

## DEMONSTRATION

# Grisaille: A Layering Technique

Grisaille is a painting technique that has been used by many oil painting masters since the Renaissance. It is basically a technique for painting your subject in two steps.

First, you'll try to reproduce as accurately as possible the effects of light and shade within an underpainting of monochromatic or nearly monochromatic gray, brown or violet.

Then you will paint the local colors. Because of the first monochromatic layers, a flat wash will result in different tones of your color.

This technique can be successfully adapted to watercolor. You can try a gray, brown or violet underpainting. The most commonly used color for underpainting with watercolors is violet. Violet can be mixed so it will contain more red or more blue, and therefore, due to the transparent properties of those colors, will be invisible under most subsequent layers.

If you were painting a violet object, an underpainting in brown or gray would be a better choice.

In the following demonstration, you'll use the grisaille technique to paint a complex subject, marbles that show many variations in tones and hue as well as a variety of soft and hard edges. The advantage of this technique is that it simplifies the process of painting a complex subject. In the first stages, you only have to worry about light, shade and edges, and not color.

## YOU WILL NEED:

Holbein Permanent Red and Da Vinci Ultramarine Blue for the violet

Da Vinci Cadmium Yellow

Da Vinci Cobalt Blue

Da Vinci Prussian Blue

Da Vinci Sap Green

Yarka Emerald Green

Holbein Permanent Alizarin Crimson

## Other materials:

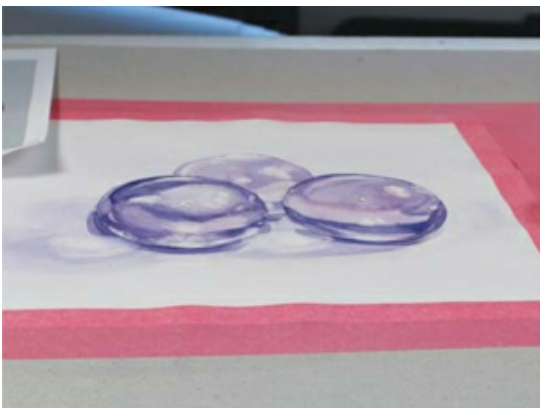
Assortment of brushes

Masking fluid and silicone brush



## 1 Transfer Drawing and Mask as Desired

After transferring your drawing to watercolor paper, preserve a few white highlights with masking fluid. You can apply the masking fluid while your drawing is still on the light box so you can clearly see where those preserved white areas should go.



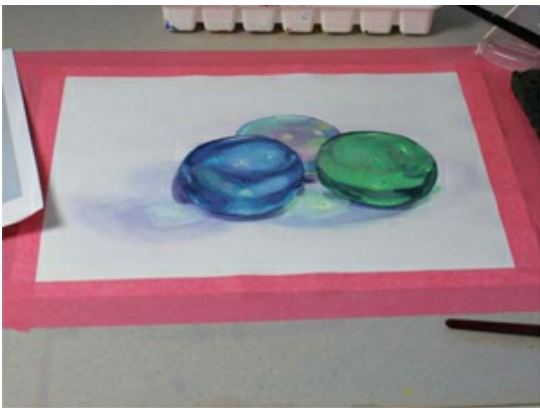
## 2 Paint Your Base Layer

Painting the monochromatic layer is easier if you can look at a black-and-white reference photograph of your subject. The violet used here is a mix of Permanent Red and Prussian Blue. Paint the marbles wet on wet if you want soft edges or wet on dry if you want hard edges. (For more on edges, see [Chapter 3, The Importance of Edges.](#))



### **3 Continue Layering**

Keep painting layers until you have achieved the desired level of contrast. Ultimately you want an array of tones from white to very dark violet. Let the monochromatic layer dry thoroughly. Drying will take a few hours.



### **4 Add Local Colors**

When painting the local colors, be careful not to disturb the previous layers. Use a soft brush with a light hand and pay attention to your hue changes. You don't need these layers to be very dark for this step because you already have a dark layer of paint—violet—on your paper. You can start with a wash that is light in color; use the same light color you see in the lightest areas of your object. Remember, all the successive layers on your paper are building up to make the final color. So let's say you are painting dark blue on a shaded area of an object. You paint an extra layer if at any point you feel your color is too light.



## **5 Make Final Adjustments**

Remove masking fluid and make any final adjustments. The white areas left by the masking fluid will probably need their edges softened with a stiff brush and water. You can also adjust colors at this stage. Lift up a bit of paint if you want to lighten any areas.

## DEMONSTRATION

# Painting a Forest with a Layering Technique

What is the difference between grisaille, layering and glazing? Basically all three terms describe painting successive layers or washes of semitransparent paint. In the grisaille technique, the first layers will be monochromatic—usually violet, gray or brown—and the tones will be fully developed. The last layers are light layers of local color. And while *layering* and *glazing* are essentially synonyms, glazing is more frequently used to add one layer of semitransparent paint over another color, while layering is more frequently used to build up multiple layers of paint.

In this demonstration, we will mix brown tones directly on the paper by layering yellow, red and blue.

### YOU WILL NEED:

- Cobalt Turquoise Light
- Permanent Red
- Burnt Sienna
- Prussian Blue
- Cadmium Lemon Yellow
- Sap Green
- Rembrandt Medium Yellow
- Rembrandt Madder Lake Light
- Rembrandt Payne's Gray

### Other materials:

- Assortment of brushes
- Gouache
- Masking fluid and silicone brush



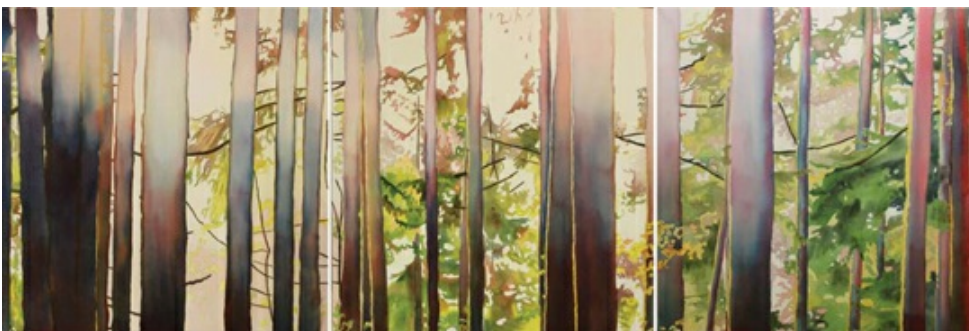
## 1 Paint Foliage and Add Yellow Layers

After the foliage has been painted by allowing colors to mix wet on wet, paint the trunks with the first layers of Medium Yellow. Be careful to leave the upper part of the painting lighter in color.



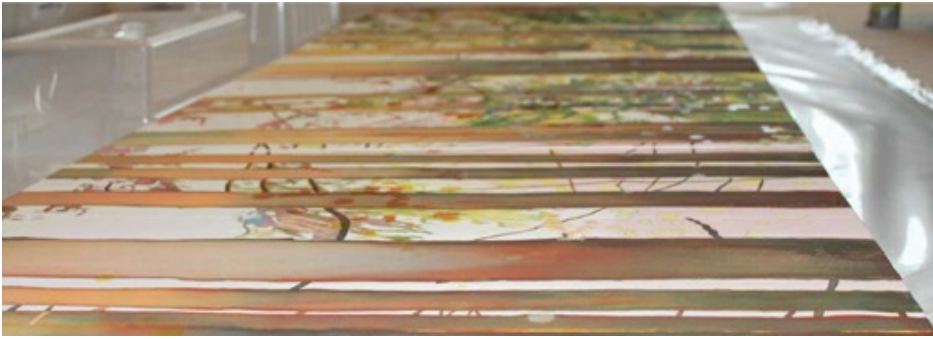
## 2 Add Blue Layers

After the previous layer has thoroughly dried, add layers of Prussian Blue. Again, be sure to leave the upper part of the painting lighter in color.



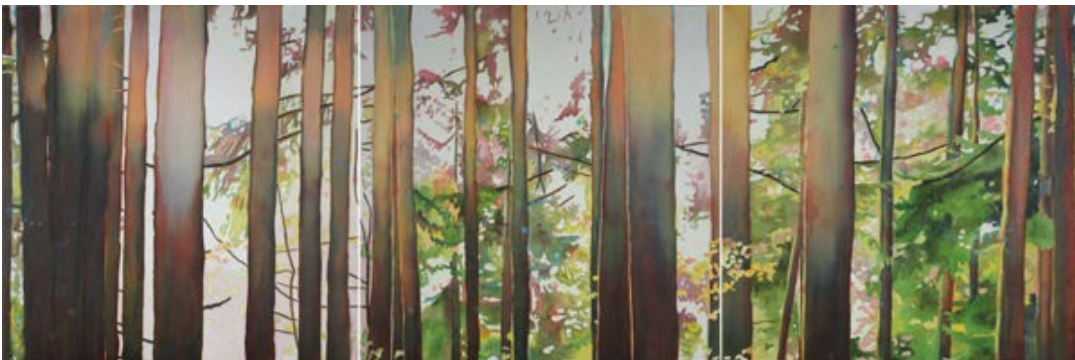
## 3 Add Red Layers

Layer on red paint, again ensuring the upper part of the painting is lighter.



## 4 Splatter Various Mixes Over the Painting

Splatter the painting with different mixes of watercolor and water, and watercolor, gouache and water.



### STICK FIGURES

Watercolor and mixed media on paper mounted on board

Triptych, three pieces each 24" x 24" (61cm x 61cm)

Private collection

### FOREST LANDSCAPES PALETTE

The palette used in this demonstration is a good palette to consider for painting forest landscapes.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF EDGES

When planning a painting, it is helpful if you know where the limits (or *edges*) of your wash are and if you want them to be hard or soft. A hard edge is an edge with a very well-defined limit, and it's the kind of edge you get when you paint wet on dry. A soft edge has a blurry or graded limit and is the kind of edge you get when you paint wet on wet.



### **TREES OF RIVERBANKS**

Watercolor on paper mounted on board

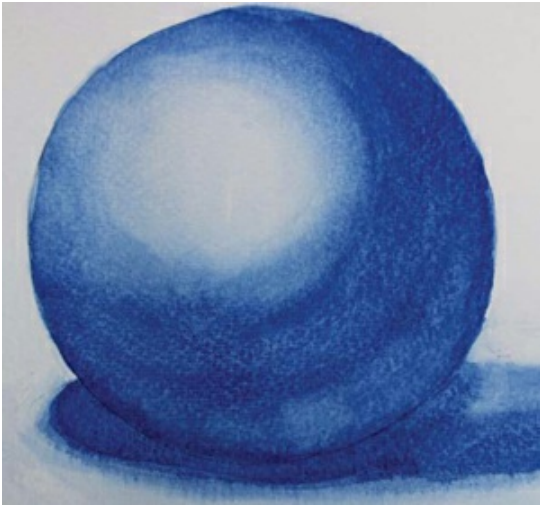
30" × 24" (76cm × 61cm)

This painting shows a variety of edges. For example, most of the edges inside the tree trunks are soft, so the trunks appear cylindrical. Most of the edges around the foreground leaves are crisp, so the leaves are easily differentiated from the background. Objects with sharper edges will appear to be more in focus than objects with soft edges; that's why backgrounds are often painted wet on wet with softer edges.

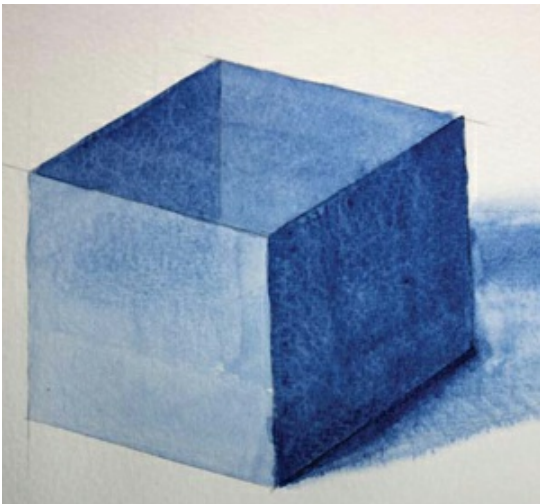
## **How Do Edges Work? What Do They Do?**

Soft edges make an object appear round, and hard edges typically define the intersection between two plane surfaces.

Soft edges are especially important in portrait painting; too many hard edges in a portrait will give it a harsh, unnatural appearance.



A round object will have mainly soft edges. If you paint on wet paper, you will get soft edges. The wetter the paper, the softer the edges.



The intersections of plane surfaces will consist mostly of hard edges. If you paint on dry paper, you will get hard edges.



The edges that are created as a result of using masking fluid tend to be very hard.



Soften hard edges with a stiff brush and water. These softer edges make your painting look more natural.



**NYMPH ECHO**

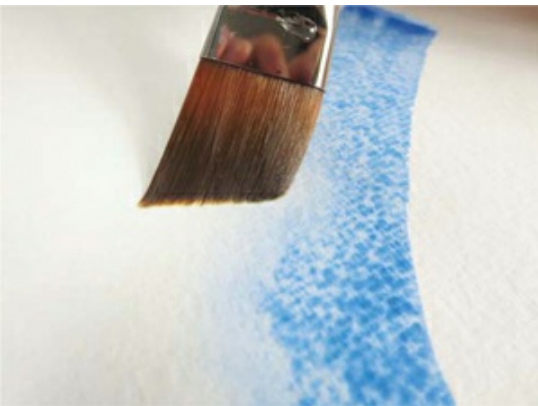
Watercolor on paper

29" × 17" (74cm × 43cm) Private collection

**How Can I Soften a Hard Edge While the Paint is Still Wet?**

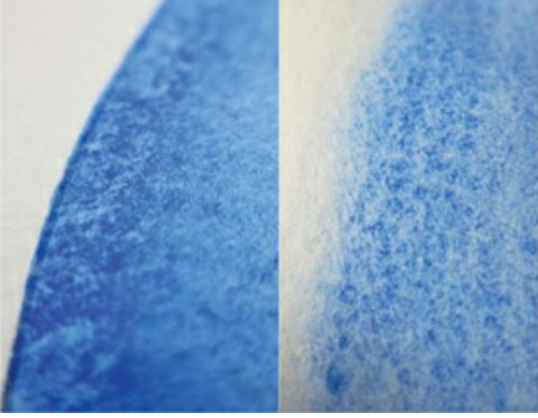


If you want to soften a hard edge while the paint is still wet, prepare at least two brushes, one a recipient for the paint mix and the other a recipient for clean water.



While the paint is still wet, go over the edge you want to soften with a damp brush. Deposit just enough water so the pigment is encouraged to move toward the water. Too much water will cause an irregular edge to form.

## **How Can I Soften a Hard Edge When the Paint is Dry?**



You can soften a hard edge once the paint has dried by scrubbing over it with a stiff brush and a bit of water.

## **Prevent Peeling Paper**



It all comes down to quality. Some papers, especially student-quality papers, are more likely to peel than others. I personally prefer and trust Arches paper. It can withstand quite a bit of scrubbing without peeling.