

5 STEPS TO SEAMLESSLY BRING YOUR WATERCOLORS INTO THE DIGITAL WORLD



Integrating watercolor into your illustration workflow is not much different from any other medium. Watercolor has a unique quality, just like 3D animation or digital painting. A significant amount of detail can be suggested in watercolor, and the lively quality can be applied to a range of applications.

1. PLAN

- Follow standard illustration development with clients
- Gather references as available
- Price appropriately: watercolor is a unique skillset
- Inform client that changes late in the process will incur additional charges (viz., 3D animation or modeling)

2. CREATE

- Analyze thumbnails and comps to ensure you have a **strong design**
- Create a **clear/accurate drawing** indicating
 - light/dark division
 - speculars
 - halftone texture
 - shadow core/reflected light
 - ambient occlusion
- Do **color studies** paying attention to hue, value, temperature, saturation.
- **Work at 1-1.5x final size** for most purposes to preserve the beauty of the watercolor texture.
- **Choose paper:** hot press for high detail, cold press for texture
- **Paint light to dark:** in order, lay in wash for speculars, then lights, then darks, then AO (drying in between)
- **Paint wet in wet first:** define overall tonal composition; dry brush over dry washes to add detail
- **Use masking fluid judiciously** (if at all) and only apply/remove to fully dry paper
- Oh yeah, **HAVE FUN!**

3. DIGITIZE

- Ensure paper is fully dry and flat (flatten if needed)
- Scan at **600 ppi, RGB** for file flexibility
- **Remove from white background:**
 - Use magic wand tool to select background
 - Invert selection, create 2nd layer and fill selection
 - Select fill shape closely fitting illustration shape
 - Delete 2nd layer then adjust perimeter as needed with lasso/quick selection tools
 - Mask background. Invert mask to verify whether the image is cleanly & fully selected. Repeat as necessary. When satisfied, mask or delete background.

4. ADJUST

- Use **spot healing brush** to fix minor blemishes (pencil line, dust, lint, etc)
- **Avoid adding excessive digital painting** as it can interrupt the charm of the watercolor effect
- Use **blend modes** when touching up
- **Fix edges sparingly with a textured digital brush** (oil/acrylic gouache style brush) in a mask to check appearance—or by copying/pasting another border into the mask for a natural look.

5. INTEGRATE

- **Backpaint with white:** if placing illustration on colored background, use a layer in between illustration/background

QUESTIONS? GET IN TOUCH:

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