

Masa Paper Workshop

These notes correctly represent the methods demonstrated by Jude Quick and Bev Nantais.

The Original Basics as taught by Sheila Hill

1. The shiny side will always be the finished product.
2. Draw on the shiny side of the paper. Make the drawing fairly distinct, as the water may wash some of the graphite away.
3. Crumple the paper, a little or a lot according to the results you are looking for.
4. Put the paper into a sink or bucket of water. I use warm water, as I think it relaxes the paper more. While in the water, you can continue to crumple the paper if you want a textured look.
5. Don't leave it in too long. I'm going to estimate about 30 seconds is as long as I need. Then remove the paper and drain off the excess water.
6. Smooth the paper out on a drying board shiny side down using a 3" or larger brush and lifting at the edges to remove most of the wrinkles.
7. Paint in the background colours (this will be on the cotton or fluffy side of the paper) using a brush and a good amount of pigment. The pigment takes on a pattern of its own.
8. Let it dry for 24 hours.

Mounting the Masa Paper

1. When the Masa paper is dry it may be mounted on watercolour paper.
2. Using a mix of 50% white glue and 50% water, paint the glue onto the watercolour paper.
3. Mount the dry Masa paper on to the wet glue, shiny side up.
4. Press or roll down the Masa paper firmly.
5. Let it dry and paint on the front shiny side.

Working White areas on Masa Paper

1. Do not use masking liquid as the paper is too delicate, and the paper will be ruined when you take the masking off.
2. Avoid painting near the white areas when you are painting in the background. Remember that the paint will flow when painting into to wet, so keep the colour a distance from any white areas.
3. You can touch up the white areas with white paint, gouache or acrylic.

This was pretty much the method I taught, except knowing our time would be restricted I experimented ahead of time and found that after the paper was removed from the water and brushed out flat, I could cover it with paper towels and use a rolling pin to squeeze out most of the water. Then after painting the back I used a hair dryer to dry the paper. This saved us the 24 hour drying time.

I also like to tape my paintings down, so my method is to cut the watercolour paper larger than the painting and tape it down. I then apply the glue to the back side of the Masa paper and place it onto the watercolour paper. Again I use paper towels to cover the painting and roll with the rolling pin to get good adhesion. Using the paper towels will prevent accidentally spreading glue onto the right side of your painting.

You can now redry your paper and start painting in the details on the front.

Bev Nantais's Demonstration

If I am correctly interpreting her style, Bev uses Masa paper to enhance areas of her paintings. She will paint some areas of her picture directly on the watercolour paper and then cut out shapes from the Masa paper and glue them on and paint into the Masa paper.

For example, she did a painting of Delphiniums where she painted a few as background. She then cut out Delphinium shapes of Masa from the original drawing and glued them into place. When these were painted, the whiteness of the Masa paper made them stand out from the painting with a special glow. She also used this method with landscapes for an equally satisfactory result.

All of her exhibits were fantastic.

Jude Quick's Demonstration

Jude tried to help us define the white areas of our paintings. After drawing, crumpling, wetting, back painting, mounting and drying the picture, Jude showed us how to enhance the white areas. She used white flowers in her demonstration.

She darkened the background around the flowers for contrast. She pulled some of the background colour into the flowers as shadows, and also splattered in some paint. Where all else failed, she used a small amount of acrylic white to cover some spots where the back painting intruded.

Problems

In our workshop, there were a few problems which we worked together to correct.

Some of us found that after applying the glue and drying, our Masa paper did not stick. Some found that they had to reapply the glue, and let the paper dry naturally with a weight on top. It worked. I also needed to reattach one of mine, and did so by

squeezing glue (undiluted) directly onto the watercolour paper and spreading with a damp brush before reapplying the Masa paper. This also worked for me. There was a couple, who only needed to lift a corner and reapply the glue.

By watching everyone else's results, we all learned a lesson about the strength of pigment you could use when back painting. One of my samples was way to strong, and we tried putting it back into the water bath to wash out some of the paint. It helped.

Some people had trouble with their Masa paper tearing or dissolving too much in the water bath. After examining the results, we came to the conclusion that some of the Masa papers were not good quality. Shop around and try to find good quality paper. I would suggest buying only one piece until you have tested your results before stocking up. My paper seemed to be very good, and I ordered it through Daniel Smith art supplies in Seattle. I think it was on sale at the time (about \$1. per sheet) and they will ship to Canada (sometimes free of charge). A sheet of paper will do a number of good size pictures.

Reasons to try Masa

1. You can do fantastic dark backgrounds on this paper. It allows for a textured look you would never achieve with other paper, and you do not experience the brush strokes you find hard to blend in on regular watercolour paper. If you need to go darker, you can do so with more washes.
2. This paper allows you to gently scrub out the layers of paint. Although you have to be mindful of the delicate paper, it is easy to lift out the colour.
3. The paper is so white, you will love the results.
4. It is a fantastic way to paint the look of marble, or textured old walls, the veins in a flower or the view from the window. With the right back painting, you will have finished results that just need touching up from the right side.