

Solar Watercolor Painting

by Robert A. Jones, Watercolor Artist

"This watercolor technique for me has helped to capture the beauty and complexity in our natural world! The results can be planned but many times the results are unexpected. Through this process my objective is to stimulate the imaginations of viewers and think about and appreciate our natural environment."



Solar watercolor painting is a process using sunshine, water, natural materials from the environment, watercolor paper or Yupo paper, and watercolor pigments to create a unique artwork.



Helpful Tools and Equipment:

- An old metal baking sheet works well, with at least 1/2 inch sides
- Small level
- Eyedropper
- Spoon
- Large plastic pail to have water at site location
- Popsicle sticks
- Wood wedges
- Old watercolor brushes for mixing the paint
- Small bowls, plastic cups, or small jars to hold the mixed paint.

Materials needed:

- Watercolor paper 140 lb cold press or 140 lb hot press; Yupo paper synthetic sheets also work well.
- Plastic wrap or better yet press seal plastic wrap
- Watercolor tube paint colors
- Natural items, small stones and sticks. (Gather and prepare the natural materials; some objects will need to be flattened ahead of time between newspaper with heavy weights on top overnight.)

From the SALMON RIVER FINE ARTS CENTER Project Corner

Process:

1. Select your choice of colors and mix watercolor pigments with water and put in small containers. You will have to experiment with the ratio of water to pigments but it should be fluid enough to pour, spoon, or use an eyedropper to place your colors.
2. Bring all your tools, materials, and a bucket of clean water to your sunny location. Select an area outside that gets a large amount of sun and find a flat surface where the solar painting will not be disturbed. Try to keep it out of the wind.
3. Place press-and-seal plastic wrap or plastic wrap on the bottom and sides of a metal tray. It helps to keep objects from sticking to the metal pan. If a glass tray is used you may not need the plastic wrap, but I have found that it takes longer to dry.
4. Place your tray on a flat surface, add watercolor paper and use the level to make sure the tray is level in all directions. You can use wedges, popsicle sticks, or similar materials if necessary for adjustments.
5. Place natural items in an artistic arrangement, and then add about 1/4 to 3/8 inch of water. The more water you add the longer it will take the sun to evaporate it.
6. After you have your materials placed in the tray, pour clean water at about 1/4 inch depth. This is where things might begin to float away. You might have to get creative with keeping the items stationary by using rocks or sticks as weights.
7. Add the watercolor mixture using some of the helpful tools such as an eyedropper, spoon or pouring device. Visualize where you would like to place the colors. Keep in mind the colors will move and blend together.
8. Now is the time to let the sunshine take over. On a warm summer day it should be dry by sunset if you get it out by midmorning. Best months to solar paint are June, July and August.
9. **Potential problems and suggestions:** You will encounter problems that can affect your paintings - wind, staining colors, too much water, rain, buckling paper, paint blocked by materials, or sticking natural objects. Practice and patience will help to reduce the problems encountered.
 - Poor results can be turned into happy accidents! Rotate your work, or crop a section until you find something you might like. Have others look at your work. They may see something that you miss.
 - Your final paper will have lots of buckles after completely drying. Wet the back of your paper with a spray mister, or sponge the back with water, and place face down on a clean surface. Put some paper towels and newspaper to absorb the water on the back and add heavy weights like books or old record albums. Let dry overnight and remove weights.
10. Reveal your solar artwork!



The Inspiration for this technique was inspired by a fellow artist Bert Legition from Oswego NY. The following book by Maxie Masterfield also had some helpful information: *Nature In Harmony With Nature Painting Techniques for a New Age*