

*Watercolor*  
artist

# Watercolor Fix-it Guide

A do-it-yourself guide to taking control of this fluid medium



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### A simple medium

Watercolor looks best when fresh paint is used, it's not overworked and it's applied with as few brushstrokes as possible, as in *Transfixed* (watercolor, 11 1/4 x 15).



# THE WATERCOLOR REPAIR MANUAL

**Warning:** You may encounter problems on your way to completing a successful watercolor painting. Don't be alarmed. Here are some helpful guidelines from Jean Pederson.

**G**reat expectations. That's what we all feel as we stare at our blank paper, anticipating the beautiful painting that's about to be created. We start with great enthusiasm by throwing paint onto the paper and delighting in the process as the colors move and meld together in a shiny bath of pigment. We're off to a fine start.

Then slowly the paint begins to dry and lose its luster, and we don't feel quite as excited anymore. We begin to lose our confidence and paint with less assertiveness.

We brush over areas that don't feel right and forget to consider carefully our pigment choices. Suddenly that beautiful painting we envisioned seems to have nothing to do with this one.

But take heart. This situation is a common one, and it's easily surmounted because the problems that cause it are really very simple ones. And simple problems have simple solutions. Let's look at some of the most common technical mistakes made in watercolor and the best ways to correct them. Your great expectations deserve that much.

## PROBLEM: Weak colors, streaks and grit

## SOLUTION: Use fresh paint

There's a big difference between fresh watercolor paint and paint that's been left to dry out. First, some pigments just don't recover well after being dried out. Cobalt blue, for example, can dry into small, gritty, granular bits that are difficult to dissolve fully again. When you dip your brush into the well, you'll pick up a few of these small pieces and end up with a streak in the middle of your brushstroke.

Second, old paint causes you to throw off your water-to-pigment ratio. It's difficult to work up a paint color of any intensity with

dried-out paint, so you're likely to add too much water to the well in an effort to scrub the pigment back to life. Too much water in the mixture subsequently results in areas of the painting that are pale and insipid where they should be colorful and bold. Fresh paint and a better water-to-pigment ratio offer you a wider range of color intensity.

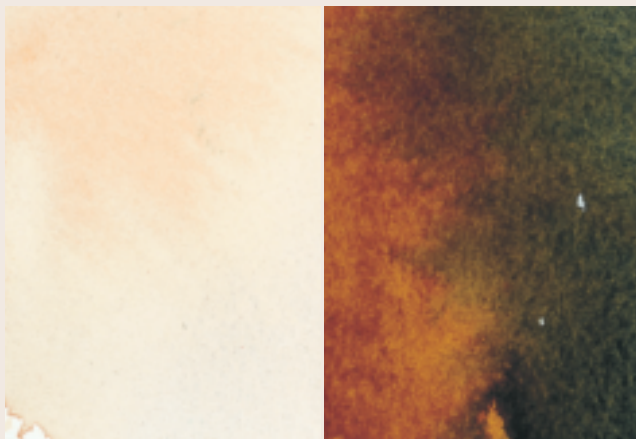
Third, watercolor paint always dries lighter than it initially appears on wet paper or on your palette. To prevent your paintings from looking pale and washed-out, you need to compensate for this drying factor by raising your color intensity with more pigment in your mixtures. But with too much water in your mixture from trying to reactivate the dried paint, or with pigments that have become gritty and hard to dissolve, achieving this high intensity becomes nearly impossible.

Finally, fear is often the artist's biggest obstacle, and it's often simply a lack of confidence that makes us hesitant to waste our time, materials and money on lots of fresh paint. Still others, afraid of making mistakes, feel that it's best to start out painting very light because you can always go darker later on to cover up the errors. Both of these fears can lead to palettes full of old paint that doesn't get removed soon enough. The paint on your palette shouldn't be too precious, and paint can always be removed from the paper by scrubbing or erasing, so there's nothing to fear in using bold color.

Here's a good habit to get into: Prepare for each new painting with the ritual of cleaning all the old paint off the open surface of your palette, and then misting any dry paint in the wells and topping them with fresh, new paint.

A Fountain of Youth

### Younger is better



**Control your water.** Working with old, dried-out paint causes you to use too much water in your mixtures, and because watercolor dries lighter, this leads to a washed-out look (left). A better paint-to-water ratio gives you more intense colors (right).



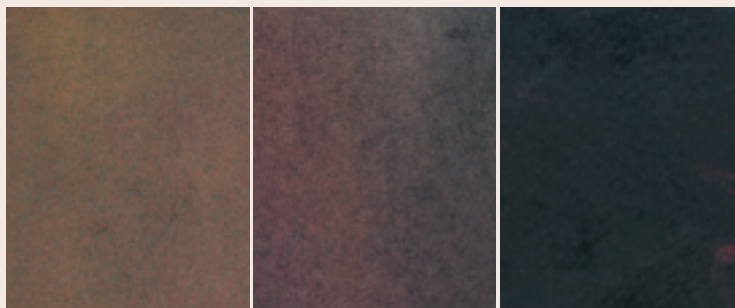
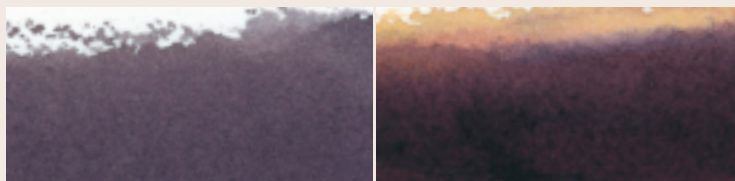
**Avoid grit.** When some paints dry out, they become gritty and granular, making them difficult to dissolve and causing unwanted streaks in your strokes, as in the examples above.

A Principle to Live By  
**Keep it simple**



**Be bold.** Watercolor can always be removed, so don't be afraid to paint with intense mixtures. Even after progressively heavy layering, as you see here, you can recover some white by spraying (see the streak in the center of the example), lifting with a brush (on the left) or scrubbing or erasing.

**Don't overwork.** Mixing paint on the palette, as I did with three primary colors in the example on the left, creates dullness. Layering too many strokes on the palette, as in the example on the right, is more luminous and appealing but still overworked.



**Transparency matters.** Layering opaque colors can create somewhat flat color (left), while transparent layers allow more luminosity (center). Layering either one over previously dried layers (right), however, kills your color.

**PROBLEM: Overworked, dull areas**

**SOLUTION: Paint with as few brushstrokes as possible, and get to know your pigments**

Paint looks its luminous best when laid down on the paper and left alone. The more we play with it, the more it becomes agitated and dull.

When things aren't going well we tend to use more brushstrokes, but that usually makes the situation worse. If this happens, try letting the area get bone dry, then dampen it with clear water and add pure paint to the area with as few strokes as possible. With this method, the last color applied will be the dominant one, providing a distinct color and temperature to the area and recovering some lost luminosity.

Another possible way to deal with an overworked area is to gently spray off the paint. You won't get back to the pristine white of the paper fresh from the factory, but you can usually get light enough to salvage some luminosity with the next application of paint.

The best solution of all, however, is to avoid the overworking problem by putting your paint down with as few strokes as possible and letting it be.

Also, it helps a lot to know the properties of your paints. Which of your paints are transparent, opaque or sedimentary? Which are warm or cool?

Transparent paints are always a safe choice when trying to avoid dull areas, but even they can become dull if you use too many brushstrokes. For the opaques and the sedimentary colors, remember that transparent colors don't mix well with the other two unless you apply the paint and leave it alone. Mixing them on your palette and layering them several times on your paper is a recipe for the dull, overworked look. Opaque paint works very well in your last layers, on top of your transparent colors.

Every color family has pigments that drift warm or cool. The red family can be used as an example. Many people assume that if it's red it must be warm, but if we look at a pigment like permanent alizarin crimson we see a bluish tinge, whereas Winsor red swings toward yellow. Alizarin, being cool, mixes beautifully with blues that contain some red (French ultramarine, for example) to create lovely violet hues. If you mix a yellowish blue with your alizarin, however, you'll get a neutral purple.

Finally, areas of your painting with lots of layers or very dense amounts of paint are difficult to paint over without dulling the area. If you attempt to glaze over these areas, especially if there are opaque and sedimentary colors in there, you're likely to be overworking. Again, if you must do something, try brushing clear water over the area and then go in with pure color and as few strokes as possible, or spray off the paint and then reapply the color with clean pigment.

**PROBLEM: Unwanted lines**  
**SOLUTION: Use a larger brush, paint vertically and remember the other tips**

For Better Shapes

**Control your lines**

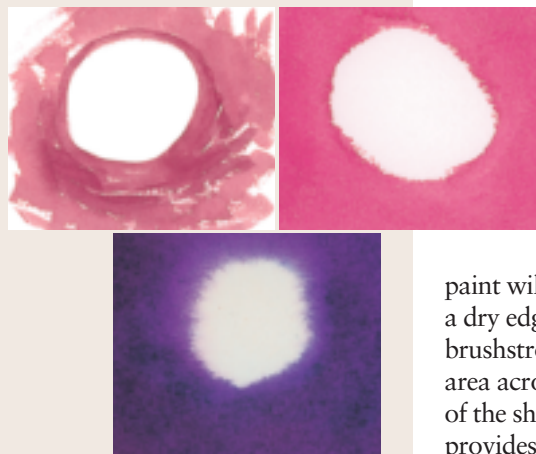
**Use the right brush.**

Using a brush that's too small creates unwanted lines, as in the pear on the left. A bigger brush leaves you with fewer edges, as on the right.



**Watch for outlines.**

Painting around a shape can create lines, especially if the brush is too small (in the example on the left) or when painting on dry paper (on the right). Wetting the paper helps to soften those lines (on the bottom).



A small brush can hold only a small amount of paint. If you're painting on dry paper, you'll apply a brushstroke, go back to the palette to reload the brush, and by the time you get back

to the paper you're left with annoying lines and streaks. Use a larger brush and you'll avoid this problem. Painting on wet or damp paper helps you avoid unwanted lines, as well.

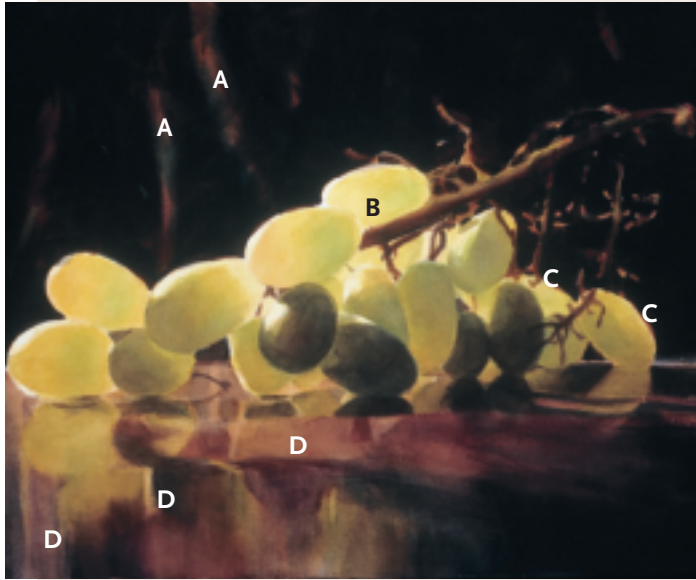
Painting vertically helps, too. When painting at an easel, try to make a bead of paint on the down side of your stroke and, when you apply the next stroke, touch the bead with your brush and let it run into the new stroke. Continue this process until you reach the bottom of the area you're painting. When you're at the bottom, simply take a dry brush and remove the bead to avoid any unwanted drips.

As with using a brush that's too small, painting around an already-painted object can cause unwanted streaks and lines. By the time you've painted around your shape, paint will have dried in some areas, resulting in a dry edge before you can connect an adjoining brushstroke. Instead, try painting the larger area across the paper while creating the space of the shape within it, which consistently provides you with a wet edge to work with.

## The Results

### Putting it together

These two paintings of grapes, *Fruitful Reflections* (left; watercolor, 14 x 17) and *A Whole Bowl of Fruit* (right; watercolor, 16 x 20), show how all these principles can be integrated to create a strong painting.



- A Paint lifted off and repainted with gold
- B Strong pigment-to-water ratio so that the color didn't dry too light
- C No unwanted lines inside or outside the shapes
- D Paint lifted off without repainting



- E Dark values not overworked
- F Washes painted vertically to avoid lines
- G Large brush used to paint around shapes
- H Last layer has some opaques over transparent color

As I stated before, you should watch out for gritty, granular paint. These granules can catch in your brush and cause unwanted streaks that are difficult to remove. Use fresh paint to avoid these little gremlins. And again, watch your water-to-paint ratio. When painting into wet, already-painted areas, you can get unwanted lines and blossoms when you have excess water in your brush, as the new load of liquid pushes the previously applied pigment outward. When the paint dries, lines and blossoms occur. Some artists use these blossoms to their advantage, however, and knowing how they're created will help you use them strategically.

Understanding your materials and what they can do for you can take you a long way

toward avoiding the common problems discussed here. You may want to deliberately use these irregularities sometimes, but you must have the knowledge and the ability to control them. And, most importantly, a good watercolorist must know how to avoid and overcome the unwanted problems they create.

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—**JEAN PEDERSON**, a frequent contributor to *Watercolor Magic* and to *The Artist's Magazine*, has work in the Royal Collection in London, as well as in important corporate and private collections throughout Canada. She has won the Gold Medal of Honor at the New York Adirondacks International Exhibition (2002) and the Silver Medal of Honor of the American Watercolor Society (2001). She lives in Calgary, Alberta.

## PROBLEM: Paper that buckles

## SOLUTION: Stretch the paper before painting on it

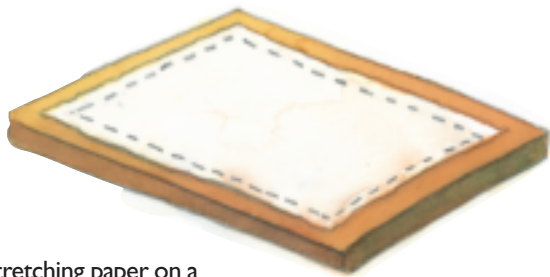
If you're working on 140-lb. or thinner paper, you'll need to stretch the paper before painting to avoid buckling. Catherine Anderson suggests three ways to go about it:

- On a board using tape: First wet your paper, front and back, with a big wash brush or soak it in a bathtub until it's limp. Let the excess water drip off, then place the paper on a board (I use a lightweight watercolor board) and tape or staple around all of the edges. It's best to use the watercolor tape that's made for this. Drafting tape is OK, but don't use masking tape or brown shipping tape because they'll pull up some of your paper when you peel it off your painting.

- On a board using staples: Wet your paper as explained above, then place it on your watercolor board and staple about a half inch from the edge of the paper all the way around the edges (while the paper is still wet). Board made out of basswood is soft enough to take the staples. After drying naturally for a couple of hours, the paper will be tight and ready to use.

- Over stretcher bars: Another good way to stretch watercolor paper is to place the wet paper over stretcher bars and staple the sides as if you're stretching a canvas. After drying naturally, it'll be tight as a drum. Inexpensive canvas stretcher bars come in many sizes. Be sure your paper is big enough to go over the sides, with enough overlap for the staples on the side of the bars. You can trim the paper when finished if need be.

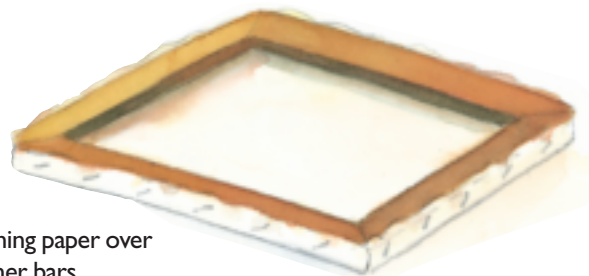
Watercolor blocks are another option. They come pre-stretched and are handy to use outdoors. And if you want to avoid all of this work and struggle with your paper, then I'd suggest you buy 300-lb. paper. It costs more than the 140-lb. paper, but not that much. You never have to stretch this paper and it never buckles—once you try it, you won't want to go back to using 140-lb. paper ever again. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Let's face it: Watercolor is hard enough. Why struggle with your paper?



Stretching paper on a board using staples



Stretching paper on a board using tape



Stretching paper over stretcher bars

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—**CATHERINE ANDERSON**, a signature member of the American Watercolor Society, also serves on its board of directors. She's the author of the *Basic Watercolor Answer Book* (North Light Books, 1999) and teaches classes around the world. An award-winning artist, Catherine offers a one-on-one intensive workshop in her studio in Houston, Texas, and her first video, *Creating Multiple Glazes in Your Watercolors*, is now available. For more information on classes and her work, or to order her video, visit her Web site at [www.catherineanderson.net](http://www.catherineanderson.net).

**PROBLEM:** Uninteresting passages of color

**SOLUTION:** Use the right wash for the job

Thin, fluid coats of paint, washes are the very essence of watercolor painting. One of the most exciting and unique qualities of the medium is the way in which atmosphere and light can be conveyed by a few brushstrokes swept over white paper. The effects you get with your washes depend on how you apply them. A wash can cover the entire paper or just a small area. Cathy Johnson demonstrates three basic washes: flat, graded and variegated.



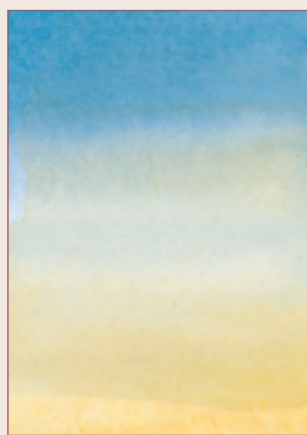
Flat Wash



Graded Wash



Graded Wash (Volume)



Variegated Wash

*Demonstrations by Cathy Johnson*

A flat wash should be even in color and value, with no gradation from top to bottom or side to side. It's used either to inject color in specific areas of a painting or to cover the entire area of paper (i.e. to tone the paper before painting or to unify the painting after other colors have been applied.) To make a flat wash, use the largest brush possible and try to keep the saturation of the wash (the ratio of paint to water) consistent. A very wet surface is the key. After you've applied the wash, pick up your wet paper and tilt it up and down and side to side, letting gravity correct the uneven areas.

A graded wash is one that gets progressively lighter in value. It's perfect for landscapes where mountains fade into the mist or dark, rich skies fade into the horizon. Graded washes are also used for creating a look of volume in an object (as in the tree shown here). To make a graded wash, you can start with wet or dry paper. Your first stroke should have the strongest saturation of color you want to use. Before each additional stroke, dip your brush into clean water. This will dilute the paint in your brush. Continue the process all the way to the bottom of the paper. The last stroke should be clear water. After you've learned to control this first wash, try a second color going in the opposite direction.

A variegated wash is like a graded wash, but uses more than one color. This kind of wash is often used in landscapes to create a horizon where land and sky meet. To make a variegated wash, first do a graded wash with the most saturated color at the top. Allow this color to dry, then do a graded wash with the second color at the bottom, glazing over the first wash where the two meet.

—**CATHY JOHNSON**, artist and writer, is the author of 22 books including *Watercolor Pencil Magic* (North Light Books, 2002) and a contributing editor to *Watercolor Magic*, *The Artist's Magazine* and *Country Living*. For more information or to see examples of her work, visit <http://cathyjohnson.info>.



## PROBLEM: **Streaky washes**

## SOLUTION: **Follow this checklist**

Trouble-shoot your streak problems with these six tips from Catherine Anderson:

### **MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A FIRST-RATE WASH BRUSH.**

I use an HK Holbein hake brush made out of pure goat hair. There are many inexpensive imitations of this brush that won't give you a clean, smooth wash, so be careful. If you try to cut corners in your brushes, you may pay for it in the long run.

Here's another tip to keep in mind when selecting a brush for your washes: Choose a size that corresponds to the size of your paper. The larger the paper, the larger the brush should be. The larger brush will allow you to apply a wash in several clean sweeps. For a full 22 x 30-inch sheet of watercolor paper, I use either a 4¾-inch or a 6-inch hake brush. Unfortunately, these larger brushes can be hard to find—most stores only carry 3-inch hake brushes. I order mine from John Bates at the Black Horse Fine Art Supply store in Burlington, Vermont (800/790-2552, john@black-horse.com). You can also call Holbein for information on stores and catalogs that carry their hake brushes (800/682-6686).

### **MAKE SURE YOU USE A GOOD PAPER WITH PLENTY OF SIZING.**

Otherwise, the water from the washes can remove the sizing and your paper will react like an ink blotter when you go in to paint details. Because I do so many washes, I use a heavy 300-lb. paper.

### **MAKE SURE YOUR PAINT IS THOROUGHLY MIXED.**

Generally, I mix my paint on a white plastic plate using a brush I don't intend to paint with. If you use your wash brush to mix the paint, little globs of undiluted color may get trapped in the hairs as you mix your wash, and transfer to your paper as specks of color. Unfortunately, you can't see these globs until they're already on your paper.

### **MAKE SURE YOUR WASH MIXES ARE DILUTED ENOUGH.**

Too much paint, not enough water, could be the reason your washes are streaky. My rule of thumb is: The thinner the washes, the better.

### **MAKE SURE YOU APPLY YOUR WASHES IN A QUICK, EVEN FASHION.**

Blending in a rapid, crisscross fashion is best. To make sure you can move quickly, and not have to slow down or stop, be sure to have everything at your fingertips before you begin applying the wash. If you have to stop, even for a moment, your last stroke will almost certainly dry and leave a streak.

### **MAKE SURE YOUR PAPER IS EVENLY WET WITH CLEAN WATER BEFORE APPLYING YOUR WASH.**

This is the best way I know to prevent streaks. I always wet the entire back of my watercolor paper first with a clean wash brush. The wet paper sticks easily to my Plexiglas work surface, keeping it from buckling or moving around when I apply washes. If a bubble appears, I just pick up the corner of the paper closest to the bubble and rewet the area underneath. Then I gently roll the paper back down, being careful not to touch the middle of the paper, as the oil from my fingers will stay on the paper and my fingerprints will begin to show after many washes.

Once this is done, I flip the paper over and wet the front. I don't want a sopping wet surface, however. So if this happens, I simply keep washing the water off with my brush until I get a nice glaze of water.

After I've applied my washes, I'm careful to wipe underneath the edges of the paper frequently to prevent excess water and paint from seeping back into the paper. After I finish each wash, I pick up the painting by its corners and lay it down on another piece of Plexiglas. Then I keep an eye on it while it's drying, continuing to wipe the edges of the paper as necessary.

Another easy way to prevent streaks is to make sure your painting is dry before applying additional washes. I put my papers on drying racks with a fan blowing directly on them. Depending on your climate, and the time of year, you may not have to go to such lengths to get your paper to dry.

—CATHERINE ANDERSON

**PROBLEM:** Creating areas of white  
**SOLUTION:** Using masking fluid

In transparent watercolor, there is no white paint. You can preserve the white of your paper with masking fluid. Catherine Anderson shows you how in these four steps:



**Step 1** Paint the areas you want to save with masking fluid. Be precise. Let the masking fluid dry thoroughly so it's no longer tacky to the touch.



**Step 2** Paint your background right over the masked area.



**Step 3** When your background is dry, gently remove the masking by peeling it off with your fingers.



**Step 4** Finish by working on the details of your masked areas.

**REMOVING MASKING FLUID FROM PAPER**

One way to remove it is to peel it off with your clean little fingers. Another is to use a rubber cement pickup. I just discovered a great product that helps me do the job on small areas I can't get to easily with a regular rubber cement pickup. It's a rubber cement pickup in a roll form called Mitsuwa Rubber Cleaner (by HK Holbein, 800/682-6686).

**REMOVING MASKING FLUID FROM BRUSHES**

The lifespan of a masking brush is short. You may be able to prolong its life by dipping it in a soapy water solution and wiping the excess water before you dip it in your masking fluid. Be sure to rinse your brush thoroughly with soap and water, as it will be greasy after taking

masking out. If you don't you'll ruin your painting. Masking brushes will eventually become useless. So don't use your good brushes for masking.

—CATHERINE ANDERSON

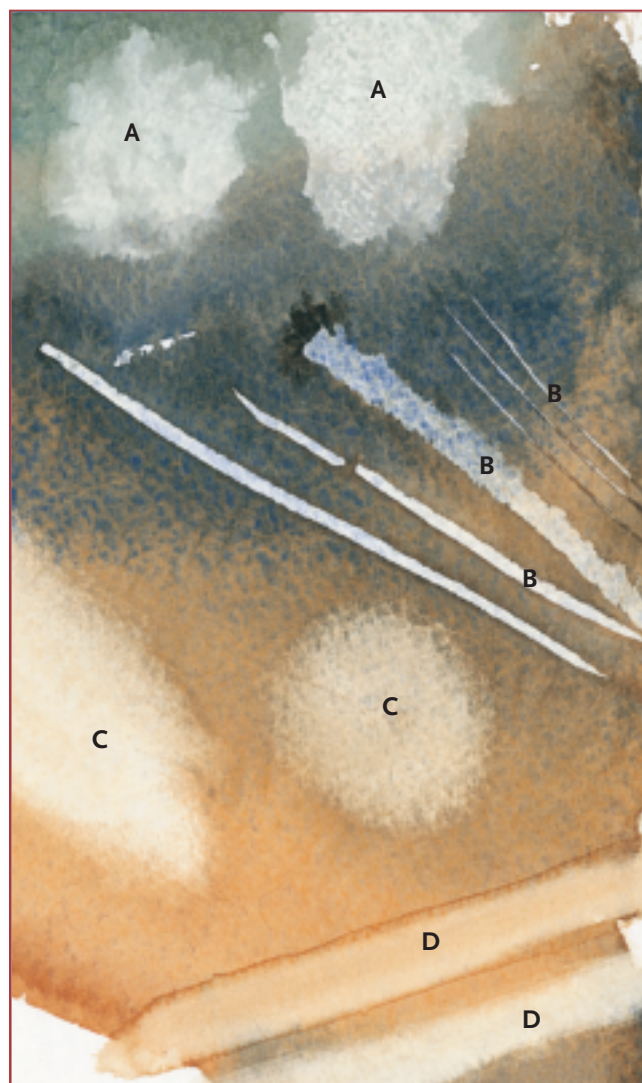
**Masking Tip:**

Shaking a bottle of masking fluid puts air bubbles into the emulsion that will break on the surface of your paper, producing pinholes where paint can leak through. If you must, stir your masking fluid—don't shake.

## PROBLEM: Color mistakes

## SOLUTION: Lifting and correcting

In varying degrees, you can remove or “lift” paint from areas of paper you accidentally painted over or sections you want to repaint either while the paint is still wet or after it has dried. Cathy Johnson demonstrates the different ways you can lift color off your paper below.



Demonstration by Cathy Johnson

- A Lifting with a sponge
- B Lifting by scraping with a knife
- C Lifting with a tissue
- D Lifting with a brush

To lift color from a wet surface, the lifting instrument (a tissue, a towel or a brush) must be drier than the surface but not completely dry. You can also lift with kitchen or natural sponges, lace or fabrics for a variety of effects. To lift from dry areas, gently scrub the paint free with a stiff, damp brush, such as a synthetic or bristle brush. Just be sure to clean the brush frequently so you won't grind the loosened paint deep into the paper's fibers.

The probability of correcting a mistake relies a great deal on the type of paper (smooth or rough) and medium (staining or non-staining paints).

When it comes to paper, some types allow you to lift more easily than others. Generally, the less absorbent a paper is, the easier it is to lift off paint. A paper's absorbency depends largely on the amount of sizing it has. It's usually easier to lift paint off smoother papers because the paint sits on the surface a little longer before it's absorbed. You'll need to consider the kind of work you do, then experiment with different paper types to find out which works best for you.

Paints are tricky. Some (such as alizarin crimson, Winsor blue and green, and phthalo blue and green) can stain the paper—and no degree of scrubbing can restore whiteness to the paper.

—CATHERINE ANDERSON

### Lifting Tip:

Rather than send your old brushes to the dump, save them for such chores as lifting paint. Shorten the bristles on a couple of old brushes (to make them stiffer) and keep them for scrubbing.

**PROBLEM:** Dull, lifeless darks

**SOLUTION:** Create interesting, lively darks by glazing complementary colors

When Catherine Anderson wants to make something darker, she simply glazes over it with a thin layer of a complementary color.

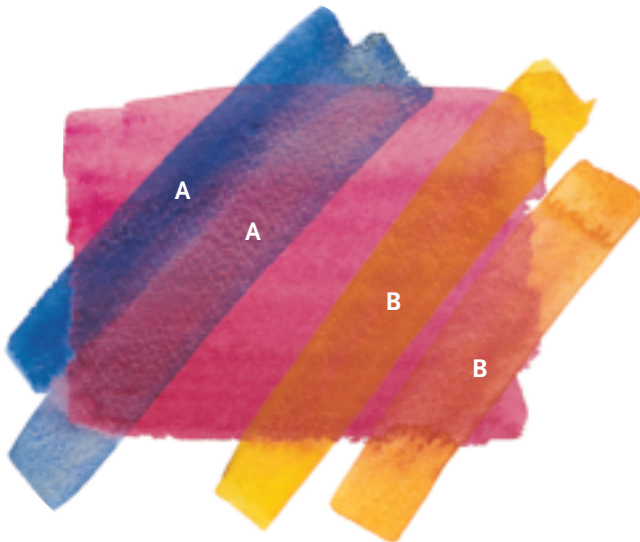
To darken a red, for example, you could keep painting the same red over red or try glazing over the original color with a darker red. But glazing over the original color with its complement (green) will not only darken the original color, but also make the color more interesting. Just be sure that the first color is absolutely dry before the next layer is applied, or you might disturb or lift the existing paint. To avoid this, work with the largest brush possible and brush on the new layer quickly, with a minimum of brushstrokes. When glazing, it's also important to work on a paper that won't let the paint lift too easily, such as rough or cold-pressed.

In *Can You Feel the Magic?* (watercolor on cold-pressed paper, 21½ x 29½, at right), notice that all the purples and warm reds in the mist are also in the ground, and all the colors in the earth below are also in the mist above. Yes, the mist has many thin layers of yellow, purple and other washes. In other words, as above, so below.



The roof of the barn is a mixture of the colors used in the mountains, trees and mist, with a little red and burnt sienna which are right next to the green trees, the complement of red! There is also a bit of green in the barn, which ties in nicely with the red roof and pink blossoms on the cherry trees. By glazing complementary colors, you just can't miss!

—CATHERINE ANDERSON



Demonstration by Cathy Johnson

## Glazing for Luminous Color

This process involves the application of thin layers of transparent color, one layer over another. Glazing allows the white of the paper to glow through the transparent layers, producing luminous color.

- A Glazed purple
- B Glazed orange

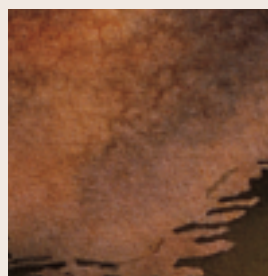
**PROBLEM:** Creating texture with watercolor

**SOLUTION:** Use these 10 simple techniques

There are more ways to create texture in watermedia than you can shake salt at. Here Leslie Russell, Betsy Dillard Stroud and Nancy Livesay share their techniques.

**Texture Up Close**

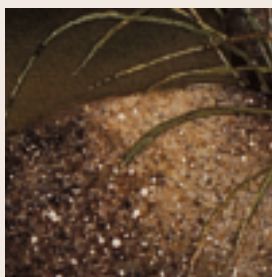
You can create all kinds of interesting textures and effects—those that imitate natural or man-made surfaces, and those that are purely aesthetic. But, if you set out to paint a painting full of texture too real to believe, you may falter with self-consciousness. If you set out to try a new tool and have fun, you may step higher than you dreamed. So enjoy yourself and try spattering, lifting paint, pouring, impressing the surface, and more.



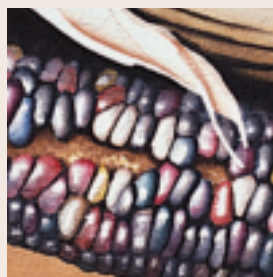
1. Sprinkle or fling Kosher salt on wet or almost dry paint.



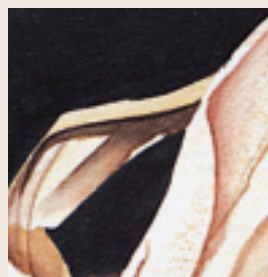
2. Load a toothbrush with paint, then rub along the bristles to spatter color.



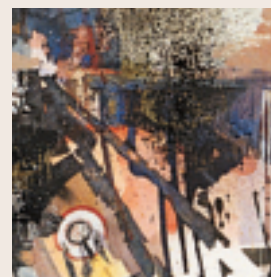
3. Spatter masking fluid to save pinpoints of white.



4. Abrade sections of dry paint with an emery board.



5. Lift paint by gouging the surface with a razor blade or an X-Acto knife.



6. Pour paint, then tilt the paper and allow gravity to do its thing.



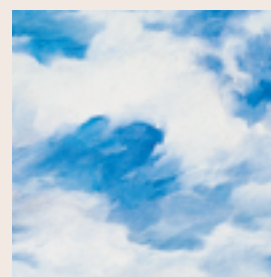
7. Impress the painted surface with an image carved into a soft linoleum block.



8. Drizzle thin streams of alcohol onto wet paint.



9. Spray paint, medium or gesso onto your surface.



10. Dab wet paint with a paper towel or the tip of a dry brush.

# 10 COMMON WATERCOLOR PROBLEMS

## 10 GREAT, MUST-KNOW SOLUTIONS

Contrary to popular belief, you can correct mistakes in watercolor. Keep this handy fix-it guide from Mark Willenbrink close by to help you out of your next fix.

PROBLEM	CAUSE
1. <b>Pale colors:</b> colors that look drab and washed out.	1. Being timid; not having a well-defined subject; working with a small brush; not mixing up enough color; using hard paints that have dried out on the palette.
2. <b>Overdoing opaque:</b> paint that's too thick and heavy.	2. Not mixing enough water with your paints.
3. <b>Smears:</b> paint that lifts off when you apply your next brushstroke.	3. Applying a second wash while the first one is still damp.
4. <b>Backruns:</b> unwanted watermarks.	4. Letting wet paint puddle at the edge of a wash or run back into an area that's starting to dry.
5. <b>Unnatural colors:</b> colors that look foreign or as if they don't belong.	5. Painting with raw colors, straight from the tube.
6. <b>Wrinkles:</b> hills and valleys that form on the paper.	6. Using paper that's too thin or unmounted.
7. <b>Spots:</b> unwanted lines and blemishes	7. Not protecting tools or paper from dust, lint, hairs or grease.
8. <b>Uneven washes:</b> inconsistent color coverage.	8. Applying an uneven wash of water to your paper before applying a wash of wet paint.
9. <b>Good start, but . . .</b> when the results aren't what you hoped for.	9. Giving up too soon—the painting may not be complete—or not having a clear end in sight.
10. <b>Overworked:</b> when you don't know when to stop.	10. Expecting perfection—even when you're not sure what that is.

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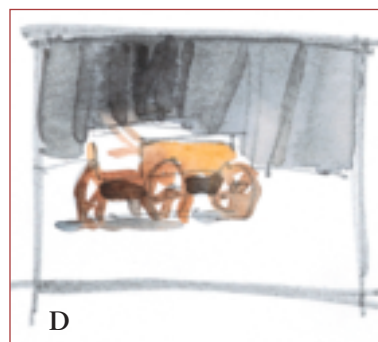
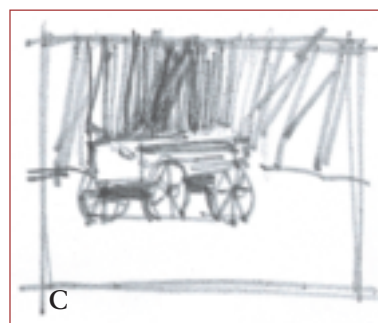


### The Solution to Pale Colors

What a difference materials make. By using a larger brush and fresh paints for the second painting (B), I was able to get more dramatic color, and thus a better painting.

### SOLUTION

1. Plan ahead; use reference materials; use the right size brush for the job; mix up generous amounts of paint; squeeze out fresh paint from the tube.
2. Take advantage of the transparent qualities of watercolors. Don't paint as if you're using oils.
3. Make sure the previous wash is completely dry before applying another wash over it.
4. Mop up any extra paint and water at the edges of a wash with a dry brush or rag before any of it runs back into paint that's in the process of drying.
5. Introduce colors from elsewhere in the painting into each new color you use; this is a sure way to achieve color harmony. Another solution is to mix the color straight from the tube with a small amount of its complementary color.
6. Try a paper with a thicker weight than you usually use; use paper that's in block form, or stretch and mount the paper on a board before painting; try paper that's partly or completely synthetic, such as Strathmore Aquarius and YUPO, which are less likely to wrinkle.
7. Make sure your materials and work area are clean. Wash your hands and don't handle the watercolor paper any more than necessary.
8. Make sure the preliminary coating of water is evenly dispersed—it should leave a smooth, even sheen on the paper—before painting wet-on-wet. Using a big, wide, flat brush to coat the paper with water can help. Also, use paper that's not prone to wrinkling (see solution #6).
9. Plan your painting with color and thumbnail sketches; have good reference material; press on to the end even if you're discouraged half way through.
10. Set the painting aside for awhile. Looking at it later, with a fresh eye, may give you a new perspective. Also, go ahead and mat and frame the painting. The "finished look" may give you a new respect for your work.



### From Good Start to Great Finish

I started with a black-and-white thumbnail sketch (C) to plan values and composition. Then I added color to the sketch (D) to work out a color scheme. Because I'd resolved all the color, value and composition problems beforehand, finishing the painting was smooth sailing (E).

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