

WATERCOLOUR DEMONSTRATION

STRAWBERRIES

By Karl Fletcher



Reference Photo

This is the reference photo I chose to use for my painting, some strawberries freshly washed and arranged on my worktop to provide a variety of angles. In particular, I like the way the stalks and leaves point in different directions and the way it leads the eye to different parts of the photo.

I decided to position the lighting above in order to create a cast shadow (you can see the base of my light to the right of the picture). I've decided that I want to create an expressive rendition in the painting - I don't want the strawberries to look sterile like they were mass produced and something I bought from a supermarket (which I did). I want them to be vibrant and juicy, something you want to pick up and eat!

Materials

I've decided to use four colours and to mix them interchangeably to achieve the various hues I see represented in the photo. I'm using:

- Cad Red
- French Ultramarine
- Cad Yellow
- Burnt Sienna.

I'm using Winsor and Newton Cotman series. I'm also using Bockingford 140lb rough watercolour paper and the size is half imperial (15 x 11 inches). Additionally, I'll be using a 5B pencil (I find I don't have to press as hard and mark the paper with softer lead) and I'll use 2 brushes - a number 12 and number 4 round (both are made from sable). I usually prefer to tape the paper to a drawing board with masking tape.

Stage One

I loosely sketch the strawberries using a contour (outline drawing). I want to get the angles and shapes on the drawing to more or less match the photo.



I decide to introduce an extra strawberry where the photo cuts one in half and to make the leaves a little more interesting by varying the shapes. Once complete, I use a diluted wash of cad yellow to begin under-painting the strawberries. I apply this using my number 12 round brush. I want this to show through as I can see lots of tiny yellow seeds in the fleshy skin.

The First Wash

When I'm using the cad yellow I'm careful to leave some white of the paper in places. I want to have some whites and some yellows in my finished painting that still appear, in order to provide interest.



I indicate the larger highlights on the strawberries by again using the white of the paper. I soften back the edge of the yellow paint with water so that I don't get a hard edge of yellow where the highlight begins (I want the edge to blend). I finish all the strawberries and leaves in the same way. I then let the paint dry.

Using Cad Red And Creating Highlights

Next, I take the cad red and apply the first wash. I paint in such a way that I create the impression of the seed-heads. I allow some of the underpainting to be visible. I know I will only have a few seed-heads visible in my finished work, so I allow ample at this stage, in order to increase my options at the later stages of the painting. I apply this to all the strawberries and allow the paint to dry



Applying the 2nd Cad Red Wash

Still using the number 12 round and once the painting is dry to touch, I apply a 2nd wash of cad red to the parts of the strawberries I can see in shadow on the photo.

I don't cover the whole strawberry again, just the areas that I need to darken.

Using Two Mixes Of Green For The Leaves

Next, I mix cad yellow and French ultramarine to make a fairly dilute light green and taking the number 4 round I begin to paint over the yellow wash on the leaves. I do this lightly as I want the yellow to appear in places, but only just. I then allow this to dry.

I then mix a stronger green. I use thicker pigment from the cad yellow and add a touch of burnt sienna (hardly any) to take the blue out of the green and begin to paint in the shadows I see on the leaves.



Creating The Cast Shadows

Now that I have my under painting complete, I want to paint the shadows I see that are really drawing me to the subject. I mix cad red and French ultramarine again into a light and dark shadow wash.

The light wash is more dilute and for the darker wash I use more pigment and less water. I add just a touch of burnt sienna to “knock back” the purple these two colours can so easily produce. I then apply the lighter, more dilute wash to give the strawberries their shadows using my number 12 brush.

While the first wash is still wet I paint in the darker areas of shadow using the thicker mix I prepared earlier. I have to do this quickly, which is why it's always good to have both mixes ready, and more than enough, if you can remember.

I move on to my next washes while the strawberries are still wet.



Painting The Background

I've decided I want to use the full range of the 4 colours I've chosen for the painting when I portray the background, so I make up mixes of cad yellow with burnt sienna, French ultramarine with cad red and also French ultramarine with burnt sienna (this gives a really dark blue brown which I like). I also mix some pure cad red, cad yellow and ultramarine as well.

I begin by laying in a wash of cad yellow. As you can see below, the wash begins to pool around the leaves.



To avoid any runs into the still wet painting I turn my drawing board upside down for the remainder of the washes. I use both brushes interchangeably at this stage as I paint into the detail of the leaves with the number 4 and paint the large washes with the number 12.

I drop in the mixes I've prepared allowing the pigments to mingle in the water on the paper.



The Foreground

While the background is still wet, I take the same cad yellow and burnt sienna mixes and lay in the foreground.

This time I'm concentrating on giving depth to the painting with my brushstrokes. I want to leave some areas of white for interest and contrast and I want to create lines to lead into the painting so it doesn't look "flat" or one dimensional .

The lines and brush strokes come out at angles from the strawberries to show they are on a surface. I only want to suggest this. I mingle wet into wet brush strokes of French ultramarine and the mix of burnt sienna and French ultramarine to show the real dark areas. I use quick, deliberate, broad brushstrokes with the number 12 and fine darker lines with the smaller number 4.

I strengthen some of the darks on the strawberries to give more form and touch in under the leaves where necessary to give more depth to the shadows.



The Finished Painting

I wait for the painting to dry and remove the masking tape. The colours have lightened slightly as they've dried and the masking tape provides a perfect white border to my lively rendition of the strawberries...



About Karl Fletcher

Karl is passionate about watercolours and paints regularly to commission and for private exhibitions. Watercolour isn't his only medium of choice - you'll often find Karl working with oils and acrylics with a particular interest in spiritual art.

See Karl's full profile at:

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