

WET-IN-WET

In wet-in-wet painting, colors are applied over or into each other while they are wet, leaving them partially mixed on the canvas or paper. It is one of the most satisfying methods to work with, producing both lively color mixtures and softly blended effects.

Because the colors don't quite blend together, the result is soft and hazy, often with a slight feeling of mystery. In landscape painting, for example, the line where the sky meets the horizon should be blended wet-in-wet. This lends a sense of space and atmosphere, encouraging the eye to sense that there is something yet unseen over the horizon. In contrast, a hard edge along the horizon looks flat and unsympathetic.

Wet-in-wet is also a quick, spontaneous method, often used in *ALLA PRIMA* painting. The Impressionists — notably Monet (1840-1926), Pissarro (1830-1903) and Sisley (1839-99) — often overpainted or *SCUMBLED* over a wet underlayer when trying to capture the fleeting effects of light on their subject.

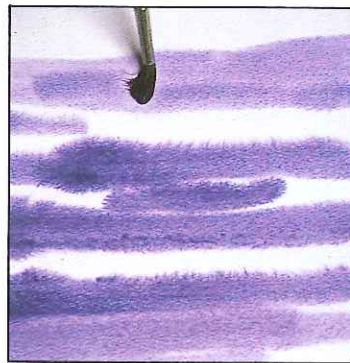
Watercolor

Wet-in-wet is one of the classic techniques of watercolor painting, as exemplified in the wonderfully fresh, lively sketches of outdoor subjects which Constable (1776-1837) executed as studies for his larger oil paintings.

When you're painting delicate or hazy subjects — flowers, mists, skies, water, shapes in the far distance — wet-in-wet allows the colors or tones to blend naturally on the paper without leaving a hard edge.

The results depend on how wet the layer underneath is. If color is charged into a wet wash, the results are unpredictable — though often very exciting. If you require a greater degree of control, however, it is better to allow the first layer to dry just a little.

Because the results can be so attractive, it is tempting to overdo the wet-in-wet effect, resulting in a painting that looks weak and wooly. Always try to introduce some stronger, sharper details for contrast.



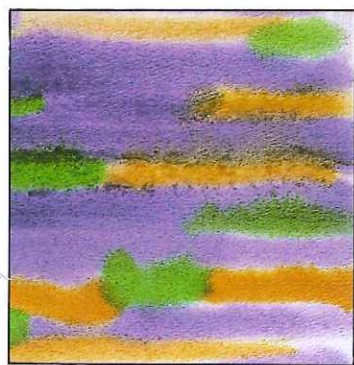
Wet-in-Wet • Watercolor

1 Watercolor's reputation as a spontaneous, unpredictable medium is based largely on the effects produced by working wet-in-wet. For this technique it is best to use a heavy grade paper (200lb or over); lightweight papers are apt to buckle when wet washes are applied. The paper should also be stretched and firmly taped to the board.

Dampen the paper with clear water, using a large brush or sponge. Blot off any excess water with the sponge so that the paper is evenly damp, not wet. The board should be laid flat, or at a very slight incline. Load your brush with pigment and apply it in random strokes on the damp surface. Don't dilute the paint too much beforehand, because this creates a weak, runny result. Because the paper is already wet, you can use quite rich paint — it will soften on the paper but retain its richness. You must also compensate for the fact that the color will dry much lighter than it appears at first — just as a wet pebble on a beach looks richer in color than a dry one does.



2 While the first strokes are still damp, further colors can be added so that the strokes spread and blur softly together. It is possible to manipulate the flow of paint by tilting the board to make the color "roll" on the paper. Keep a tissue handy for wiping away color where you don't want it to go.



3 A wet-in-wet passage has a soft, impressionistic feel. The technique is unpredictable but exhilarating, and it is worthwhile experimenting on scrap paper to see what effects you can create with it.

Acrylic

Acrylic may be quick-drying, but this property does not rule out the possibility of working with it using the wet-in-wet technique. For example, tube color heavily diluted with water behaves very like watercolor, creating soft, blurred strokes. If you require a greater degree of control, dilute the paint with matte medium and perhaps some retarder.

Oil

The soft, pliant nature of oil paints means that you can achieve a remarkable range of wet-in-wet effects, while retaining a degree of control over the paint. By slurring the wet colors together — without overblending — you can achieve subtle gradations of tone and color, while the colors themselves remain fresh and lively because each retains its identity.

Another method of painting wet-in-wet involves brushing a light color sparingly over a darker, still wet color. The light color partially blends with the underlayer, creating an attractive “lost and found” effect. This technique is perfect for rendering wispy white clouds in a blue sky, or the soft highlights on hair.

Wet-in-wet • Oil

Wet-in-wet is a feature of much alla prima painting in oils, where each stroke is painted next to or over another wet stroke to produce softly blended tones.



1 Lay a patch of color. While it is still wet, brush into it with a second color, using loose, random strokes.



2 Continue building up tones and colors as desired, taking care not to overwork the brushstrokes: a wet-in-wet passage should have a fresh, lively appearance. Here you can see how scumbling strokes leave an interesting texture. The complete passage contains hints of the two separate colors, as well as a subtle range of tones in between.