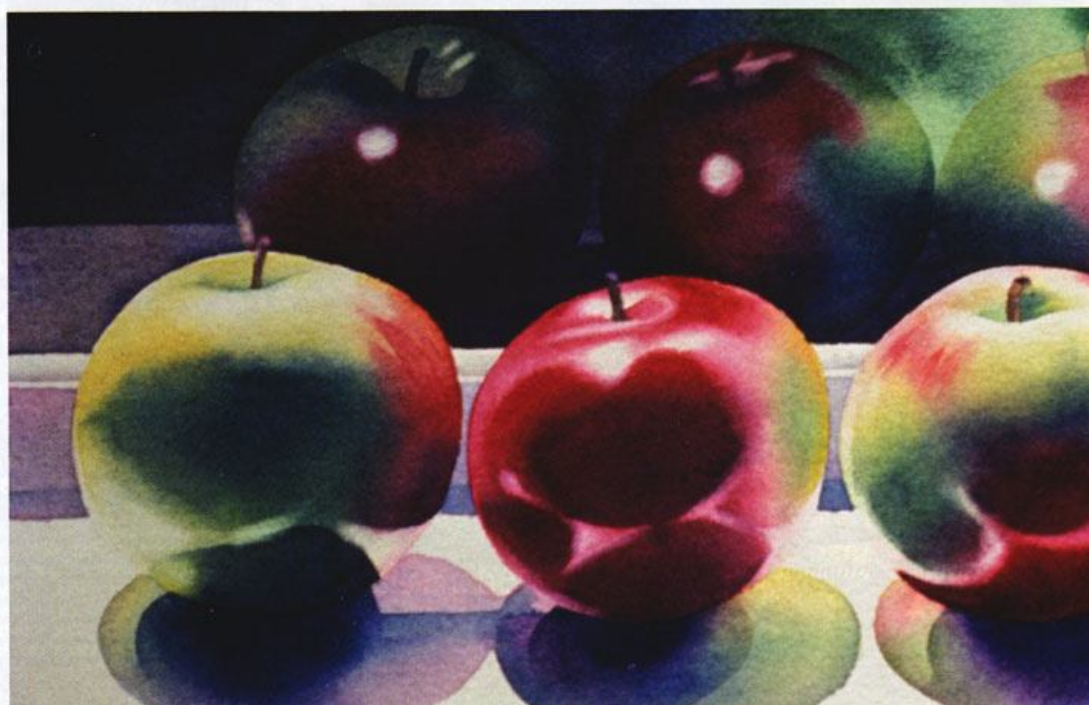
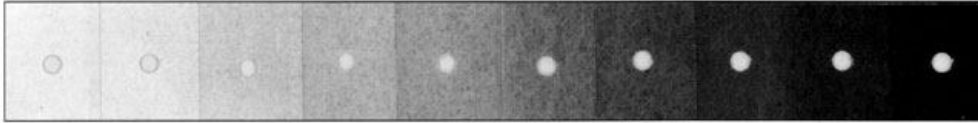


Following a four-step application of color washes, I capture the glow of light, the richness of color, and the realistic detail of my subjects.

FOUR STEPS TO A GLOWING WATERCOLOR

by Barbara Fox





paint watercolors very realistically, with an emphasis on color and contrast, almost to an extreme. In fact, many of my paintings are more about color and light than they are about specific subjects. I arrived at this system of painting after years of observation, reading, and painting, and now I want to share my system with others.

A Quick Look at the Steps

The four steps of my process can be summarized as follows:

Step 1. Glow. I lightly draw the major outlines of my subject on watercolor paper with graphite and apply a light wet-in-wet wash of warm and cool colors over the entire stark white sheet so it has a flow of light pigment.

Step 2. Base. After the glow is dry, I lay in flat, graded, and wet-in-wet washes of color to establish a general description of the image.

Step 3. Contrast. I build up from two to five layers of a more extensive palette of colors to create a sense of depth in the values, and gradually build up contrast until the painting is nearly complete.

Step 4. Details. I lift and lighten areas of color, darken lines, erase graphite marks, tone down colors, remove masking fluid, and use any other technique that will add balance and detail to the painting.

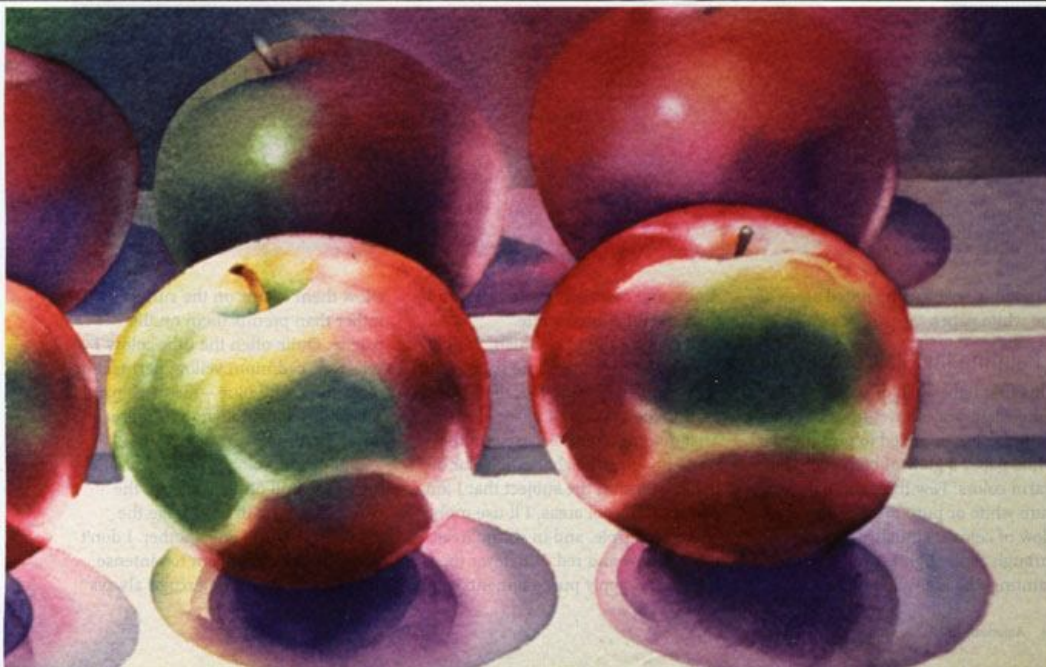
Getting Started

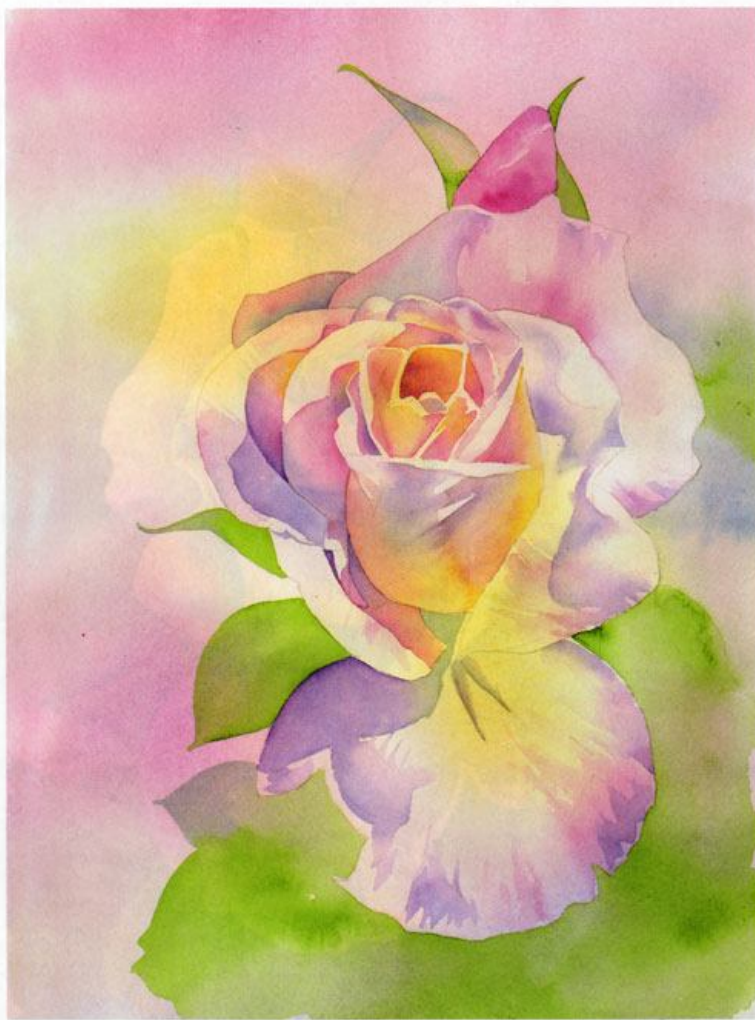
I sometimes work from life, especially when I'm teaching a class or workshop or when I'm on a painting trip; however, most of the time I paint from photographs. In either situation, I follow the same four-step painting procedure. Before I prepare a palette of colors, however, I sketch my subject on a sheet of drawing paper to work out an effective composition of shapes and

values. Once I have that resolved, I enlarge the sketch to the size of the watercolor paper using a photocopier and, because I don't have a light box, I tape the copy to a window. Next, I tape a sheet of 300-lb watercolor paper over the photocopy while it is up on the window, so that daylight will make the drawing visible under the watercolor paper, and then I lightly trace the important lines using a graphite pencil. On rare occasions, I apply small amounts of liquid masking agent to shapes that would otherwise be

ABOVE
A homemade gray scale created by painting successively darker squares and punching holes in the middle of each square. I hold this up to a painting so that I can see the painted color through the hole and am able to judge the relative value. That's especially helpful when gauging the contrast between light and shadow.

BELOW
Five Macs in a Row
2004, watercolor, 6 x 18. Collection the artist.





Step 2. Base
 After the glow dried, I laid in flat, graded, wet-in-wet washes of color to establish a general description of the image.

dries lighter and the subsequent layers of contrasting colors will quiet down those first washes. I allow this first wash of color to dry thoroughly before I proceed to the next step.

Defining the Base

The next application of washes defines the shapes, colors, and values within a painting. Those washes are applied with a variety of techniques, including wet-in-wet, flat washes, graded washes, hard and soft edges, pure color,

premixed colors, and free-flowing mixtures on the watercolor paper.

In most cases, I prefer to apply rich mixtures of color that have less water than when I'm painting fluid wet-in-wet blends. If necessary, I will apply another glow of soft colors, but usually I'm satisfied with the original underlying tone.

Establishing the Contrast

A strong contrast between the values will give a realistic painting its strong

three-dimensional look. To achieve that degree of realism, I darken areas of my painting by adding more layers of color and modeling shapes using color and value. Initially, I use the same pigments I introduced in the first two steps, then I add other paints depending on the subject.

To create a sense of three-dimensionality in watercolor, one needs to remember a few things about contrast:

1. Shadows are approximately 40 per-

Step 3. Contrast

I built up washes of additional colors to create a sense of depth in the values and gradually increased the contrast between the lights and darks.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Step 4. Detail

I lifted and lightened areas of color, darkened lines, erased graphite marks, and toned down colors to add balance and detail to the painting.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Barbara Fox earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of California, Davis and did further study at The Academy of Art, in San Francisco. Since 1981 she has owned and operated her own commercial and fine-art business under the name Barbara Fox Art Studio. She has worked as a graphic designer, illustrator, and fine artist producing greeting cards and gift items. She has also taught art, managed an art gallery, and creates hand-painted needlepoint designs. For more information, e-mail the artist at foxbrachmann@hotmail.com or visit her website: www.barbarafoxartstudio.netfirms.com.



cent darker than the area on which the light is falling. The use of a handmade value scale, such as the one illustrated in this article, can prove that point.

2. Shadows are painted as a color version of the color of the light, or they can be made by adding the complement of a color to create a grayed version of the color of the light.

3. Bounce light or reflected light gives objects more dimension. They come from the light reflecting off nearby

objects. For example, in *Five Macs in a Row*, the reddish and greenish lights in the shadows on the windowsill are bouncing off the shiny red apples. Sometimes these reflected lights are subtle and one has to look for them to give extra "oomph" in the values and colors.

Finishing With Details

This final step can take minutes or hours, depending on how much definition is needed to confirm the focal point, adjust the layers of space, sepa-

rate the cool and warm colors, pull the composition together, and adjust sharp edges.

If liquid masking agent was applied early in the process, it is now removed and hard edges are softened. For example, in *Five Macs in a Row* I covered the white highlights on the apple and removed the protective masking material just before finishing the watercolor. I used a stiff stencil brush to soften the hard edges of the highlights so they looked more natural. ■

