

Watercolor Painting

Color Your World, Rest Your Mind

By: Deborah Liv Johnson



Imagine a quiet place — a sturdy table, a comfortable chair, a tablet of thick paper, brushes and a palette of bright colors. You have cleared your schedule, turned your electronic devices off and all that remains is creative possibility and the rhythm of steady breathing. You are ready to begin.

Painting is one of the best ways to be present — to be in the moment. Think of it as something as important as exercise. Carve out a few hours each week, during your morning, your evening or on the weekend. You might even schedule a weekly date with your brushes and paper.

Watercolor is a wonderful painting medium — simple for beginners, challenging as one's skills progress and all-consuming. Whether beginning or advanced, each level has its merits and rewards. No skill level is required to begin — just a desire to dip one's brush inside a jar of water before exploring the palette of colors.

"I really enjoy painting," says watercolor artist Moira Johannessen. "You can get totally absorbed in it. It can be challenging but when you paint something well, you feel wonderful about it. I paint nearly every day."

Born in London, England, Johannessen has lived in California for most of her life. She is a life-long artist but didn't put everything aside to paint until her children were grown and she retired to the desert. Johannessen teaches watercolor painting at the Desert Art Center in Palm Springs.

"My students love to paint because it is so stimulating and they enjoy the company of other artists in the class," explains Johannessen. "Each class is three hours long which may sound like a lot of time, but it goes by so quickly. They really enjoy the process of painting."



Getting Started

The tools of the trade for watercolor painting are as varied as in any artistic endeavor, but painting can begin with the most basic items: a few decent brushes, a tray of dried watercolor discs or paint tubes, watercolor paper and a jar of clean water. Paper towels are handy for clean-up.

Watercolor paper traditionally comes in three surfaces: hotpressed (the smoothest), cold-pressed (medium texture) and rough (roughest texture). Hot-pressed paper is especially good for scenes with background washes and for re-wetting edges. It doesn't soak up paint as quickly as cold-pressed paper. Generally, watercolor paper is determined by weight — the higher the number, the thicker the paper. 140-pound paper is a good, standard thickness, while 300-pound is thick like cardboard.

Inexpensive watercolor brushes are fine for beginning artists, but quality brushes are capable of finer detail and control and may last longer.

What to Paint

The possibilities of what to paint are endless. Go abstract, or find something simple to paint, like a flower. You may also try painting a photograph or book cover. Play with your colors and mix them to create new colors. You may want to sketch an outline first in pencil or you may want to add detail using a black pen, once your painting has dried. Experiment, practice and most importantly, enjoy what you're doing.

Making Cards

Once you've purchased some good watercolor paper, you may want to cut a few sheets into card-size pieces, based on the size of unused envelopes you may have in your stationery stash. Cut the paper with enough room to slip easily into the accompanying envelope. Home-made cards can be a wonderful surprise — add a short note on the back and know that in our digital world, this card will stand out as a real treasure.

Take a Class

Classes are a great way to improve your painting skills, to meet other artists and to receive feedback on your work. Often, classes are offered as a series or as individual, ongoing classes. Desert Art Center in Palm Springs is one of several businesses in the valley offering art classes, including painting and other media.

