



*"Morning Glory"*

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**LEO KAHL**  
American Watercolors

## Tutorial **Masterclass**

### "Morning Glory"

**Project # 001**  
September 2020

## **FREE Tutorial!**

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## Project Introduction

*Hello! Welcome to my watercolor (print version) tutorial series. I will do my best to explain “why” I do what I do for each step of the process.*

*Don’t get discouraged if your efforts do not match my efforts. Just have fun and experiment, it’s the only way to really learn.*

## Project# 001 “Morning Glory”

*The scene to the left is a photo of my dog Wyeth. I was inspired to do this scene for several reasons.*

*Besides the sentimental value of being with my dog, I was attracted to the beautiful flowers growing wild along the salt marsh near my home. I call them “Morning Glories” but this might not be accurate. I also love the wildness of marsh. The challenge was all the green grasses and brush.*

*When I decide to do a scene, I’m after the mood and ambiance of a moment, not every item in the scene.*

*My objective was to capture the energy of the breezy salt air, the wildness of the marsh, the delicate translucent flowers and of course, the happiness of my dog.*

*I am never a slave to a photo. A photo simply helps me remember the moment and the light.*



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## Materials, Tools & Preparation

*In this project, I used a sheet of Arches, 140 lb. Cold Press paper. I usually always use the Rough texture paper but this was to be a demonstration project. Rough paper facilitates textural effects by dragging pigment across the tops of the paper's "peaks".*

I always try to layout my paper so that it will fit into standard size mats and frames. In this case, I planned on a mat with a 12 x 18 inch opening. Always give yourself a good extra inch or more of image area. This sheet was layed out to a 14 x 20 image area.

By working larger, it allows you to move the matboard around to find the best final composition.

I do not ever pre-wet my paper. I simply tape it to a sheet of lightweight, corrugated plastic board. Use plain beige tape, not the blue painters tape. The blue color will throw off your judgement of hues.



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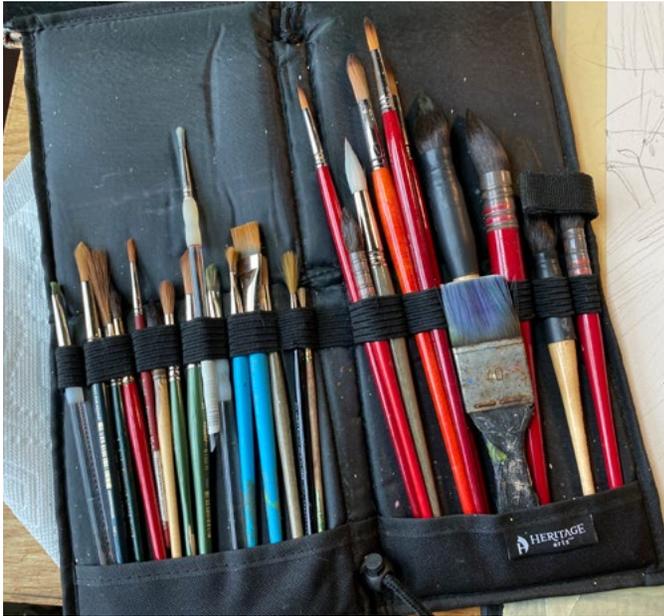
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## Materials, Tools & Preparation

### Brushes:

*This topic is a full tutorial in itself. The photo to the left shows my brushes. Big, squirrel hair mops, medium sized pointed sables, thin, long hair riggers, a big, soft flat synthetic and lots of smaller detail and utility brushes.*

### Paint:

*I use tube watercolor pigments. I use various brands. My palette is fairly limited. You really only need a warm and cool version of each of the primary hues, a few secondary hues that are difficult to create with primaries, some Chinese white, and neutral tint ( a rich dark that darkens other hues )*



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# Materials, Tools & Preparation

## My set up



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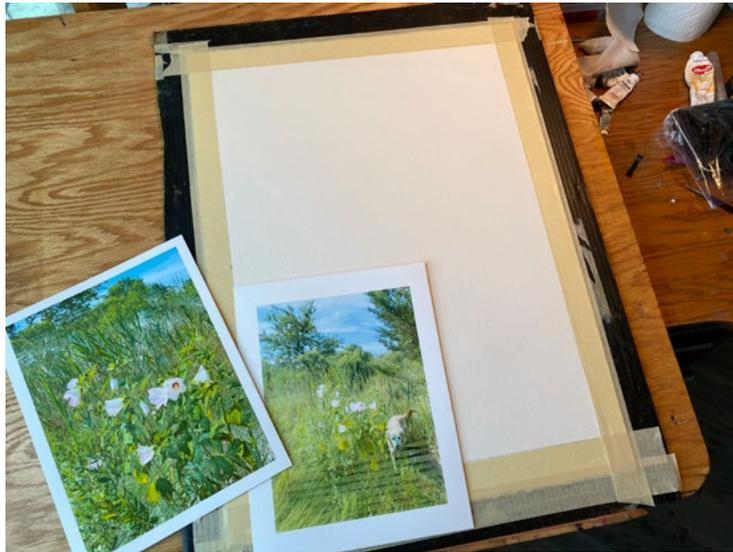
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## Step 1:

*I try to always do a small simple sketch of my design. This is really important for beginners.*

I use inexpensive plain white index cards to sketch on with a soft graphite pencil. Play around with several iterations until you find a composition you like. Simplify your scene into a few big shapes, some medium shapes, and some small shapes.

That's all a watercolor scene is. A juxtaposition of simple shapes. More on this later.

Who or what will be the star of the painting? In this case, it was one of the flowers that was turned towards me. The dog is a subplot, not the focal point.

I shaded my sketch to plan out the value patterns. I will use dark values behind the flowers to make them "pop."



## Step 1: ( Continued )

After you are happy with your composition sketch, it's time to sketch out your design onto your watercolor paper.

If you don't feel comfortable accurately enlarging your sketch onto the watercolor paper, here is a simple method to this.

Divide your sketch into a series of squares as shown to the left.

Very lightly, add the same divisions to your watercolor paper. You can use a ruler for this. Now just replicate the outlines within the squares on your sketch onto the larger grid squares on your watercolor paper.

Try not to draw too darkly on your watercolor paper.

**( The grid lines were added to this graphic to illustrate the process. You would never draw them this dark. )**

Note how I suggested darker values on the actual WC paper by cross hatching line work. These lines will completely disappear in the final painting.



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## Step 2: The "Glow" Layer

I create my painting in value layers, 3 - 4 as a rule of thumb. The initial layer is important. This is the layer that will "glow" in the final painting. This is because the light striking the painting will penetrate this watery, translucent layer and bounce back to the viewer.

It is also important that we use mostly "warm" hues in this initial layer. These warm hues will energize the painting. We will be using "cooler" hues in subsequent layers.

It's important to use lots of water in this early phase. This will ensure that we are placing a translucent layer of pigment. Subsequent layers will use less and less water and become more opaque in nature.

Thinking 3 steps ahead like a billiards player, determine which shapes need to "glow" in the finished painting.

Liberal washes of light blue for the sky then a light wash of spring green for background foliage. Wash over the flower shapes with a very light wash of permanent rose or other very warm magenta. Use washes of orange and more opera pink towards the bottom. Create warm greens by mixing yellow ochre and various blue hues to wash in around flower petals as shown.

Try to create a smooth, intermingling of hues. Don't worry about lines other than painting around the flower petals.

Wash over the dog with warm orange and yellow ochre hues.



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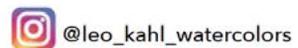
## Step 2: The "Glow" Layer ( Continued )

Glow layer application.

Let the watery washes run together. The idea is to achieve smooth transitions between hues.

Don't be afraid to use strong hues. They will dry much lighter.

Use a hair dryer to thoroughly dry this layer before moving on to next layer.





## Step 3: Middle Values

I start off the next layer by first suggesting some tree branches in upper left of painting. I use any darker value I can create by simply swirling left over pigment on palette to a mid value gray.

After suggesting a few branches, I use a splatter technique to suggest tree foliage. I always prefer to paint trees in this manner. Protect the painting with sheets of paper or towels where you do not want errant splatter.



This technique takes a lot of practice. The angle of my brush aligns with the way that the tree grows and also aligns with the direction of the breeze. I do not like rigid depictions of tree foliage. Trees are wild and should look to have an energy about them. Note how I protected the flower petals with some scraps of paper.

Let the splatter accumulate where the tree leaves are most dense.

I used yellow ochre mixed with viridian and other blue hues to create varying types of greens for leaves.

Find a good medium sized brush for this. Your pigment to water ratio is a kind of milky or cream-like consistency. Tap the loaded brush against your finger as shown.

***This takes some practice to get the hang off. Practice on some scrap watercolor paper.***





## Step 3: Middle Values

After suggesting the wispy tree in upper left, I begin using cool hues such as ultramarine blue, burnt sienna, and viridian mixed together in constantly varied proportions to cool down the initial layer of warm hues.

These cool hues are used to not only suggest the positive shapes of big weeds and such but to also use to paint the negative space around the flower petals and the plant leaves.

This process "reveals" the shapes that should visually "pop." Try to apply this layer as a continuous, connected series of washes. Be expressive and bold in your brushwork.

I could make out the pencil lines of many of the larger plant leaves but mostly just make it up as I go along, painting around an area to reveal leaf shapes.

Continue on until you have applied all of the middle values of the scene.



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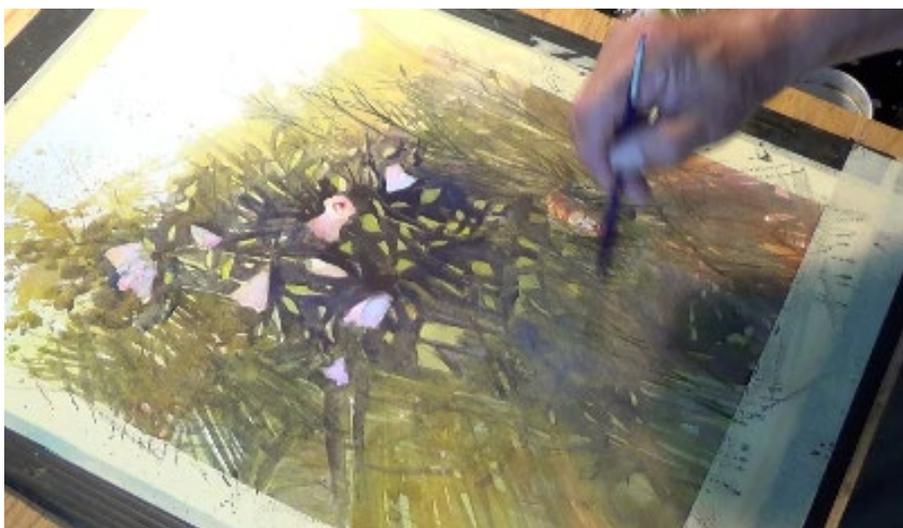
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## Step 4: Dark Values

In and around the focal area ( the flower bloom ) use a very dark mixture of ultramarine blue, viridian and a touch of alizarin crimson. Using very little to no water, apply this thick gooey pigment by painting and strengthening the negative spaces around the flower bloom and nearby leaves.

Using rich darks in this manner will create an area of high contrast around your focal area. This will ultimately command the viewer's attention.



Using more dark pigment with a bit more water now I apply lots of thin brushstrokes using a rigger type long hair brush to suggest lots of weeds and grasses around the bottom of painting.

Use your imagination, paint how it feels to you, not necessarily what's in the photo. This is the time to be really expressive. This will bring energy and movement to your painting.



## Step 5: Details

Now its time for some details. Details will really bring a painting to life. Most boring paintings that I see lack this crucial step.

I first add in the center of the flower. I also add some light cobalt blue washes to the other flowers to sort of model them a bit more and to cool them down with respect to my main star, the flower facing us.

Next I add a ball to the dog's mouth. I use the same magenta pink hue as used in the flowers. This is a really small detail but I find that it delights and rewards my viewers as they scan the entire painting.

Add more hues to the dog along with some shadows so as to make him a bit more 3 dimensional. A nose and eyes were also added with some dark neutral tint pigment.

Additional weeds and grasses are also applied over the dog so that he recedes into the scene.



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## Step 5: Details (Continued)

Almost done.

The plant with flowers needs some stalks etc. to better resemble a plant. Using some Chinese white pigment mixed with spring green and other green concoctions, Make some suggestive strokes to resemble the plants stems.

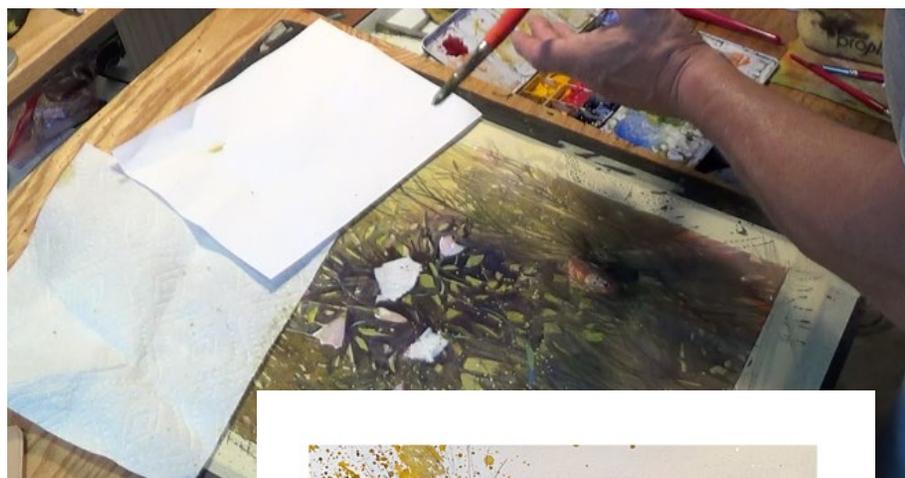
These "lines" also help to guide the viewers eye through the scene. Paint the stems in same direction that the plant grows.

Add some opaque suggestions of bright green leaves.

Lastly, add a few highlights to the edges of some of the flower blossoms with titanium white, especially on the edges of the main flower. Be careful don't overdo these highlights.



The painting is finished...or is it?



## Step 6: Embellishment

After looking at my painting on the floor, I was not happy with the somewhat dullness, or lack of energy in the central area.

As I will often do, I'll do some additional splatter work just to enliven a dull area.

Using some Chinese white mixed with a bright spring green hue, introduce some random, meaningless splatter across the mid section of painting.

This serves to break up some slightly boring areas and adds a touch of excitement and wildness to the scene and mood.

Be sure to protect areas of painting where you do not want errant splatter drops.

At this point, I was reasonably happy with my effort. Was it exactly as I had envisioned. Not quite, but they never are. Watercolor painting is an adventure. This is the allure for me.

***Just have fun and see where the process takes you!***



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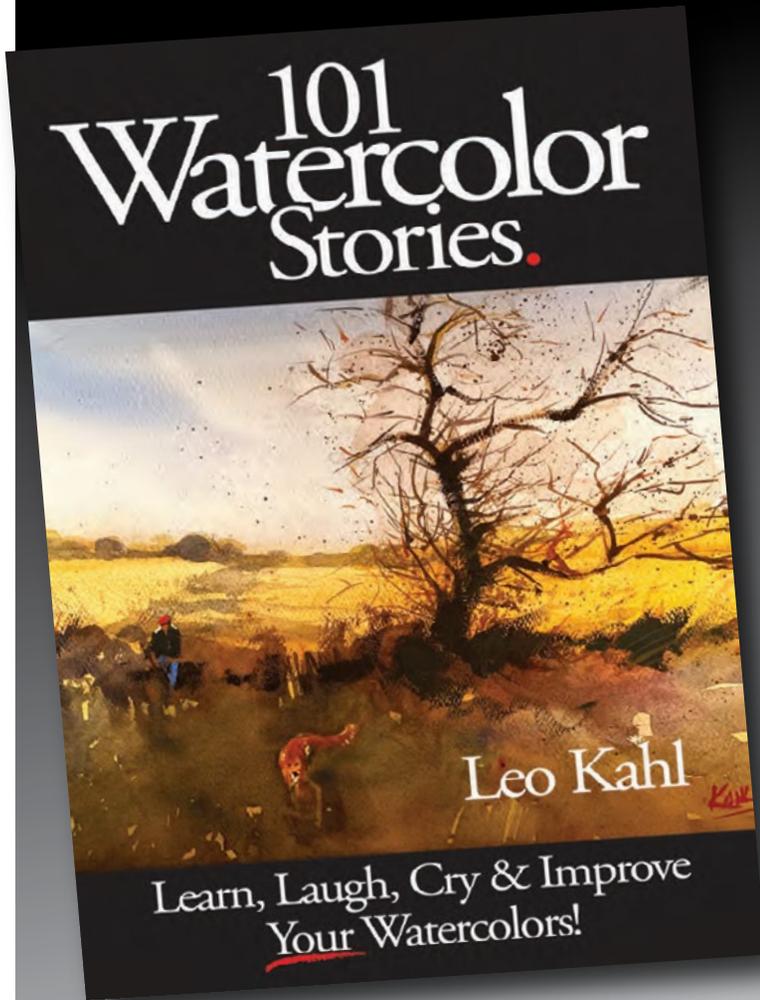
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# Check out my new book!



*Six years in the making, this book recounts the stories and execution of over 100 paintings. Each story details how the painting was approached and what I learned about the watercolor process.*

*This is a fun read for both aspiring artists and people who just enjoy art and life stories.*



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