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Painting Portraits And Figures In Watercolor



Synopsis

Using clear and concise language and in-depth, step-by-step demonstrations, author and renowned artist Mary Whyte guides beginning and intermediate watercolorists through the entire painting process, from selecting materials to fundamental techniques to working with models. Going beyond the practical application of techniques, Whyte helps new artists capture not just the model's physical likeness, but their unique personality and spirit. Richly illustrated, the book features Mary Whyte's vibrant empathetic watercolors and works by such masters of watercolor as Mary Cassatt, Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, John Singer Sargent, and Georgia O'Keeffe.

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[Human Figure](#)

Customer Reviews

MARY WHYTE has earned national recognition as an artist and illustrator. Her watercolors have been exhibited at some of the nation's most prestigious museums and exhibitions, including the American Watercolor Society and the Allied Artists of America.

I am a very big fan of Mary Whyte. I think her work is outstanding; she is at the top of her game right now. There are very few artists today working in watercolor that are able to create the quality of work she is creating. Mary is known for her loose/tight paintings. Often a quite loose background surrounding very (VERY) tight work on a figure. I would guess that most artists drawn to her work also love Wyeth. I own four of Mary's books. An Artists Way of Seeing, which has no technique and is all philosophy with some nice reproductions. Watercolor for the Serious Beginner which is exactly

what it says. *Working South*, a showcase of a recent series of portraits and *Painting Portraits and Figures in Watercolor*, the book being reviewed here. I also own two DVD's. I have learned something from them all and find value in most everything she has to share. I think she is to be commended for going beyond the usual step by step and trying to present a more holistic (for lack of a better word) approach to painting. In and of itself, *Painting Portraits and Figures* is excellent. If someone wanted one book on the subject I am unaware of one that gives as much breadth as this one. There is some very basic information but there is also some very good in depth information you only glean through much time and work. The color reproductions are excellent and numerous with many close up excerpts. At 160 pages there is only so much you can do. All that said, I think there is one consistent deficit that runs through her two instructional book and two DVD's. I have to believe she is deliberately holding back on teaching about the finish work of her paintings. Many of her most stunning paintings have an extraordinary amount of detail work. I think many of us assumed, after the book *Watercolor for the Serious Beginner*, we were going to get a more in depth treatment of her complete technique. She does give us three paragraphs on painting details saying, "There is no secret to painting details, since they are nothing more than smaller forms." I think Mary underestimates the value of showing us how she achieves those details. Its a little more than just painting smaller forms. It is like the cartoon making light of step by step instructions where you are taught to draw a portrait by first, draw a ball. Second, mark a center line. Third, mark a line for the eyes and mouth and fourth, draw the face. The first, second and third step simply show a ball and some lines and the fourth step shows a complete face as would be finished by the likes of Rembrandt. It is such a glaring deficit to all her instructional books and dvd's. Perhaps she is simply trying to keep things simple but I am guessing that most people who come to sit at Mary's feet don't want that simplicity. We may not be able to replicate what you do Mary but we want to see how you do it. Your next book needs to be this size (160 pages) and called *Painting Detail with Watercolor*. Show it all. Show how you draw your initial detail. Show how you mask off some parts. Show your first washes in such areas that are to be finished in detail, such as the beard of the man in *Absolution*. (Do you literally go in with a tiny brush and delineate the hairs by painting between them?) Information like this is not just a matter of "painting smaller forms". I will recommend this book to anyone because it certainly has a great deal of value for any water-colorist. But Mary, please, show us what we come to you to see.

The book is filled with spectacular examples of Mary Whyte's work, particularly the results of her trips through the Southern United States. These portraits are not only gorgeous watercolors but also

tell intimate stories about the culture and lives of the Black residents who serve as models for Whyte. I was however, as a beginning student of watercolor, very disappointed at her reluctance to share her process of producing her paintings. Other than a helpful description of how to mix skin colors, there are no detailed demonstrations, tips and little useful advice to other watercolorists. A wonderful example of her work though, which shows what is possible in a master's hands.

I truly enjoy Ms. Whyte's artistic abilities, both by subject and her skill. It is superb in every way. However, this book is mistitled in my opinion. I would have given it a 3.5 stars if that were available but I can not recommend it as teaching portraiture and not much in the way of figures. The book is thorough on Whyte's personal philosophies of art; she also shares a lot about basic watercolor painting (palette and brush selection, color, atmospheric perspective, values and shapes) just as most other books do, but nothing detailed enough to specifically feel like you are being instructed in painting figures and portraits. Beginners will be sorely disappointed I'm afraid. It does offer insight for the upper-intermediate painter but little that is specific. The few demonstrations in the book are limited to such things as saying wet-into-wet technique is good to use for some skin tones. I hate not to recommend this book because it is nicely done and pretty to look at but written in a way that beginners will likely have trouble applying her teachings. It is a bit more useful than a coffee-table book and may help the experienced with the wet-into-wet technique. If you are good at picking and choosing useful information for advanced technique out of a maze of "artist statements" then go for it. As another reviewer said above, I too was hoping Ms. Whyte would let go and tell exactly how she achieves her beautiful paintings. Instead, after telling us the rules of painting and not to break them, she basically says, "Here are the basics. Experiment and break the rules until you figure it out on your own." (my paraphrasing)

Mary Whyte is an exceptional watercolorist as the illustrations in this book prove. I wish there were more detailed demonstrations to show how she obtained her incredible results.

Mary Whyte is one of my favorite watercolorists and I am amazed at her work. This book is just like taking lessons from Mary in her studio. She explains a lot of technical information (including her color choices for skin tones), and gives the reader insight into her own personal philosophy about being an artist. She also gives the reader a short historical trip through watercolor in her section on Learning from the Masters. This book is worth twice the price and you will learn much from it. I am slowly going through it, as I would if taking a class, and savoring each chapter for its information and

insight into Mary's work and methods.

Not a good tutorial on portrait painting, but a history of portrait painting, and useless "materials" list. What amateur is attempting portrait painting, and then ask yourself why is so much space spent on materials, color wheel, and value theory. The meat and potato, working artist who wants to really learn portrait painting will get little out of this book. It is too challenging for the beginner, in terms of examples of the magnificent portrait artist/author's works, with history thrown in for some unknown reason. It is just, sadly not full of in depth issues likeness techniques of eye painting, how to construct the portrait to look like a finished piece. What about teeth...yea or nay? All in all, an OK book, but will quickly land in the used for sale book list, or one's "misplaced book" shelf.

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