

# Light + Water = Magic

## 9th March 2013

### Workshop Notes

#### Introduction:

Today we are going to cover some skills, theory & exercises which will (hopefully!) translate to all your paintings!

We firstly covered some theory with these fundamental skills:

- Perception
- Conceptual
- Technical

And reiterated the three areas which can affect your technical skills, or more specifically, your use of a brush:

- Amount of paint on your brush
- Amount of pressure you apply
- Amount of medium used (including water)

**Managing your palette is especially important when using strong pigments - even a tiny touch of Pthalo Blue in the wrong place can equal disaster!**

#### Exercise 1:

Using an medium sized brush and pigment only (no water or medium added), see how many marks and what different marks you can making using only one brush, one colour. Think pressure, and how many different ways you can use your brush.

Now add medium (like water for example) and see how that affects the marks you make.

**TIP: Using a specified medium vs water:**

Using water as a medium tends to break down the pigment in your paint. Using a specified medium means that the pigment is suspended in a layer of plastic, and what happens is the light shines through the layer of plastic, hits the surface & then bounces back to your eye = amazing luminosity! The impact of using glazes in your painting is unparalleled for creating depth and light.

You can use your brush like a surgical instrument, or a hammer, you can make different shapes, for example trees, rocks, grass, shrubs. Think nature.. The number of marks you can make is amazing! Take the time to figure out what your brush can do - educate and train your brush so you know what it will do in any situation.

You can train your brush to do what you want - for example flatten it out on both sides - shape your brush. Turn your chisel on the side - you now have a thin line.

**Make sure you put plenty of paint out!!**

## Reiterate the Theory of Water:

### The Four Elements:

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

**Observe. Think of painting water as a series of mirrors and windows.**

**TIP: Anything wet ie wet rocks, wet sand, wet streets etc can be thought of using the same theories. For example a wet rock, the rock becomes the substrate, there is very little water colour, so the surface becomes quite reflective.**

**Translate this theory to any “wet scene” you want to paint!**

### Starting your water scene:

Create your water colour & substrate all at once - gradation technique - use a large brush to paint a gradation using a “Default Setting” mixture for clean, clear tropical water, which is Pthalo Blue, Cadmium Yellow Light & White. Use as big a brush as possible.

Gradually add more Cadmium Yellow Light and White and blend down the canvas in a gradation. Use columns on your palette to create a “visual history” of your colour.



### Refraction technique:

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 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 - irregular flat rectangles.

The further away from you (ie the higher up the canvas), the flatter and smaller the “diamonds” will be. Remember perspective - that is objects further away from you will appear smaller and flatter.

**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 under clouds on the horizon.**



### Creating the waves:

We covered a bit of theory on waves as windows and mirrors, that is 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.

### “W’s”

Use the sky “default settings” of Ultramarine Blue + White, and a very dry brush to make a series of loose and flat “w’s” on your canvas which depicts the sky reflecting off the back of the waves.

**TIP:** If you make a pattern out of the “w’s”, your painting will look like a set for a pantomime!

**TIP:** At the top of the canvas ie further away from you, there will be more sky reflected, or more mirrors (more “w’s”), or less water showing.

Closer to the bottom of the canvas there will be more water showing.

**TIP:** With each process, start with the darker colour and then add the lighter colours.

When you want to paint a water scene, ask yourself a series of questions so you can work it out:

- What is the substrate?
- What is the colour of the water?
- How much of the light is reflected on the surface?

Then paint it in that order, first the substrate, then the colour of the water, then the surface (and the light).

### Exercise 3:

Let's focus now on the light. Let's create a moonlit night with this “muddy” gradation.

Use your swatches and create a dirty grey-purple-ish colour (use your swatch as a guide), using Red, Blue & Yellow.

Create a horizontal (horizon) line and create a gradation from dark, adding more White and Yellow as you create a light source in the centre.

Create a mountain range with a darker horizon line and then add some thin white highlights and soften with a large dry brush to create wispy clouds.

Set up your light first so you can paint the water!



**TIP:** Let the painting lead you.

The concept of using warmer colours closer to the light source was introduced.

Now come down the canvas and paint your water. Add detail to your waves to create realism.

**TIP:** The secret to making stuff appear wet and shiny is reflections - use a dry brush technique to make loose vertical marks, then some horizontal marks with the same dry brush technique.

On this occasion white works perfectly as it reflects the whitewash of the broken wave.

**Remember wet sand, and even shells and rocks (when wet) are highly reflective!!**

Homework: Investigate mistakes. That doesn't work? Why?

**TIP:** How much information can you leave out to get your point across?

Painting is all about illusion.

Find, and paint the information that gets an emotional response, and you are on a winner!



# Thanks to everyone for a great day!

**For support material about what you learnt today, check out these pages:**

[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/how-to-paint-water.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/how-to-paint-water.html)

[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/painting-waves.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/painting-waves.html)

[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/gradation.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/gradation.html)

[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/brush-technique.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/brush-technique.html)

[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/acrylic-glazing.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/acrylic-glazing.html)

[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/support-files/aa013defaultsettingtropicalwater.pdf](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/support-files/aa013defaultsettingtropicalwater.pdf)

**and these video clips!:**

**How to Paint Water - Refraction on our Youtube channel ExploreAcrylics:**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzCGPAUXJOg&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzCGPAUXJOg&feature=player_embedded)

**How to Paint Trees - Default Settings on our Youtube channel ExploreAcrylics:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXbtL9HrgUs>

**How to Paint Wet Rocks - on our Youtube channel ExploreAcrylics:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4qv1uzfW7E>

**Overheard in class:**

**“Nothing’s never not-saveable!”**

**“Nature puts colours together that work - based on the light.”**

