

WATERCOLOUR

Explore the vibrancy, fluidity and spontaneity of watercolours without missing out on the fun!

Plastic Fantastic: Cutting Loose with Watercolour

By Maria Field

I love watercolour...alot! I love its fluidity and the effects, with which it likes to surprise me. So even though the majority of my work remains traditionally on watercolour paper, I find myself drawn a lot these days to its application on various other supports, in order that I may fully investigate its remarkable qualities. I have found that working on Yupo paper gives me a chance to really explore the vibrancy, fluidity and spontaneity that watercolour can achieve.

Yupo paper is a Japanese-made archival synthetic paper made from polypropylene resin. It combines the advantages of both paper and plastic film and is used mainly

in the fields of commercial printing and packaging. However, artists are an inventive lot and we seem to have taken it under our wing as another form of support.

As it is a smooth plastic paper, the watercolour does not soak into its fibres, but merely sits on top and eventually dries. The advantage is that it is possible to lift or wipe back the paint completely to regain the white of the paper, providing you have not used a heavily staining pigment. Also, as the paint is not absorbed, it tends to be more vibrant and glowing. A bonus for all those artists who love colour.

Yupo paper is a delight to play on. And yes, I do mean "play". For those watercolourists

who like to work detailed and considered, the thought of letting loose may at first be terrifying. However, I have found that usually students, once they overcome the initial fear factor, absolutely love the freedom that working on Yupo can give. The knowledge that the paint can be completely wiped back and started on afresh is liberating, although few students seem to do that. Usually the wonderful effects that the watercolour creates by itself on the paper captivate and thrill and although I lift and wipe back sections, I usually love the areas where the watercolour has woven its own magic.

You can do most of the things that you would normally do on watercolour paper, like paint wet in wet, dry on damp, wet on dry, scraping back, salt, cling wrap, sponging, stipple, resists, spritzing, scratching out etc. You can still also choose to work very detailed if desired.

However, other exciting things seem to happen as well. Blooms and fingers, quite unlike unwanted cauliflowers on normal watercolour paper, seem to occur as the paint continues to slide and travel long after you've looked away. So keep an eye on it. I actually like to purposely create blooms just to see the developing magical "accidents".

Textures like granulation from sedimentary pigments are often heightened. Stamping objects, pressing perspex and even pressing fingers into damp washes can achieve a different look to that achieved on normal watercolour paper.

If yupo paper is not widely available in stores near you, they may have "Ezi-cut (Stencil Film) Paper" which is an equivalent.

It is best to mount Yupo paintings behind glass with a mat for protection and even a light spraying of a fixative or varnish doesn't hurt to seal the painting, although this is not totally necessary.

Art is meant to be fun, so experiment and splash around some watercolour on Yupo paper. It will help you to let loose and have some fun! □



Tulips, 43 x 36cm

Composition, focal point, complementary colour scheme, variation of edges and counterchange were all planned beforehand, but the painting was executed quickly. I loved how the paint bled itself onto the tulip at middle left. This is the kind of thing I can't plan!



Still Life on Yupo, 37 x 27cm

Lifting out the highlights on glass and reflections is more fun to me than masking them. If you have done a painting with a lot of masking, try repainting it on Yupo.



Rockin Rooster, 37 x 27cm

I used my greasy finger to create the ear lobe of the rooster which then resisted the point. I was able to scratch through the paint in the tail whilst it was still damp. I lifted out the beak and white feathers when the paint was dry.

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This was a class demonstration painting and a funny thing happened. The tree trunk had not dried completely by the time I had to pack up and knowing I could always lift and rework it, I simply put another board on top of it. When I got home and took off the board it had created amazing textures in the wood that looked like peeling bark and lichen, so I left it. Notice how the Cerulean Blue, being sedimentary, has left pigment on the surface in the top left.

Kookaburra, 20 x 40cm



Yupo Painting

Top Tips for Yupo Painting

- If you want the paint to really move, try spritzing or wetting the paper first. Remember that with watercolour in general, the more water, the less control we have.
- Spritzing can also give great "feathering" effects.
- Since it can be hard to layer paint or glaze over the top without lifting the underwash, it is advantageous to try to obtain the best result in the one wash.
- If you must go over an area without lifting, use a very light touch and a soft brush, work with thicker dry paint, or you can try a light spray of fixative between layers.
- I have found the best way is to plan colours and then let the watercolour have its fun. Lift out areas or shapes that you want white or light, or rework sections.
- Charge the wash with wetter colours that would normally create cauliflowers and watch interesting things happen.
- Press fingers into damp paint for texture.
- Press Perspex and lift for interesting monotype effects.
- Certain paints seem to glaze better, without disturbing the under-layer, than others.
- Certain pigments push the other paint around more.
- If you want to lift out a hard edged white shape, use a firm brush.
- Stand up to paint for looser mark making.
- Work larger than you are used to.
- Masking tape can rip the plastic layer off the paper, so I suggest either using just a little in the corners, or else just use a little blu-tac on the back.
- It can be fun to play with ink or acrylics on Yupo too, but you won't be able to lift them.
- Do not use a hairdryer as it might melt the plastic surface.
- Try dropping alcohol into the paint for interesting effects.
- Try using a wax candle as a resist and a form of "barrier" between areas, similar to batik painting.

THE DOWNSIDE: Cons of Yupo

- Takes a while to dry.
- Can be hard to rework without lifting the previous layer.
- Although it is easy to obtain a soft edge whilst the paint is still wet, it can be very difficult to soften an edge once the paint is dry.
- Can be easily scratched or unintentionally lifted off, so either spray with fixative or varnish, or frame behind glass as soon as possible.
- Can be easily marked with grease from your fingers, which will resist the paint, so handle with care or gloves.



Yupo Dancer, 24 x 24cm

Colour remained vibrant on Yupo and movement was created by spritzing the edges of the skirt. This painting has a variety of soft, hard and textured edges.

THE UPSIDE: Pros of Yupo

- Great for people who want freedom and loosening up.
- Equally good for people who like detail or who normally work on hot pressed paper.
- Colours remain wonderfully vibrant.
- Fluid, unpredictable, challenging, exciting!
- No need for masking, simply lift off the paint to reveal the white of the paper.
- Fun to experiment and let the watercolour do its magic.
- If you are not happy with a shape, say the sky, you can lift it all off and have another go.
- Able to work "dark to light" by lifting out the white areas.

What the Artist Used

Yupo paper 37 x 27cm

Brushes:

Dagger, Neef Mop #2, Escoda #8

Colours: Permanent Rose, Gamboge, Cerulean Blue, Dioxazine Violet, Alizarin Crimson, (Ultramarine and Burnt Sienna for the dark)

my art in the making Geisha Girl Red



Stage 1

Planning and design

Although I want the watercolour to do most of the work, I still always plan my composition, format, edges and colours. I decided on a predominantly warm palette. The more I plan beforehand, the freer I can be whilst painting.



Stage 2

First splash of paint

Working with my board at a slight angle, I had fun painting onto dry Yupo, but let the colours bleed and run where they wanted. I have a dagger brush that I rarely use, so thought it would be fun to play with it as well at this loose stage.

Stage 3

Intensifying the colours

With slightly thicker paint I started to intensify areas and create a little detail. I'm having so much fun, I really don't care about the result!



Stage 4

Creating excitement

I love to drop extra paint, both wetter and drier, into areas to encourage the paint to finger, cauliflower, bleed or push paint around. I encourage it to surprise me!



Stage 5

Lifting out whites

I let the painting dry. Now I can lift out some white areas simply by wetting the area with a little water on a brush. Some of the other hard edged white areas on the painting are where the paper was dry and therefore the paint simply didn't flow over it.



Stage 6

Painting in details

I keep the details to a minimum so that the focus is on the paint effects. I negatively paint the dark hair, made with Ultramarine and Burnt Sienna, around the headpiece for counterchange.



Stage 7

The finished painting

As always in my work, the areas I love the most are the areas where the watercolour did all the work, like the effects in the headpiece and on the kimono.



Yupo Tree, 22 x 22cm

This painting was a demo and has the whole box and dice in it. There is spritzed watercolour and black ink pen, wax resists, string (left to dry in the paint and then removed), pressed leaves and greasy fingers, cling wrap and spatter. Predominantly cool painting with hints of warmth. Don't forget to plan your composition, unity, variety and design issues before you splash away.

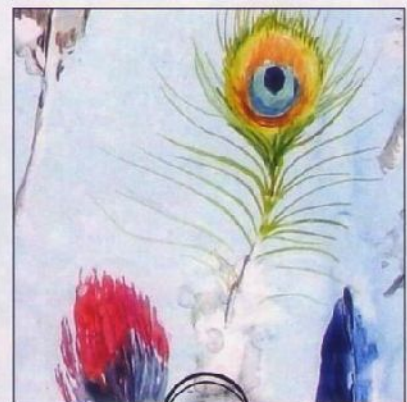
Feathers, 36 x 36cm

This was a very detailed pattern painting of my daughter's feather collection. I used a rigger for a lot of it, but was able to lift out white markings and to create feathered edges.



Wax Lilies, 27 x 27cm

Using a white wax candle, I drew a loose drawing. The wax acted not only as a resist, but as a barrier between areas, although I actually loved where it broke the barrier and bled, as seen on the left flower.



Detail



Ekka Fun, 25 x 38cm

Using a white wax candle, I drew a loose drawing. The wax acted not only as a resist, but as a barrier between areas, although I actually loved where it broke the barrier and bled, as seen on the left flower.



Proud Peacock, 50 x 40cm

I didn't actually need to lift anything in this painting, but I chose Yupo paper to keep the colours of the peacock bright and luminous and to hint at texture without getting bogged down by painting every feather detail. The hardest edges and greatest tonal contrast are kept at the focal point.

about the artist

MARIA FIELD, self-taught Brisbane artist and chocoholic, is constantly inspired by light, shadows, colour and the sheer beauty of the world around her, which she strives to portray in all her work. She delights in creating colourful, clean watercolours loving the challenge of the spontaneous, fresh and exciting medium, with her work encompassing many subjects.

Maria enjoys sharing her love of art by teaching several weekly art classes and giving demonstrations and workshops for art groups including in NZ, Norfolk Island and the USQ McGregor Summer Schools.

Since commencing competing in shows in 2003, Maria has won over 62 awards, including 19 Firsts and her works are held in private and corporate collections throughout Australia, England, Canada, South Africa, Italy, Poland, UAE, Germany and Japan.

Her work has featured in several editions of *Australian Artist*.

Her work can be viewed at:

Queensland Watercolour Society,
(various venues) QLD

Scattered Arts 6 Newman Road,
Camp Hill QLD

Royal Queensland Art Society 162 Petrie Tce,
Brisbane QLD

If you have any queries or are interested in class, workshop or demonstration information please do not hesitate to contact Maria Field at P.O. Box 2043, Toowong 4066 or Email: mfield@cheerful.com

Website:
www.paradox.com.au/mariafieldart

