

DEMONSTRATION

Paint Skin Tones Using a Layering Technique

If you don't use a layering technique to paint skin tones, you need to think about many different things simultaneously, including color hue, color tone and edges. It can become overwhelming.

If you layer the colors one after the other, you don't have to think about the color hue anymore because you are going to paint all the yellow first, then all the red and all the blue; you won't need to do any color mixing. When painting directly you must have the right color mix for every section. Because this is a difficult thing to do, you probably will not have time to pay attention to edges and details in tone.

Layering makes painting portraits more manageable because you focus only on tone and edge quality, and not on mixing the right hue.



1 Paint Your First Layer

Use photo editing software to help you determine how much of each primary color you should use and where to place them. After you've finished your drawing and preserved some white areas with masking fluid, apply the first layer. Here I've used Yellow Ochre.



2 Paint Your Second Layer

The second layer is red. Consider painting your background in an irregular way; textures will develop and provide a more interesting effect than a perfect flat wash would.



3 Paint Your Third Layer

The third layer is blue. Remember to use a very diluted blue wash, as it can easily overpower the other colors.



4 Continue Layering

Keep layering colors until you get the desired tone. When you are satisfied, remove the masking fluid and soften the edges with a bit of water and a stiff brush.



I WISH IT WOULD SNOW FLOWERS

Watercolor and mixed media on paper
15" x 22" (38cm x 56cm)

This painting, including the background, was painted in successive layers of yellow, red and blue. Then I applied a layer of gouache mixed with a bit of Turquoise Blue watercolor. (See [Chapter 5, Demonstration: Painting a Background with Watercolor and Gouache](#); I used ink in that demonstration, but you can do the exact same thing with watercolor.) The background was then reworked with watercolor pencils to add flowery patterns. (See [Chapter 5, Demonstration: Drawing with Watercolor Pencils](#).)



SOPHIE IN THE KITCHEN

Watercolor on paper

28" × 28" (71cm × 56cm)

Sophie in the Kitchen was painted with layered colors for the skin tones. Sometimes you might need to adjust the colors you achieve with the layering process. In this case, I lightened some of the darker colors by scrubbing them off with a stiff brush and water. I wanted to keep the portrait simple, almost minimalist, so the focus remained on the face. This is also why I left the background unpainted.

WATCH IT! Watch Sandrine **Paint a Portrait Using a Layering Technique**. Visit [ArtistsNetwork.com/fearless-watercolor](https://www.artistsnetwork.com/fearless-watercolor).

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:

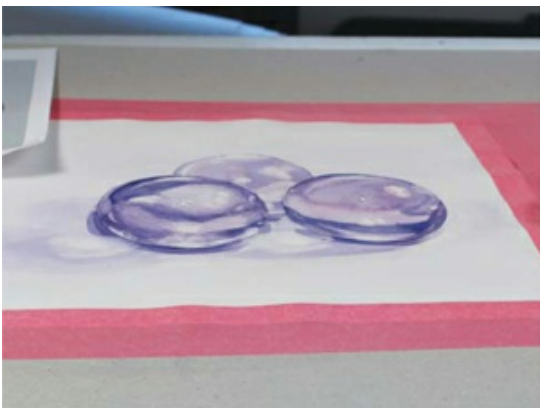
Assortment of brushes

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.



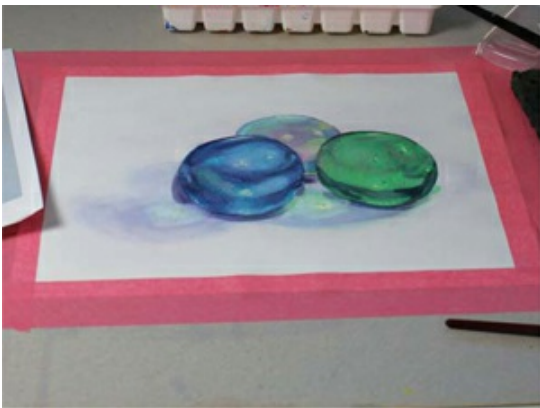
2 Paint Your Base Layer

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.