

Solving Problems Before You Begin

Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery.
That is why today is called the present.

— Carla Tocomeo Carey

Hey, have you ever taped down a picture that you wanted traced with a piece of tracing paper? Then removed it only to discover you have forgotten some important lines or features? You should have done what I call “match marked” the piece. This is the best way I know to ensure that you get an accurate copy. Just follow the steps outlined in Fig. 5A.

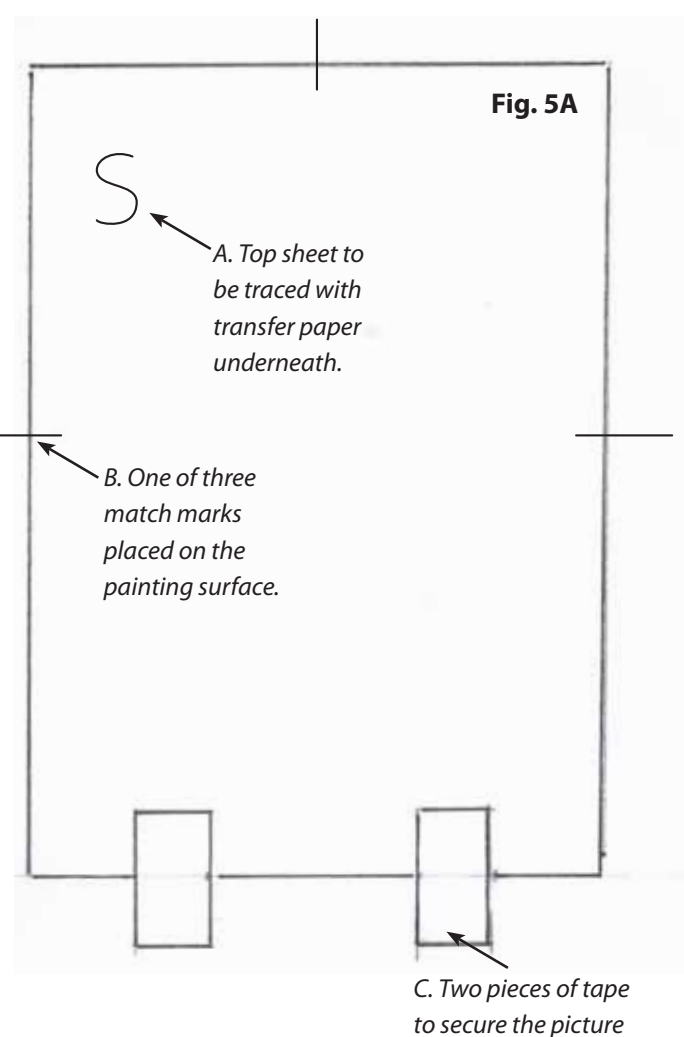
How to create “Match Marks”

- 1 Tape down (at least in two places) the picture you want traced to the watercolor paper.
- 2 With a pencil, match mark the picture in at least three places as shown in Fig. 5A. The marks should be placed between your watercolor paper and the painting surface. If you remove the picture, and later want to return to tracing, all you have to do is line up your work with the original match marks and tape it down. It's that simple!

Fig. 5B



If you are having trouble seeing your image through the tracing paper, and you don't have a light box, you might try taping the picture up to a window. As shown in Fig. 5B.



What Brush to Use?

Beginner painters are often overwhelmed with the selection of brushes. The names alone are not very descriptive: Filbert, flat, bright, and round, pointed round, fan, and wash/mop, among them.

Purchasing a brush set might eliminate confusion.

This is a start, but even so you won't need to buy a lot of brushes (Fig. 5C). As you get familiar with painting, you will discover that you have certain favorites. I recommend asking your instructor or your fellow painters what their favorite brushes are and compare notes.

Protecting Your Palette

Some art books recommend putting saran wrap over your palette to retain the moisture of your paints. (There are also palettes that come with a snap-on lid.) This might help if you are taking a short break. But beware that if you leave the saran wrap or the lid on for a few days, especially in humid conditions, mold or mildew may occur and ruin your paints and your day!

Protecting Your Paint: Tight Paint Caps 101

Did you ever have trouble opening caps on old tubes of paint? I have. You might try lubricating the threads on first opened tubes. Use a Q-tip dipped in Vaseline (petroleum jelly), being careful not to touch the paint!

You might try placing the caps under warm running water for a minute or two. Then try opening the caps with a pair of pliers.

Try opening the lid with a round piece of rubber — the kind you would use to open lid jars (Fig. 5D1).

Fig. 5C



My Brush Set: (1) #2 Round Brush, (2) #6 Fan Brush, (3) 3/4" Flat Brush, (4) #8 Round, (5) 1 1/2 Flat, (6) #38 Round (7) 1" Angle Shader.



Do not keep saran wrap on your palette for a prolonged length of time.



One friend says she heats up a cup of water in the microwave to a near boiling temperature, then dips the top of the tube for a few seconds into the water. She swears this does the trick. She also reports that covering the paint tube threads with saran wrap also works well (Fig. 5D2).



On Beginning a Painting

- 1 Whenever you begin a painting, work from the top down if conditions allow (Fig. 5E). That way you can work on the foreground while the top is drying.
- 2 When working in watercolor, you always work from light to dark colors.
- 3 Never (I know, never say never!) make the horizon in the middle of a painting (neither half way up or down). (See the *Rule of Thirds* in this chapter).
- 4 If the sky is the main feature, make it two thirds of the painting. Conversely, if the land (in a landscape painting) is the main feature, it should be two thirds and the sky one third. (again, see the *Rule of Thirds*).
- 5 The best compositions generally have most of the following elements: value (light and dark areas), various colors, interesting textures, a focal point, repetition or patterns, and a direction that guides the viewer's eye.

Planning Your Work

The best compositions generally have most of the following elements:

A focal point (FP): The FP is any element in a painting that draws the viewer's eye into the picture. It is generally the center of attention such as tall vertical element, or the main subject such as a house. (Fig. 5F)

Line: It may seem obvious that a painting must have lines, but I am speaking of how you use line. Line is generally not randomly placed but is used to define a space, create an outline or pattern, imply movement and even suggest mass or volume.

Shape: Shape may be another way to describe objects in a painting, but do fall into two categories: geometric and organic shapes. The former has length and width dimensions. The latter has natural, less defined edges such as a cloud.

Value: Value refers to both lightness or darkness of a color. It may be called tone or contrast. Think in terms of how a shadow cast on an object changes the color of the object. The shadow provides a contrast.



Unity: Unity is one of those hard-to-describe art elements, but a painting that lacks unity generally has too many focal points, goes in too many directions and appears unbalanced. A painting with unity is generally pleasing to the eye and has no jarring elements.



As a fledging artist, you should have fun in adding interesting elements to your compositions. Here I added Charlie, the Canadian goose— he's leading the pack!

Balance: A painting is said to have balance when its key elements (lines, shapes, and colors) are arranged in harmonious way.

Repetition with variation: Strive to create an element of interest in your painting by including pattern or repetition. However, if you add pattern without variation you will find that repetition becomes monotonous.

Other Things to Think About

Before beginning your composition, look at your subject and decide your page orientation. If your subject is taller than it is wide, then you might want to consider what is known as the “portrait” view. *Fig. 5G* illustrates how the same subject can look different depending on whether it’s in the “portrait” or “landscape” orientation.

Fig. 5G



Portrait



Landscape

Fig. 5H shows a trick you can use when you have started your painting and have an unplanned addition such as a tree.

You can try painting the image first on a sheet of transparency (or a piece of glassine paper) and then moving it around the composition to see where it looks best. Of course, you have to have unfinished, white areas on your watercolor paper since it’s very difficult to add elements to a watercolor surface that has dried.

Fig. 5H



Fig. 5I



On Copying Images

Hopefully, the previous pages will guide you in transferring your images to paper. Here’s another thought: As beginners, we might see a picture in a magazine or a greeting card that we really want to paint. However, if the image is too small to trace, and you’re not great at enlarging the image by sketching by hand, here are some simple solutions:

Enlarge the image on a photocopying machine, experimenting with different sizes, 125, 150 and 200 percent, for instance.

If you find yourself making a lot of copies, you might consider buying what is often called a Tracer Projector and Enlarger (*Fig. 5I*), which are readily available online or through any art supply company. Much like an old-fashioned slide projector, a tracer is used in the dark and projects images (your art work) on a wall where you have taped up your watercolor or drawing paper. The magnified image can be adjusted in size, making it easy to transfer even the smallest image to one that fits a standard mat. In one respect, you are skipping the use of transfer and tracing papers. It’s also a fun and creative way to work on your composition skills.

Inspired vs. Stealing

Whenever anyone discusses copying an image, that formidable word copyright comes up. Of course, I won’t attempt a full discussion here, but it’s worth mentioning that artists and illustrators have been using photo references since photography was invented.

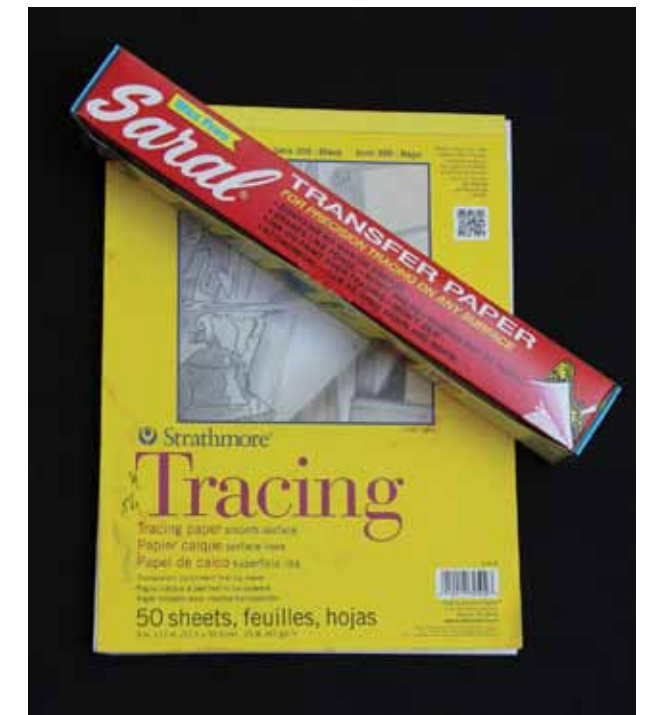
Being inspired by another artist’s work is also common. In fact, there is no violation of copyright when the painting is done for your personal enjoyment and will not be sold. If the image you want to copy is a landscape, you generally have some leeway since it might appear that you actually painted the scene outdoors and the work is less about a concept or idea.

TIP

If you are copying the work of a famous artist or a commercial image that is not in the public domain, you must sign it with your own name and add the phrase “After” (insert the name of the artist being copied). That means that your work is “after” or follows a previous work.

Still, I would avoid copying any work exactly, and instead use parts of the scene as points of departure. Think inspiration, not copying.

At the end of this book, you’ll find one of the paintings that inspired me (See *Frame 4*). You will see that I took a closer view of the scene.



The tools of the trade: transfer and tracing paper.

What's Wrong with This Picture?

Have you ever looked at a painting (your own or someone else's) and thought something was a bit "off?" It might have an interesting subject, nice colors, and even convey a perfect understanding of perspective.

The problem is likely to lie in the composition or design of the painting: the elements and focal point of the work proves to divide the picture plane into boring, equal-size shapes.

It's also a good indication that the artist doesn't know about a basic principle of composition: the Rule of Thirds. This technique takes its name from the placement of the elements such as the horizon line one-third of the way down from the top of the paper (or one-third from the top).

The Rule of Thirds may also be the most effective means of creating truly professional art, or to put it another way, of reaching your full potential as an artist.

The Rule of Thirds is simply a method of dividing the picture plane into unequal segments for maximum impact. Why unequal segments?

Simply put, avoiding a dead-center focal point is one way to ensure that your work has visual interest.

Compare the sketch in *Fig. 5J*, with *Fig. 5K*. They both have a strong vertical element (the lighthouse), but the strict adherence to left-to-right symmetry in *Fig. 5J* somehow makes the subject look static and boring.



Fig. 5J



Fig. 5K

The Rule of Thirds

To get the hang of the Rule of Thirds, here are some pointers.

- 1** Plan the design of your composition by drawing a light grid over your work or on a piece of tracing paper. The grid should look like a window with nine panes.
- 2** The overlay grid is designed to divide your work into thirds, both vertically and horizontally.
- 3** Consider the horizontal elements. If you are working on a landscape, the horizon line should be directly on or near the upper or lower "rungs" of the "window" grid.
- 4** Consider all the strong vertical elements in your painting such as a tree or a figure. They should be placed directly on or near the intersection of your grid lines.
- 5** Remember to erase your grid lines before you paint.

Use the Rule of Thirds consistently and you will find that with practice, you will automatically create a composition that uses an effective and dynamic division of space

Some Perspective on Perspective

If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door

— Catherine Galasso-Vigorito



Detail of "Untitled," shown entirely in Chapter 18, Frame 18

This is an example of the Rule of Thirds: the eye of this bird is slightly off center.

TIP

Did you know that once you finish a painting, you still own the rights to it even if you sell it? That means if the buyer wants to reproduce the painting — to make a limited-edition print or photo copy — they need to get your written, expressed permission.

Words of Wisdom: If you don't fail now and again, it's a sign you're playing it safe.

— Unknown

If you have had some experience with art, you know that understanding perspective is as important as knowing how to hold a tennis racket or golf club correctly. Perspective, in other words, can break or make a painting.

If you are a beginner, you more than likely are taught a type of perspective called Linear Perspective. It's a technique of creating the illusion of depth and distance by using two key techniques: adding a horizon line and a vanishing point.

Objects... May Appear Closer?

The most basic type of perspective is "one-point" — think railroad tracks or a boat dock. Both subjects are created by establishing a Horizon Line (H.L., where the sky meets the ground) and a point in the distance where all lines converge.

As shown in Fig. 6A the vanishing point (V.P.) serves as a guideline for ensuring that all the subjects like roof-lines and doorways are "tilted" in the right direction. It is the main

technique to replicate what happens in real life: objects appear smaller as they get further back in space.

So what do you do if you are painting a landscape and there are no apparent converging lines? Try what is known as **aerial or atmospheric perspective**. With this technique, you render depth or distance by modifying aspects of the painting such as the color intensity and an object's clarity (Fig. 6C).

