

# a focus on waves

## sa 27th-28th september 2014

### Workshop Notes

Introduced the idea that this is not “the way” - it is just my way! Take what you can use and discard the rest! We all borrow ideas from each other - you will always put your own spin on everything you have borrowed.

We covered some initial theory with these fundamental concepts:

- **Perception** - the ability to find information out in the world. Very important. Find the information that makes the difference. This workshop is designed to escalate your perception skills.
- **Conceptual** - this is YOUR area - relatively handled today.
- **Physical ability** - ability to manipulate your tools - to make exactly the mark you want. To master this will take time, practise and willingness to put the time in. Because we have worked a lot on our perception skills, it's now more important that we continue to develop our physical ability.

We talked about the value of developing your perception skills, and how finding that little extra bit of information is the thing that sets your painting apart. As an example, looking on the opposite side of something that is lit, for an alternative source of light. The side of a face, tree, etc. Often these secondary light sources can be more interesting than the primary one.

We discussed how after looking at something in detail (perception skills) we then use our conceptual skills to “you-ify” it. What do I leave out? What do I exaggerate? What's important? What's not?

Physical ability - we discussed three particular techniques. The first being gradation of colour. The second, dry brush techniques, and the third, being able to roll and relinquish control of the brush. We then discussed some of the functions of a paintbrush, and looked at the concept of “Shovel, Rake, Broom”. We investigated the almost limitless marks that can be made with a paintbrush by varying, a) the amount of paint, b) the amount of pressure, and c) type and amount of medium used.

Painting is primarily about problem solving - asking the questions is how you will solve your painting problems. The more questions you ask, the more problems you'll solve. Remember to use all these processes to solve problems.

## The Four Elements:

- **Substrate** - can be lots of different colours ie pebbles, sand, rocks, kelp etc.
- **Colour of water** - can also be lots of different colours.
- **Surface** - probably the most important element - from underneath and above.
- **Light**

The concept of Default Settings was introduced:

**Default Settings:** Concept of a “starting point” set of colours.

### Tropical Water:

Cadmium Yellow Light

Pthalo Blue

Titanium White

### Warm Summer Skies:

Ultramarine Blue

Titanium White

Pthalo Blue (add a little as you get higher in the sky)

### Shadow Under Waves:

Burnt Umber +

Pthalo Blue (into deeper water)

(thin wash)

### Sand:

Cadmium Yellow Medium

Dioxazine Purple

Titanium White

(for drier sand add more Titanium White)

## Set Up Your Palette:

Dish up more paint than you think you'll need. Nothing worse than trying to match colours halfway through a painting because not enough paint was dished up at the beginning.

And, after dishing out your paint, make sure you leave plenty of room for “working out”. Your palette is for your “construction process” - your canvas is for the glory.

These next exercises were done as part of our “warm up” process. This eases us into the process of making a painting.



## Gradation Exercise 1:

We then blocked in a canvas using our default settings, or paint recipe for Tropical Water. Pthalo Blue, Cadmium Yellow Light and White.

However, starting at the top of the canvas, we mixed a little bit of French Ultramarine and White, adding Pthalo Blue and Cadmium Yellow Light as we came down the canvas into the shallower water, eventually diminishing most of the Pthalo Blue.

**TIP:** When painting gradations (particularly sky gradations), get plenty of colour down, then pull the colours together in a cross hatch fashion to blend. Then use the tip of a clean, large-ish brush to soften the transition even more (Shovel, Rake, Broom).

**TIP:** If you want to paint a luscious cool water, use lovely cool colours.

**TIP:** Determine the sky first – the light will determine everything in the rest of your painting.

**TIP:** When doing gradations of colour, shifts in colour as well as tone will make your paintings POP.

We looked at how versatile a dry brush technique is, in that we can use the same technique to create waves in both low light and bright light (and a million other places). We also illustrated what happens to the elements (ie substrate and colour of the water diminished).

We then investigated our next technique - dry brushing. We discussed how important the surface of the water is. We discovered that the light and the surface of the water, are almost inseparable. And how the light reflected on the surface of the water is what shapes waves and water to a greater degree. We discovered that by reflecting the sky, we flattened water, and by not reflecting the sky, we "steepened" the water (in other words, waves).

We practised our dry brushing techniques and suggested the light from the sky being reflected on the surface of the water (predominantly French Ultramarine Blue + White). We spent some time creating those lovely scalloped shapes that the surface of the water makes (ie ripples).



We experimented with: How much pressure do I apply? How much paint do I need? And do I need any kind of medium?

After determining the surface of the water, we used Burnt Umber, thinned, to suggest the shadow that the face of a breaking wave creates. Harder, sharper lines - steeper, more powerful waves.

We then looked at refraction. The refraction process is what happens when the light hits the surface of the water and creates tiny rainbows of patterned light on the substrate. Refraction is affected by the depth of the water. Hold your small chisel brush on the side and from the front, parallel to the canvas, and loosely between your thumb and forefinger (or fingers) roll it back and forth, and up and down to create a series of loose diamond-y irregular flat rectangles.

The further away from you (ie the higher up the canvas & closer to the horizon), the flatter and smaller, and less distinct the "diamonds" will be. Remember perspective - that is, objects further away from you will appear smaller and flatter and less distinct.

**TIP: When using this technique, try to turn your brain (mostly) off. This exercise is more difficult than it looks. When you master this technique it can be used for a number of different things including representing spinifex grass on the beach, or highlights on clouds on the horizon. Random chaos.**

After doing this, we also discussed that the face of a wave would concentrate light as well, so we added Cadmium Yellow Light, with a touch of Pthalo Blue and White to the face of the wave, to create the impression of being able to see through the face of the wave.

We also decided that a wave was a lump of water, and therefore should have more of the water colour in it. In this instance, Pthalo Blue was ideal. We thinned Pthalo Blue right down with water, and took most of it off the brush. (Thinned paint, dry brush) We painted this glaze on the face of the waves, just under the highlights from the reflected sky. Voila. Lump of water.

We discussed what happens as a wave forms a cylinder, and investigated the light shining through the top of the tube. A touch of Pthalo Blue and White suggests the curve of the inside of the underside of the tube.

So, what colour is whitewash? There are lots of different things that will influence the colour of whitewash. But on this particular occasion, we're dealing with bright light, a warm sunny day and clean water.

We started with the darkest shadow areas in the whitewash - use a mix of Pthalo Blue, Burnt Umber & White. For the next level of shading we added a pile of White to this mix & French Ultramarine Blue. Then we added pure White to build up the final highlights of the whitewash. (Cool to warm).

Adding vertical and horizontal reflections to the front of the whitewash will make your paintings zing with realism! You can create the illusion of a steeply breaking wave, or a soft crumbly wave using these white horizontal (ish) and vertical reflections. (Dry brush down, wet brush across.)

Add some soupy whitewash trails to your foreground using perspective and a loose elliptical pattern, with a vanishing point in mind to create realism.



I also used this demonstration to highlight how to paint highlights and sparkles, and reflections on the surface of the water.

### **Gradation Exercise 2:**

We mixed up a muddy, greeny-grey colour and gradated it, gradually adding French Ultramarine Blue and White as we came down the canvas (we rotated it later on).

### **WATER:**

We reviewed the elements that make up the appearance of water, and focussed on the surface of the water. Observe. Think of painting water and waves as a series of mirrors and windows. The flatter to your eye the water is - the more will be reflected on its surface. The **face of the wave is a window**, and the **back of the wave is a mirror**. This is handy to think of when you are painting waves in water. When you are looking at water at a flat angle, the water becomes very reflective like a mirror, despite the colour of the water.

I now demonstrated a wave painting in a moody, low light. We used the same skills of gradation of colour, dry brushing and then rolled the brush here and there to create broken clouds and flecks of light on the tops of waves. We also discussed using glazes to accentuate the principle of using warmer colours closer to the light source, and cooler colours further away. We also looked at light that was bouncing off the wet rocks, and the face of the whitewash from behind the viewer. This gave depth and interest in the shadows.

Remember the four elements. Depending on the light, you may cancel out, or diminish some of the other elements. Depending on the colour of the water, you may also diminish access to the substrate. One thing remains constant, is the surface of the water, which defines the shape of it.

**TIP:** Any time you wet something, the principles of water apply. That is, wet rocks, wet roads, wet sand. Anything wet you can treat in the same way you would a water painting.

**TIP:** Remember whitewash has perspective. Use the edge of the chisel brush held flat and softly add the “soup” trailing behind the waves. This soup should point towards the vanishing point.



### **Demonstration - Small Waves and Suds**

This demo was designed to do two things. Firstly, emphasise the elements necessary to create the illusion of crystal clear water. And secondly to discuss suds (whitewash), and look at perspective.

Remember, crystal clear water has very little colour. Therefore, we diminished that element (the colour of the water). Substrate will be very very obvious - and the surface of the water and the light are always important, so nothing changes there. Crystal clear water? Diminish the colour of the water.

We discussed how whitewash leaves a trail, and that over a distance the trails are roughly parallel. This is a great opportunity to create the illusion of perspective. Each wave will have it's own vanishing point, and the suds will point loosely in that direction.



**Tip:** To give even more zip add a light shadow within the soupy pattern of a very VERY thin wash of Burnt Umber. Instant depth in the shallows.

What colour is whitewash? Whatever the colour (depending on the light, rain, etc), it stops light, therefore it creates a shadow. Look for the shadows in the whitewash, they will create depth.

### **Demonstration - Ripples**

In this demonstration we changed the colour of the water to see what difference it made. We did a gradation of colour from shallow water through to deeper, and I demonstrated the refraction pattern on the substrate.

We did this quite loosely, in order to create an impression, rather than exact representation.

We altered the colour of the refraction to create the illusion of the pattern receding into the depths. This brought us back to the surface of the water again. We went back to the default technique, which was a dry brush, to create the illusion of the sky reflected on the surface of the water. I can see a pattern forming here. Surface of the water, and the light, are paramount.

I then demonstrated how we could make some waves bigger by adding white to the French Ultramarine Blue, to exaggerate the steepness of the back of the wave.



Thanks to Brigeen for her animated laughter at my poor jokes. Everyone needs a Brigeen in the audience. And thanks to the other ladies for their quietness ;) You all know who you are. Many thanks to Chris for the use of her lovely studio, and for accommodating me; and to Jen for ferrying me around in her sweet ride. Feeling very spoilt.

thanks to everyone for a lovely weekend in sunny Ja!

**For support material about what you learnt on the weekend, check out these pages:**

[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/ocean-landscapes.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/ocean-landscapes.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/marine-painting.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/marine-painting.html)  
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**and check out these video clips! (subscribe to our [Youtube channel](#) for all the latest clips):**

**How To Paint Water - Sparkles & Light:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9m51aI0EcD4>

**How To Paint Tropical Water - Paint Recipes:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vH8xAeu6njY>

**Acrylic Painting Techniques - Shadows in Waves:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfIAtF-0UoM>

**Painting Waves - Perspective in Whitewash:**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDvlwo\\_e9Jl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDvlwo_e9Jl)

**Acrylic Painting Techniques - Reflections in Whitewash:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUDJHY9h9fA>

**Brush Technique:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icWYYJHJFVc>

**How to Paint Water - Refraction:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzCGPAUXJOg>

**Acrylic Painting Techniques - Glazing:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spJETxwJsdK>

**How To Paint Shadows:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDut2Tma1QU>

**Painting Waves - Perspective in Whitewash:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDvlwo\\_e9Jl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDvlwo_e9Jl)

**Acrylic Painting Techniques - Glazing - How to Paint Water:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spJETxwJsdK>

**How To Paint Landscapes - Light Effects:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2\\_JSb9iJVY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2_JSb9iJVY)

**Sunset Painting:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51fpxO\\_dIOY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51fpxO_dIOY)

**Sunset Painting - Gradation Warm Through Cools:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNJkgJROfpQ>