

DEAR ERIC COLUMN - MARCH

Dear Eric,

I'm really hoping that you'll answer my question. As a beginner watercolorist, I've been intently studying watercolor for over two years, but still haven't painted very much. I feel inhibited to use the "very expensive" paints, especially possibly getting other colors mixed in with them thus losing my original color. I've been letting my colors dry in the palette (which does make them easy to clean), but then it takes a lot of "elbow grease" with some water and a brush to get any amount of paint from these wells when I actually want to use them. I see you use freshly squeezed out paint in your wells, and you're dipping your brush in multiple colors without rinsing the brush. How do you keep your paints clean, or does this really matter to you? *Linda from Nevada*



Linda,

You have asked a question that is most likely one of the biggest challenges to watercolorists: how to keep our colors fresh and exciting. The following I have found very helpful:

- 1) I squeeze out enough fresh color so that it is the consistency of sour cream. Once it starts to set up and become goopy, then it becomes difficult to "grab" with my brush and I resort to scrubbing color in the wells- a sure recipe for muddy colors.
- 2) I make sure I have plenty of moist colors so I can stack multiple colors on the brush.
- 3) I don't over mix! Muddiness is caused by over mixing and indecisive handling, not poor color selection. Sometimes I will just let the colors mix on the paper. If I do mix my colors, it is usually not more than two or three strokes.
- 4) I use enough water so that a bead of water forms at the bottom of my washes. This is a sign that the water is mixing the colors, which produces a very fresh look.
- 5) I am aggressive about my darks- I can only achieve these rich washes with fresh color.

6) Once the paint becomes sticky and unresponsive, I throw it away. I would much rather throw away hardened color than poor paintings done with that hardened color.

7) If my wells have enough paint (a pinky knuckle's length) then there is little cross contamination of colors in the wells by stacking multiple layers on the brush.

This is just an overview. I strongly recommend you get my video titled "*Color Mixing*" as this will help you to see what I mean and will give further insight.

Keep your brush wet!

Eric



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