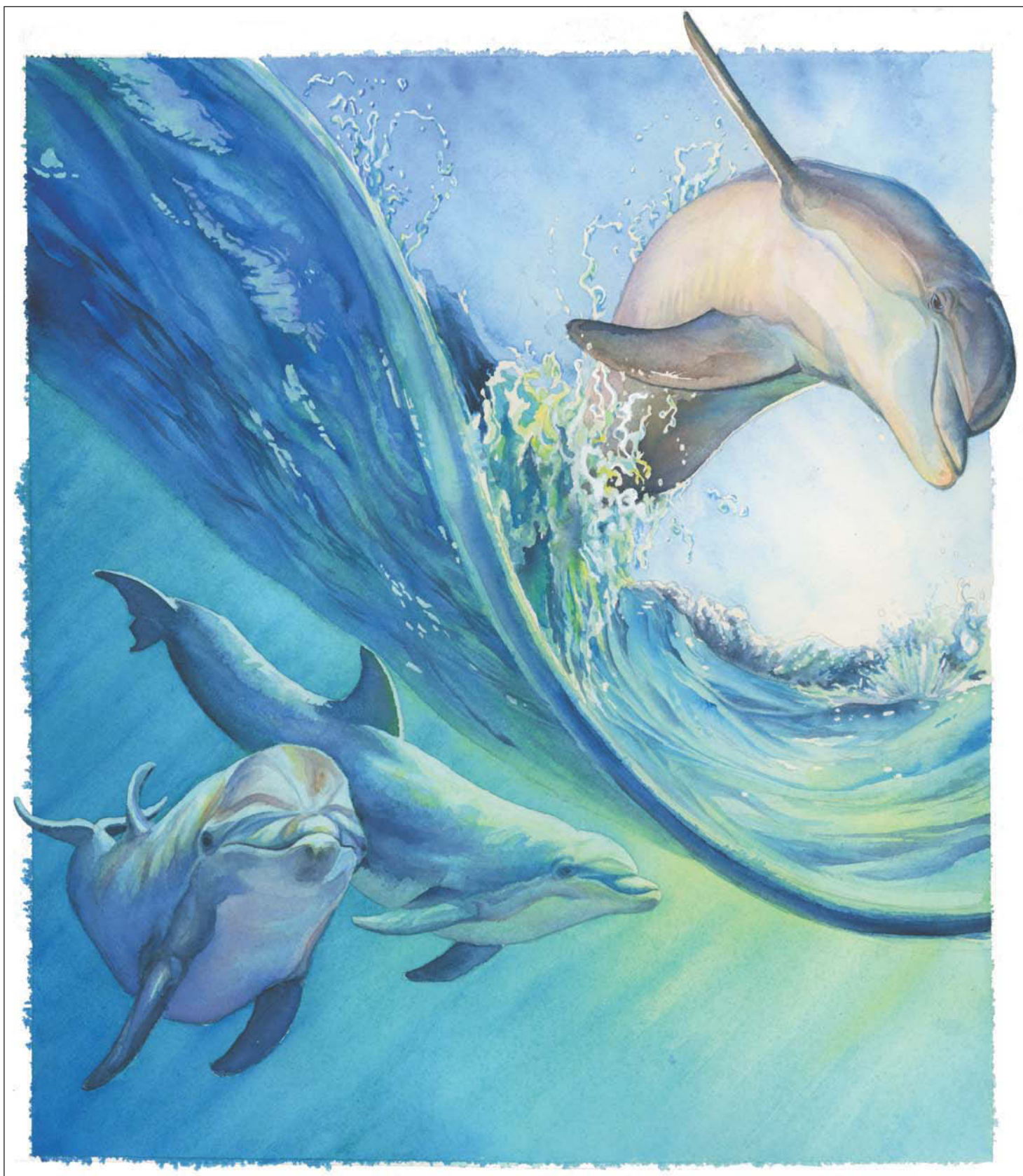




Step 7 With my wash complete, I can now apply darker values to provide contrast and make the dolphin really “pop.” Using a combination of indigo, ultramarine blue, and burnt sienna, I add dark reflections on the rubbery skin and distinguish the light underbelly from the top half. In deeper areas of shadow, I apply more blue and indigo. In the mid-tone areas, I mix in some burnt sienna with the blue to create warmer shades of color. I let these colors mix together in some places (such as in the dolphin’s back) to create variegated washes and try to keep some of the shapes distinct in others (such as the reflections along the head). Then I peel away the masking fluid from the flippers to reveal the highlights.

Artist’s Tip

Even though a dolphin initially may be called “gray,” using blues and browns and purples to create the effect will leave you with a richer color.



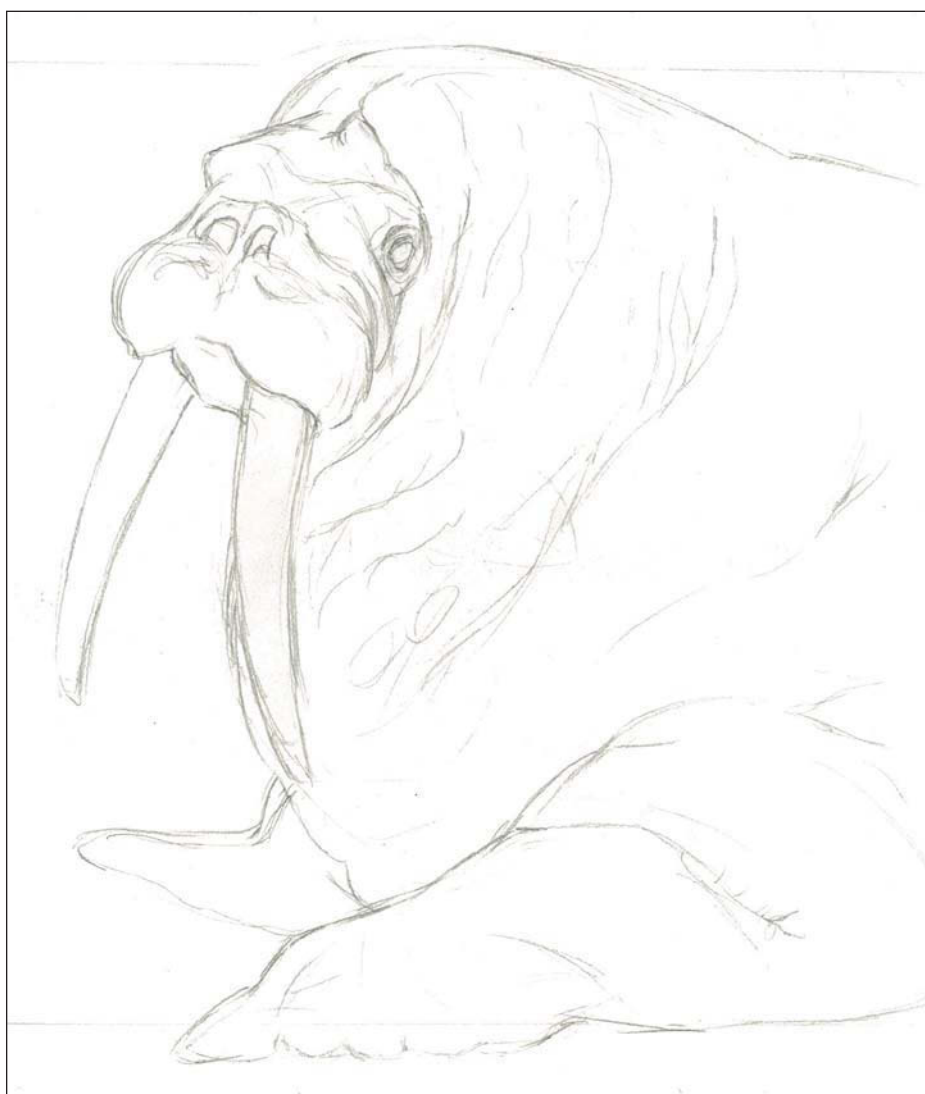
Step 8 Lastly, I trace along the mouths with indigo to give the jawlines distinction and to create the eyes. The leaping dolphin has more eye detail, so I use a fine-liner brush to paint the curved lines above the eye in burnt sienna and the eyelids under the eye in ultramarine blue. The splashing water, like the dolphin belly, is not entirely white. I paint the bottom edges with the “white” color scheme from the previous step. In the darker shadows, I dilute a mixture of turquoise and indigo to create light blues in the middle of splashes, and I mix lemon yellow with the blues to create some warm highlights. Finally, where I think I painted away too much of the white, I brush in white gouache paint to return the color.

Walrus

To me, walrus appear to be grumpy, sad, regal, dumpy, wise, and impressive—all at the same time. The oversized whiskers and blubbery body combine to create an animal that is certainly loaded with character! A presence like that seemed to me best captured by painting it as a portrait instead of painting its whole body.

Color Palette

alizarin crimson • burnt sienna • burnt umber
cobalt blue • dark burnt sienna • dark burnt umber
gamboge yellow • raw sienna • ultramarine blue
white gouache



Artist's Tip

It is important to draw the animal before applying paint to make sure the walrus features are drawn to scale. After all, if he is disproportionate by the end of the painting, all the work with watercolor techniques can't save the end result from looking off.

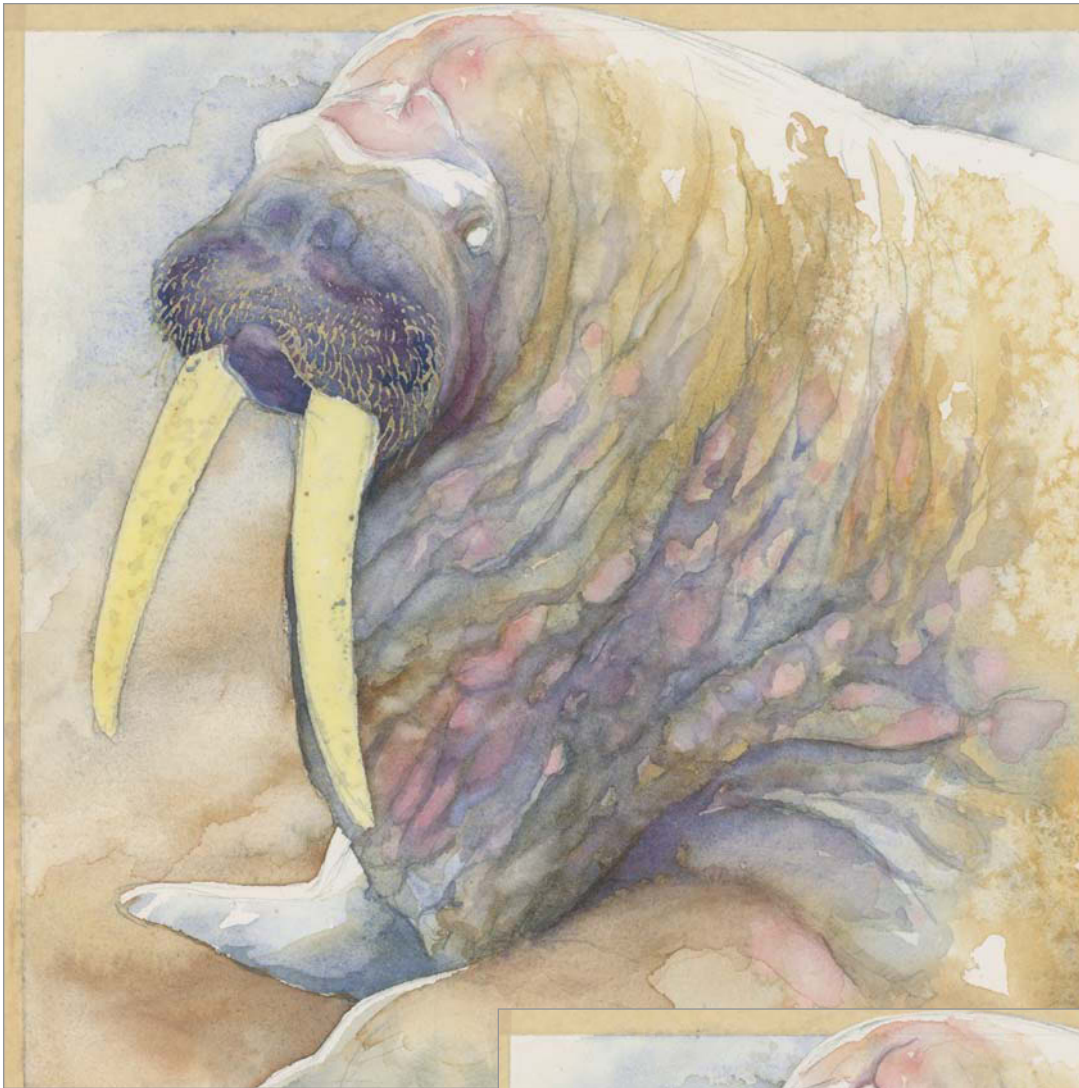
Step 1 To begin, I lightly draw my framing box with a hard lead pencil. Then I sketch the walrus inside that box, allowing the flipper and top of the neck to break the bonds of the box.

Artist's Tip

There is a lot of variability you can achieve with a simple color scheme. By using some of the same colors in the background as in your subject matter, you can attain a level of unity in your painting.



Step 2 I tape down the borders around the area I plan to paint in, and using an X-acto knife, I slice away the tape that covers the neck and flipper poking out. I apply masking fluid to the tusks. I paint the sandy beach background by wetting the whole area, then use ultramarine and burnt umber and let them bleed into the wet background. When the first wash is dry, I begin the second wash. I use a four-color scheme: ultramarine blue, burnt umber, raw sienna, and alizarin crimson. I wet areas along the middle and back of the neck and along the flippers with a large flat brush. Using the blue and raw sienna, with a large, wet, round brush, I quickly add more blues in the chest, face, and back flipper and let them bleed into raw sienna up into the neck. While the paper is still wet, I add some dark burnt umber to the front flipper and in areas where shadows collect in the muzzle of the animal and in between folds of skin. I sprinkle salt at the top and right of the painting, to bleach out some pigment and create blotchy textures. Finally I use a diluted puddle of alizarin crimson and a small round brush to create ovals and circles in the skin. I apply crimson to the top of the head and let it bleed into my existing wash, still leaving white highlights.

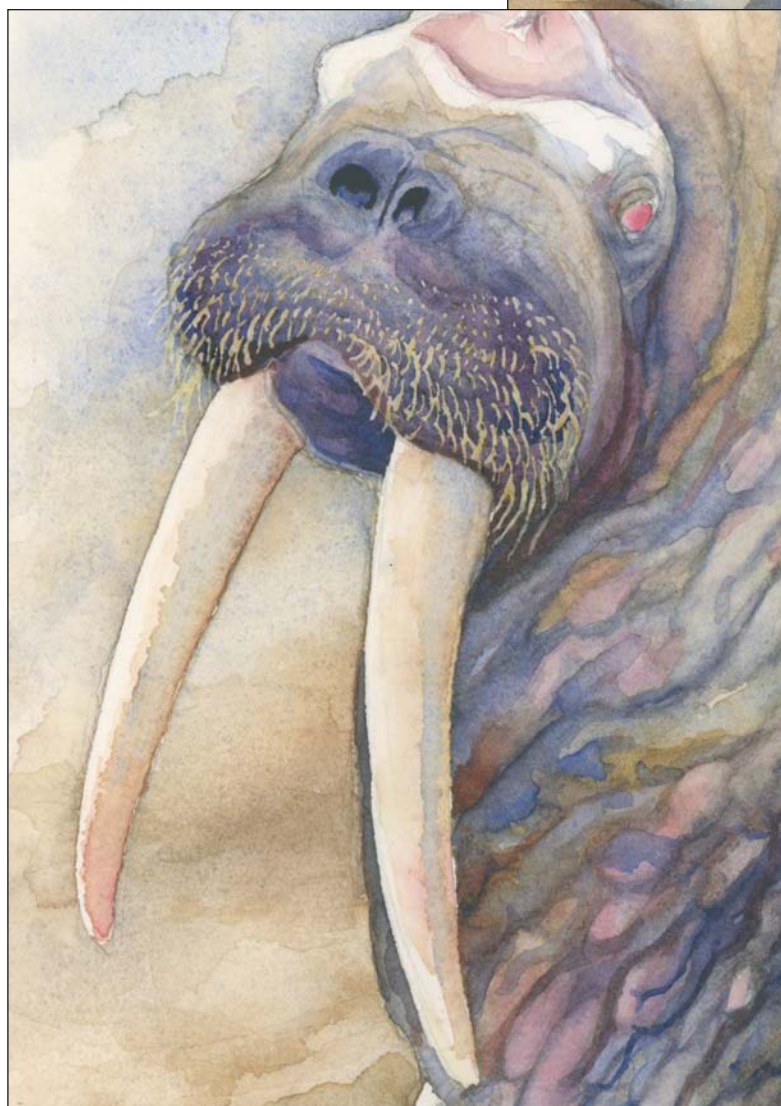
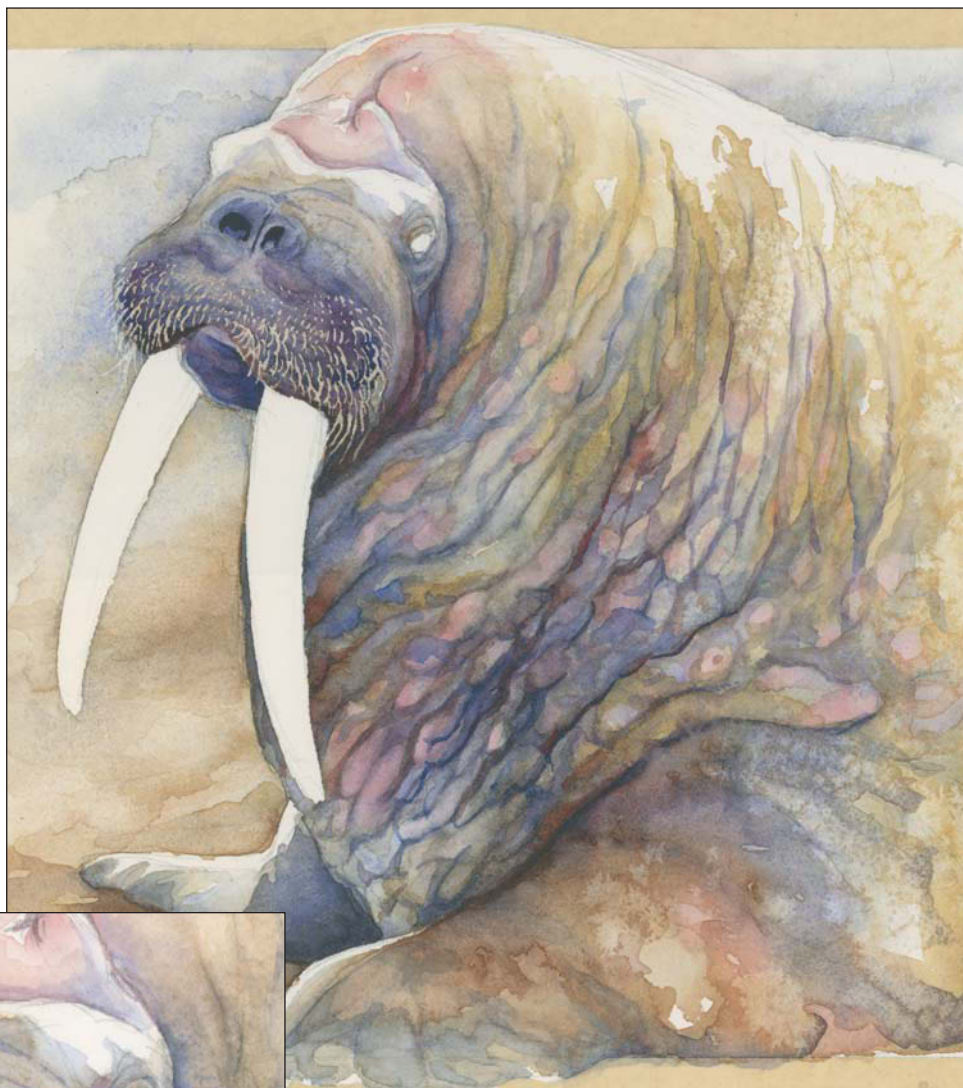


Step 3 I use the point of a toothpick to apply masking fluid to the whiskers in wavy rows across the face. Mixing the blue with the crimson, I create and use purple to deepen shadows between skin folds and around nodules. I introduce darker browns in the shadowed areas. I also paint purple and blue to create a dark muzzle, with some raw sienna mixed into the grayish area between the nose and eye. I paint purple over some of the pink nodules that are more in the shadow.

Step 4 I add darker hues to create the shadows that run along the walrus skin folds and in the face. Using the same four colors, I work in smaller areas. Deep blues and crimson browns line the cracks in the skin. In some areas I leave a hard edge to my lines, and in others I use a wet brush and “soften” the borders of paint I’m adding. To create the darkest areas, such as the nostril holes, I mix the browns with the blues and get black. To add further pronouncement to the walrus’s lip, I line the bottom edge with a concentrated dark brown pigment.



Step 5 Add more browns and blues, letting them bleed into the background. I use diluted paint at the top of the page, and more heavily pigmented paint at the bottom. The sand at the bottom is darkest, and as the paint stretches to the left, I leave some hard edges to the browns to create a hint of detail. I darken the back flipper with blues to deepen the shadow but leave the highlights on the top alone. For the front flipper, I add more heavily concentrated mixtures of browns and blues and let them bleed into the flipper. I dash some salt along the middle to right edge of my wet pigment and let it do its bleaching magic.



Step 6 To create facial details, I retrace the whiskers with masking fluid. I add the base-color for the eye: a diluted alizarin crimson. While the eye is still partially wet, I use a tiny brush to add a dab of more concentrated pigment to the right edge, and let it bleed into the lighter color. I lay the foundation of basic color values for the ivory tusks by mixing a diluted puddle of gamboge yellow and burnt sienna and applying it to the right edge of the tusk. While still wet, I add some diluted alizarin crimson to the left tusk at its tip and just below the lip. On the right tusk, I add a bit of crimson toward the bottom.



Step 7 I mix dark brown and blues, and paint the deep lines that crease the face above and below the eyelids, along the side of the snout, and around the nostril. I paint over the whiskered muzzle with more dark blues and purples. I add some browns to the edges of the lips and in the swoops under the nostrils. With a tiny liner brush, I add black dots at the base of the nostrils, which serves as the large pores from which they protrude. Next I add a darker circle of alizarin crimson to the edge of eyeball. In the bottom half of that circle, I paint a small black oval to create the pupil. To create the tusk grooves, I use a diluted burnt umber and paint thin lines running the length of the tusk. Once everything is dry, I peel away the masking fluid from the whiskers. Finally I pull the tape from the borders.



Step 8 I paint alizarin crimson mixed with raw sienna, and extend the sienna down into the neck. Using light mixed blue-grays from my existing puddles, with a small flat brush I add tiny patterns to the skin folds to hint at patchy skin and tiny fur patches. I add dark burnt sienna to the edges of some of the skin folds to create darker creases that add a hint of warmth to the browns. Using some of my purple from the crimson/blue mixtures, I deepen the hue in the creases running over and along the top of the walrus's forehead. Using a small wet brush, I wipe the top edge of these areas to fade out the top of the creases, leaving the darkest areas of paint in the deepest part of the skin crease. Using a black mixture, I add the darkest area of shadow at the base of the back flipper. I use this black color to emphasize the creases running where the flipper protrudes from the body. In the flesh arm-portion of the flipper, I paint areas of burnt umber around the folds. Using ultramarine blue, I add detail to the flipper "fingers."

Atlantic Puffin

Puffins are often referred to as the “clowns of the sea,” and it’s not hard to see why. With their chubby bodies, penguin-like tuxedo plumage, and colorful faces and feet, they seem made to excel at being charming and a touch silly. But they are devoted mates, parents, and experts at fishing.

Color Palette

alizarin crimson • burnt sienna • cadmium orange
cadmium red • cerulean blue • gamboge yellow
Hooker’s green • indigo • permanent green light
Prussian blue • raw sienna • raw umber
ultramarine blue • yellow ochre



Step 1 I make a light sketch, positioning the birds and their cliff-side home. To create the ocean background, I mix a watery puddle of indigo and a little raw umber and use a smaller hog-hair flat brush to sweep in horizontal strokes moving from left to right. I add a little Prussian blue to the wash then let the pigment diffuse softly into the water and apply more irregular horizontal strokes with a smaller brush. Once the ocean wash is dry, I create the dirt cliff wash. I sweep in various puddles of raw umber, raw sienna, burnt sienna, and alizarin crimson to mix with each other. In some areas I add diluted indigo to darken the colors slightly and tie the cliff in with the ocean background.



Step 2 I use permanent green light and Hooker’s green to paint into the wet area, letting them mix together on the page. Using a round brush, I loosely add yellow ochre to the middle of the wash and let it diffuse into bright greens. I add an indigo/Hooker’s green mixture to the wet wash around the base of the puffin’s tail and let it bleed outward into the wash. While this wash is wet, I use a liner brush to sweep some of the pigment in arcs and downward to create grasses curving over at the bottom right and to the right of the perched puffin.



Step 3 I add masking fluid in the shape of bent and curved grass blades through the area. Once these dry, I use a medium flat brush to sweep in Hooker's green, yellow ochre, permanent green light, and Prussian blue. I pull the darker colors up and into curved grass blades overlapping the dirt cliff behind the puffin's head and neck.



Step 4 I peel away all the masking fluid and note the difference between the grass that was masked over in Step 1 and the grass masked over in Step 3.

Artist's Tip

The ultramarine came out darker than I intended on the puffin's right wing; to pull some of the color back, I used a slightly damp paper towel to dab and pull away some pigment. This method can rarely "erase" paint, but it can soften it.



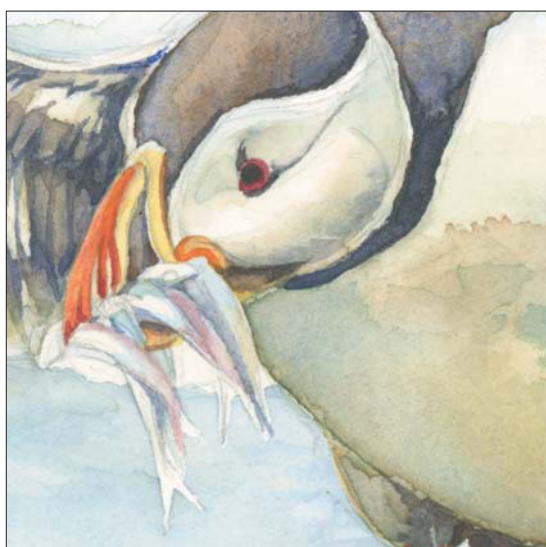
Step 5 I add masking fluid and block off the puffins' beak and feet, as well as some overlapping blades of grass and a few highlights on the folded flight feathers of the perched puffin, to preserve the purity of those bright colors. I paint the light part of the puffins: the white underbelly and light feathers in the wings. I mix separate puddles of cerulean blue and burnt sienna, and lightly wet the areas of white on the puffin. I add yellow ochre to the bellies of the birds, which helps their form "pop." I add motion effect to the flapping wing tips by using a burnt sienna and cerulean blue mixture to create areas of color and warm grays. I dab ultramarine blue on the wing tips and let it bleed into the "flutter zone."



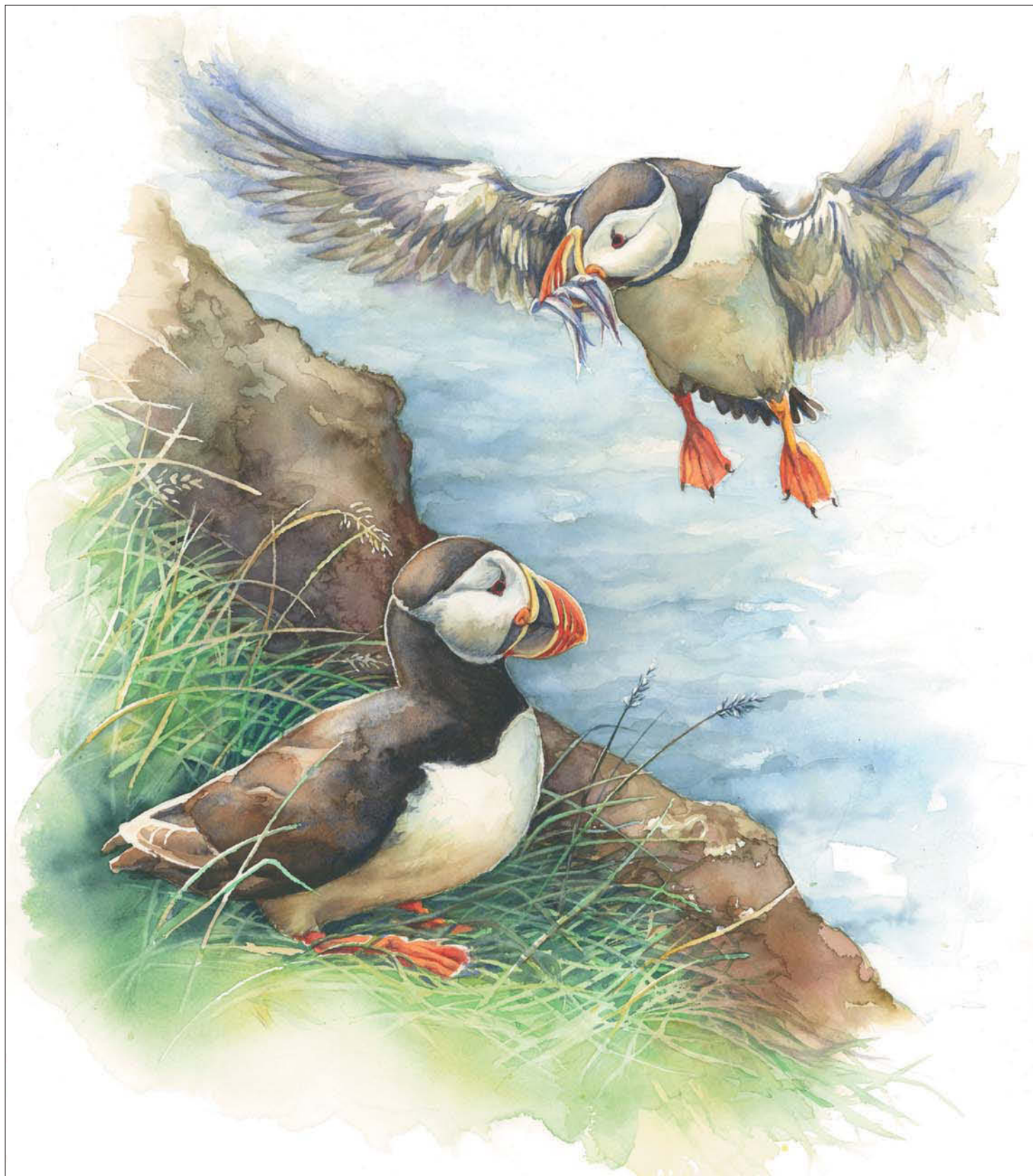
Step 6 I use a combination of ultramarine blue and burnt sienna to work in small areas at a time, concentrating on each block of dark color in the flying puffin's tail, the nape of the neck, and the top of the head. In lighter areas of the body, the burnt sienna serves as the highlight color, and the ultramarine blue achieves the mid-tones. I combine the two to make black for the flying puffin's tail and the sitting puffin's neck and chest. To create the darker hues in the flapping wings, I use ultramarine blue, yellow ochre, and alizarin crimson. I use the yellow ochre and crimson to paint the surface area of the feathers, and then use the blue to paint the dark areas of shadow between the feathers and the tips. Once the paper is dry, I peel away the masking fluid and reveal the white space of the beaks and feet.



Step 7 I create the orange of the beaks and feet with cadmium orange. I add cadmium red to the parts of the feet that are deeper in shadow. I mix a puddle of the orange and red to make the bill color and let that dry. I then add the large, curved yellow streaks in the bill with gamboge yellow. For the dark parts in the bill, I paint a mixture of ultramarine blue and burnt sienna. I use alizarin crimson to paint the eye ring.



Step 8 Where light reflects off the fish skin, I paint very light and diluted colors. I use darker color for the areas between the fish, and along some of their backs. I use various combinations of alizarin crimson, yellow ochre, cerulean blue, and ultramarine for the darkest areas. For the puffin's eye, I return to the mixture of ultramarine blue and burnt sienna and use a tiny brush to create the pupil as well as the swooped triangle shape that surrounds the eye. I paint the dark line that extends from the bottom of the eye up and toward the back of the head.



Step 9 Using ultramarine I darken the areas in the feathers of the flying puffin that need more shadows. For the wing tip extended over the cliff, I use a small, stiff flat brush and flick the paint in little drips away from the tip of the feathers. I add areas of cerulean blue and yellow ochre to the shadows around the face of the perched puffin, and I deepen the underbelly shadow with burnt sienna. For both puffins, I use alizarin crimson mixed with sienna to create darker shadows on the feet to give the toes definition. I use the black mixture from earlier to create nails for the flying puffin. Then I define the beaks by adding more gamboge to the vertical stripes at the tip of the beak and deepen the reds in the middle of the beak with cadmium red and alizarin. I paint yellow ochre into the blades of the grass that were left white before, and some very light green in the grass overlapping the puffin.

Octopus

The octopus is a beautifully strange creature. Being a mollusk with an entirely soft body possessing tentacles and suckers could make it seem alien and unrelatable. Yet with its graceful and intentional movements and clear intelligence, it seems to embody people's fascination with the unfamiliar beauty of the ocean. As a painting model, it is rich in its variety of shapes and colors to capture on paper.

Color Palette

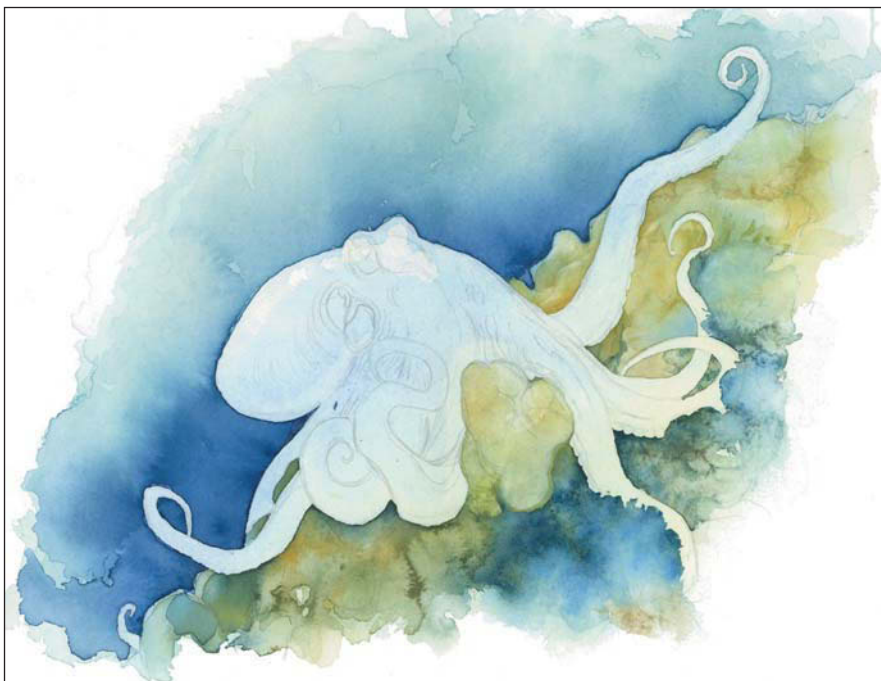
burnt sienna • burnt umber • cadmium orange
cerulean blue • indigo • permanent rose • phthalo blue
Prussian blue • raw sienna • red lake • sap green
transparent yellow • yellow ochre



Step 1 I try to pull together the different shapes and tentacle positions that I like from various photographs into my initial sketch. I like the rocky coral background and curled tentacle in one picture, the outstretched tentacles in another, and the composition of the octopus head in the other. I draw it out on paper, envisioning how the painting will look.



Step 2 I lightly create a sketch on stretched-out paper. Using a large flat brush, I let the painting be contained within an irregular shape. I mix a diluted puddle of sap green and cerulean blue with a hog-hair brush. I let the pigment spread across the paper in different opacities and keep the lighter values at the top of the wash. I add cerulean blue along the edge of the rocky structure where it meets the open water, allowing this “bluer” blue to permeate into the first wash. Using a smaller brush, I dab watery cerulean blue among the corals and rocks to give the first hints of shadows yet to come. I apply masking fluid with a putty knife around the contours of the octopus, so that the next background washes will not intrude into its form.



Step 3 Working wet-on-wet, I use clean water to re-wet the open water area of the painting, leaving the rocky coral dry for the moment. I apply more cerulean blue at the edge of the rock/octopus and let it permeate into the wet paper outward. I add Prussian blue to the same area with a smaller brush, so it diffuses into the cerulean blue wash. I wet the area of the rocky coral over which the octopus is crawling, then apply three colors to various areas: burnt umber, raw sienna, and phthalo blue. To create shadows among the coral and rocks, I add dabs of burnt umber with a small brush, letting the brown diffuse among the cracks. I add areas of phthalo blue, again in places where shadows would collect.



Step 4 I begin work on the octopus by adding in the lightest values, mostly golds, pinks, and orangey-browns. I make the area about half as damp as when I created the background washes, covering the animal except the underarms where its tentacles are. With a medium round brush, I apply a light wash of yellow ochre through the body, then add touches of cadmium orange and burnt sienna to create subtle shadows on the forehead, the back of the head, and around the tentacles. I create the striking tube-like siphon below the eye in pure cadmium orange. To paint the base colors of the underside of the tentacles, I use a light mixture of permanent rose and burnt sienna.

Artist's Tip

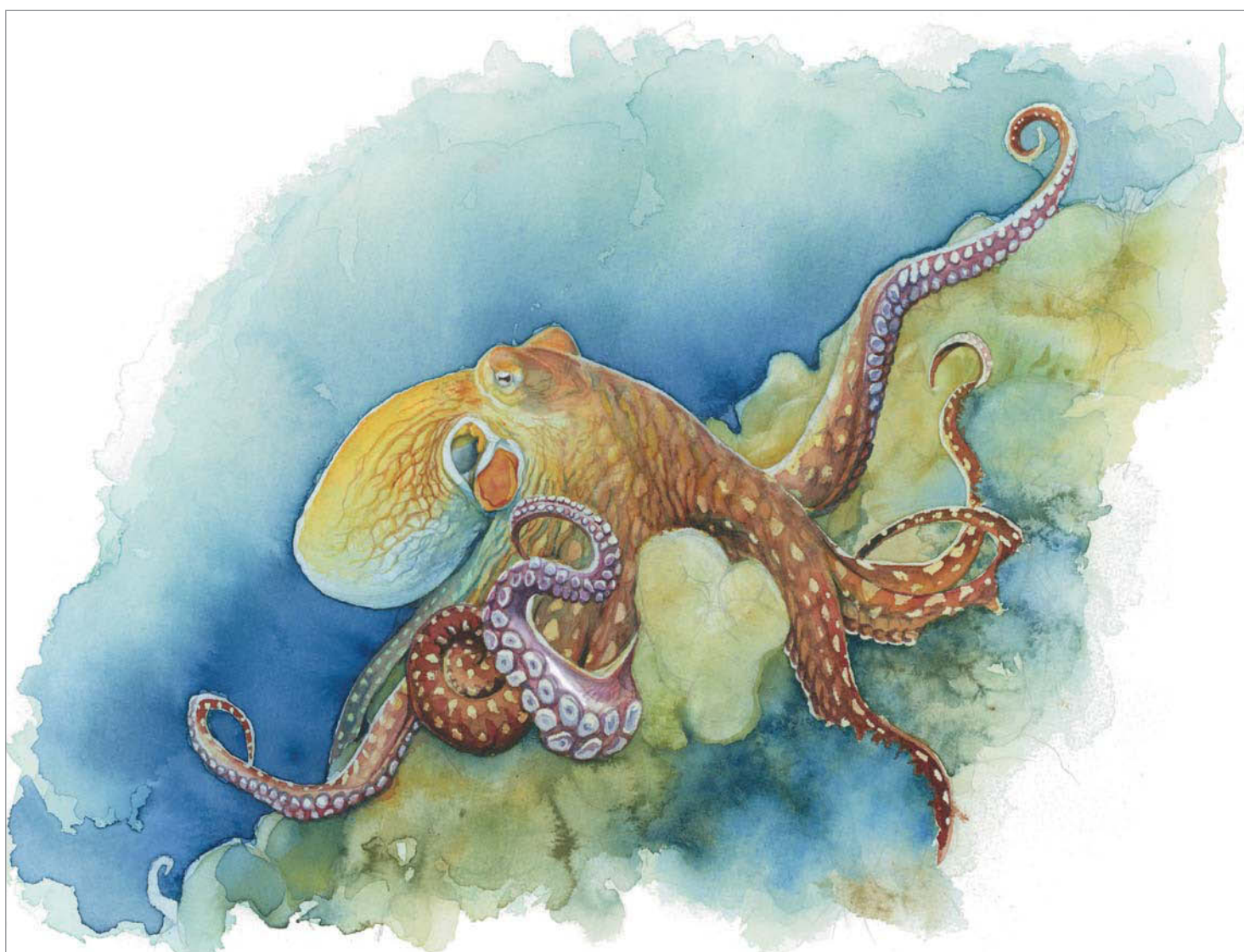
To create texture among the corals and rocks, I drop pinches of salt in the wash where the edge of the paint meets the white paper, creating bleached-out bursts with tiny fingers of condensed pigment bleeding outward. This creates a natural look, impossible to re-create with a brush, that establishes the rough appearance of the ocean in which the octopus lives.



Step 5 I mix puddles of cadmium orange and burnt sienna to create the darker brown and tan oranges that further develop the shading around the octopus. I do not wet my paper in advance, but instead paint the wet pigment with a medium-small round brush onto dry paper. I fade the edges of the brushstrokes to give the octopus a smooth appearance. The underside of the balloon-like octopus head seems a little too white to be underwater, so I add a light blue wash to pick up some shading and tie the animal into its environment. To create more value on the underside of the tentacles, I mix puddles of red lake and permanent rose to deepen the shadows, particularly on the backward S-shaped tentacle in the foreground. Once the paint is dry, I peel away the masking fluid and am left with white suckers and yellowish-tan spots patterning along the arms.



Step 6 I first use raw sienna to create the tiny crevices in the skin that seem to go from the middle of the head down to the left. I create a series of grooves, and then go back and pull pigment up and away. I move through the entire body and tentacles this way. Areas where the lines are darkest are places where shadows would collect, such as behind the siphon and in the “armpits” between tentacles. Using red lake, I deepen the color in the tightly coiled arm. Using transparent yellow, I fill in some of the areas between the textured grooves on the octopus body. I use my watery cerulean blue to paint over the backmost tentacle underneath the head to give it the appearance of fading back into the water, providing more depth to the animal.



Step 7 Turning my attention to the underside of the arms and among the suckers, I mix up some purple colors combining my various blue puddles with permanent rose. The darkest and most heavily pigmented purples are added with a liner brush around the bottom edge of the suckers and for the dots in the middle of the suckers. Using a more watered-down solution of the same color, I paint lighter tones on the suckers themselves. To address the eye, I use a light phthalo blue mixture and paint a ring around the eyeball. To create the sideways hourglass shape of the pupil, I use some of the darker purple I mixed for the areas around the suckers.



Step 8 Using a puddle of burnt umber, I create brownish areas of shading between the cracks and crevices of the rocky surface and in some of the wavy textures on the corals and rocks. I paint areas of shadow with burnt umber, but leave the bumps and top edges alone. I use more cerulean blue to paint the background rocks running along the top right edge. I also apply cerulean blue along the crevices and cracks I painted with burnt umber, allowing the blues and tawny browns to mingle. Along the deeply shadowed areas where the tentacles cover the rocks, I add yellow ochre, burnt sienna, and sap green to capture some mid-tones. I mix indigo and phthalo blue to paint some areas between the tiny tentacles of the anemones popping up among the rocks. I dab tiny dots of water on the back of the octopus head, then place within those dots a bit of burnt sienna.

Parrot Fish

Some years ago I snorkeled in the tropical waters around Thailand and was dazzled by the colorful sight of various species of parrot fish: neon fish capable of chomping through hard coral with their impressive “beaks.”

Color Palette

burnt sienna • cobalt blue • lemon yellow • mauve
phthalo crimson • turquoise • ultramarine blue



Step 1 I sketch the fish on watercolor paper, placing the eyes and fins as proportionately as possible. Scales can be tricky, so I draw two sets of swooping lines that form curved Xs along the fish's flank. Inside the diamond shapes created by these lines, I draw in curved Cs to mark the scale placement.



Step 2 I mix three puddles of pigment: lemon yellow, turquoise and cobalt blue, and burnt sienna. I dab the right and left edges of my paper with turquoise and let the color run from the middle toward the edges. I add cobalt blue and let the pigment spread out. Next I mix lemon yellow with aqua to create the bright greens of the coral, and I dab the paper with this color, allowing it to dilute across. I dab in diluted burnt sienna to create warm rouges in the coral above the fish's dorsal fin and under its chin.



Step 3 I use lemon yellow mixed with turquoise and cobalt blue. The “bluer” blues of the fish (such as the creases in the tail fin, the underbelly, and the tip of the pectoral fin) receive watery mixes of cobalt, and the “greener” blues get doses of my yellow/turquoise mixture. I let the two shades combine at times to create variegated washes. To create the effect of color transitioning from darker to lighter, such as in the shading under the belly and on top of the forehead, I wet the area that I want to paint with clean water. Then, where I want the darkest value, I apply the pigment directly and let it run into the area that I pre-wet. In the pectoral fin, I paint cobalt blue at the top and tip of the fin and transition to a turquoise/yellow color. As that dries, I use a liner brush with mostly yellow and a hint of turquoise to create the veins in the fin.



Step 4 I apply some darker blues along the side of the fish, starting with ultramarine blue at the base of the tail and brushing that from the back of the fish toward the front. Working quickly, I paint the scales at the front of the fish phthalo crimson and work back toward the ultramarine blue, letting the two colors mix and create a gradient. To paint the purple pinks in the dorsal and anal fins, I paint another variegated wash, with mauve/ultramarine blue added to the back of the fin and phthalo crimson to the front. In the face and chest, I mimic this color scheme. I go one step further in the cheek of the fish by adding lemon yellow. On the nose, I paint a variegated wash of ultramarine blue running backward into mauve around and behind the eye. I paint both pectoral fins with heavily pigmented crimson to create the flame-like shapes as well as diluted mauve to create the color running along the left edge of the fin. I remove the masking fluid and reveal the colorful pattern along the side of the fish.



Step 5 To create the shades I want for the coral, I use burnt sienna, lemon yellow, and turquoise. While the pigment is still wet, I use burnt sienna, phthalo crimson, and mauve to create subtle details in the cracks of the coral. I wet areas at the left and right of the paper where I want to paint blue water, and then with a large brush filled with turquoise pigment, I paint around the edges of the fish's tail and head, letting the colors bleed. I make sure the darkest values are in the center of the painting, and the colors fade away as the background bleeds to the edges of my paper. I also toss salt on the edges of my painting to bleach away some pigment, leaving a textured surface. In areas where the values still seem too dark, I use a slightly damp paper towel to dab at the color and lift out some pigment.



Step 6 To create the pattern along the throat and the bottom of the tail, I lightly wet the area with clean water then paint scales in rows. The bottom of the fish needs darker value in the scales, so I use the most pigment there, and I dilute the color with each row up the side of the fish. I also subtly use this technique at the top of the fish head. To create the scales in the colorful pattern of the fish, I create a variegated wash that includes ultramarine blue running from the belly upward. I mix it in with some greens (created by mixing lemon yellow/turquoise) and run it along the back and behind the head, with purplish pinks (created by mixing mauve and phthalo crimson) running down the center of the fish. I dilute areas in the scales that became too dark with my wash; I pull some of that pigment out with a paper towel. Finally, I paint concentrated ultramarine blue pigment in a row of scales along the belly, and brush streaks of it in the veins along the tail.



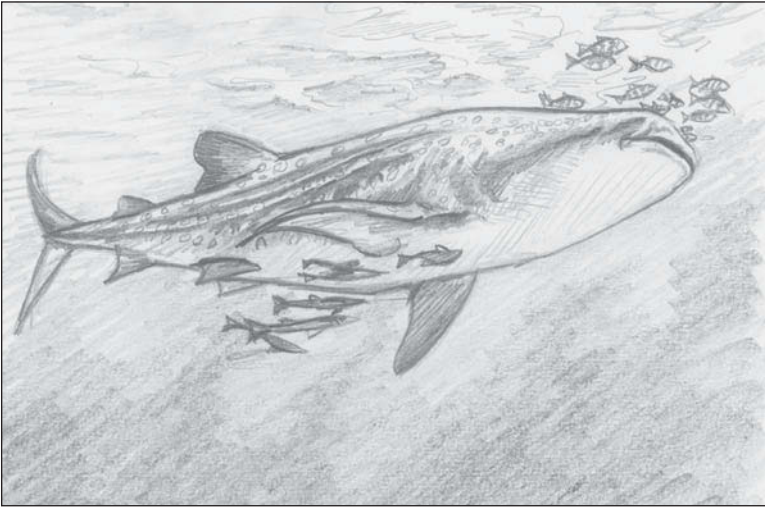
Step 7 I add dark values to some key areas by using the existing puddles of color and a liner brush. I paint in the tiny ridges along the fins of the fish; the dorsal and anal fins have sharper edges at the top and left. Using blues and pinks, I add the eye and beak. The area above the eyeball has color fading down toward the eye, and the purple area below the eye fades upward. I paint the beak with turquoise that fades from the top and bottom jaw toward the sharp middle, which I keep white by dabbing out any pigment with a paper towel. In the background, I use dark blues and browns to further deepen the shadows under the nodules and between the cracks of the coral. I create the hint of a brain coral just below the fish by washing in some aqua over the top of a dome shape and by painting around empty circles. I place small dabs of green pigment in the middle of these circles to give the impression of polyps in the coral.

Whale Shark

Whale sharks are huge and mysterious, gracefully carving watery paths through the world's tropical oceans. In painting the earth's largest fish, I wanted to capture a sense of scale of the animal. Including the entourage of pilot fish and remora fish help showcase the enormity of the shark.

Color Palette

alizarin crimson • indigo • phthalo blue • Prussian blue
sap green • ultramarine blue



Step 1 I create a rough sketch of the shark and fish, then stretch the paper on an art board.

Step 2 Using a large painter's brush, I wet down the entire paper. I mix a large puddle of phthalo blue and sap green on my palette, then turn my art board upside down and at a gentle tilt. I use a large hog-hair brush to apply phthalo blue at the bottom (or, the top) and let the color run down the paper and dilute as it goes. I repeat this process twice, then flip the board and do the same thing with the sap green (to which I add a small amount of blue). I apply the green/blue mix in dabs around the top of the page, then tilt the board again to let it wash downward and mix with the blue.

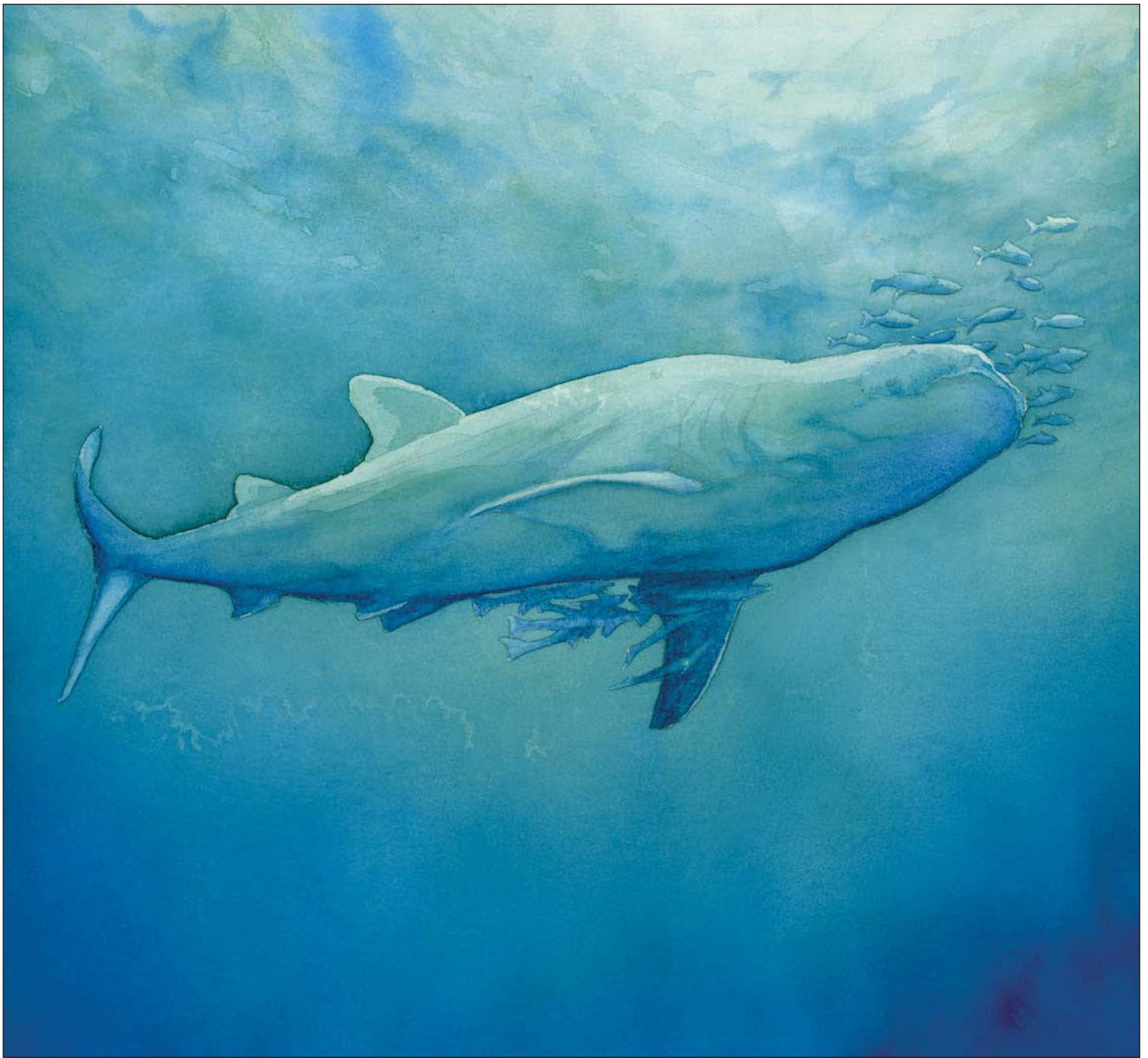


Artist's Tip

I dab areas in the top-right edge of the paper with a damp paper towel to soak up some pigment. This creates light areas in the wash, which serve as dappled water where light pierces through.



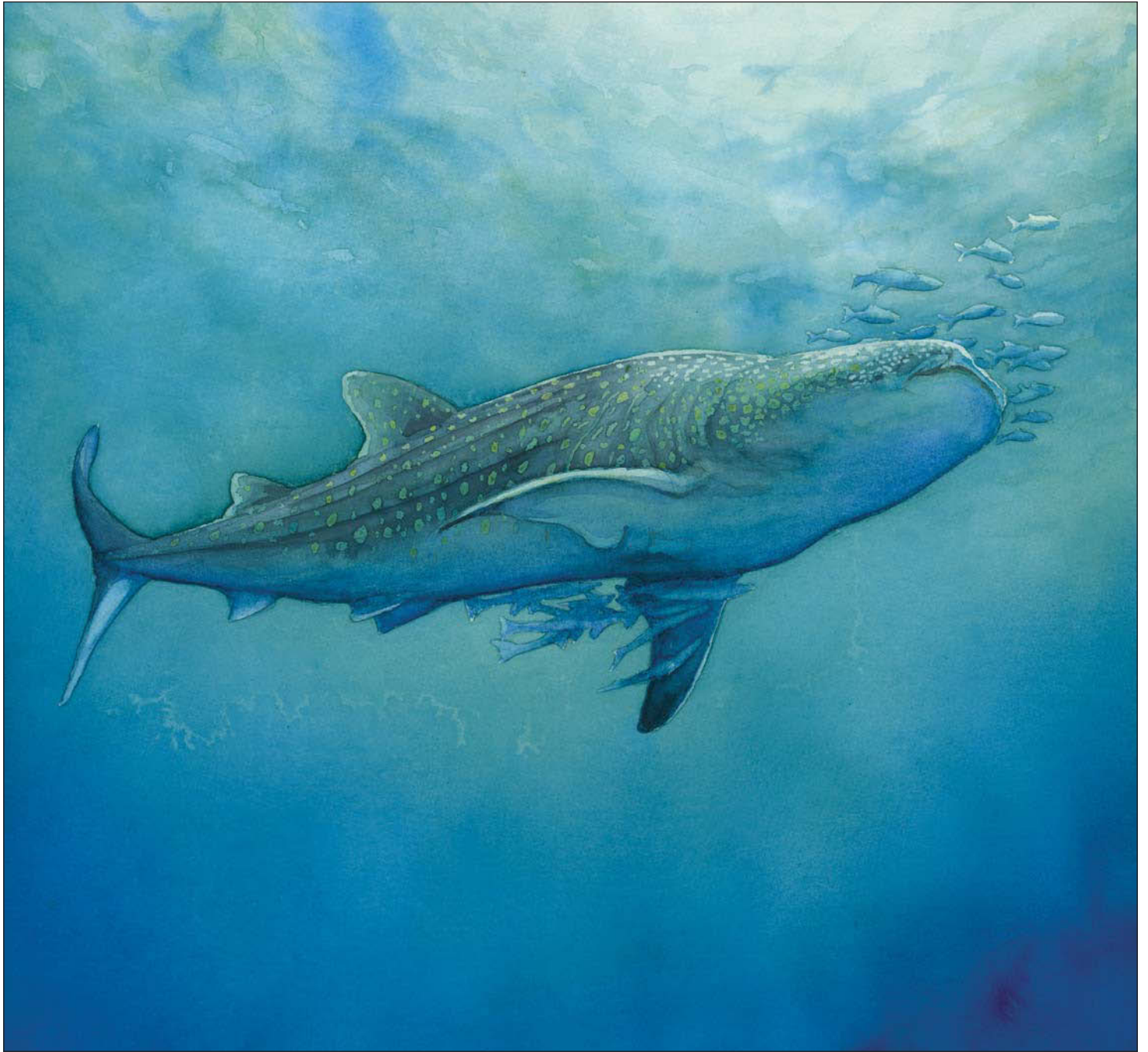
Step 3 When the paper is completely dry, I use a painting knife to apply masking fluid around the contour of the whale shark and over the surrounding fish. I wait until the masking fluid dries. I repeat the steps from my last wash, moving quickly before the paper dries and tilting the art board to keep the paint running in the correct direction. I use a medium-sized flat hog-hair brush to add dabs and streaks of sap green and phthalo blue to the top. The pigment spreads and fades at the edge in the wetness, but because the paper isn't as wet, it stays more contained. These serve as the dappled surface water. The closer I get to the top-right edge, the less paint I add. The farther away I move from that point, the darker pigment I use. By the time my dabbing reaches the shark, I stop.



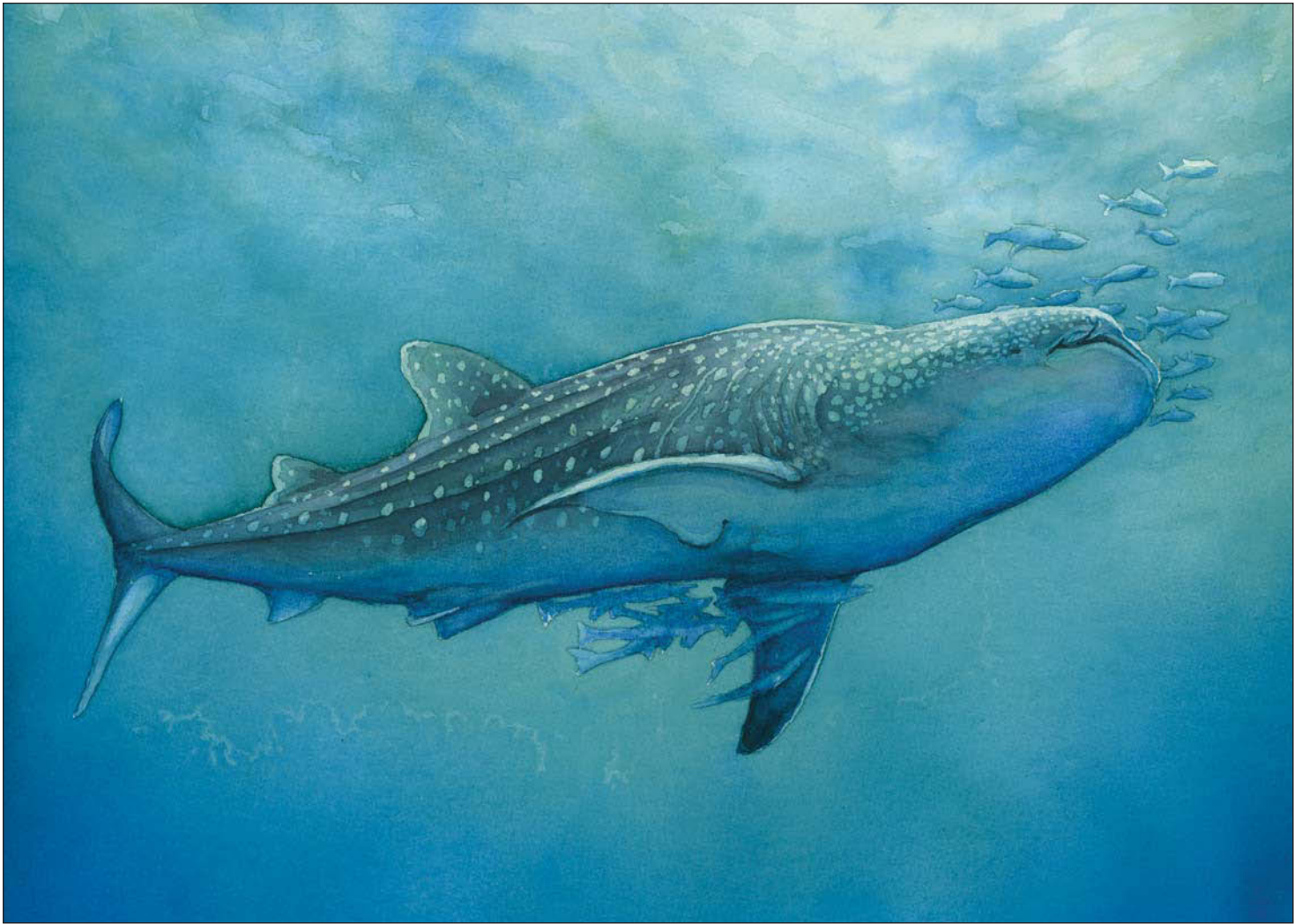
Step 4 When the paper is dry, I peel off the masking fluid and expose the shark and fish. I focus on the underside and the spots that cover the animal. I lightly wet the bottom edge of the shark, and with a medium round brush I add some ultramarine blue, which I fade out upward. I use a mix of Prussian blue and sap green to shade farther up the shark's body.

Artist's Tip

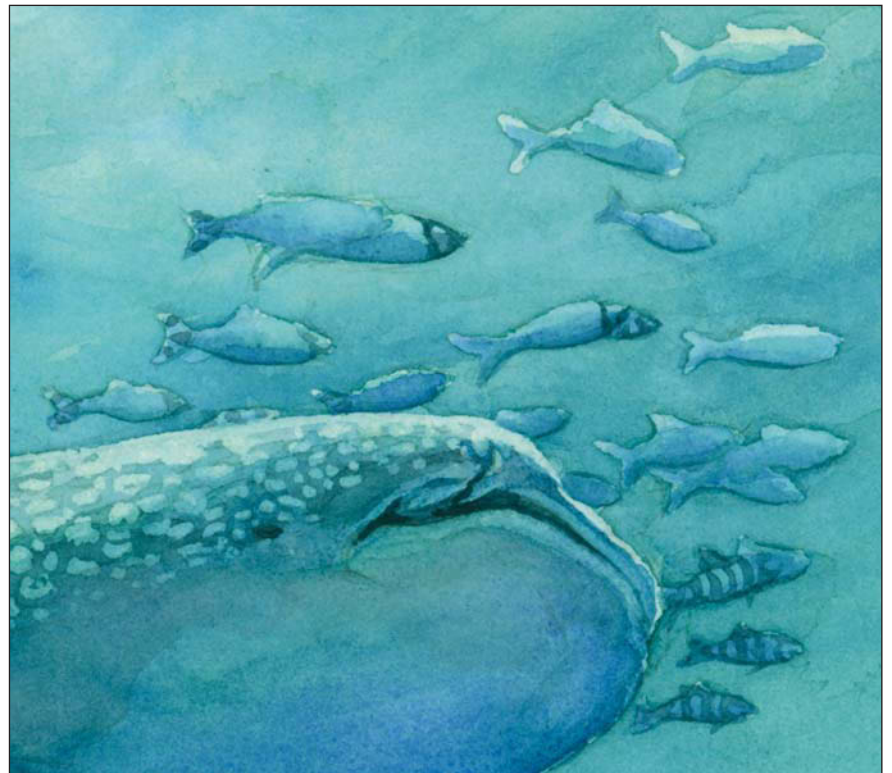
The bottom of the great fish should be a cooler color; the color should grow warmer around the sides. Similarly, the fish below the shark are a cooler color, and the pilot fish above are warmer colors (although the bellies of the fish are still darker than their backs).



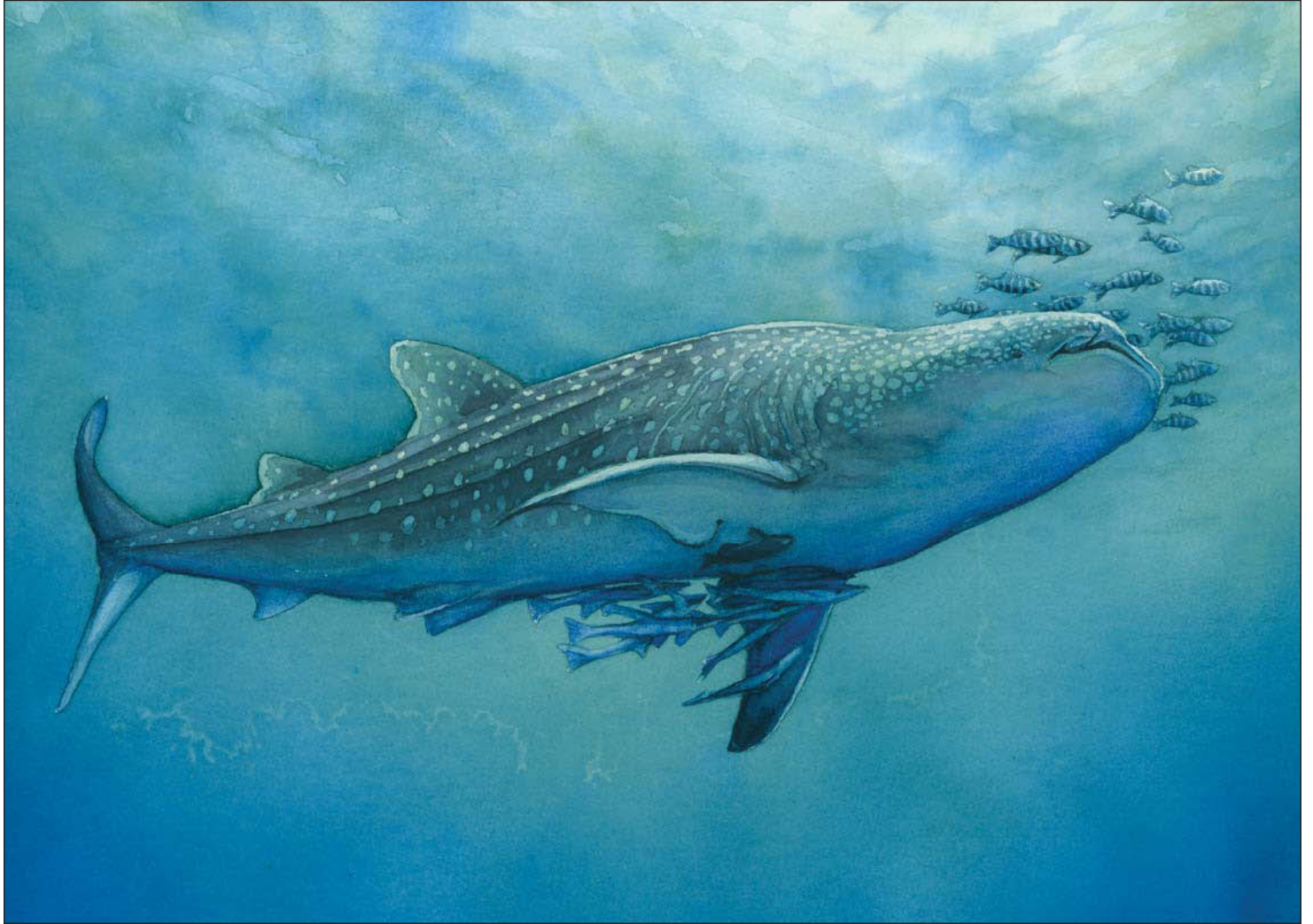
Step 5 I lightly draw in dots on the shark. I apply masking fluid to cover the dots. Mixing indigo and alizarin crimson puddles, I paint the sides and back of the shark with a round brush. I run a wet brush along the top and bottom edges of my paint strokes to “fade out” the color and avoid harsh edges of paint. I lightly paint the area of the eye, mouth, gill edges (fading the color to the right), and the ridges on its sides (fading the color downward from the ridges). I also paint the tips of the front flippers very darkly, particularly the left one, then fade it back into ultramarine blue as it moves into the fin.



Step 6 I fine-tune the painting by removing the masking fluid from the dots so that they “pop.” I add some aqua color to the dots, which I make by diluting the phthalo blue and adding a small amount of sap green. Then I brush the aqua wash lightly throughout the middle of the shark, running from the tip of the snout through the tail. At the back of the head, I make the wash more green to give some variation to the color. Using the existing color puddles, I add a little more shading to the ridges along the side and around the gills, and I give the tail fin some more shape.



Step 7 I create the pattern on the pilot fish around the shark’s head, using a puddle of indigo to create the stripes. I start with the head and tail, then work my way to the middle using a liner brush. The tail has three patches of black (one on the top of the tail fin, one below, and one sideways triangle in the middle). I create darker stripes for the fish closer to the viewer; for the fish farther back I dilute the pigment a bit. I complete the stripes on the pilot fish, leaving some white space on their backs. I use a liner brush with ultramarine blue and indigo to add the dark lines surrounding the remora fish.



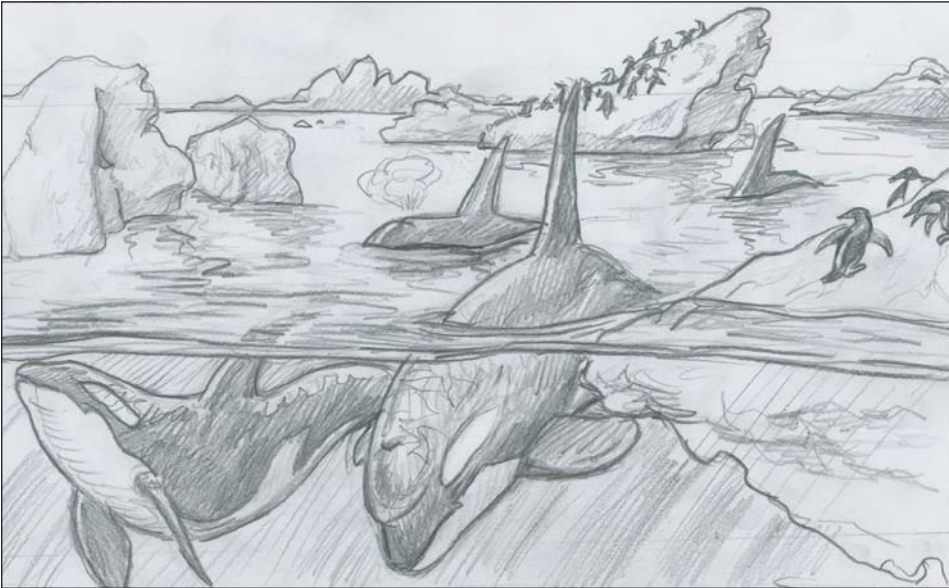
Step 8 I use indigo to fill in the shape of the suckerfish clinging to the underside of the whale shark's fin. Using a clean liner brush with water, I brush away a little pigment on the suckerfish's head and along its belly and fin. I add a bit more ultramarine blue to the shark's belly and fade it upward. I add more blue for a touch of shadow around the eye. Finally I wet some of the ocean area around the top half of the shark with clean water. Using a flat brush, I dab phthalo and Prussian blue into the middle of these wet areas. The colors softly diffuse into the background and create more texture in the surface waters.

Orcas

For this painting, I've decided to feature killer whales (orcas) and Adélie penguins in an arctic setting. It can be a big undertaking to tie in various techniques, animals, lighting effects, and reflections, but with careful planning, it is well worth the effort!

Color Palette

burnt sienna • cerulean blue • gamboge yellow • indigo
lemon yellow • sepia • phthalo crimson
turquoise • ultramarine blue



Step 1 I lightly draw the sketch on watercolor paper.

Step 2 I apply masking fluid to the areas I want to protect from my initial wash: around the icebergs, the thin above/below waterline, the above-water orcas, and the foremost penguins. I load my brush with indigo and run it along the top, letting it melt into the turquoise. I use a round brush to add some gamboge yellow, which lightly diffuses in with my blues. For the surface water below, I use turquoise mixed with lemon yellow at the top, moving down with cerulean blue, ultramarine blue, and ultramarine blue mixed with phthalo crimson at the bottom. To create the color in the submerged water, I paint with turquoise mixed with lemon yellow.



Artist's Tip

To avoid having to erase or draw too many lines getting the drawing right, try using dark pencils on a piece of thin sketch paper the same size as your watercolor paper. Then use a light box to lightly trace the drawing onto the watercolor paper, using a minimal amount of lines and eraser marks.



Step 3 I wet the paper as before and paint (from top left to bottom right) lemon yellow, yellow mixed with turquoise, turquoise, and phthalo crimson. I use a very light pencil to draw where I want the deepest shadows and then paint the shadowed portions of the ice with the turquoise/yellow mixture, ultramarine blue, phthalo crimson, and a bit of cerulean blue. I use a combination of colors to paint the shadows of the ice. The darkest shadows get the deepest blues, and lighter shadows are painted with warmer purple and yellowish-aqua colors.

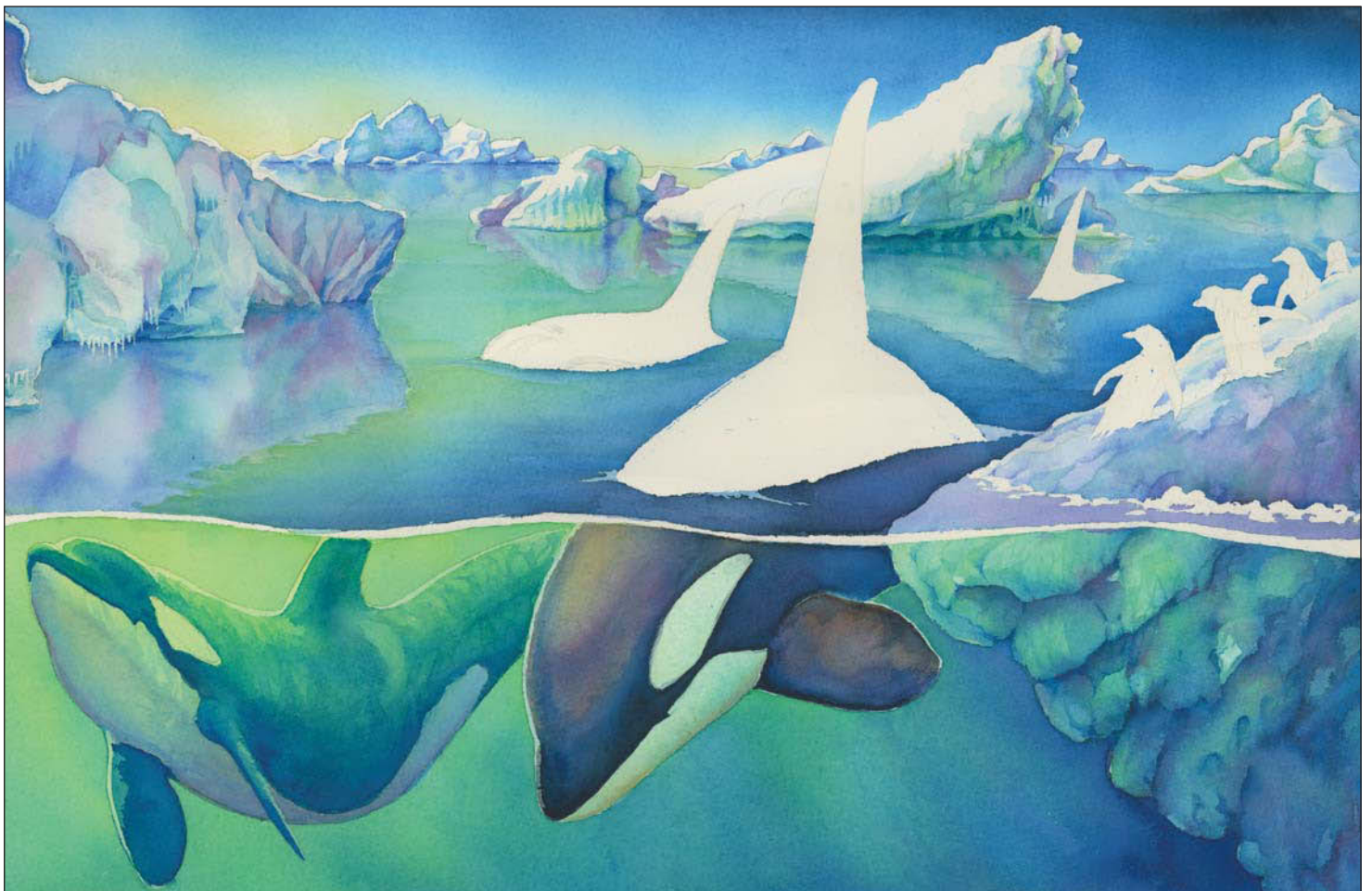


Step 4 I use the same colors as earlier and move in the same top-left to bottom-right direction. I paint some of the colors in angled columns to give the impression of light shining down. To create the reflections in the arctic waters, I wet the areas beneath the icebergs. Using the same colors as were used to paint the ice, I apply the colors where they would appear in the mirror image. To finish creating the reflection, I dampen my flat brush with clean water, and wipe downward through the entire reflection, continuing the brushstrokes until they stop at another iceberg or at the waterline. I repeat this process for each piece of ice, working one at a time.

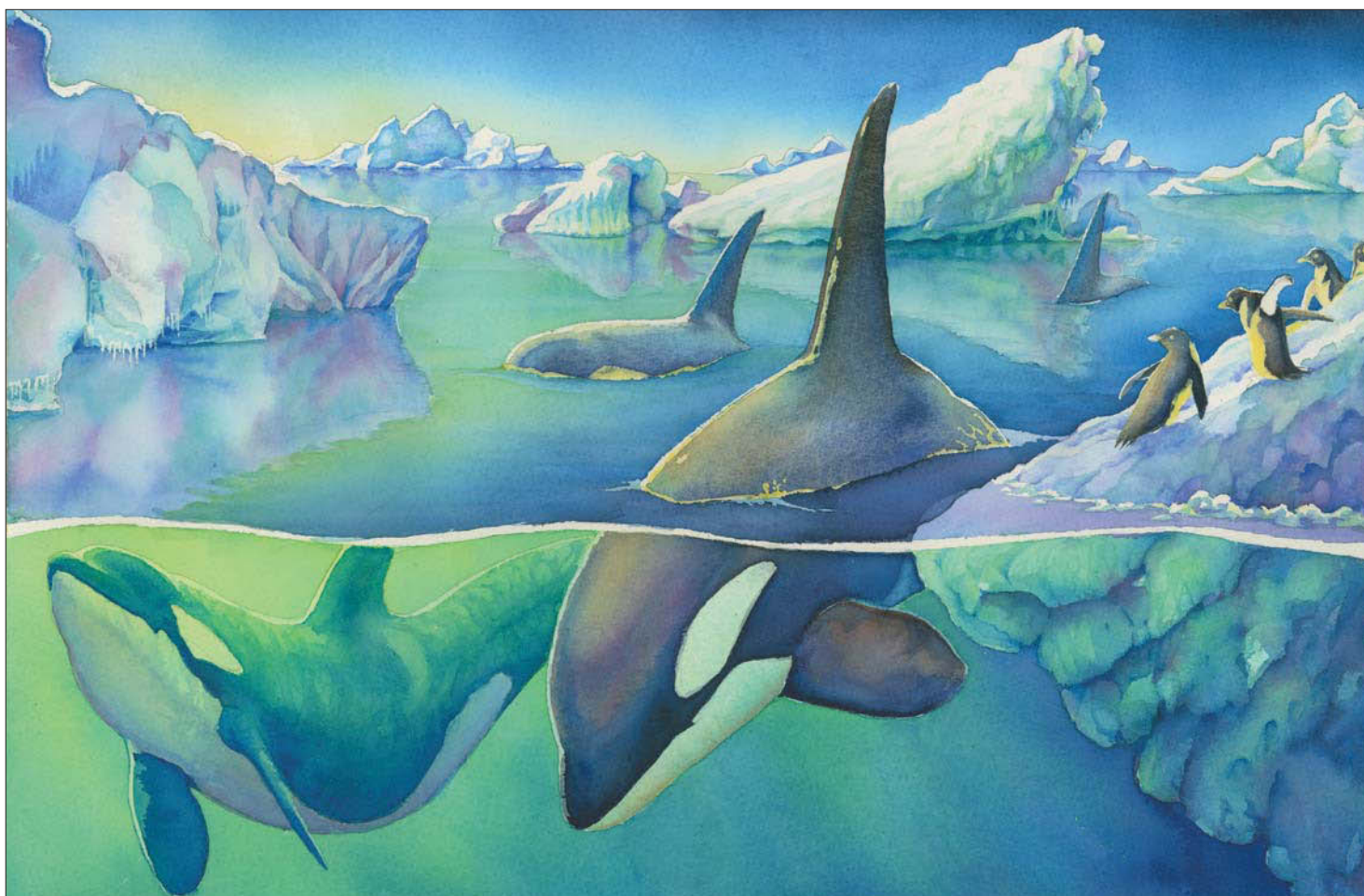


Step 5 I flip my art board upside down and paint the turquoise yellow mixture with a large flat brush in the middle of wet, allowing the color to diffuse downward toward the horizon line. I add turquoise at the top (waterline) and let that bleed downward. Finally, in the areas between the orca and the ice flow, I add phthalo crimson. As the surface water dries, I work quickly to wet the submerged ice with a round brush, leaving some irregular areas un-moistened. I use lemon yellow, turquoise, ultramarine blue, and phthalo crimson to create a mottled pattern on the ice. Once everything is dry, I peel away the masking fluid.

Step 6 I use ultramarine blue and phthalo crimson along the bottom edge and fade it upward along the throat with a small flat brush. When the light area is dry, I paint the dark area wet-on-wet, using the same color scheme from the submerged water wash. For the foreground orca, I paint the white areas, using turquoise for the mid-tone shadow along the jaw and fading the color upward, with a light wash over the eye spot. I add burnt sienna with a small brush lining the bottom edge of the jaw. I create a wash that holds more color variety in the foreground orca. I use gamboge yellow and burnt sienna for the warm colors along the forehead and fin edge, with phthalo crimson, turquoise, and ultramarine blue to create the shadowed areas.



Step 7 I deepen the dark values by adding ultramarine blue along the bottom edge of the dark areas of the background whale and fading upward. I preserve areas of highlights along the fin edges and in the “saddle” of the back, between the eye spot and dorsal fin. Using a clean, wet flat brush on an angle, I pick up some of the wet blue paint on the whale and pull it upward in spidery paths to create water reflections along the orca’s back. I add dark values of more blues and crimsons to the foreground whale, but I work wet-on-dry so the colors do not diffuse as softly as in a wash. To create the underwater ice, I paint the negative space between the cracks to create various shapes and forms. I create variegated washes between blues and crimsons in areas of dark values. I paint the darkest values first and use watery pigment to fade the color downward. I create variegated washes of turquoise and yellow in the lighter areas.



Step 8 I apply masking fluid to the bellies, eyes, and beaks of the penguins, as well as to some of the reflections and water highlights along the whales. The orca fin in the background is painted with a variegated wash of turquoise, indigo, and ultramarine blue. Moving one whale forward, I create another variegated wash and paint a diluted gamboge yellow along the back and mix turquoise, ultramarine blue, and indigo as the values deepen closer to the bottom edge. The black plumage of the penguins is created with a wash of heavily pigmented indigo on the right and lightening it with burnt sienna on the left. I lightly wet the back of the killer whale in the front first, then use burnt sienna, gamboge, and turquoise in the light areas on the far left and right. I create darker values in the shadowed part of the whale using phthalo crimson, ultramarine blue, and indigo.



Step 9 I deepen the dark values in the whales on the surface, using the same paints from my palette but adding more pigment to deepen the color values. The darkest values are used where the whale meets the water on the bottom edge and along the tall dorsal fins. To create the reflection in the water, I wet the area first, adding values from the whale in the mirrored reflection, then run a damp flat brush downward to blur the borders. The light underbellies of the penguins are created with diluted colors of gamboge, burnt sienna, and ultramarine blue. Wherever they face the sun, I leave white edges along their bodies to reflect the light. The beaks and feet I paint with a gamboge/crimson mixture. I populate the ice flow in the background with penguins. In the foremost orca, I create wavy reflection patterns using ultramarine blue on the dark part of the forehead and turquoise in the eye spot. To create the blowhole, I paint a dark upside-down U shape. I wash a final coat of the same colors over the top of the ice flow on the right to darken it. I repeat this in the reflection below.



Herrera

CHAPTER 3

Beneath the Surface

with Hailey E. Herrera

Hailey E. Herrera uses her superb talent in this chapter to share steps and techniques for painting her own sea-life favorites. From a colorful jellyfish to an elegant lionfish, Herrera explains how to meld a colorful background with an even more colorful subject. Enjoy trying your own hand at these dynamic, vivid paintings.

Lionfish

Lionfish come with red, maroon, or brown stripes and specks on their bodies and flashy fins. Their beautiful long fins flowing gracefully in the water with eye-catching colors are fascinating and inspiring. No doubt lionfish are one of the most popular aquarium fishes and favorite painting subjects as well. I want to create a captivating image while enjoying an exploration of the beauty and details of lionfish. For the underwater backdrop, I suggest a coral reef environment. The challenge is creating a background that doesn't compete with the splendid and colorful lionfish, yet adds enough interest to the viewer's eye.

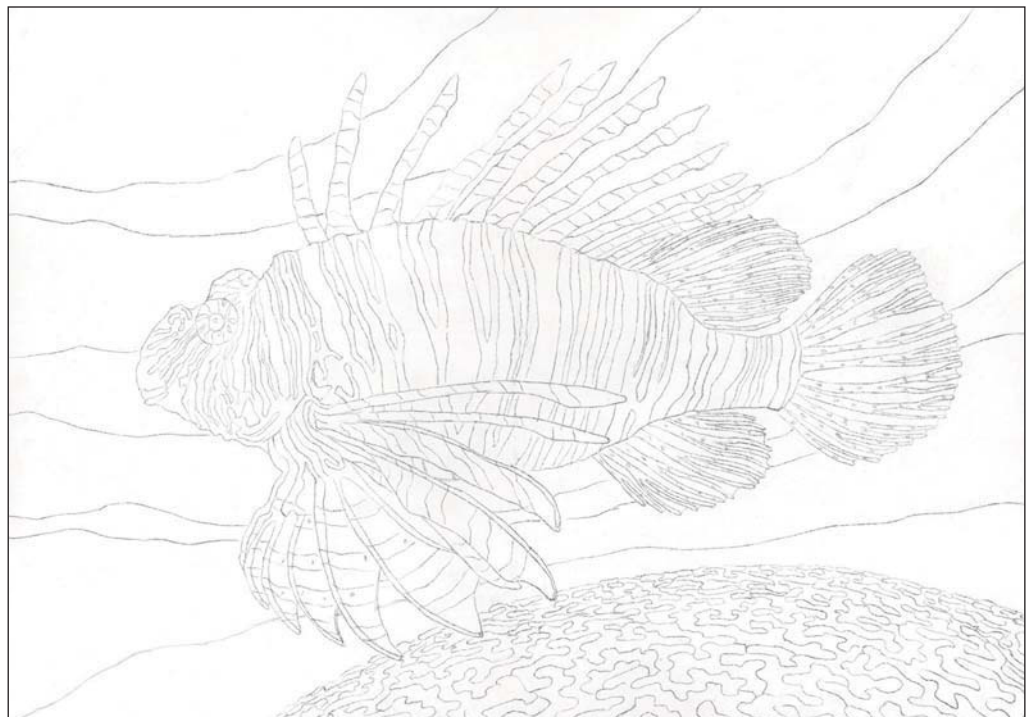
Color Palette

brown madder • burnt sienna • cobalt turquoise • indigo
magenta • new gamboge • phthalo blue • phthalo green
Prussian blue • purple • quinacridone gold
ultramarine blue



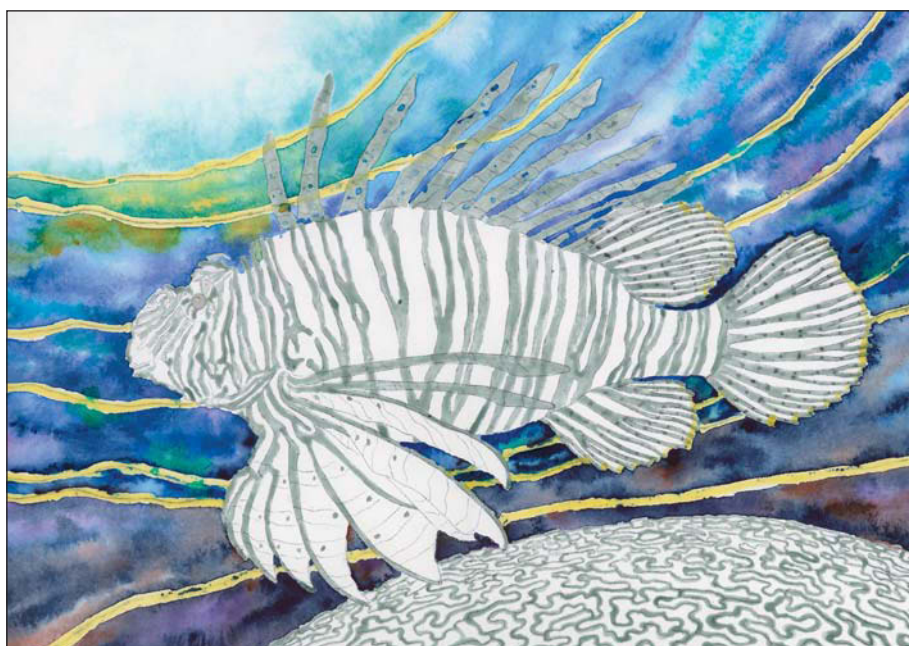
Step 1 I sketch out the lionfish first on tracing paper. I adjust my drawing until I achieve the desired lionfish shape. Once I finalize the shape of the body and fins, I draw the stripe details and pay close attention to fin rays and specks. I then draw the outline of the dome-shaped brain coral and a few lines across the lionfish that suggest underwater ripples. To depict the grooved surface of the brain coral, I draw squiggly lines mimicking a maze from the bottom toward the top, reducing the size as I go.

Step 2 I use graphite paper to transfer the final design onto my watercolor paper.





Step 3 I mask out all stripes and fin rays of the lionfish with the round tip of a small brush. I mask out all dorsal fin spines, and then all squiggly lines of the brain coral. I start off thicker with the bottom lines and finish thinner as I work toward the top. For the underwater ripples, I apply masking fluid wider than the lines I drew and make sure all my pencil lines are covered. I let the masking fluid dry thoroughly.



Step 4 I start working from the top on the underwater ripples, one section at a time. I prepare a pool of cobalt turquoise, phthalo blue, ultramarine blue, Prussian blue, indigo, burnt sienna, and purple. I first wet the top section and drop cobalt turquoise at the bottom of the section along the masking. I encourage the color to spread. While the paint is wet, I continue working the next section. I repeat this process in a similar manner, but this time, I drop in quinacridone gold and phthalo blue on the bottom of the section. I let the wet colors blend. As I work toward the bottom, I vary the color combination and use darker colors. I let the wet colors dry.



Step 5 I apply another wash of the underwater background, using only blue hues. I prepare a pool of cobalt turquoise, phthalo blue, ultramarine blue, Prussian blue, and indigo. Once again from the top and one section at a time, I apply a wash, trying not to disturb the initial wash. When the washes dry, I work on the brain coral. To give the illusion of a spherical shape, I first wet the brain coral and drop indigo on the bottom of the coral. I paint the bottom part in a half-moon shape and let it fade as I work toward the top. I allow the wash to dry before I apply the second wash. From the top of the coral, I apply a pale wash of phthalo blue and change the color to Prussian blue as I work to the bottom.

Step 6 For the initial wash of the lionfish, I prepare a pool of new gamboge and quinacridone gold. I wet the main body and apply a medium wash of yellow only to the top area. Before the yellow wash dries, I drop in burnt sienna and brown madder, mostly in the middle area of the body and face. For the darker skin areas, I drop in ultramarine blue, indigo, and purple. I paint the face, around the mouth, with a pale wash of magenta, as well as the back area of the body. Finally, I mix black with burnt sienna and indigo to paint the eye black.



Step 7 Using the same colors as in the first wash, I apply another wash to the lionfish, making the dark skin area darker. I continue working on the fins. The back dorsal fin, anal fin, and caudal fin are transparent, and their colors are affected by the underwater backdrop. Using the same underwater background colors, I wet each fin with clean water and then mingle colors wet-into-wet. I make the washes appear lighter than the water. For the pectoral fin, I first apply a thin wash of phthalo blue. To make soft-edged stripes, I paint stripes with magenta and quinacridone gold before the blue wash dries. For the darker fin parts along the fin rays, I drop in indigo and let it blend out. I let the washes dry thoroughly.



Step 8 I lift and remove all the masking. Using my small chisel blender brush, I clean all rough edges. For lines in the underwater background, I apply a blue wash to each line—the blue color I applied to each section of the water. I blend out wet colors into the background. For the brain coral, I prepare a green color, mixing quinacridone gold with indigo. From the top of the coral, I apply the green wash as I touch the paper surface lightly. I add more indigo to the mixture as I work toward the bottom.



Step 9 Before I work on the details of the lionfish, I apply the final wash to the underwater background. I prepare a dark green mix of phthalo green and indigo and apply the color fast and carefully so that it blends out smoothly. For each dorsal fin spine, I paint a stripe with pale magenta and then apply a thin wash of phthalo blue only to the right-side half. I paint the darker fin area with burnt sienna and magenta. Next, I tint white stripes and fin rays with quinacridone gold, phthalo blue, and magenta. Finally, I paint all specks with black, the mixture of burnt sienna and indigo.

Jellyfish

I saw these beautiful Japanese sea nettle jellyfish in the Houston aquarium. I could watch them freely floating around in the water for hours. They looked like they were dancing in the water with the air bubbles. I find them fascinating and inspiring. I want to capture the beauty of a playful jellyfish and its movement in watercolor. The challenge is painting a whitish and translucent jellyfish while mimicking its underwater environment. Another challenge is to work with the complementary colors of warm orange against cool blue without turning them to mud.

Color Palette

brown madder • burnt sienna • indigo • opaque white
orange • permanent rose • phthalo blue • phthalo green
Prussian blue • ultramarine blue • yellow



Step 1 I first sketch out my compositional elements: a jellyfish and air bubbles. I pay close attention to the details of the jellyfish I am working on. I depict the bell, tentacles, and lacy oral arms in detail. When I am satisfied with the final design, I use graphite paper to transfer my design onto watercolor paper. Once I transfer all lines as accurately as possible, I mask out the tentacles to protect from the heavy wash of the underwater background. I let the masking fluid dry completely.



Step 2 I wet the entire paper with a 2-inch flat wash brush. Working from the top to halfway down the paper, I paint the underwater background with a pale wash of phthalo blue and phthalo green. I then continue with a pale wash of ultramarine blue. Next I paint the rim of the bell with the same colors as the background, yet I make them even paler. For the bell and oral arms, I paint a thin wash of orange wet-into-wet. I also drop in the pale orange on the bottom of the water area. While the paper is still wet, I spatter it with clean water using a round brush to encourage water blossoms to form. When the wash starts to dry, I sprinkle table salt over the underwater area. I let the wash dry thoroughly.



Step 4 When the background wash is completely dry, I start working on the bell of the jellyfish. I prepare a pool of yellow, orange, brown madder, and permanent rose. I then wet the bell of the jellyfish and apply a wash of pale yellow and orange. I drop brown madder and permanent rose in the middle section of the bell. Before the wash dries, I drop in ultramarine blue on the top and side of the bell. I continue painting the oral arms with the same colors, one section at a time. I leave some areas white to make the oral arms appear transparent, and I leave the rim of the bell pale yellow to obtain its shimmering appearance. For shadows where the oral arms overlap, I drop in some more ultramarine blue. I drop the background color into some areas of the oral arms to suggest transparency. I let all the washes dry thoroughly.

Step 3 I mask out the rest of the jellyfish and spatter masking fluid around the air bubbles with a round brush. When the masking fluid dries, I load my wash brush with phthalo blue, and then apply a second wash on the background water from the upper right area. I change to Prussian blue and indigo as I work toward the bottom from a third of the way down the paper. I drop indigo or orange into some areas around the tentacles and oral arms. I like my wash to have a natural and organic underwater look, rather than a perfectly smooth blue wash.





Step 5 I continue working on the details of the bell and tentacles. I first paint the individual line to create the umbrella-like structure with burnt sienna wet-on-dry. I drop in ultramarine blue for the darker area and blend it into the burnt sienna. Using a clean, damp brush, I blend the color out to make a soft edge. I repeat the process for the other lines. For the tentacles, I apply medium orange wet-on-dry where the tentacles are overlapped. Using another damp, small round brush, I blend out the orange color into white. For the other parts of the tentacles, I simply clean the rough edges with my small chisel blender brush. Rubbing an edge with the brush where it touches the blue background water will leave a pale blue stain on the tentacles, which gives them a perfect transparent look.



Step 6 Using a script brush, I draw every bubble carefully with white paint as close as possible to the original pencil lines. I use a small scrub brush to add a faint light reflection to the air bubbles. After gently rubbing the paint with a damp scrub brush, I dab the wet paint with a facial tissue.



Step 7 I continue adding light reflections to all of the other air bubbles. I let the wet paint dry before adding a white highlight to each air bubble. I gently rub through the paint until I see the white paper. Using my small chisel blender brush, I blend out a white circle into the air bubble. I repeat this process for the other air bubbles.

Sea Horse

The vibrant colors of marine life and other sea elements enhance the beauty of sea-life environments. This yellowish-brown sea horse against a blue underwater background comes to mind. There are more than thirty different kinds of sea horses. Their charming form and beauty make them an inspiring subject, yet one that is challenging to paint. I have decided to add colorful sea grass alongside the sea horse; my goal is to capture the texture and rhythm of the underwater environment.



Step 2 After wetting the entire paper with a 2-inch wash brush, I start painting the sea horse and some water areas with a pale wash of new gamboge. I drop ultramarine blue, phthalo blue, and phthalo green into the wet water background. I also add magenta to the water area and let the wet paints blend softly. When the wash starts to dry, I spray it with my misting bottle and sprinkle table salt over the water area. To add texture and bubble-like shapes, I drop rubbing alcohol on the wet surface with an eyedropper. I then let the wash dry thoroughly.

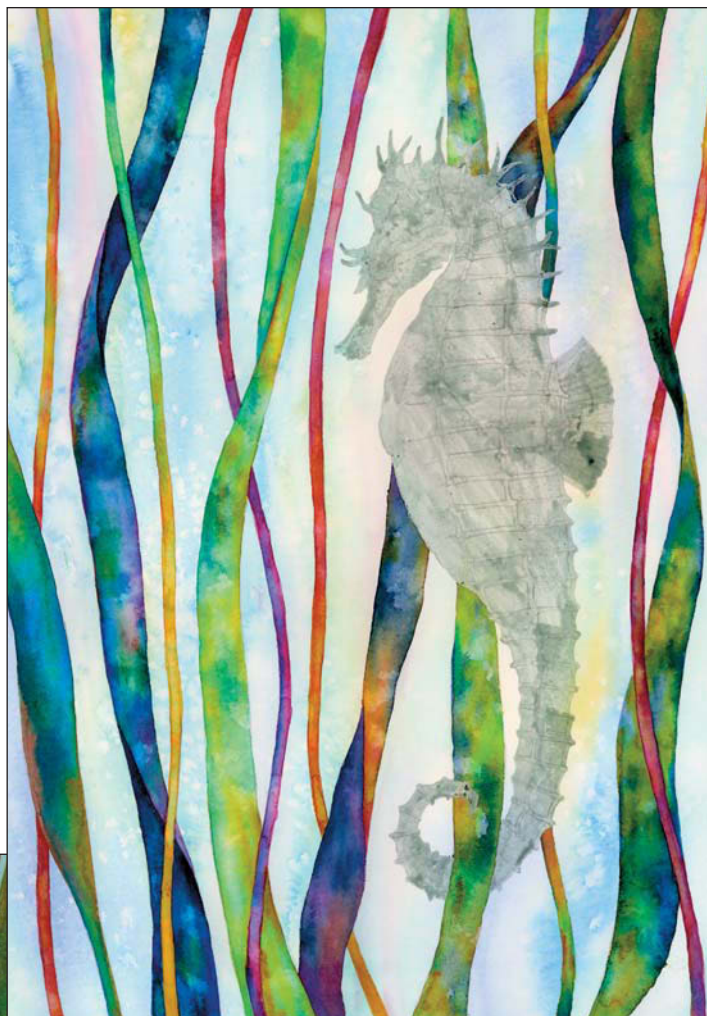
Color Palette

black • burnt sienna • indigo • magenta • new gamboge
opaque white • phthalo blue • phthalo green • purple
quinacridone gold • ultramarine blue

Step 1 Before I start my drawing on the watercolor paper, I often design my composition on tracing paper. Once I finalize my composition, I transfer the final design to the watercolor paper. Though the sea horse will be the point of interest, some attention will be given to the sea grass as well.



Step 3 I mask out the sea horse to protect it from the wet wash of the sea grass and the second wash of the underwater background. I apply the masking fluid to the sea horse thickly and carefully. While the masking fluid dries, I prepare a pool of ultramarine blue, phthalo blue, phthalo green, new gamboge, quinacridone gold, magenta, and indigo. I wet each piece of sea grass with clean water and then mingle two or three colors. I drop one color after another and allow them to blend together. I repeat the process for the other pieces of sea grass, changing colors as I work. To add an interesting texture, I lift out some wet colors with a facial tissue. I let the washes dry.



Step 4 I mask out the sea grass before applying the second wash to the underwater background. Using a 2-inch wash brush, I wet the entire paper again carefully and apply new gamboge first on the left side from the bottom corner, moving into other water areas. I continue dropping in phthalo blue and ultramarine blue wet-into-wet. For areas where the main elements overlap, I drop in thick and dark indigo to make them stand out more. Before the wash dries, I add more table salt and rubbing alcohol to the left side of the sea horse.



Step 5 Using a liquid frisket remover, I carefully lift and peel off all of the masking. For some thin, pale lines along the edges of the sea grass, I use my small chisel blender brush to clean them up. I dampen the brush and rub each thin, pale line until it is softened and blends with the sea grass. I mask the highlights of the sea horse and its dorsal fin. To suggest speckles on the sea horse, I spatter masking fluid with an old toothbrush. I let the masking fluid dry completely.



Step 6 For the initial wash of the sea horse, I prepare a pool of new gamboge and quinacridone gold. I apply a pale wash of yellows to the entire sea horse, but I make it paler for the light area of the face. Before the yellow wash dries, I drop in burnt sienna and thin magenta, mostly on the bottom of the face and darker skin areas around the ridges and rings of the trunk and tail. I continue dropping in purple for a darker shade. I paint a dorsal fin with a pale wash of phthalo blue to suggest its transparency.



Step 7 Sea horses change colors and patterns to camouflage themselves and blend into their surroundings. To simulate this ability, I paint some areas of its body and its face with phthalo blue. Phthalo blue turns into a greenish color, which matches the color of some sea grass. I continue applying a medium wash of magenta and indigo on the top area of the face, around the eye, and on some other parts of the body and the tail. I remove the masking fluid on the sea horse.

Step 8 I mix black with burnt sienna and indigo. I then paint the eye with the black, going around the highlight of the eye carefully. I add a light shadow to areas around the bumps and horns with a thin wash of new gamboge. I then prepare a pool of thick indigo and return to the underwater background. I add dark indigo close to the sea horse and around the sea grass to make the sea horse stand out. Using a damp round brush, I spatter white paint over the sea horse. This final touch gives a unified look to the speckled sea horse with its environment.

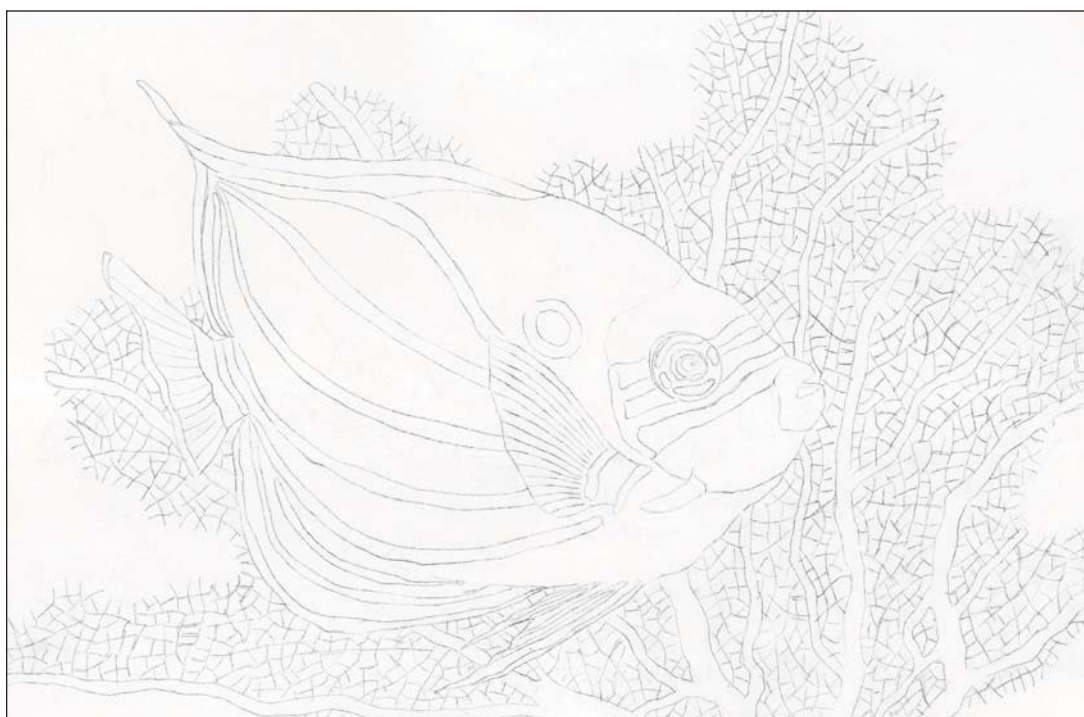


Angelfish

In this painting, a pale-colored sea fan behind the angelfish makes it stand out in the water. The colorful reef background is muted so as not to compete with the angelfish or make the scene appear too busy. The challenges are creating a soft color transition in the body of the angelfish and maintaining the details of the sea fan through various washes.

Color Palette

alizarin crimson • indigo • magenta • phthalo blue
Prussian blue • purple • quinacridone gold
ultramarine blue • yellow



Step 1 I make a rough sketch of the angelfish and sea fan on tracing paper. When drawing the angelfish, I pay attention to the details of its eye, stripes, and fins. For the sea fan, I first draw just its outline around the angelfish. Then I draw a few thick branches. I draw random lines resembling a spiderweb between branches. When I am satisfied with the final design, I use graphite paper to transfer it onto watercolor paper.



Step 2 I mask out the white of the angelfish eye and the lighter-colored fins to protect them from the wet wash. I apply masking fluid to the thick branches of the sea fan as I would paint them. Next, I mask out the thin branches. The round tip of a small brush works well for applying masking fluid to create thin branches. While I apply masking fluid, I add more thin branches between the lines until I am satisfied with the shape of the web.



Step 3 For the underwater background, I want to suggest colorful corals behind the sea fan. I carefully choose colors to use for painting the angelfish or the sea fan later. After wetting the paper around the angelfish, I randomly drop yellow and quinacridone gold onto the wet background, including on the sea fan. Then I add magenta, phthalo blue, and ultramarine blue and let the wet paints blend together. I carefully apply colors, avoiding bleeding onto the angelfish. I drop clean water on the wet surface to encourage water blossoms to form. Finally, I drop indigo onto the sea fan beside the angelfish. Before the paints dry, I spatter masking fluid with a round brush. This technique creates interesting textures for the underwater background. I let the wash and masking fluid dry thoroughly.



Step 4 Before applying the second wash of the underwater background, I apply masking fluid thick enough to prevent the wet wash of indigo from running onto the angelfish. Using a 2-inch wash brush, I carefully wet the paper around the angelfish without disturbing the initial wash. Using the same colors from the first wash, I apply a heavier wash of indigo around the angelfish and the outer part of the sea fan. I let the wash dry thoroughly.



Step 5 I remove all of the masking. For the initial wash of the angelfish, I first mask the pectoral fin. While the masking fluid dries, I prepare a mixture of yellow and quinacridone gold. I apply a wash of yellow to the entire angelfish except for the eye, caudal fin, and blue-colored areas. I apply quinacridone gold to darker skin areas. Before the yellow wash dries, I drop in alizarin crimson and purple, mostly on the dorsal and anal fins. This color will turn into red-orange and brown. I work quickly so that I can apply Prussian blue to the face area before the yellow paint dries. Once the initial wash dries, I paint the blue stripes with ultramarine blue except for the top stripe. The top stripe and caudal fin are made with phthalo blue. I paint the eye with phthalo blue, indigo, and yellow.



Step 6 Although the white sea fan looks beautiful, it stands out too much. I tint it with the pale colors I used for the underwater background by lightly touching the paper surface to preserve the crispness of the edges as much as possible. I leave some areas white to suggest light reflections. Some smaller branches seem dull and some edges appear less crisp. For these areas, I paint the water background with a small brush to re-cover the dull edges. For the final touch to the backdrop, I add dark indigo to the area above the angelfish and around the sea fan.



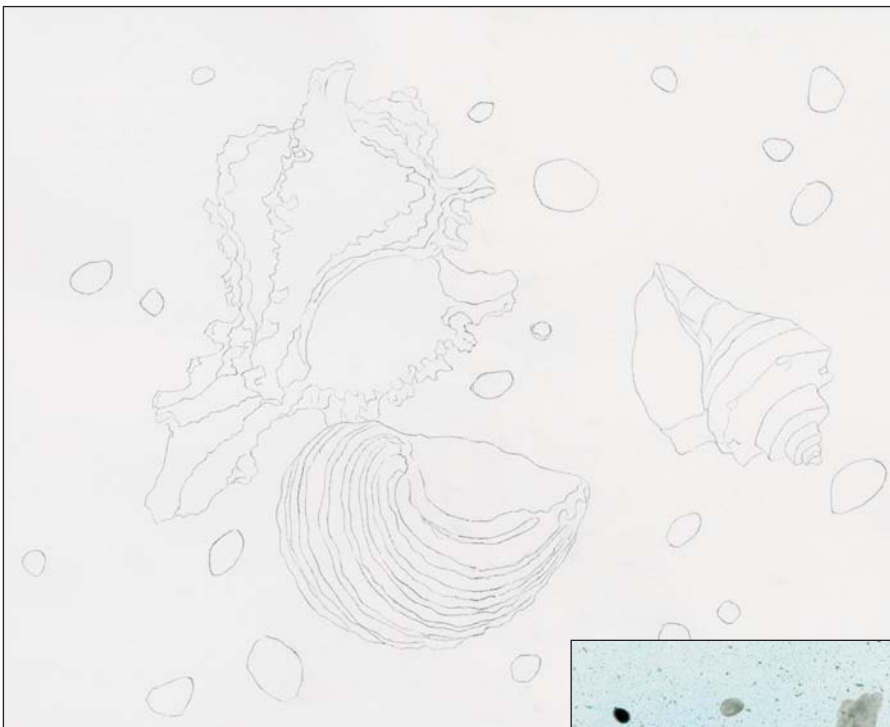
Step 7 I continue the second wash of the angelfish and its details, applying the same colors as the first wash. I apply a medium wash of purple for the darker skin areas, especially the dorsal fin and the area above the pectoral fin. I also add purple to the lower stripes of the body. I paint the darkest part of the dorsal fin with indigo, then allow the colors to dry. I remove the masking on the pectoral fin. Using my small chisel brush, I clean up any rough edges, then paint the pectoral fin with light yellow.

Seashells

Seashells, clean sand, and the ocean are beautiful and captivating images for many people. As a painter, I admire the beautiful spiral form and details of seashells. For this project, each seashell will have a smooth interior surface with multiple soft colors. Watercolor is a splendid medium for creating soft blended colors and for capturing their intricate beauty. As a backdrop for the main subject, clean sand and small pebbles are a wonderful choice. The challenge is creating a realistic sand texture in watercolor.

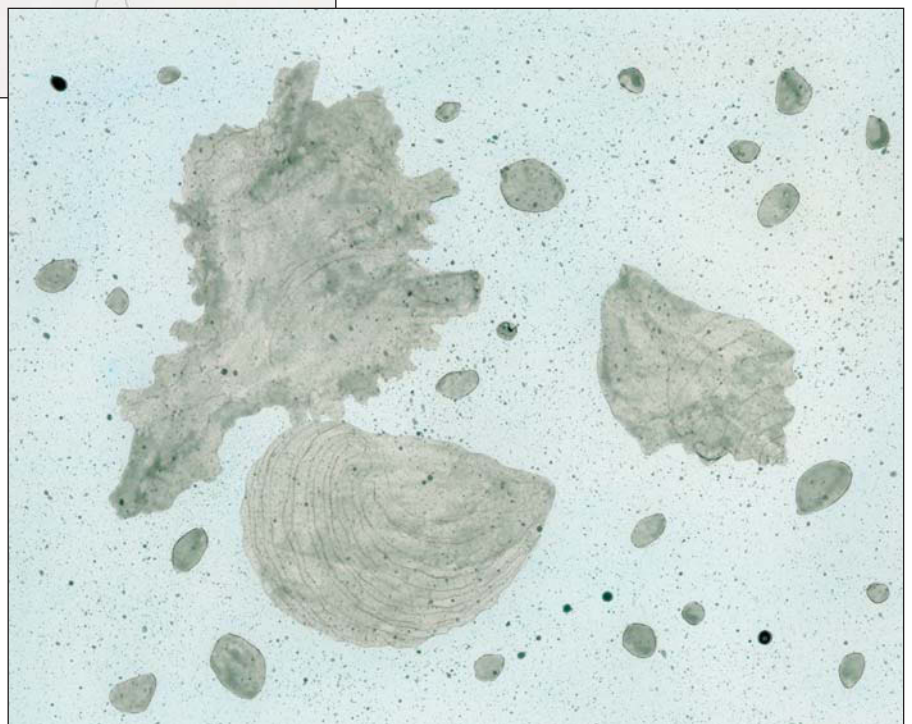
Color Palette

brown madder • burnt sienna • phthalo blue
phthalo turquoise • Prussian blue • purple
quinacridone gold • ultramarine blue



Step 1 I first sketch out three seashells on tracing paper, paying close attention to their forms and skeletons. I depict all exterior structures and divide sections of the skeletons by ribs and sutures. However, I leave out detailed growth lines, which can be easily added with a tiny brush. For the sand background, I draw pebbles in different sizes and shapes. Using graphite paper, I transfer the final design as accurately as possible onto my watercolor paper.

Step 2 I mask out all seashells and pebbles and then prepare a mixture of phthalo blue and ultramarine blue. Once the masking fluid dries completely, I apply a pale wash of blue. I make the dominant color of sand turquoise, which will help the brownish seashells stand out. I allow the wash to dry and then spatter masking fluid over the entire paper by dipping the tip of a toothbrush into masking fluid and dragging my thumbnail along the bristles. This creates a fine sand texture. I allow the masking fluid to dry.





Step 3 Next I prepare a pool of quinacridone gold. I apply a wash of pale yellow. Once the wash dries, I again spatter masking fluid with a toothbrush over the entire paper. I allow the masking fluid to dry, then I repeat the process, switching to phthalo blue. While applying the wash of blue, I drop indigo underneath the seashells to suggest shadows. I let the colors blend out.



Step 4 I continue repeating the process until I am satisfied with the color and texture, alternating blue colors and quinacridone gold and burnt sienna. While applying the blue wash, I again add indigo underneath the seashells. I also spatter masking fluid with a round brush to make larger blobs. Finally, I spatter phthalo blue and burnt sienna with the toothbrush. Layering with spattered masking and color will make the sand look authentic. Depending on the dominant color of washes, the sand will appear either yellowish gray or bluish gray.

Step 5 I remove the masking. Before painting the seashells, I mask out their highlights and any small areas I want to protect from washes. I paint the seashells one section at a time. I apply a wash of quinacridone gold and then drop purple along the edges of the sections. I let the colors blend out. While the purple paint is still wet, I pull out fine lines with tiny brushes. For the light bluish areas of the seashells, I apply a pale wash of phthalo blue.



Step 6 Following the line pattern, I continue working on all sections of the seashells. For the reddish part of the shells, I add a little brown madder. The mixture of quinacridone and purple creates a brilliant brown. I add more purple and dab in the darker spots. To paint the aperture, or opening, I first wet the area and then paint it with quinacridone gold and phthalo blue. I drop in purple along the edge and allow it to blend in. I paint each of the remaining seashells in a similar manner.





Step 7 I use quinacridone gold, purple, and brown madder as dominant colors for the seashells while varying the blue colors. From the first shell, I paint counter-clockwise, adding phthalo blue, phthalo turquoise, and Prussian blue to each shell. Once all colors dry thoroughly, I remove all masking. Using my small chisel blender brush, I clean all rough edges. For the small pebbles, I mingle colors that I used to paint the seashells.



Step 8 The background does not yet have the look and color I desire. I decide to apply a final blue wash to the background. After carefully wetting the paper around the shells, I apply a medium wash of phthalo turquoise and add indigo beneath the shells. I allow the wash to dry completely. I then apply a pale wash of purple over the shadow area and blend out the color into the background with a damp round brush. I continue to add more details to the shells where needed.



CHAPTER 4

Ocean Portraits

with Louise De Masi

Louise De Masi shows her love of the ocean through playful images of creatures on both the land and under the sea. Her clean backgrounds create a contemporary look that allow her subjects to really “pop” off of the page. From a family of seals to a quirky cowfish, these paintings evoke familiar coastal images of our favorite ocean animals.

Seals

Notice that the color palette of the seals is repeated in the rocks. The areas of burnt sienna add warmth to the grays of the seals. I left my background white because I love a simple, contemporary look, but experimenting with some cool blues on the background is also an option worth considering.

Color Palette

brown ochre • burnt sienna • Indian red • lamp black
Payne's gray • sepia • ultramarine blue
ultramarine violet • white gouache



Step 1 I use clean water to wet the areas on the seals where I want brown ochre. While the paper is moist, I drop in brown ochre and let the moisture disperse the pigment. I mix a gray color with ultramarine blue and burnt sienna, and I use this to paint the rocks wet-into-wet. I drop in some brown ochre here and there while the paper is moist. On the right-most seal, I paint the stomach where it touches the rocks with Indian red on moist paper.

Step 2 I wet the seals with clean water, making sure I don't wet the areas where I have painted the brown ochre. I paint the seals with the gray mix I used for the rocks. I use a clean, damp brush to soften the edges where brown ochre meets the gray.





Step 3 I build up the color value on each seal with another wash of the gray mixture. While the paper is damp, I drop in some sepia to create brown patches on some of the seals. I let the paper dry, and then I use my #1 round brush to paint the markings around the eyes. I paint the ears in with sepia and also some Payne's gray. I use ultramarine violet to paint the purple areas on the flippers and on one of the seal's stomachs. I paint the flippers with Payne's gray and sepia while the paper is moist. I paint all the seals' noses with Payne's gray, and I drop a little ultramarine violet onto the noses while the paper is damp. I add some shadows on the seals where their stomachs touch the rocks.



Step 4 I start to define the flippers using Payne's gray and sepia. I work wet-on-dry where I want hard edges and wet-into-wet where I want soft edges. I paint another wash of the ultramarine blue/burnt sienna mix on the rocks to start to deepen the color. While the wash is moist, I drop in some Payne's gray, and I let the moisture disperse the pigment.



Step 5 I start to add detail to the seals' faces. I paint ultramarine violet into the eyes while the paper is dry. I use sepia to paint the mouths, and before they are dry, I take a clean, damp brush and wipe the edges to soften them. I paint the nostrils with lamp black on dry paper. To define the ears, I paint on some lamp black while the paper is dry. I use an HB pencil sparingly to add some detail on the rocks.



Step 6 I paint the eyes with lamp black on dry paper. I keep the value light at first, and then I deepen it with a few layers. I re-wet the rocks with some clean water, and while the paper is moist, I drop in some more brown ochre. I decide to add a little more warmth to the seals, so I re-wet the areas where I had painted brown ochre before, and I drop in more burnt sienna. I also deepen the dark markings on the flipper of the seal on the right of the painting with some lamp black painted on moist paper.



Step 7 I add whiskers with my rigger brush with some white gouache. I add a few more whiskers with Payne's gray. I increase the warm areas on the rocks with burnt sienna painted on moist paper.

Pelican

Light is one of the main elements that attracts me to a photograph. This proud pelican has beautiful light on his back, and the shadows and highlights on his feet just beg to be painted. This painting takes a little more patience because of the detailed work on the feathers. Each feather on the wing has to be individually painted, while the breast and body of the bird can be painted a little more loosely.



Step 2 I wet the head, neck, and body of the pelican with water, and while the paper is damp, I drop in some Vandyke brown and let the moisture distribute the pigment. I paint in the top of the beak, below the eye, with lamp black on dry paper. I carefully paint the pupil and around the outside edge of the eye in lamp black on dry paper. For the light gray area around the eye, I paint with the gray I mixed from ultramarine blue and burnt sienna. I paint the tip of the beak with Naples yellow on dry paper. Next I paint the log with ultramarine violet on the left side and sepia on the right. I drop a little Vandyke brown into the ultramarine violet while it is still damp. I begin to define the feet with ultramarine blue on dry paper.

Color Palette

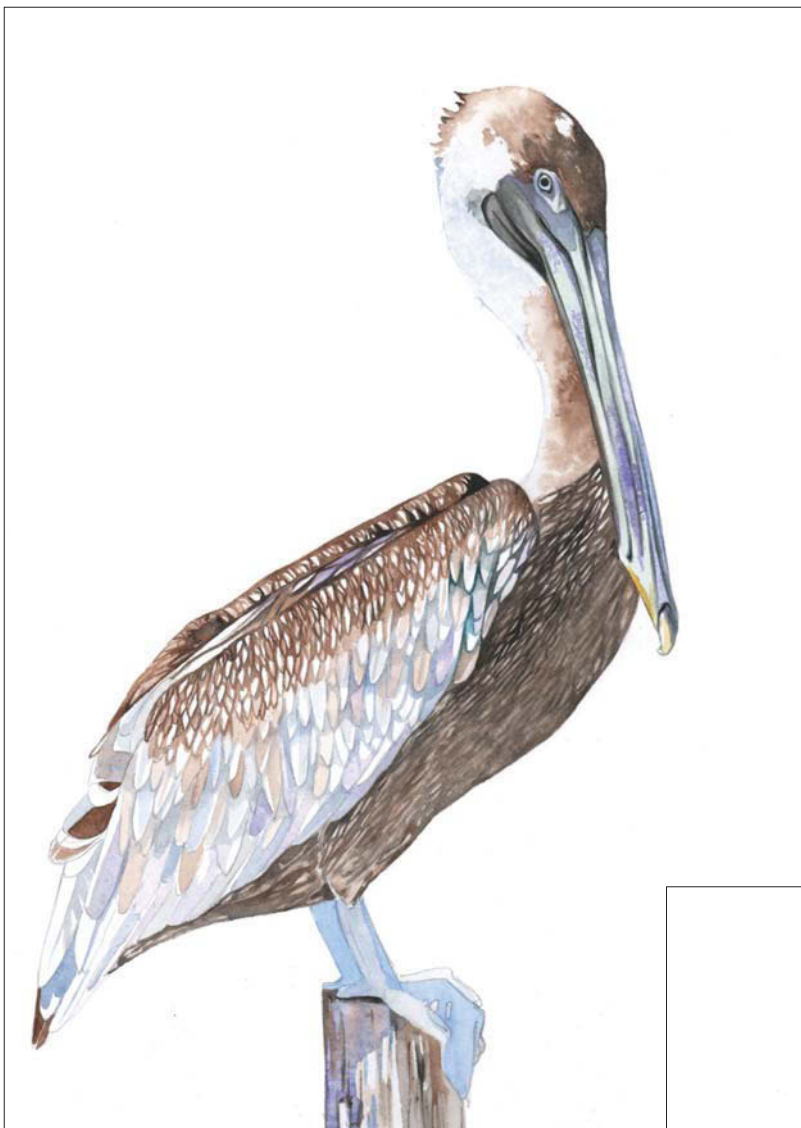
burnt sienna • lamp black • Naples yellow • Payne's gray
sepia • terre verde • ultramarine blue • ultramarine violet
Vandyke brown • white gouache

Step 1 I begin by painting the iris in ultramarine blue on dry paper. I wet the front of the beak and paint it ultramarine violet. Before the ultramarine violet dries, I drop in ultramarine blue to add interest. I create a mixture of light gray with ultramarine blue and burnt sienna, and I use this to wash in the head, neck, body, and legs of the pelican. I paint the wash on dry paper. I paint a wash of terre verde on the beak. I begin to negatively paint the wing feathers at the tops of the wings with Vandyke brown with my #1 round brush on dry paper. I avoid the areas that I want to remain white.





Step 3 I use lamp black on dry paper to paint the beak's grooves. I wait for the black to dry, and then I wet the paper and drop in some ultramarine violet while the paper is damp. I wet the top of the head with water and darken the brown areas with some sepia. I begin to define the feathers on the breast and body of the pelican. I use sepia to indicate the feathers on damp paper. Where I want the feathers to be more defined, I paint on dry paper. I allow this area to dry completely, then I take a wet flat brush and lightly paint some clean water over the top. This helps to soften any distracting hard edges. I add some detail to the log. I use sepia on dry paper to define the feathers between the two wings on the back of the pelican. I begin to paint soft washes directly onto some of the larger wing feathers. I use Vandyke brown, ultramarine violet, and the gray.



Step 4 I darken the feathers on the breast and body with sepia. I use more pigment this time with less water. While the paper is dry, I deepen the value around the feathers on the top of the wing with more sepia and Vandyke brown. Before the paint dries, I soften any edges that are too hard with another brush that has been dampened with water. I use Vandyke brown on dry paper to begin adding some color to the tail feathers.



Step 5 I erase all of the pencil lines of my drawing because I want to see my values better. I can now see where I need to deepen shadows and define the feathers further. I make sure my painting is completely dry, and then I paint a wash of Payne's gray over the top corner of the wing and down onto the body of the pelican to create a shadow. I use sepia to outline the larger wing feathers, and I also use some Payne's gray here and there for some detail. More details are added to the feet with Payne's gray and lamp black.



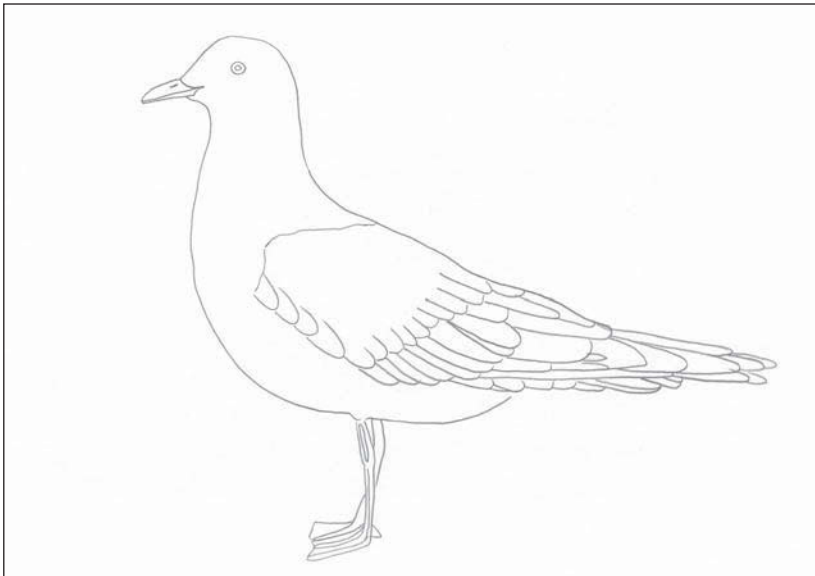
Step 6 I deepen the shadows on the feet and log with a wash of Payne's gray. I paint a small white highlight in the eye with white gouache, then I use the gouache to define some of the feathers on the side of the pelican near the wing. I paint a little more Vandyke brown onto some of the larger wing feathers.

Seagull

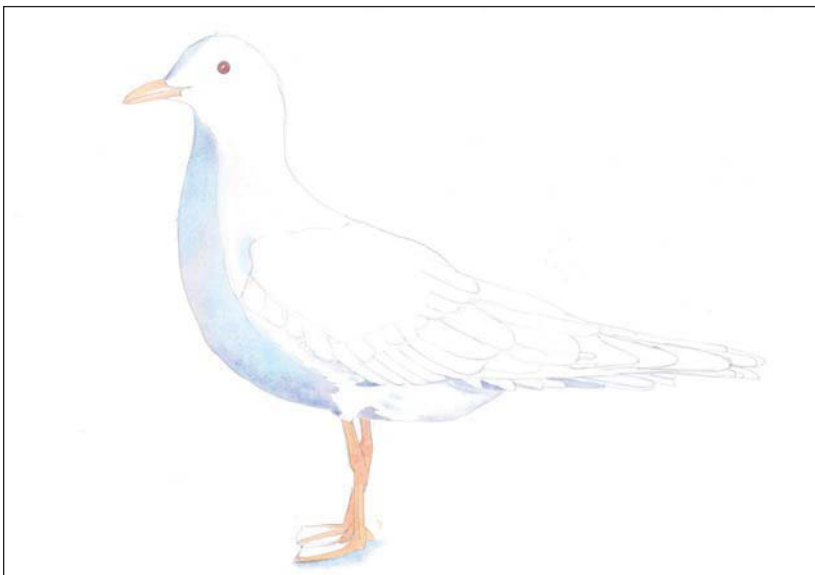
Birds are my favorite subject to paint. I normally look for photographs that show the bird in an interesting pose. I also like to see the feathers fluffed up rather than smooth. However, painting feathers can be difficult, so I chose a simple picture of a sleek seagull suitable for the beginner. I love the beautiful blues reflected in the shadow on the front of the seagull and the contrasting warm orange of the beak and legs.

Color Palette

burnt sienna • cadmium red • cerulean blue
Indian red • lamp black • phthalo blue • phthalo green
sepia • ultramarine blue • ultramarine violet
Winsor lemon • white gouache



Step 1 I draw the seagull on a piece of paper, making sure it is accurate. Then I trace it onto my watercolor paper using a light box and an HB pencil.



Step 2 I wet the seagull's neck, breast, and stomach with clean water and paint in the shadow that defines the front of the bird. I mix a blue/gray color using ultramarine blue and burnt sienna. While the shadow is moist, I drop in some cerulean blue here and there. The shadow on the left side of the head and the shadows on the rump feathers are painted with the same ultramarine blue/burnt sienna mix, but this time I paint it on dry paper. I wet the shadow area under the foot with water, and while it is moist, I paint the shadow with the ultramarine blue/burnt sienna mix. I drop in a little cerulean blue before it dries. I use a #1 round brush to paint the eye in Indian red on dry paper. The beak and legs are a mix of cadmium red and Winsor lemon.

Artist's Tip

“Moist paper” is paper that has been dampened with a wet paintbrush and allowed to soak in slightly, leaving a slight sheen on the surface.

Step 3 I wet the wing with some water, and while it is damp, I paint it in using the ultramarine blue/burnt sienna mix. I deepen the color on half of the eye with more Indian red on dry paper. I dampen the section in front of the eye with water, and I paint the brown mark with sepia. I use lamp black to paint the pupil and carefully outline around the edge of the eye with sepia. I use sepia on dry paper to paint the dark flight feathers on the wings. I paint the long, thin flight feather along the top of the wing with lamp black. I paint the webbed part of each foot in ultramarine blue. I paint the middle webbed section in ultramarine violet.



Step 4 I wet the area under the beak on the neck, and while it is damp, I add some detail. First I use the ultramarine blue/burnt sienna mix, and then I use a little ultramarine violet. I wet the area around the top of the eye and add some definition with ultramarine violet. I use my #1 round brush to paint the fine line along the neck and along the back of the head with the ultramarine blue/burnt sienna mix. When it is dry, I carefully erase my pencil lines. I paint over the beak with the cadmium red/Winsor lemon mix on dry paper. While the paper is still damp, I darken the tip of the beak with ultramarine violet. I deepen the color of the beak slightly with more cadmium red on damp paper. I mix a little more cadmium red into the cadmium red/Winsor lemon mix, and I use it to paint the darker areas on the legs with my #1 round brush.



Step 5 Next I start to define the feathers on the wing. I work in small sections, using the ultramarine blue/burnt sienna mix and painting it on with my #1 round brush. Before it dries, I quickly wipe the edge of the paint with my dampened flat brush to soften the edges.



Step 6 I darken the flight feathers with a mix of phthalo blue/phthalo green/cadmium red. I use it to paint the bottom half of the flight feathers, and then I use sepia on the top half, all on dry paper. I let the pigment run together slightly. I am careful not to touch the white markings on the feathers. I deepen the color on the legs with a little cadmium red on dry paper. I use white gouache to add a small highlight on the eye.

Artist's Tip

I like to use two brushes to soften the edges when I paint. I load one brush in pigment, and the other one is dampened with clean water. I paint the area I need with the pigmented brush, and then I use the dampened brush to soften the edge of the paint.



Step 7 I paint the background wet-on-wet in small sections. I wet the background with clean water. I am careful to take the water only to the edge of the seagull because I don't want the paint washing onto the bird. I drop in some cerulean blue and let the water disperse the pigment. I do the same with the ultramarine blue here and there.

Sea Otter

Who can resist this happy face? His folded front flippers, cheeky grin, and relaxed manner make me want to jump in the water with him! Lots of wet-into-wet painting helps to create the texture on this otter's fur, and the water dances around him with pretty blues and greens.

Color Palette

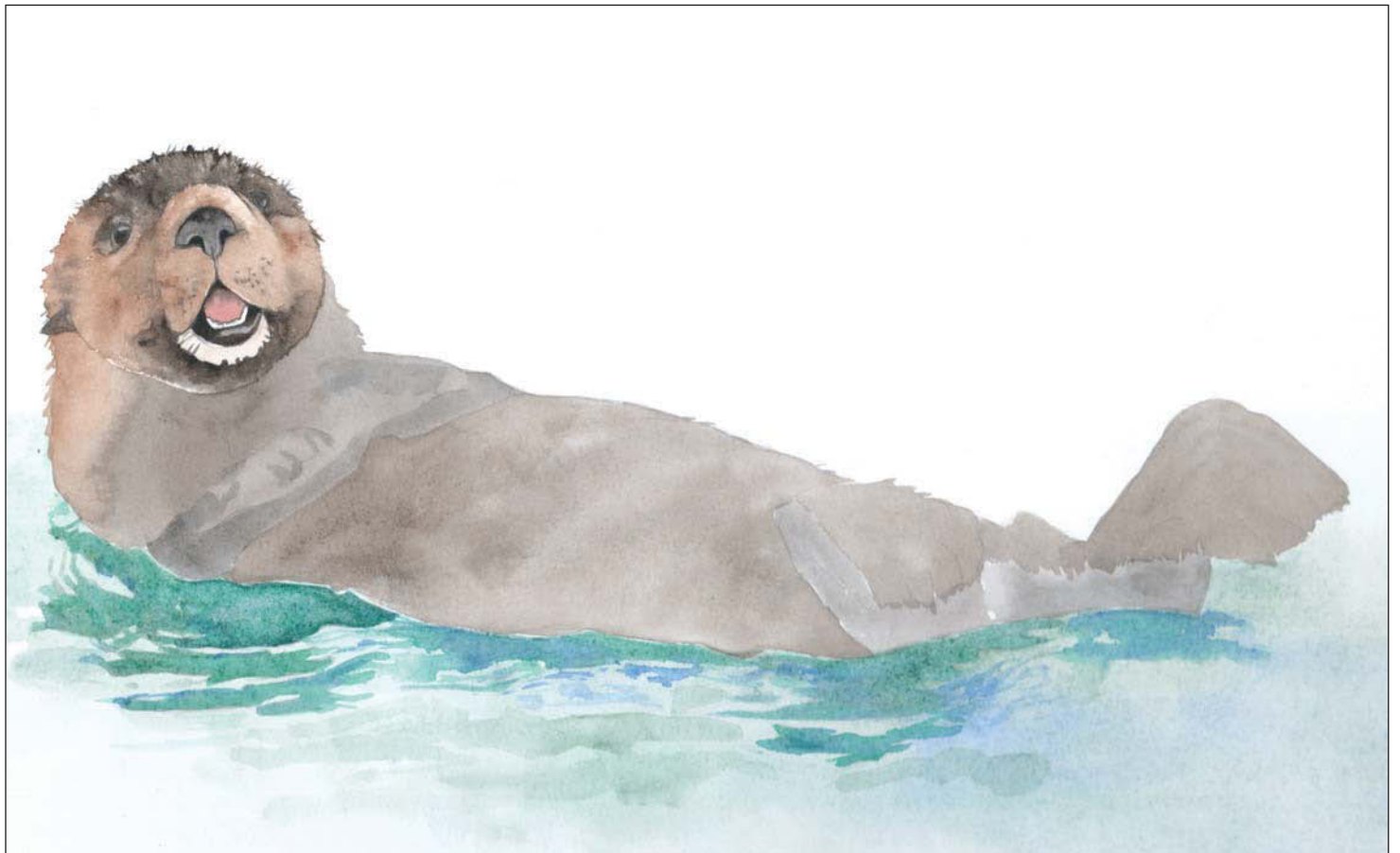
Indian red • lamp black • sepia • terre verde
ultramarine blue • Vandyke brown
white gouache • Winsor green



Step 1 I begin by wetting the area underneath the otter with clean water, and while it is damp, I paint a soft wash of terre verde. I paint a soft wash of Vandyke brown onto the face and neck of the otter, then I use lamp black to begin painting the upper and lower flippers. When the wash on the face is dry, I use lamp black to paint the nose and eyes, and I use Indian red on the tongue.



Step 2 I use a mixture of Winsor green and ultramarine blue and a large round brush to add detail to the water. While the paper is moist, I drop in a few areas of ultramarine blue. I paint a wash of sepia over the otter, avoiding the areas that I had painted in Vandyke brown earlier. Where the two colors meet, I use a clean damp brush to soften the edges. I add detail to the eyes with more lamp black, and I paint in the nostrils with black as well. I wet the top of the nose with water, and while the paper is damp, I use lamp black to darken this area. I wet the top of the head with water, and while the paper is damp, I paint the fur with sepia. When this area is dry, I add more detail with some sepia.



Step 3 I use both sepia and Vandyke brown on the otter's face. I paint most of it on moist paper to keep the edges soft. I wet the tongue with water, and while it is moist, I drop some sepia onto the top of it to paint the shadow. I wait until the paper dries, and then I carefully paint sepia on the mouth and around the edges of the teeth.



Step 4 I wet the area on the neck under the otter's chin, and while the paper is moist, I use lamp black to paint the dark area of the fur there. I use sepia in the same manner on either side of the neck. I start to define the flippers with lamp black, but I paint on dry paper this time because I need to have more control of where the pigment goes. Any hard edges I don't like I soften with another damp brush. I begin to add texture to the body by painting wet-on-wet with sepia.



Step 5 I paint the whiskers with white gouache. I wet the otter's shoulders with water, and while the paper is damp, I use both sepia and Vandyke brown to add more texture to the fur. Where I want the deepest values, I use more pigment and less water on my brush. I further define the top flippers with more sepia on dry paper. I wet the bottom flippers with water, and I start to add the fur with both sepia and lamp black.



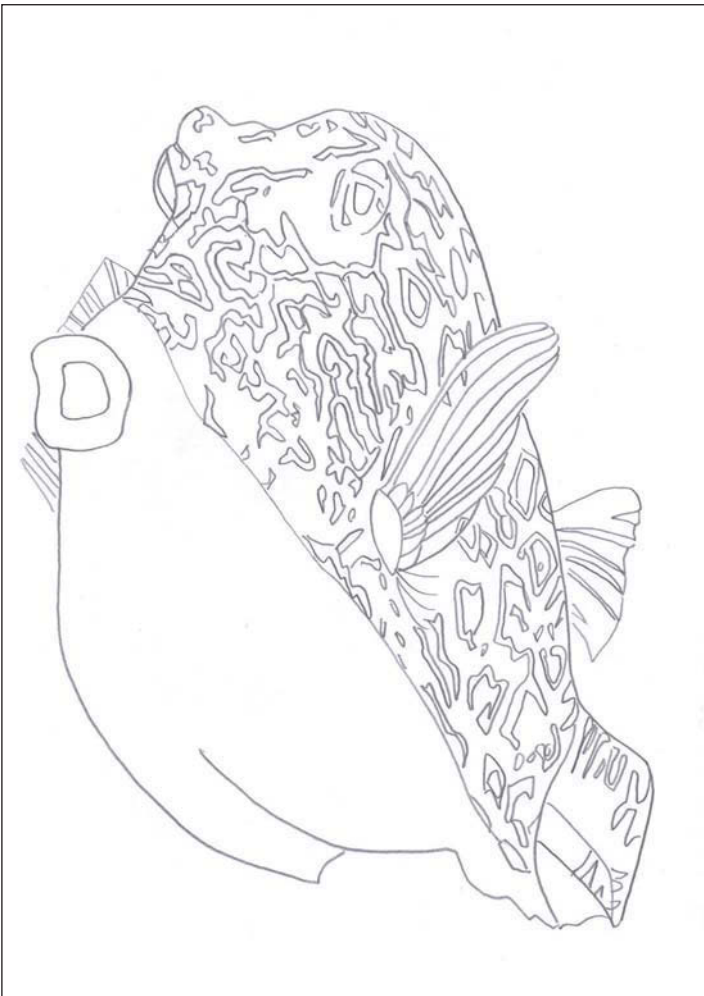
Step 6 I continue to add fur to the lower flippers by painting sepia on moist paper. I add some brown reflections in the water near the otter with sepia. I paint these reflections on dry paper. I wet the paper on the lower right side and add another wash of the mix of Winsor green and ultramarine blue to deepen the color there. I paint the splash of water on the otter by wetting the area with water first and then dropping in some white gouache while the paper is wet. The water on the paper will disperse the gouache. I use white gouache to add a few highlights here and there on the fur of the otter.

Cowfish

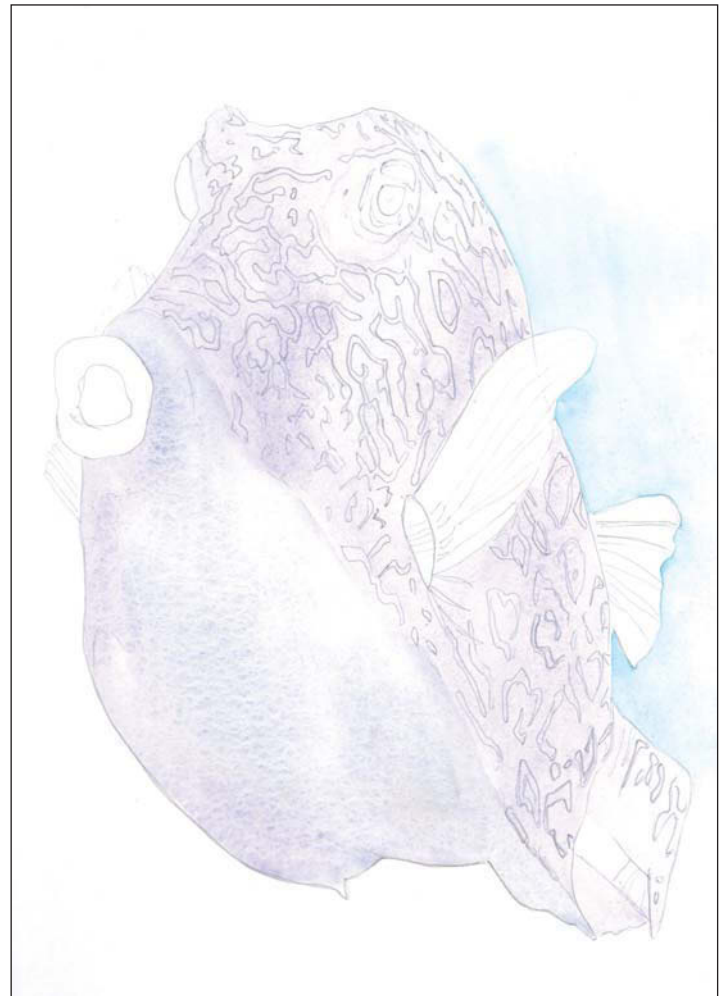
When I saw the beautiful patterning on this cowfish, I knew it would look fabulous in watercolor. The background water is painted with blues that have a granulating effect, and this effect is repeated on the underside of the fish.

Color Palette

burnt sienna • lamp black • manganese blue
Naples yellow • olive green • Payne's gray
phthalo blue • ultramarine blue • ultramarine violet
Vandyke brown • white gouache



Step 1 First I sketch out the cowfish on paper before I begin to paint it with watercolors.



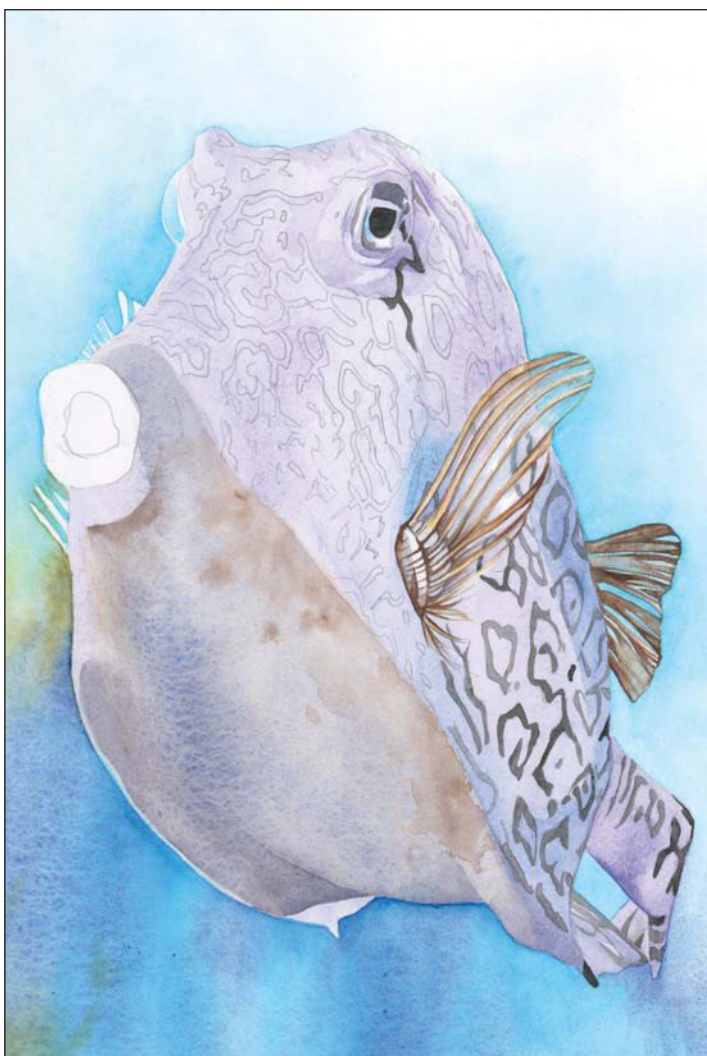
Step 2 I wet the bottom of the fish with water, and while the paper is moist, I wash in a gray mix of ultramarine blue and burnt sienna. I drop in a little ultramarine violet along the left edge while the wash is moist. To begin painting the water, I wet the background to the right of the fish and I paint a wash of manganese blue. When the other washes are dry, I wet the pattern area of the fish with water and paint a soft wash of ultramarine violet. I wipe a damp clean brush along the edge where the gray wash and ultramarine violet wash meet to soften it.



Step 3 I paint manganese blue onto the fins of the fish where I see water showing through. I wet an area of the background with clean water, carefully taking it right up to the edge of the fish. While the paper is wet, I wash on some manganese blue. Under the fish, I do the same thing with ultramarine blue and phthalo blue, and I use some olive green on the left side. When I paint the water, I wet a section at a time with clean water and leave a perimeter of clean water where I don't put any pigment. I move to a section on the other side of the paper and repeat the process. When both areas are dry, I work the section in the middle to join them. I build up the depth of color by repeating the process once the first wash is dry.



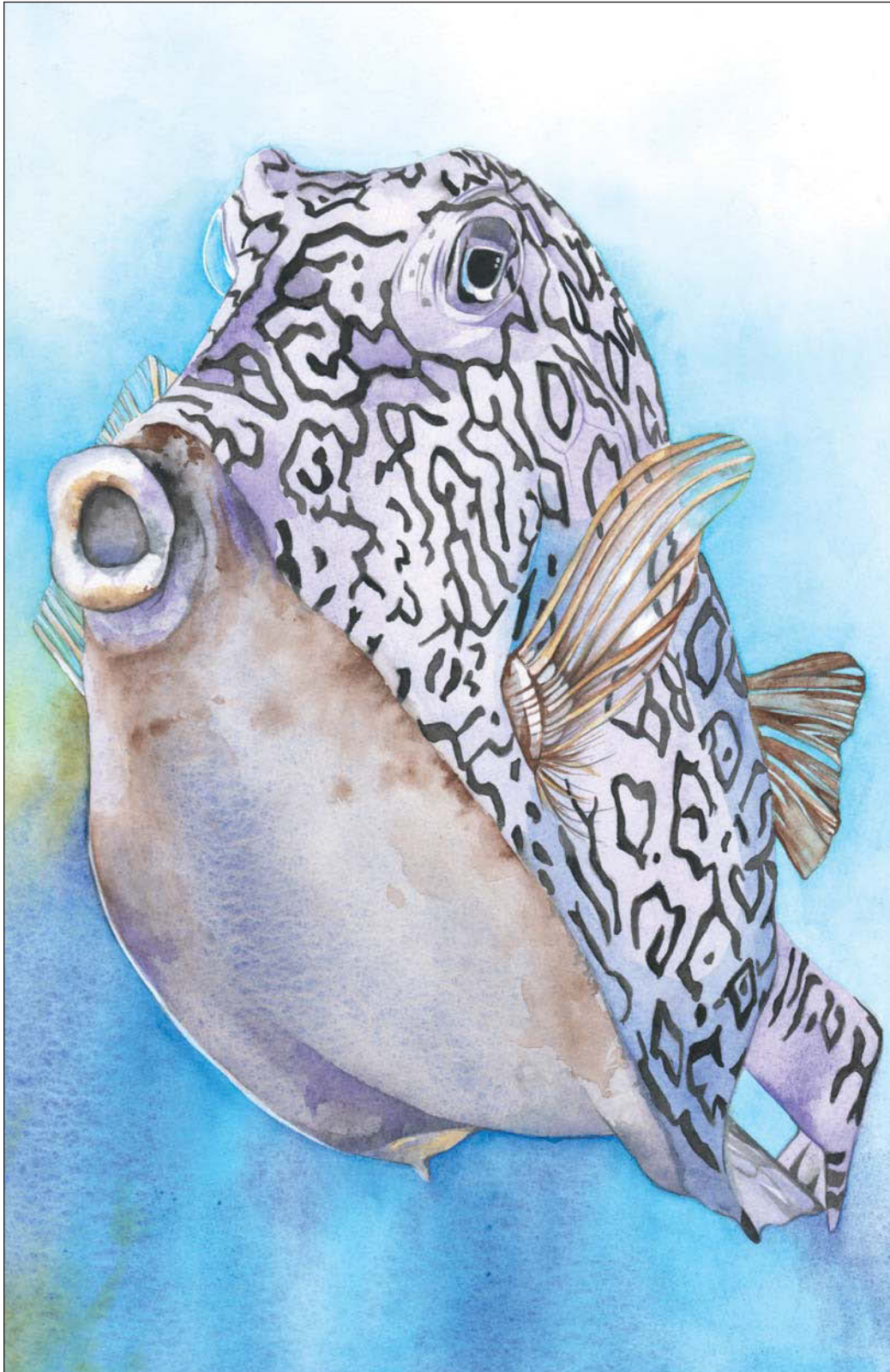
Step 4 I add detail around the eye and on the fin on the right side of the fish with ultramarine violet on dry paper. I paint a wash of ultramarine violet onto the tail. I deepen the gray wash on the bottom of the fish with the ultramarine blue/burnt sienna mix I used earlier. I paint a darker area of ultramarine blue on the side of the fish. I paint the eye in lamp black on dry paper. I wet the tail with clean water and paint a darker area of ultramarine violet along the lower edge. When the paper is dry, I begin to paint the markings on the fish in lamp black. I paint the fin on the right side of the fish with Vandyke brown, and while the paint is moist I drop in a little manganese blue here and there.



Step 5 I add some darker areas to the fin on the right side with Vandyke brown. I paint Naples yellow onto the fin on the side. When the paint is dry, I add some Vandyke brown to the yellow areas and also to the base of the fin. I continue with the pattern on the side of the fish with lamp black on dry paper. I wet the underside of the fish with water, and while the paper is damp, I drop in some Vandyke brown. I paint some more ultramarine violet around the eye on dry paper, and I paint a small amount of manganese blue beside the pupil.

Step 6 I mix some more gray with ultramarine blue and burnt sienna, and I use it to paint inside the mouth. When that is dry, I paint a little Naples yellow onto the lips. I move over to the fins on the left side of the fish and paint some Naples yellow. I also paint some Vandyke brown and a few highlights with white gouache on these fins. I wet the area around the mouth with water and paint some ultramarine violet, Vandyke brown, and lamp black.





Step 7 I darken all the pattern areas on the fish with lamp black. To paint the lips, I wet them and paint some areas of Vandyke brown and Payne's gray. When the paint on the lips is dry, I wet inside the mouth again with water and paint along the inside edge of the lips with lamp black. I darken some areas on the underside of the fish with Vandyke brown on moist paper. I am careful not to disturb the black pattern. I add some small white highlights in the eye with white gouache.



CHAPTER 5

Undersea Landscapes

with Ronald Pratt

In this final chapter, award-winning watercolor artist Ronald Pratt shares his love of painting colorful undersea landscapes. He provides step-by-step instructions and tips for painting vivid marine environments with multiple layers of color, from coral reefs to tide pools, including a few of their curious inhabitants: a hermit crab, a clown fish, and a royal blue tang. Enjoy the challenge of re-creating these paintings on your own canvas!

Coral Reef

When I am painting a subject, I generally collect a variety of reference photos for guidance. I am a designer, and I want to create my own scene using all of the reference materials I have at my disposal—photos, books, calendars, sketches, and more. I pick and choose elements from these materials to create a unique and colorful scene that captures the mood I am aiming for.

Color Palette

burnt sienna • cadmium red deep • cobalt blue
horizon blue • Holbein's permanent lemon yellow
marine blue • opera • Payne's gray • peacock blue
permanent alizarin crimson • permanent yellow deep
permanent white gouache • royal blue • yellow ochre

Artist's Tip

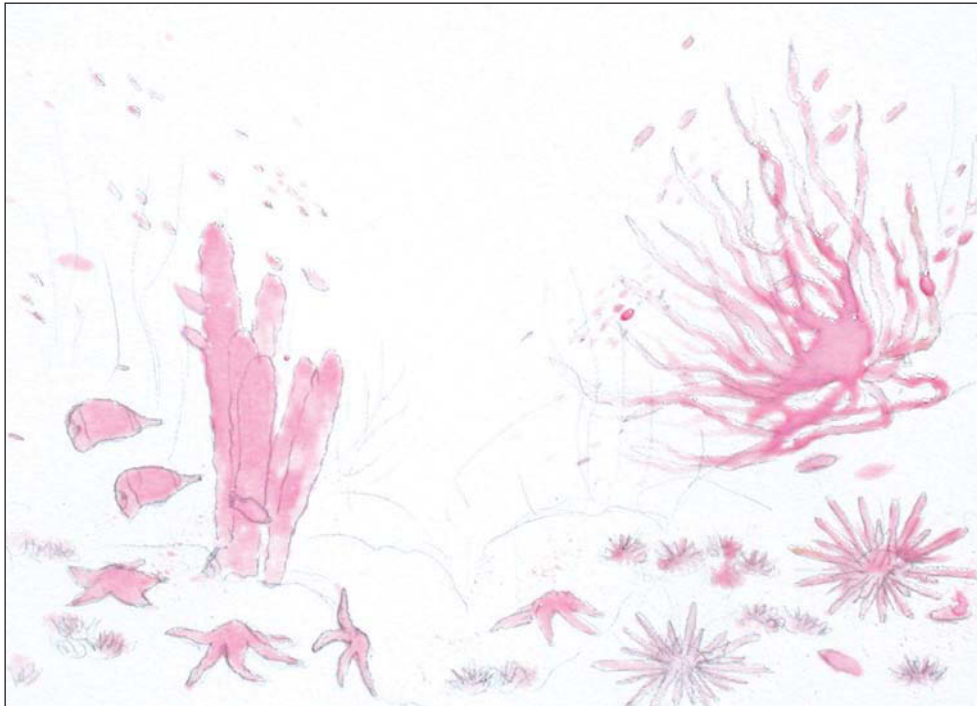
Before I start masking, I dip my masking brush in liquid soap to coat the bristles and then wipe off any excess soap. This prevents the mask from drying on the brush too fast.

Step 1 The first step in the process is to do a quick value sketch to lay out the items of the scene in a strong compositional arrangement. I also establish where my light, medium, and dark values will be. I try to keep the value sketch loose, without too much detail. I am more interested in the larger shapes and will let the detail take care of itself once the painting process starts.



Artist's Tip

For this painting of a colorful coral reef, the tools I use include a 1-inch flat sable brush, a #3 round brush, a #0 round brush, a nylon-bristled masking fluid brush, an old toothbrush, and some table salt. The specific colors used aren't as important as choosing a wide variety of color to instill life and drama into the scene.

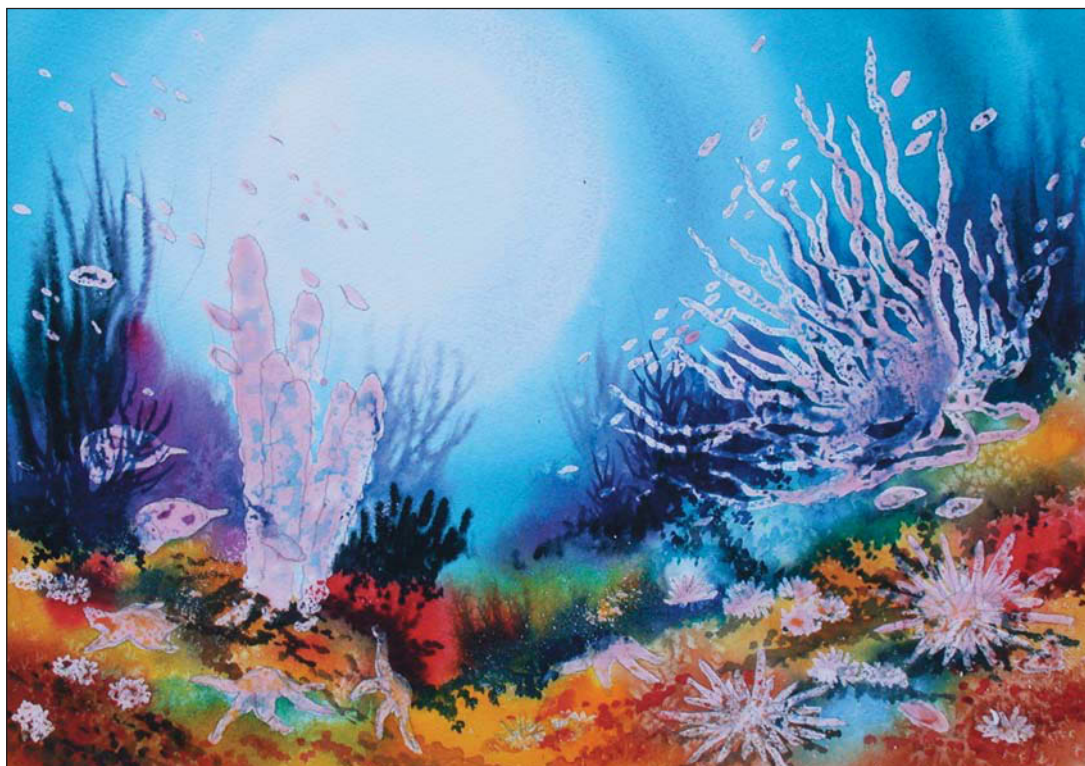


Step 2 Using a #2 pencil, I carefully sketch out the basic components on watercolor paper. After blocking out the major shapes (the reef edge, the two larger coral clusters, the glow of the light in the water), I can then start drawing in more specific shapes (the starfish, the sea urchins, and various fish). Items that must be masked need to be drawn very specifically. These items include the two large coral formations, the starfish, the sea urchins, the clown fish, and any other fish that I want to appear swimming around the reef.



Step 3 Once my colors are ready to go, I wet the entire paper evenly with a 1-inch flat brush, making sure not to have excess water puddled on any area of the paper. Starting with horizon blue, I start painting in a circular pattern around the area that will be the glow of light from above. Outside of this area, I wash in more rings with peacock blue and marine blue. Next I pick up some of the yellow ochre and paint in a few random areas of the reef with this color. Then I similarly blot in sections using burnt sienna, permanent yellow lemon, permanent yellow deep, cadmium red, and permanent alizarin crimson. Sprinkle a little table salt on a few areas of the reef while the paint is still wet for texture.

Step 4 Once the colorful wash has dried, I go back into the reef area and establish some hard edges to create specific coral shapes. This is done with a #3 round brush and a little negative painting. I pick an area where I like the color, and I start painting some darker colors behind this area, creating the edges of coral formations in the process. I work my way around the coral reef, creating specific edges for interest and depth in the painting. On a few areas of the coral bed, I create additional texture by stippling with my brush to create the look of the rough ocean floor.



Step 5 Once the paint is dry, I remove the masking from the two large coral formations, exposing the white paper underneath. Prior to starting to paint the coral, I re-mask a few fish shapes that I want to have appear swimming in front of the coral. The coral on the left is painted with opera, permanent alizarin crimson, and royal blue. I start by wetting a section of the coral with clean water and then flooding in a light wash of opera. While this wash is still wet, I stipple in a little permanent alizarin crimson and then a mixture of permanent alizarin crimson and royal blue for the darker side. The coral on the right is painted with the same colors, but with less opera.



Step 6 Now I remove all the remaining mask from the paper. For the starfish, I will use yellow ochre, burnt sienna, and Payne's gray. I start with yellow ochre at the top and add burnt sienna for shadow areas along the arms. Using my small round brush, I next stipple in some dark spots running along the arms with the Payne's gray. Using the white gouache, I stipple in white spots. With a little Payne's gray, I create shadows underneath the starfish. For the red sea urchin arms, I use cadmium red and royal blue. Painting each section at a time, I start with the cadmium red and then add some royal blue for shadow while the red is still wet. The smaller sea urchins are created using a mixture of permanent alizarin crimson and royal blue to make a purple color. A little white gouache is mixed with the purple to create a lighter purple color for the spines of the urchins.



Step 7 I paint the tangs with a mixture of permanent yellow deep and a little red for the orange areas of the tails. I use Payne's gray for the gray and black markings. I paint the clown fish with the same orange mixture, leaving the white of the paper for the white stripe areas. I paint the schools of smaller fish with orange, Payne's gray, blue, or just leave them white to create a colorful array of fish swimming and feeding around the reef. I use a small brush to add a little detail in some of the fish, including the eyes and gills.



Step 8 A final pass around the painting helps me spot any areas that might need adjusting, like edges, colors, details, and anything else that might grab my attention.

Artist's Tip

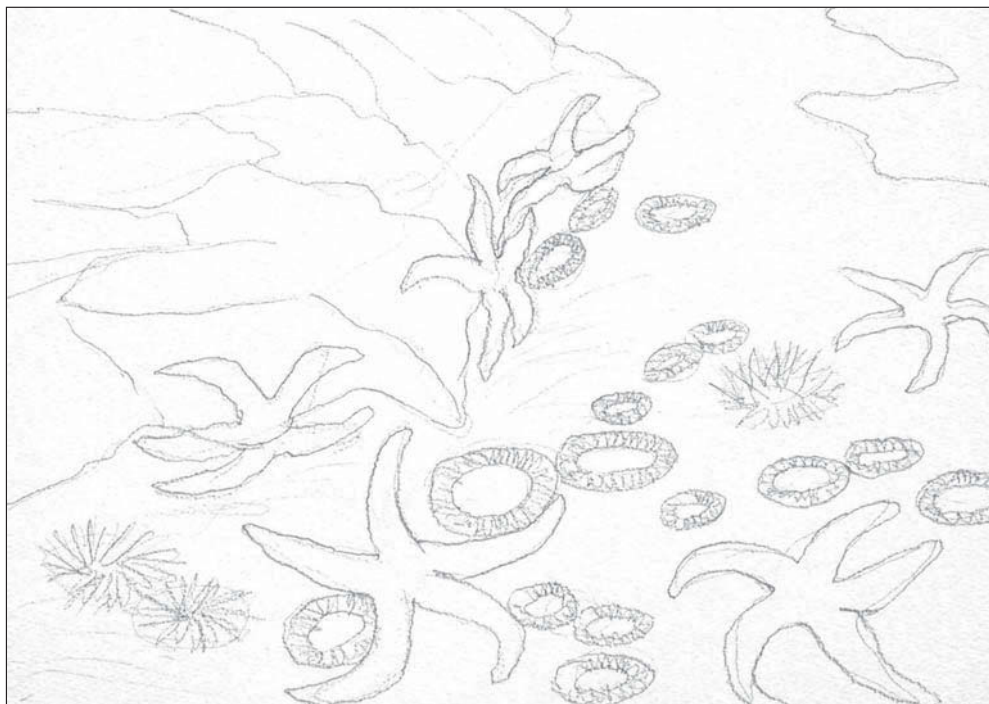
I prefer to put the painting away for a couple of days and bring it back out later to look at it with fresh eyes. Too often we are unhappy with a painting because it didn't come out the way we expected. With watercolor paintings, they never do, because we never totally control the medium. With time we get to see what the painting actually looks like and not what we expected. The main thing to remember with watercolor painting is to have fun and be daring!

Tide Pool

I want this painting to be very colorful, playful, and mysterious—much like the feeling I get when I am out at the coast and exploring the wonders of tide pools and all that they reveal.

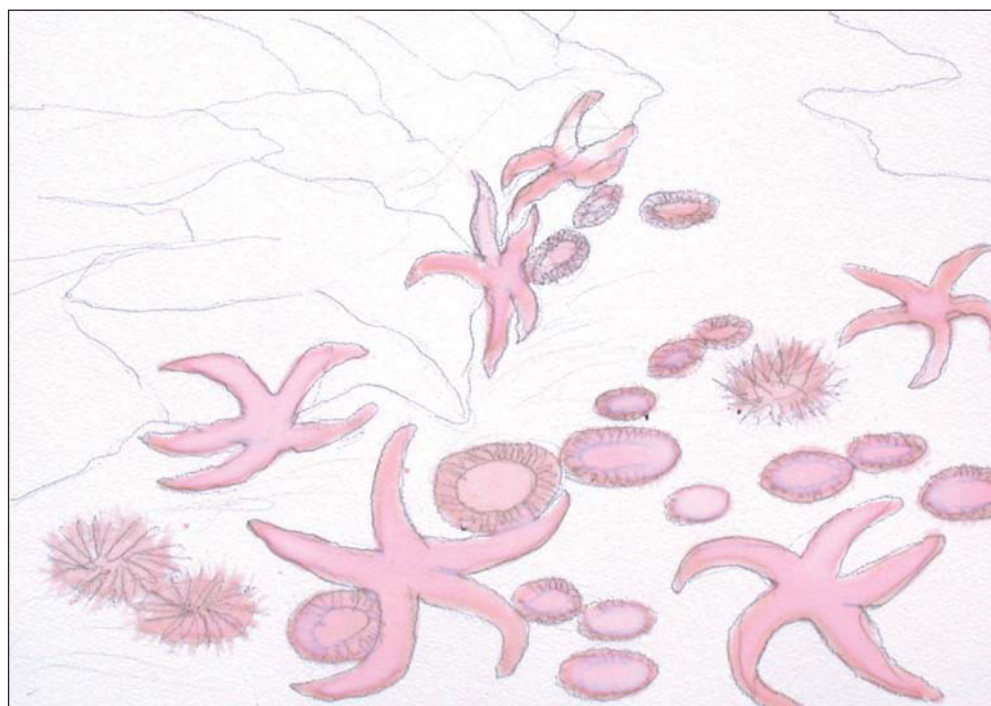
Color Palette

burnt sienna • cobalt blue • Hooker's green • horizon blue
lemon yellow • marine blue • opera • Payne's gray
permanent alizarin crimson • permanent green #1
permanent white gouache • permanent yellow deep
permanent yellow orange • pyrrole red
phthalo green • ultramarine deep • yellow ochre



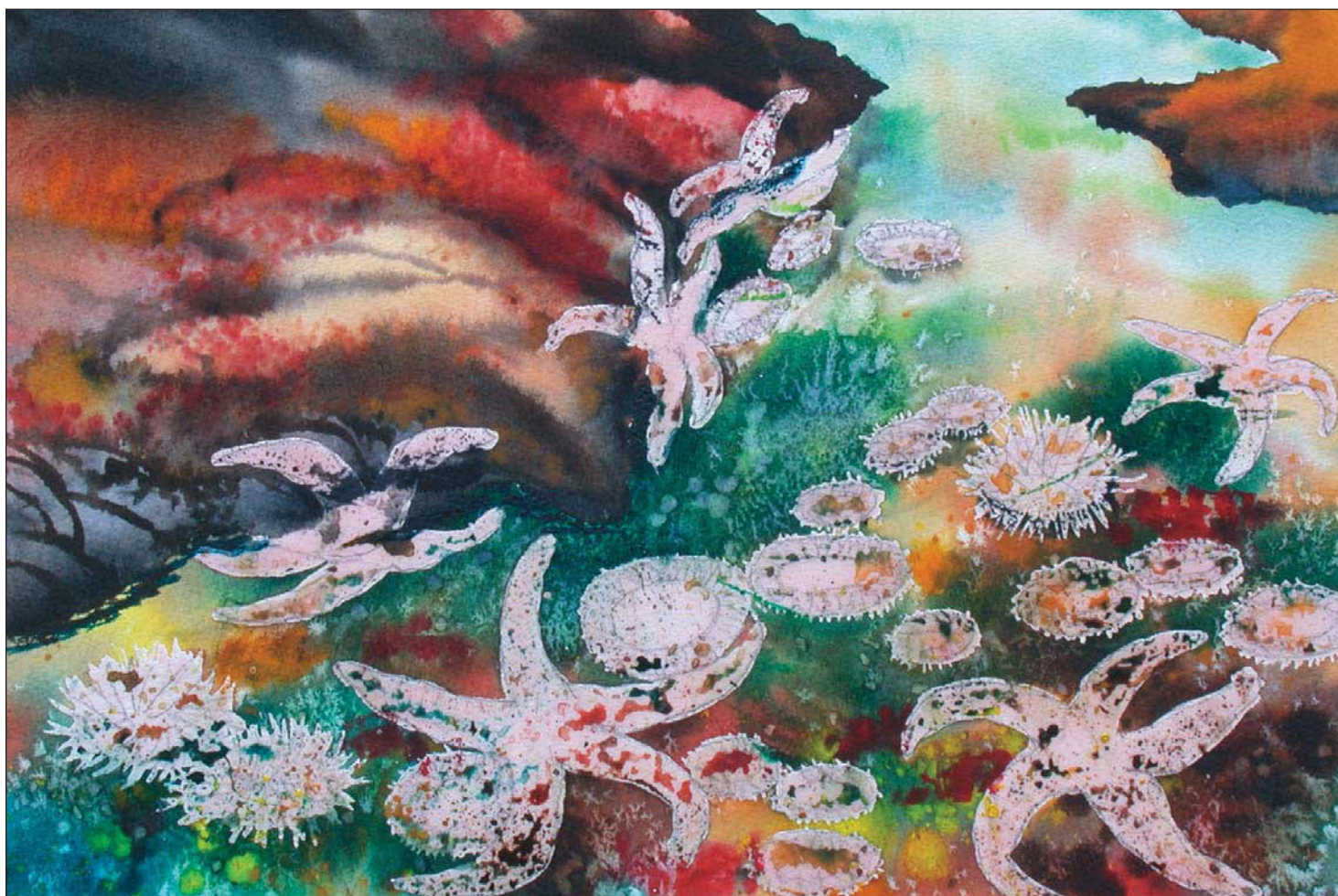
Step 1 I draw the sketch on watercolor paper, and starting with the larger basic shapes, I outline the edges of the rock formations where they meet the water. I loosely sketch in where I want to place the starfish, sea anemones, and sea urchins, being careful with their location, size, and the overall pattern established in the tide pool.

Step 2 I carefully start brushing in the mask for each of the shapes, painting the entire edge of the shape I am masking and then filling in the rest with a cotton swab dipped in mask. For the next shape I pull the brush out of the water, add more soap, and repeat the process until each sea urchin, sea anemone, and starfish has been masked. I then put a little mask in my splatter screen and blow a few random bits of splatter around the painting for the start of texture in the tide pool.

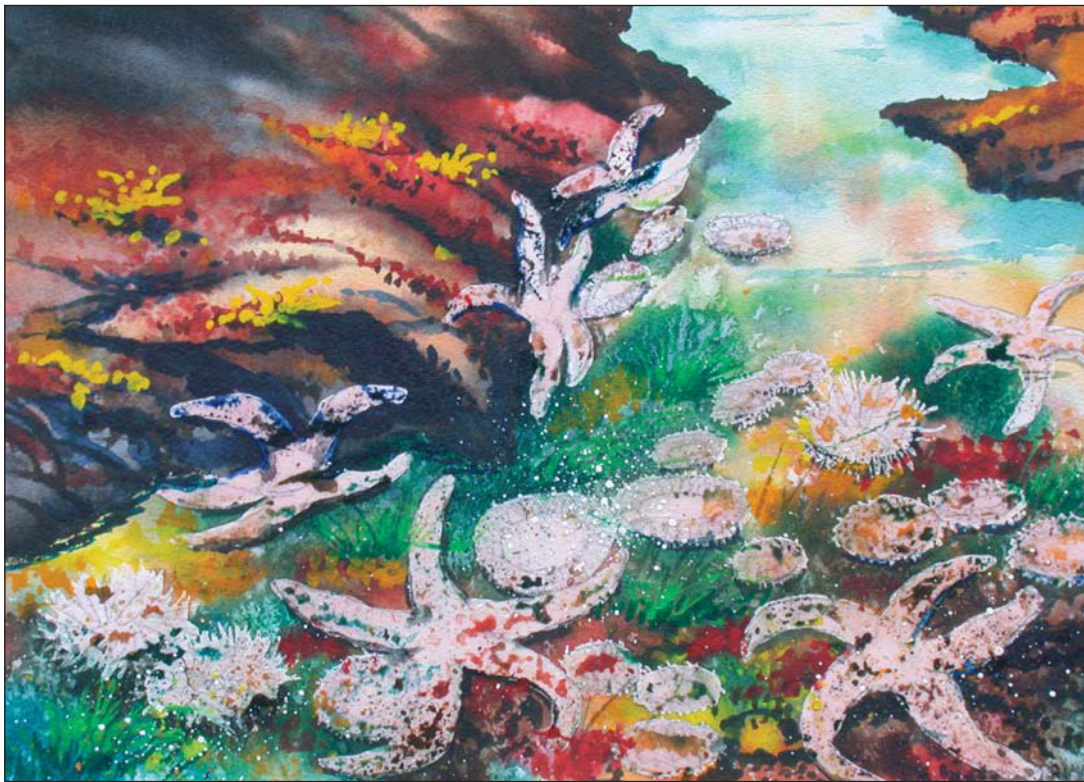




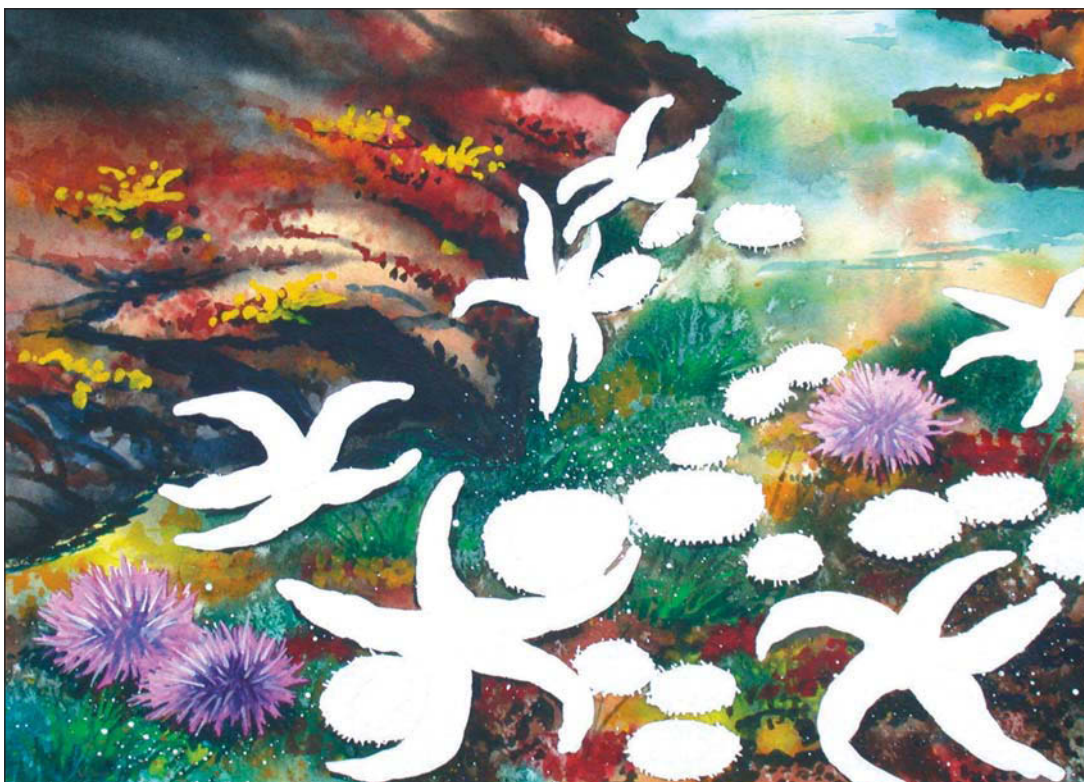
Step 3 After the masking fluid is dry, I wet the water area with a 1-inch flat brush with clean water and flood in the first colorful wash. Using phthalo green, permanent green #1, Hooker's green, yellow ochre, burnt sienna, pyrrole red, permanent yellow lemon, permanent yellow deep, permanent yellow orange, marine blue, and a mixture of burnt sienna and ultramarine blue, I paint areas to simulate the varied colors on the bottom of the tide pool. I keep the value of my colors lighter at the top and get progressively darker and brighter toward the bottom. While the paper is still wet, using my #3 round brush, I stipple in more of these colors to create texture in this area and sprinkle on some table salt and a few pieces of rock salt.



Step 4 When the water area of the painting is dry, I wet the exposed rock areas with clean water with a one-inch flat brush and flood in the colors for the initial wash here. I use yellow ochre, burnt sienna, permanent yellow lemon, permanent yellow orange, pyrrole red, Payne's gray, and the burnt sienna and ultramarine blue mixture in this area, making sure to brush up and away from the water to create the sense that the rocks are higher than the water. Strong darks are used in some areas to create shadow pockets in the rocks and to make the rocks look wet closer to the water.



Step 5 I stipple in some additional rocky, rough texture on the bottom of the tide pool using the same colors as the wet wash. I paint shadows beneath and around the sea urchins, sea anemones, and starfish to ground them to the floor of the tide pool. I paint sea grasses to add variety. Using opaque white gouache and a splatter screen, a few random sections of white are added. I remove the masking fluid.



Step 6 I paint the sea urchins using a mixture of opera, cobalt blue, and pyrrole red. I need light, medium, and dark values to create the three-dimensional shapes of the urchin. I wet the urchin and flood in the light and medium purples. A few darker strokes are added toward the center area. When this is dry, using a #3 brush, I paint in the spines of the urchins, radiating my brushstrokes out from the center toward the edges. White gouache is added to the light purple to create highlights on the spines.



Step 7 I paint the varied-colored sea anemones with phthalo green, marine blue, horizon blue, Payne's gray, and yellow ochre, making sure to vary the base color of the anemones. I wet each anemone and flood in the base color I want, creating a ring of darker color toward the center. I make some of the centers gray and some yellow ochre. I paint the outer tentacles of the anemones with brushstrokes radiating up and away from the center. A bit of the center detail is added, as well as highlights with the opaque white gouache.



Step 8 After wetting each starfish with clear water, I drop in the color of each particular one. At the edge of the exposed rock, where several of the starfish are partially submerged, I paint the two sections separately, making the portion in water darker than the sections exposed to the air. Using a darker value of the starfish color and my small detail brush, I paint the spots on the starfish that give them their rough, spiny surface and mottled coloring. White gouache is used for the highlights.



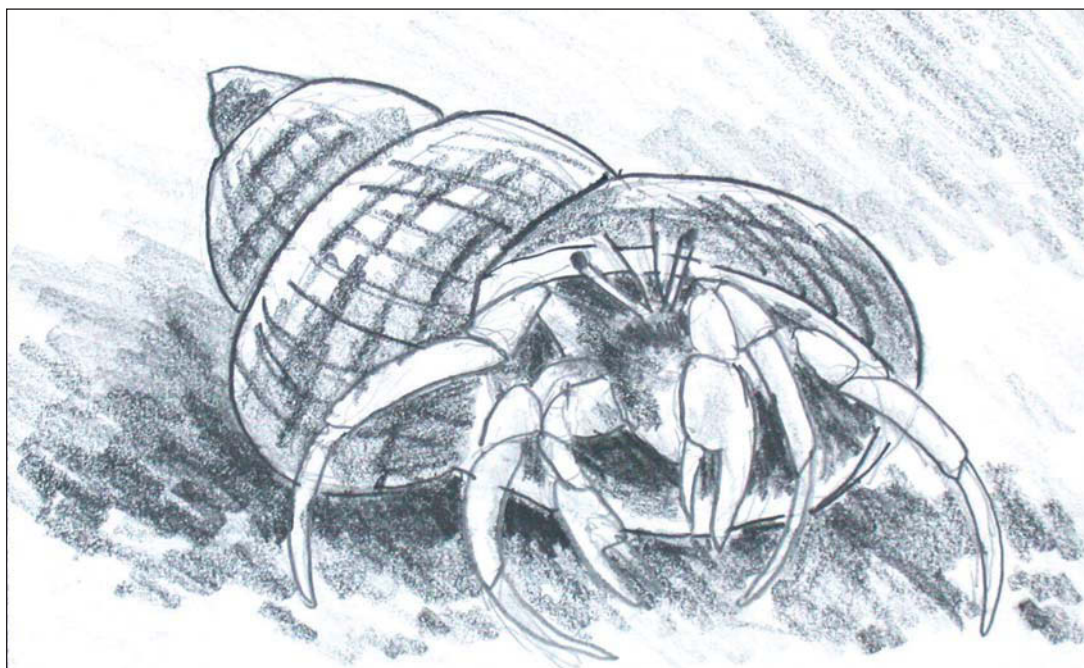
Step 9 I create surface detail on the water by using the white gouache and horizon blue to create reflections. Toward the upper area that is farthest away in the scene, I brush horizontal strokes of horizon blue across the water. At some of the edges of the exposed rock, I paint with my detail brush an intermittent line where the water meets the rocks and starfish. I extend a few white ripples and reflections out across the water.

Hermit Crab

I enjoy painting, but I realize there will be parts of the final product I like and parts I could have done better. That is the nature of the artistic mentality—never being quite satisfied. I need to be cautious about spending too much time fixing every little thing that bothers me.

Color Palette

burnt sienna • cobalt blue • Grumbacher's phthalo green
Holbein's yellow ochre • horizon blue • Payne's gray
permanent green #1 • permanent green #2
permanent white gouache • pyrrole red • royal blue



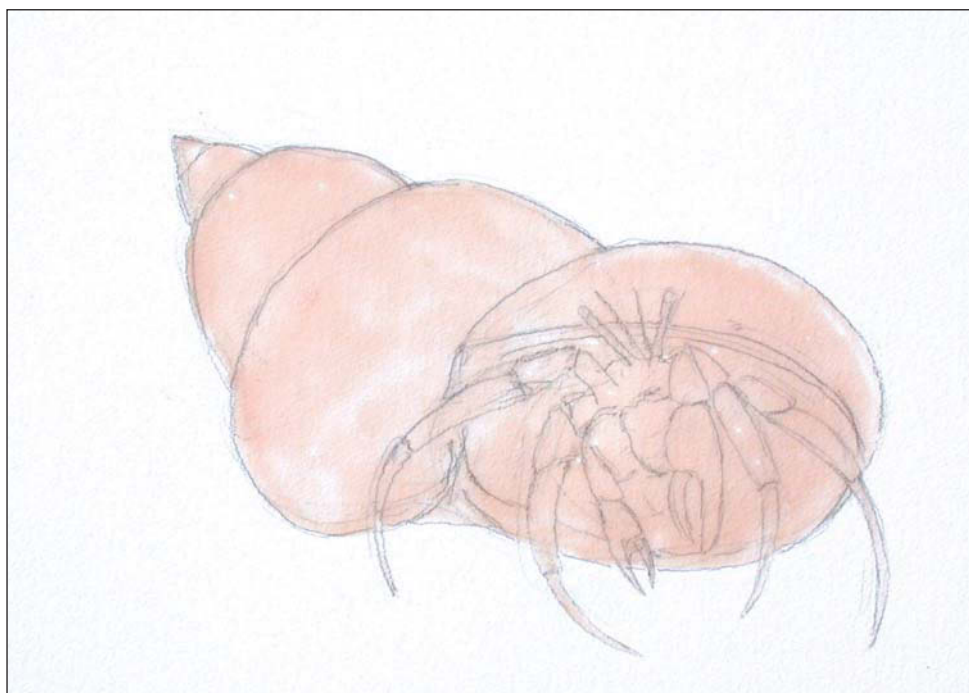
Step 1 In the value sketch, I focus on the placement of the main elements of the painting and establish where I want the light, medium, and dark values.



Step 2 I create a line drawing either by free hand or with transfer paper. I spend a little more time drawing the shell and the crab in this step because I'm going to cover these with liquid mask before I start the painting, so I want them to be accurate.

Artist's Tip

If you use transfer paper to create a line drawing on watercolor paper, be sure to trace a few lines and then lift up a corner of the paper to see if you are pressing hard enough to leave a graphite line.



Step 3 I carefully mask the edge of the shell and the parts of the hermit crab that extend beyond the shell. I drop my brush in water, then dip a cotton swab in the mask to fill inside of the edges of the shell and crab. I let this mask dry before starting the first wash.



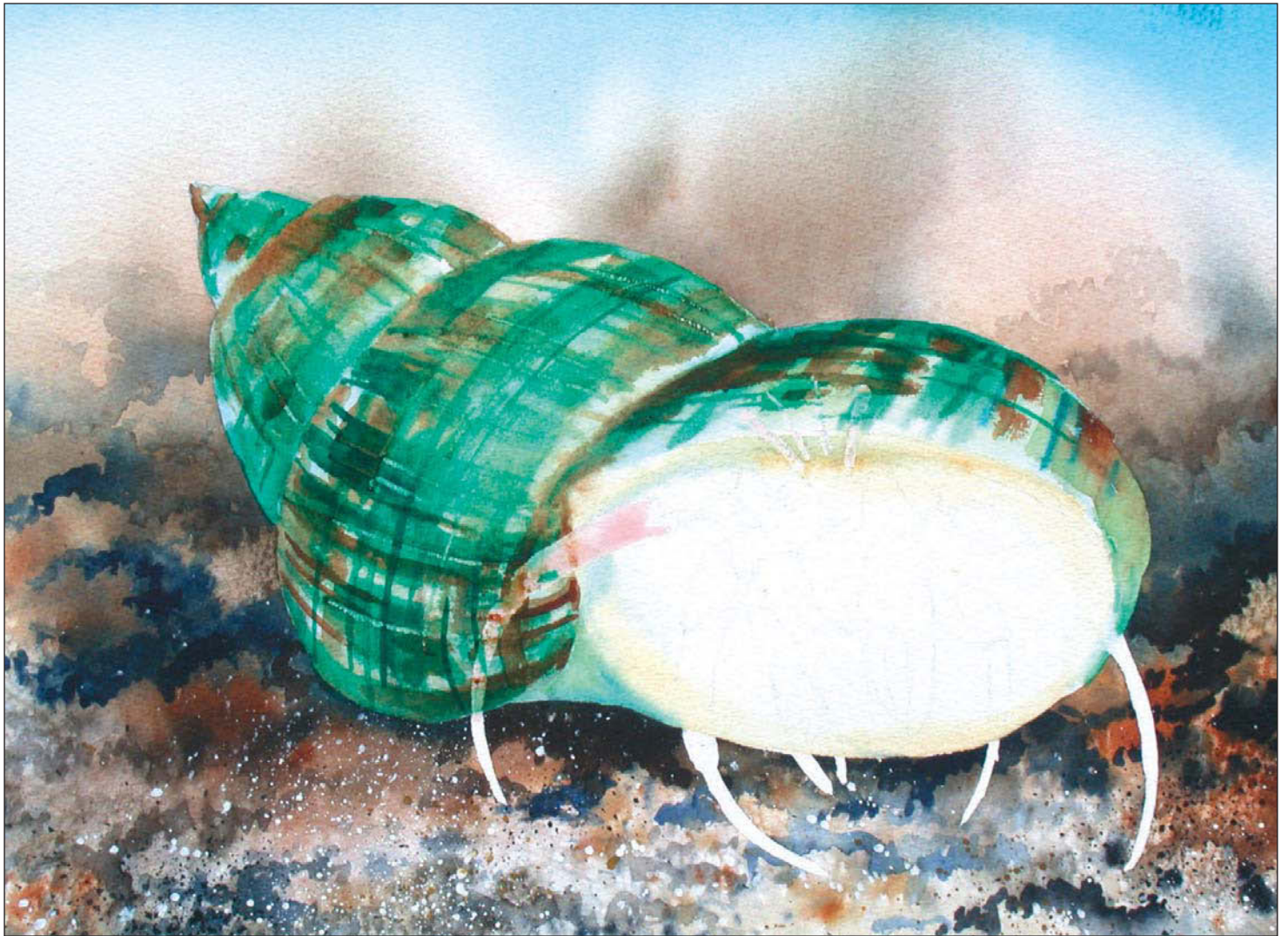
Step 4 For the first wash—the sea beyond and the ocean floor—I mix puddles of yellow ochre, burnt sienna, Payne's gray, royal blue, horizon blue, and cobalt blue. With a 1-inch brush, I thoroughly wet the entire paper (without puddling anywhere), and with the same brush, I paint a band of horizon blue and cobalt blue at the top of the page for the water. Next I brush in some of the yellow ochre and burnt sienna between the sea colors and the shell. I add some Payne's gray to set up a nice contrast for the shell and the crab. I use the same three colors to paint around the shell, but blot them in with the brush for a mottled look. While the paint is wet, I sprinkle a little table salt into the wash to create an interesting texture. This will be the basis for the ocean floor.



Step 5 The ocean floor around the crab is still soft and shapeless, so I set up some edges to create depth. I create both negative and positive edges for variety. I work my way around the painting creating enough edges and shapes to make it look like an ocean floor. I stipple in a little more texture with a small brush and also use a splatter screen to place more texture onto the foreground using the same colors plus a little white gouache. The splatter adds variety to the area.

Artist's Tip

I use a 1-inch flat sable brush, a 1/2-inch flat brush, a #3 round brush, a #0 round brush, and a small nylon bristle brush for the masking fluid. I will also use Graftix's Incredible White Masking Fluid, some table salt, and a splatter screen or an old toothbrush. I prefer Arches 300# Watercolor Paper because of its tough surface; it doesn't easily tear when removing masking fluid. It also stays wet longer, giving me a greater window of time to work with the wet-on-wet washes. I use a 12" x 16" block so as not to stretch the paper.



Step 6 I remove the mask with a masking fluid pickup. I re-mask the left crab leg and the eyes and antennae that overlap the shell. I then paint the shell a greenish color to contrast with the earth-tone background and the red hermit crab. The first wash is light and creates the shape of the shell. With my 1-inch brush I wet the entire shell and brush in bands of phthalo green, burnt sienna, and a mixture of permanent green #1 and horizon blue for the markings. I put stronger color at the bottom of the shell and the intersection of the different parts of the shell to give it a three-dimensional shape. Once this wash has dried, I re-wet the shell and brush in with my 1/2-inch flat brush more of the markings. The final touch is a few smaller, sharper bands put in with the rigger brush.



Step 7 I remove the mask from the eyes, antennae, and leg. I mix puddles of a light red, medium red, and dark red using pyrrole red and varying amounts of royal blue. Starting with the leg on the right, I paint in the light red. Using the medium and darker reds and a small brush, I add shadow and shading. Once the legs are complete, I paint the crab body with darker reds. Next I paint the darker shadow area of the shell surrounding the crab with the darker red mixture and Payne's gray. With a small brush I paint the dark around the crab parts and up to the edge of the shell opening. I move around the crab and down to the areas of shadow at the bottom of the opening. I fade the dark value out with a light wash of pyrrole red and Payne's gray.



Step 8 I make a final pass over the painting with fresh eyes after putting it aside for several days. With a little time, things that had bothered me no longer do so and things that I didn't see before now become apparent. The final pass allows me to make any appropriate adjustments. After adjusting the shape of the shell a bit and adding detail to the ocean floor, I consider the painting complete.

Artist's Tip

Using three values of the same color allows a watercolor painter to create shape through value shading.

Clown Fish

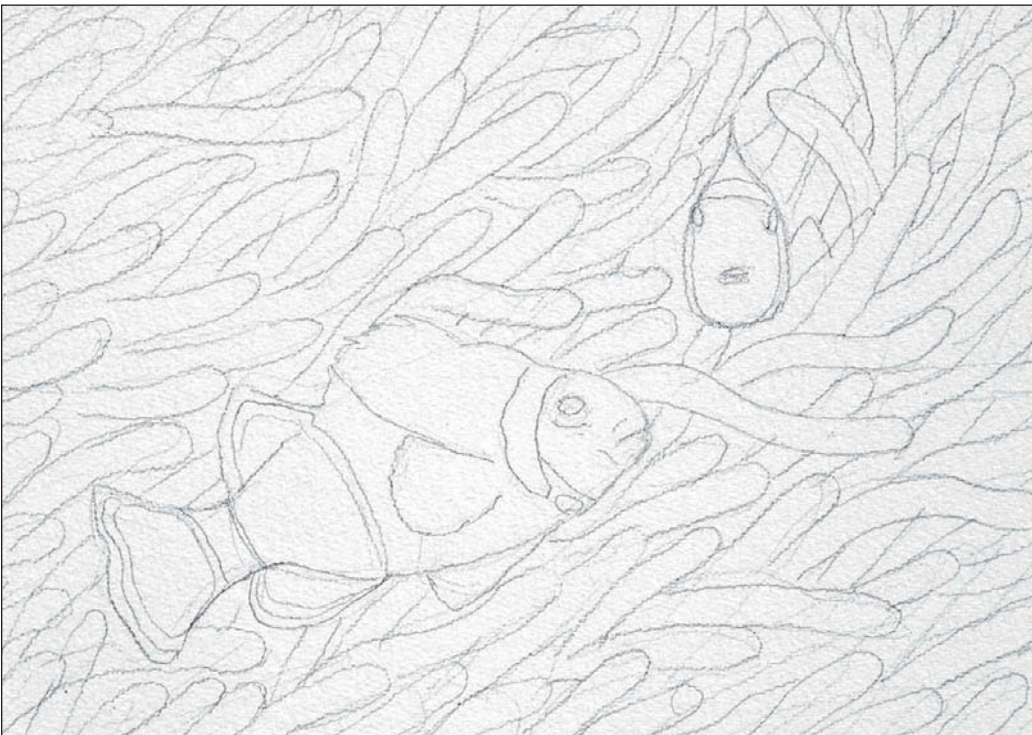
A generous array of reference photos of clown fish and sea anemones allows me to pick out the specific items I want in my scene without feeling like I am merely copying a photograph. I have chosen blue sea anemones as a colorful backdrop that contrasts nicely with the yellow and orange colors of the clown fish. Looking at so many photos of clown fish, I realize they come in many varieties of shapes and markings, so I know I am free to create the fish that I want for my painting.

Color Palette

burnt sienna • cadmium red deep • cobalt blue
Holbein's horizon blue • royal blue • Payne's gray
permanent yellow lemon • permanent yellow deep
permanent white gouache

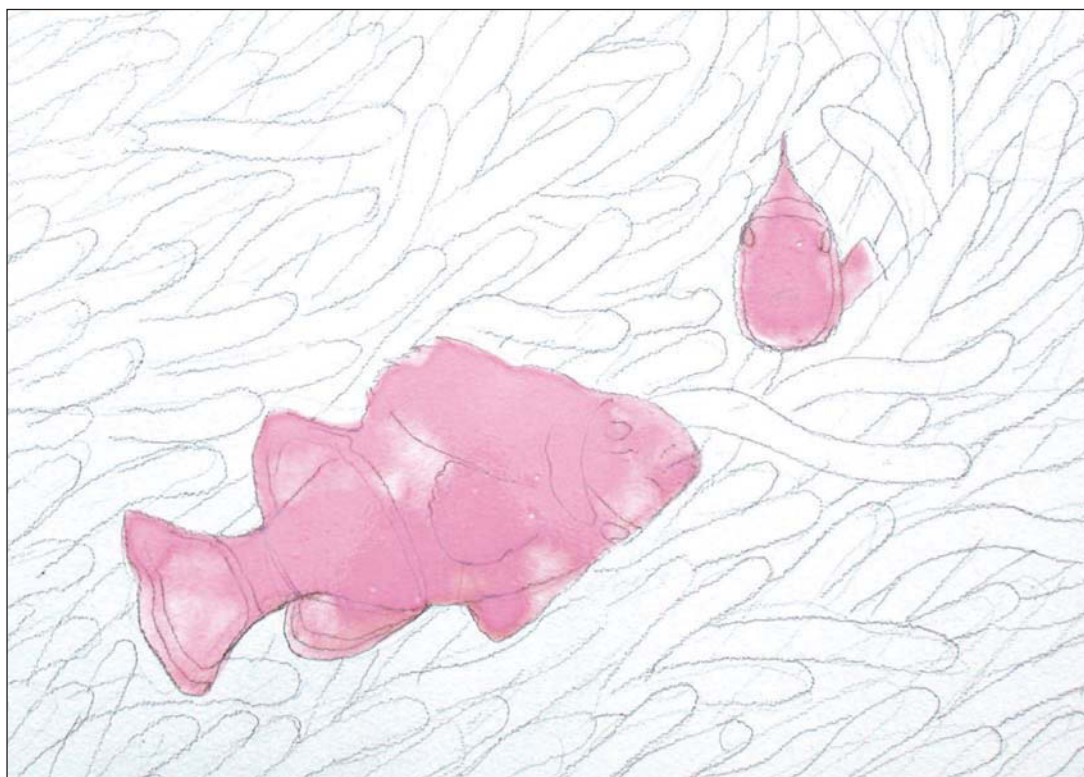
Artist's Tip

For this painting, I work on Arches 300-lb. cold-pressed watercolor paper in a 12" x 16" block. The brushes I use include a 1-inch flat, a 1/2-inch flat, a #3 round, a #0 round, and a nylon-bristled masking fluid brush. I prefer Graftix's Incredible White Mask, which is easily removed from the paper with a masking fluid pickup.

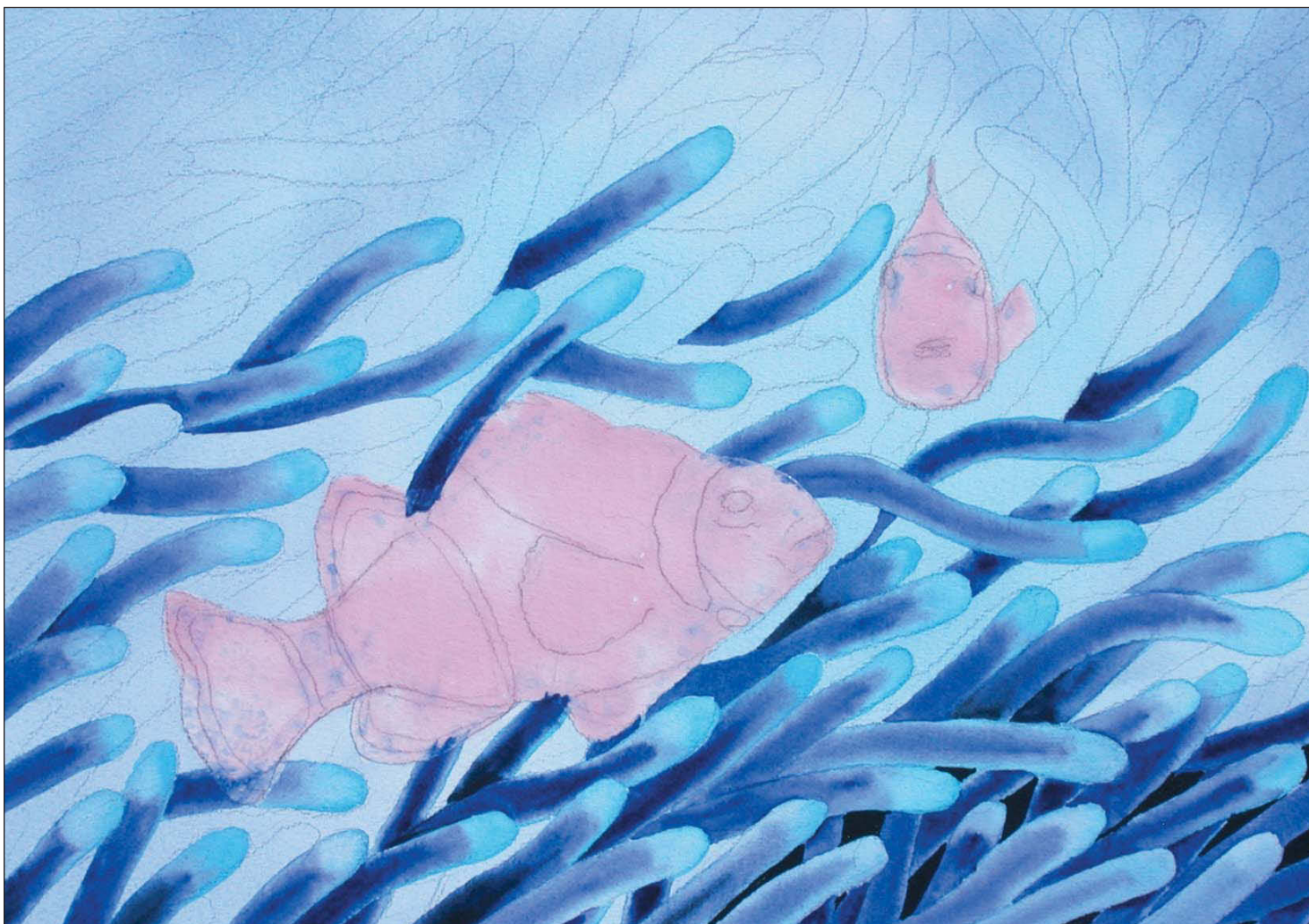


Step 1 I have chosen to incorporate two fish in my design, one swimming near the sea anemones, showing the length of the fish and its intricate pattern, and one hiding in the sea anemones' tentacles. Once I've located on the paper the location of the fish, I proceed to draw them more accurately, putting in the detail I want. The tentacles of the sea anemones are drawn in as well.

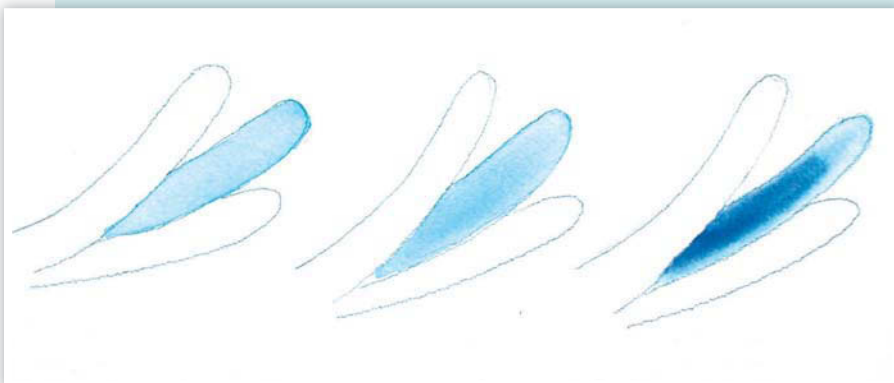
Step 2 With my nylon brush, I mask out the two clown fish, making sure to cover the entire fish and that the edges are accurate. A little soap applied to the brush prior to starting the masking will prevent the mask from drying too quickly on the bristles, and it allows for easier cleanup.



Step 3 Once the mask is dry, with my 1-inch flat brush I paint wet-into-wet with horizon blue, cobalt blue, and royal blue. This wash varies the background values a little so the sea anemones will each look a little different when they are completed.

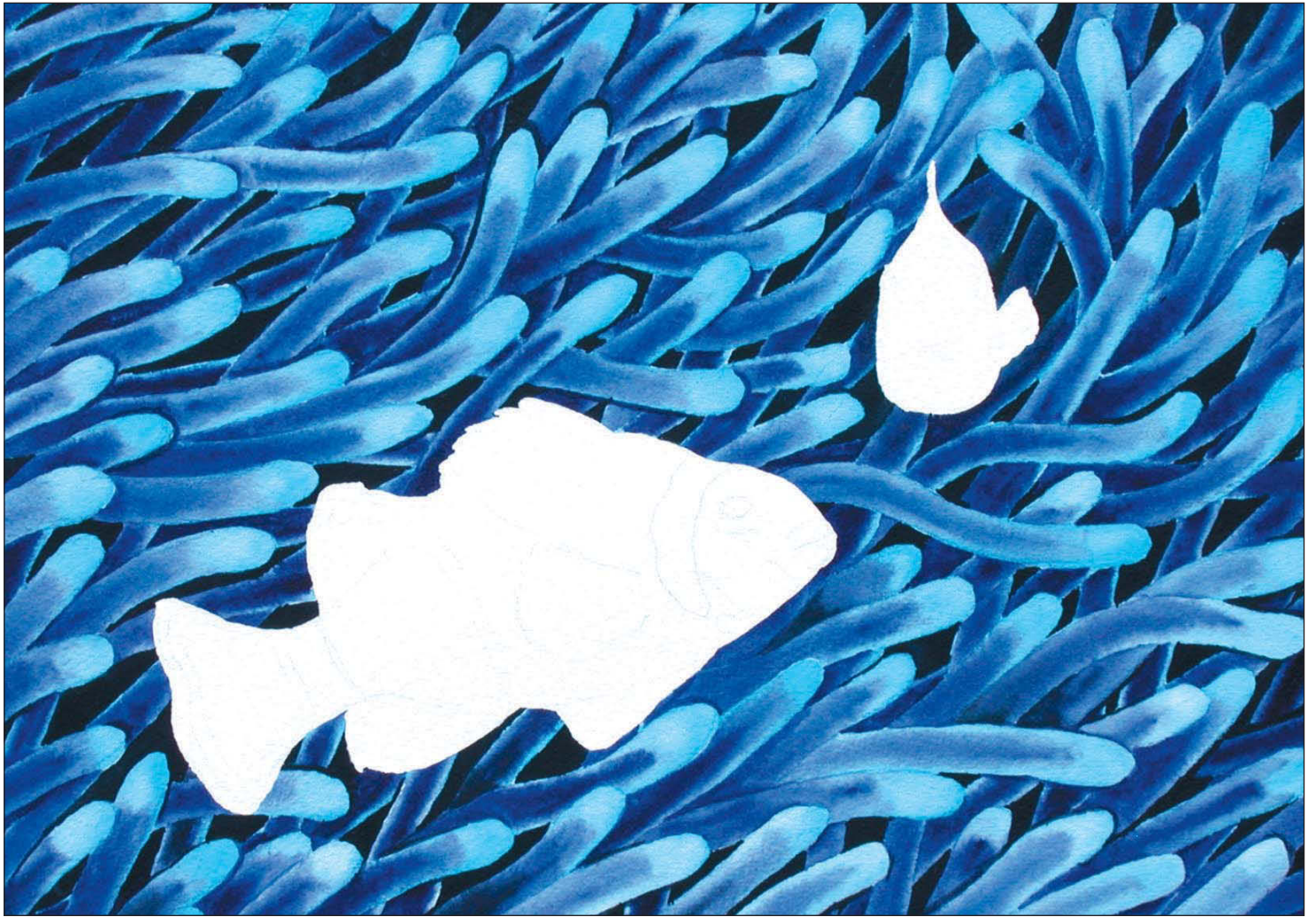


Step 4 Starting at the lower right corner, I wet one of the tentacles with clean water, staying about a $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch away from the edge. While this tentacle is drying, I can move to another one and repeat the process. I paint several of them before I dry them all with a hair dryer. I carefully move around the scene, painting each arm. With Payne's gray, I paint a dark value in some of the empty spaces that represent the deeper parts of the sea anemone that don't receive much light.



Anemone Detail

Using my #3 round brush, I paint the entire tentacle with horizon blue, making sure to paint right up to the edge. While this is still wet, I pick up some cobalt blue and paint the center of the tentacle, staying away from the end and the edges. Next I pick up some royal blue and paint further down the tentacle with some of this darker color, leaving the tip and the edges to appear lighter, almost like they glow in the dark.



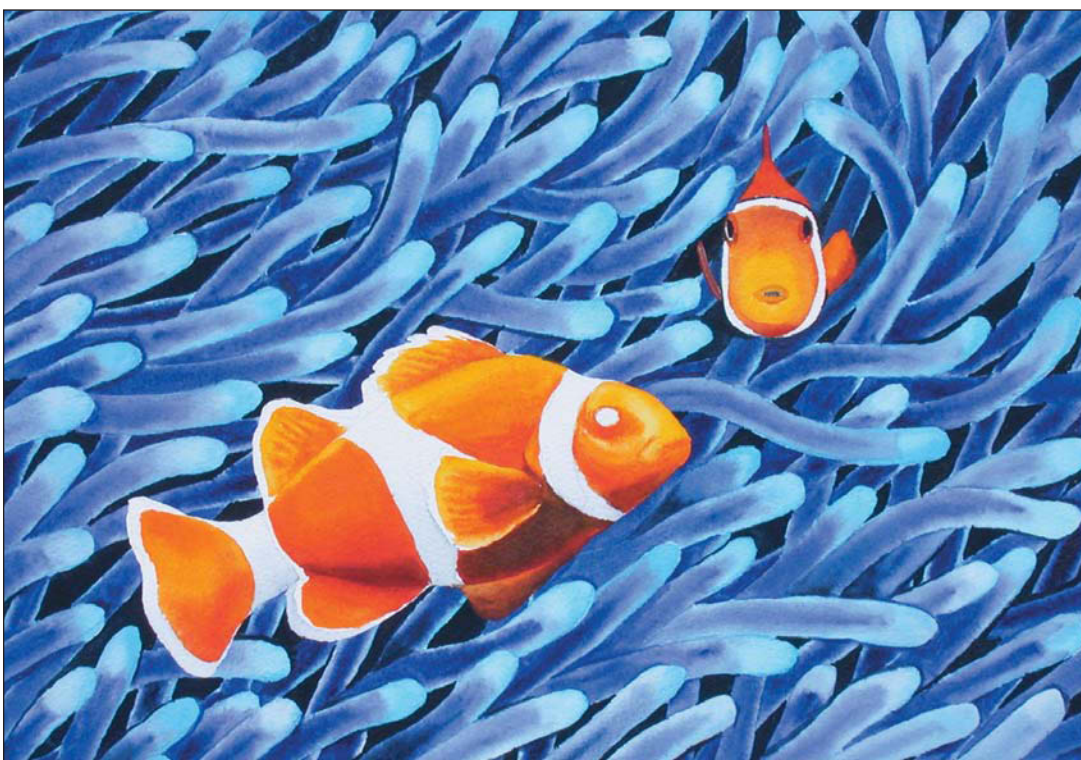
Step 5 Once the paint is dry, I remove the mask with masking fluid pickup. This reveals the white paper where I want my clown fish to be located. In my palette, I mix rich puddles of permanent yellow lemon, permanent yellow deep, permanent yellow deep mixed with a little cadmium red (orange), burnt sienna, and Payne's gray. The permanent yellow lemon and the permanent yellow deep will be my lighter value orange; the permanent yellow deep mixed with a little cadmium red will be my medium value orange; and the medium value orange mixed with a little burnt sienna will be my darker value orange.



Artist's Tip

A “thirsty brush” is a brush that has had all the color rinsed out of it and then has been dried with a tissue.

Step 6 Starting with the smaller fish hiding in the sea anemone, I paint a section at a time, leaving the white of the paper as the white bands on the fish. I wet the section I'm working on with clean water and start with my light values first and add the medium and darker values as required. If the colors start to move more than I want them to on the wet paper, I can use a thirsty brush to wick up some of the color and keep it from running too much.



Step 7 For the large clown fish, I start at the tail, using the same procedure of wetting the section first and then adding my light, medium, and dark oranges. I also use a little cobalt blue to shadow the white areas of the fish, to help create the shape. Once the tail, back section, midsection, head, and fins are painted, I add in the dark detail with Payne's gray. If I need to adjust any of the white areas, I can use a little permanent white gouache.



Step 8 After all these steps are completed, I look at the painting and make any adjustments that might be needed, particularly at the edges where the shapes meet. I also want to make sure all the sections of the larger clown fish are balanced and look continuous. If need be, I can darken the underside to give the fish more dimension. As always, I like to put the painting aside for a few days and then pull it out again later to look at it with fresh eyes. I think of my initial idea for the painting and see if I have come close to achieving that goal. I keep reminding myself that the reason I paint is to have fun, explore, and be willing to try new things!

Blue Tang

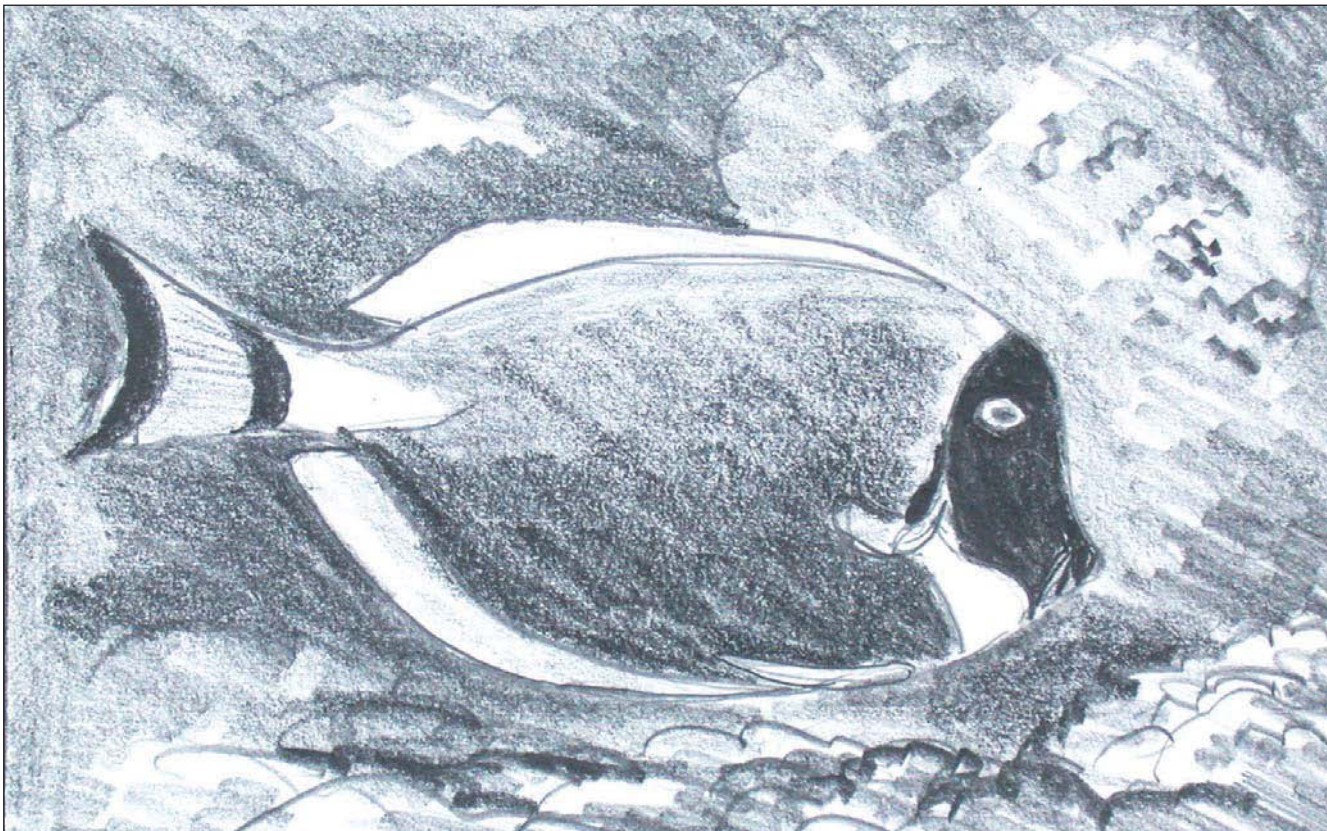
I approach each painting with a positive attitude. Having fun is the main reason I paint! Despite the challenges and the work, the creative process always brings me a sense of satisfaction. Each time I finish one painting, I can't wait to start the next.

Color Palette

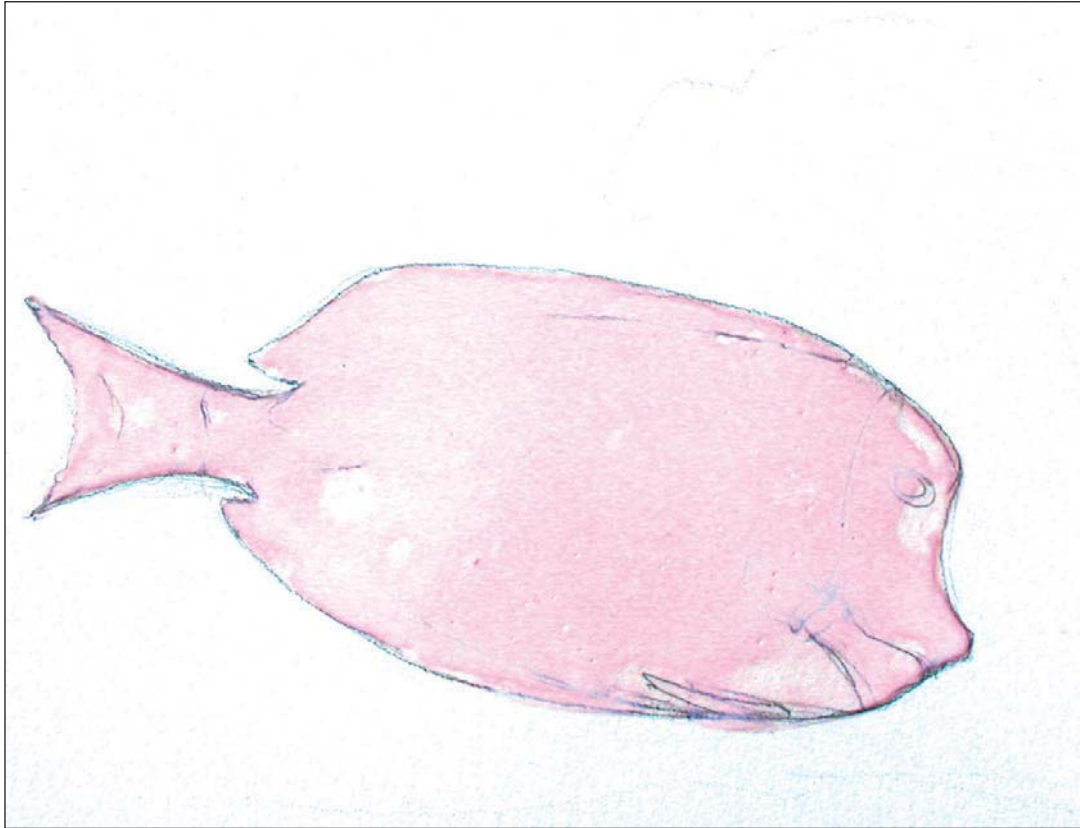
burnt sienna • cobalt blue • Holbein's marine blue
horizon blue • Payne's gray • peacock blue • permanent
white gouache • permanent yellow deep • permanent
yellow lemon • pyrrole red • royal blue • yellow ochre

Artist's Tip

I use Graftex's Incredible White Mask, a masking fluid pickup, and a splatter screen for texture. The brushes used include a 1-inch flat brush, a 1/2-inch flat brush, a #3 medium round brush, a rigger brush, a #0 small detail brush, and a nylon bristle brush to apply the mask.



Step 1 I keep my value sketch loose, concentrating on the larger shapes and their relationship to each other. When I have completed the value sketch, I make any needed adjustments before I start painting. This sketch is a road map, but I'm not afraid to alter things later if something exciting starts to happen on the paper.



Step 2 I transfer the design from the value sketch to watercolor paper. I draw the shape of the blue tang carefully so that the masking will accurately capture the shape of the fish. I use a nylon bristle brush to apply the mask. I first dip the brush in liquid soap, then wipe off excess soap with a tissue. I carefully work around the edge of the tang, being sure to capture the exact shape of the fish. Once I've completed the outside edge, I fill in the remainder of the shape with cotton swabs.



Step 3 I use marine blue, horizon blue, Payne's gray, burnt sienna, yellow ochre, and royal blue in this wash. After wetting the entire paper, I start at the top with a 1-inch brush. I lay in a few strokes of marine blue followed by a transition into horizon blue. With the same brush I paint areas above the tang with burnt sienna, yellow ochre, and Payne's gray to suggest coral shapes in the distance. I streak in Payne's gray and royal blue with a rigger brush to suggest coral and seaweed shapes. Below and alongside the fish I dapple in a variety of colors including burnt sienna, yellow ochre, Payne's gray, and a touch of pyrrole red.



Step 4 To create more depth and recognizable shapes in my colorful wash, I set up some edges. I look for places where one shape meets another, and I make these intersections sharper by either painting more of the actual shape in front or by adding more color to what is behind—or what is called negative painting. Some more stippling with my small brush and a little splatter with the splatter screen adds more texture and variety to this area.



Step 5 When the background area is completely dry, I remove the mask. For a larger area, I wait at least a day for the paper underneath the mask to dry so the paper does not rip easily. I then wash in horizon blue with a little peacock blue in all areas with blue tones. This is a wet-on-wet wash, but I do not wet the areas of the tang where there will be yellow. This keeps the blue out of this area to avoid creating a green tone.



Step 6 Next I wet the areas to be yellow (the upper fin, tail section, and a small area by the gill). I wash in permanent yellow lemon and permanent yellow deep to create bright spots on the tang. When these areas are dry, I re-wet the blue areas and wash in peacock blue, royal blue, and a touch of Payne's gray—including the band on the tail and the main body. I use darker blue toward the bottom of the body to give the fish some shape. Finally I paint the face and eye of the tang using Payne's gray and a little peacock blue. Again I wet this area first to make it easier for the colors to blend.



Step 7 I make a final pass to adjust the edges, add some detail in places, and lift color if necessary. This takes the painting to a greater stage of refinement. I add a little stippling of blue on the ocean floor to balance out the blues in the painting. I add more detail to the tail and fins. A small dot of white gouache to the eye makes it look shiny and alive. Some stippling with the white gouache on the ocean floor adds more variety to this area.

About the Artists

Maury Aaseng has always been excited about drawing and art. After graduating with a BFA in graphic design from the University of Minnesota–Duluth, he moved to San Diego to begin an illustration career. His freelance work over the last eight years has spanned a variety of subject matter and styles. The range of his work has included anatomical illustration and cartoons for medical textbooks, informative illustrations for young adult nonfiction, custom watercolor work for independent authors, and logo design and creation. An avid nature enthusiast, Maury moved back to Duluth in 2009, where he supplements his illustration work with wildlife photography and painting, hiking, skiing, and canoeing in the northern forests that border Canada. Maury lives with his wife, who works as a graphic designer at the university.

Louise De Masi is an Australian wildlife artist who specializes in watercolor paintings. Although she studied briefly at art school, Louise is predominantly self-taught. She is an emerging artist who works primarily in watercolor and acrylic paint. Her naturalistic, detailed paintings show her ability to capture the personality and charm of the wildlife that inspires her. Her paintings can be found in private collections all around the world. Learn more at <http://louisedemasi.artspan.com>.

Hailey E. Herrera is a water-media and mixed-media artist who loves learning new techniques and experimentation. She received her PhD at Texas A&M University, College Station, and worked as a research scientist and lecturer at Virginia Commonwealth University for a short term before returning to her first love, art. She is a signature member of the Texas Watercolor Society. Visit her website at www.hailey-e-herrera.fineartamerica.com.

Ronald Pratt is an associate member of the National Watercolor Society and the California Watercolor Association and a member of several San Francisco Bay Area art groups. His award-winning paintings are proudly displayed in homes and galleries around the world. Ronald says he tries to express the amazing beauty and fascination of life in his work. His subject matter varies from dynamic seascapes to peaceful landscapes, from still lifes to surreal abstracts, and from florals to the human figure. Visit his website at www.ronaldpratt.com.

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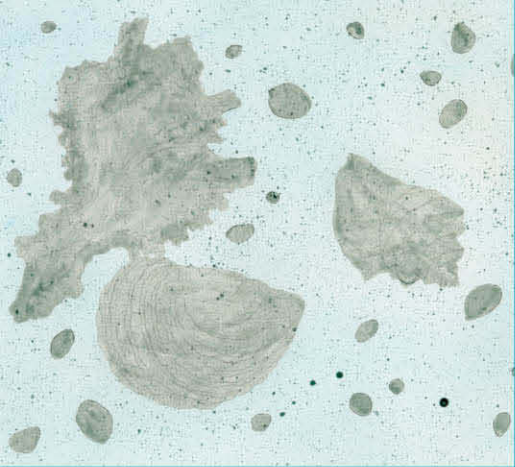
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The Art of Painting Sea Life in Watercolor

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