

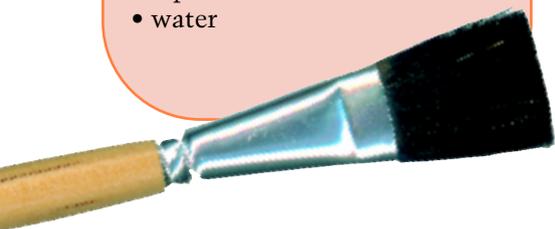
# Painting with Wax

**Eliana Mere**

**W**atercolor artists use liquid latex, often called masking fluid, to save the highlights of their paper. Watercolor brushed over the latex is not absorbed, and once the painting is dry, the latex is removed to reveal spaces of pure white with sharp, clean edges. The result is usually dazzling. But because latex ruins brushes, is expensive, and takes a while to dry, it's hardly suitable for the classroom. The technique described here uses wax paper to get the same effect as latex.

## Materials

- paper (watercolor paper is best, but any heavy white paper may be used.)
- wax paper
- watercolor paints
- brushes
- pens
- tape
- water



## Before You Begin

Wax impression works because wax repels water. All it takes is a little pressure to transfer the wax from the wax paper to the art paper. These wax-covered areas will remain white even when color is brushed over them.

Wax impression forces the artist to think backwards. This is excellent training. By backwards, I mean doing first what you would normally do last. The under-painting used by the old masters is an example of this. Skin was often painted in an odd color, such as green, which was later painted over with another color. In some places the second layer of paint was very thin and the green came through as a shadow. The result, surprisingly, was glowing and realistic.

Another backwards method is to paint in negative. Say you want a white flower on a black background. If you use black paint to define the flower on white paper, you are painting in negative, because essentially you are painting the flower by not painting it. Clearly, both examples require planning and an ability to see the finished work in your mind before it can be seen on the paper.

Any backwards method can become confusing. Wax impression is not difficult, but it is important to remember that every mark you make on the wax paper will be white in the finished painting.

## Getting Started

1. Plan your design. Think especially about what you want to keep white. Large areas of white are easy to paint around and won't need to be covered with wax. Small areas will. You can draw guidelines lightly on your art paper, but remember that if you trace those lines onto the waxed paper, you won't be able to erase the lines because they will be covered with wax.
2. Tape the wax paper securely over the art paper.



3. Use a pen to draw the part you want to keep white. Press firmly on the wax paper, but don't be too rough. It's easy to break through it and mark the paper underneath.



4. Remove the wax paper. The art paper still looks blank. Only if you look carefully can you make out the wax impressions.



5. Go over your design with watercolor. Make sure the paint is not too thick. It has to flow for the wax to repel it. If you are using pan watercolors, this probably won't be a problem. If you're using tube watercolors, be sure to dilute them.

You can do all kinds of things with wax impression, Don't be afraid to experiment. Do several pictures quickly as an exercise. Here are some examples:

For this effect, wax was pressed onto the paper in solid patches by coloring in with the pen on the wax paper. Then black paint was brushed quickly over the art paper and the picture emerged like magic. Small dots of black can be seen on the zebra's white stripes where the paint beaded up or the wax missed the paper. This gives the picture an interesting texture.



*Zilhouette*



*Fall*

In this image, wax is used to outline the veins of the leaves and mark their undersides. The colors were laid down in the general areas of the leaves and blended into the background. The small spots were made by spattering paint from a toothbrush.

Wax was used only on the six dandelions. Their sharp outlines contrast with the shadowy forms of the other flowers, which were done in white paint, making the wax flowers seem much closer.



*Ghost Flowers*



*Garden Party*

This represents a combination of "coloring in" with wax (the fence) and outlining (tulips). But the color application had to be carefully controlled. To get the colors in exactly the right places, the "invisible" wax drawing on the art paper had to be constantly compared to the pen drawing on the wax paper. The tulips were painted first, then the leaves, and then the sky and the path.

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