

Syllabus

2025 Pre-recorded course

Watercolor Portraiture I

Instructor: Tess Myers

Course description:

Learn watercolor portraiture through the lens of expressive realism. In this class, students will gain skills to navigate a compelling and often elusive medium. While our focus will be on portraiture, the techniques we cover will apply to other subjects as well. Learn how to analyze and emulate the translucent & reflective nature of skin, capture emotion and personality, and how to plan, prepare, and execute an effective portrait.

We will spend time exploring the mechanics and properties of watercolor, work through practice exercises designed to improve brush and pigment control, and then apply these techniques to progressively work towards increasingly complex portraits. Students will work from reference photos. Expect a combination of theory, demonstration, and application exercises. I will use an overhead camera to record my work as I guide the class through each portrait step-by-step.

Course Progression

Class 1: The Basics - gradients + layers, sketching, and a simplified portrait

Class 2: Applying gradients and layers to create a monochrome portrait

Class 3: Full color portrait using a limited palette

Class 4: Full color - Focus on rich skin tones

Class 5: Full color - Introduce colorful shadows

Approach:

I teach a very particular style and approach to watercolor portraiture. This method is by no means the best or only method for watercolor portraiture, simply one option. Among other themes, expect to explore the balance between realism and loose expression. Most people tend to be more comfortable with one side or the other, so to get the most out of this class I recommend being prepared to step outside your comfort zone. Above all, work through this material at your own pace and have a wonderful time!

The first class will focus on understanding the portrait process and refining technique through isolated exercises. For the rest of the course, we will work on full portraits of increasing complexity using preselected reference photos. All reference photos are available on the course page. In the class recordings, I do not spend much time focusing on sketching or drafting steps as this is its own area of study. Assistive tools like tracing, projection, and grids are encouraged, though I do not recommend relying entirely on these tools.

Time Commitment:

One of the great benefits of a pre-recorded course is that you get to work through the materials at your own pace. The original format of this class is three hours per class across five weeks, so I would recommend setting aside at least 20 hours - 13 for the actual video content, and 7 to give you plenty of time to pause and rewind as well as to prepare sketches for each tutorial.

F.A.Q

Q: Am I experienced enough for this intermediate – advanced course?

A: I do not recommend this course for a raw beginner in watercolor, simply because watercolor is a challenging medium that leads most people to at least one mental breakdown at some point in their career. It's best to already know how frustrating watercolor can be before starting in on a difficult subject like portraiture. You do not need to be accomplished in watercolor, but I do recommend that you have experimented enough to 1) understand that it is frequently an infuriating medium, and 2) still want to pursue watercolor.

If you are still not sure, please feel free to send me an email and we can discuss your situation further.

Q: I am experienced with acrylic and/or oil portraiture, will this translate well into watercolor?

A: Yes and no. You likely have excellent sensibilities about color, value, composition, and observation that will serve you well in any portrait project. However, watercolor can often feel like a very backward medium compared to more controllable methods, and in some cases prior experience with other painting methods can create an extra challenge. If this is the case, just plan to come with an open mind and be prepared for adventure!

Q: Can I expect any instructor feedback while taking this pre-recorded course?

Unfortunately, not really. The structure of the course means that you get to work through the material at your own pace, but it does prevent us from having much meaningful contact. If something comes up and you have burning questions, I encourage you to reach out to me via email! I do my best to respond to online student queries, but depending on my current schedule my response may not be timely. I have endeavored to include all the relevant information needed for this course, but if you find anything missing or unclear, please don't hesitate to let me know.

SUPPLY LIST (for portraiture I & II)

Pre-recorded course

Feel free to contact me if you have any concerns or questions:

Tcymyers@gmail.com | (202) 361- 8003 (Text first) | www.tessmyers.com

Required

- Watercolor pigments**, pan or tube. You will need:

Payne's gray Quinacridone rust Quinacridone red Nickel Quinacridone gold	Gamboge yellow Phthalocyanine blue (green shade, if shade is specified on the tube)
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Cadmium red and Ultramarine blue may also come in handy, but are not required. No black paint, and be sure to keep any white paint off your palette! We will primarily be using transparent pigments, and white can really dull and opacify these pigments if it is mixed in by accident.

- 100% cotton Watercolor paper, cold press, 140lb or higher.** At least 9x12" or similar size.

Windsor & Newton Watercolor blocks are recommended but you are welcome to mount your own loose sheets on a board. We will be experimenting with isolated exercises as well as working on actual portraits, so you may prefer to use loose or scrap paper for these cases.

- Brushes** appropriate for watercolor. I recommend at least:

- A round brush with a tapered tip and good water holding capacity (*I use a squirrel mop brush*)
- A large and flat brush
- A small flat brush with stiffer bristles for scrubbing/lifting pigment from small areas
- A few teeny brushes for finer detail
- A rubber tipped "brush" for frisket application (Rosemary & co makes a good one for \$2.50)

- Blotting rag.** Paper towels ok
- Mixing wells or palette**
- Wash jar(s)** for water (these are also available in the classroom)
- A pencil and good quality eraser.** A **kneadable eraser** will come in handy if you have one.
- Fine mist spray bottle with clean water**
- Laptop or tablet** for viewing reference photos, OR plan to print out the reference photo.
- Frisket removable masking fluid + rubber brush** Don't skip this! We will use it in every class.
- A hair dryer**, to speed up drying times between layers.

Optional, but recommended

A stand or table easel if you need to work upright. I usually work flat.

Blue or artists tape for edges, if desired

White ink or gouache, to be used very minimally.

A portable desk lamp for extra light