Watercolor: Making colors lighter

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In watercoloring, it is essential to know how to lighten colors, brighten overloaded areas, alternate textures and, especially, correct mistakes.

What you need to know

- This procedure is easier to do on wet paint than on dry paint.

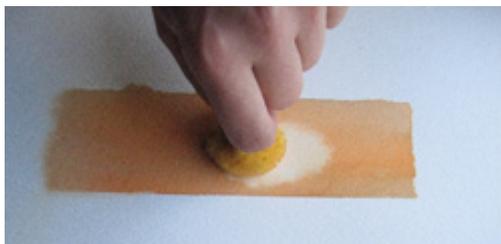- You need to work with clean tools, to keep from muddying the colors.

1. Removing from wet paint

With a paintbrush

Moisten a medium paintbrush then apply to the part of the wash you want to lighten. Remove the excess color with a blotter. Repeat the operation until you have the shade you want.

With a cotton swab

Lightly rub the surface being treated with a dry cotton swab. Be careful, it is very absorbent and should only be applied briefly.

With a sponge

Moisten your sponge with water, wring it out, then apply it to the part being lightened. Press the sponge down on the paper to make it absorb the pigments better.

Use a sponge on very large areas, such as a sky.

- To vary effects, alternate natural and synthetic sponges.

With a blotter

A blotter, while less flexible than a paper towel, is nevertheless very absorbent. There are two possible techniques:

- For precision color lightening: fold the blotter firmly in two and apply it.
- To lighten the color over larger areas: lay the blotter flat, tapping lightly.

Other solutions:

- Business cards, razor blades and paintbrush handles: for creating straight, precise, scratched effects!
- Coarse salt: sprinkle over a very wet wash to create star-shaped effects.

2. Removal from wet paint

Use coarse sandpaper to gently sand the area being lightened: little bursts of light will appear on the sanded surface. For rough grain paper, sand harder.

Note: only use this technique on high grammage paper!

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watercolor pencils (or watercolor crayons) resemble ordinary color pencils, but, when diluted with water, they can produce a broad number of pictorial effects.

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