make something real

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ARTIST NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 17 | ISSUE 2 | SPRING 2019

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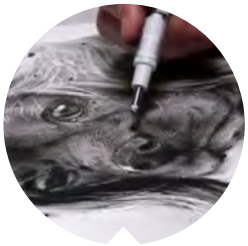

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MAIN FEATURE

Using Inspiration and Routine to Rediscover My Love for Making Art

By Jordan Rhodes

My name is Jordan Rhodes. I am currently a Ph. D. candidate in the Department of Chemistry at Vanderbilt University. So what am I doing in the Strathmore Artist Newsletter? That's a great question that I still don't really know the answer to. Growing up I used to draw all the time, but over the years my path seemed to stray further away from art, whether it was because of sports in high school, majoring in chemistry during undergrad, or teaching and doing research in graduate school. It wasn't until about eighteen months ago that I began consistently drawing again as an outlet to cope with the frequent challenges, frustrations, and failures that accompany research in a doctoral program. My research involves synthesizing nanocrystals so small that they can only be observed on a multimillion-dollar transmission electron microscope, so making art is a nice change of pace where the final result is something tangible that I can hold in my hand. It is gratifying to turn a blank sheet of paper into something that brings inspiration to my life.

"Inspiration is not only inconsistent but it is also transient and fleeting."

Back in September of 2017 I reluctantly started an Instagram account for posting my art after my wife had "suggested" that I do so, and by "suggested," I mean forced. The journey has been unexpected, but pleasantly surprising. I would have never guessed that sharing my art through a social media application would be as well received as it has been or lead to opportunities like this. The biggest lesson I learned from the experience was to definitely listen to my wife because she obviously knows best.

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So what sparked this urge to draw again after so long? It happened the moment I stumbled across old Bob Ross episodes on Netflix on a lazy Sunday afternoon. I remember the feeling of nostalgia and witnessing the seemingly magic transformation of a blank canvas into a finished piece of art in a matter of minutes. Single brush strokes would result in the illusion of distant mountain ranges or tree lines. Instead of binge watching more episodes like I usually would any other time, I knew I had to get off the couch and draw something.

"In order to see more consistent improvement a more reliable fuel must be used in addition to inspiration, and that is establishing a routine."

That initial burst of inspiration was certainly the catalyst to help me start drawing again, however, relying solely on inspiration to be motivated is inefficient. Up until this point inspiration was the primary fuel that motivated me to draw and as a result I would have periods when I felt inspired and I drew a lot, or droughts where I wouldn't draw at all. It was difficult to be inspired when I had the busy schedule of taking chemistry classes, labs, teaching, and research, all at the same time. My drought periods would easily go from weeks to months or even years.

Inspiration is not only inconsistent but it is also transient and fleeting. Those first couple drawings will inevitably be underwhelming and it will be difficult to find them very inspiring, especially if you're a beginner. It might even be worse when you know how to draw but haven't done so in a while and therefore the skills you had acquired are rusty and your art seems worse than it's ever been. Even during the course of working on a single piece of art, the level of inspiration can be variable. It is usually high in the beginning then drops somewhere in the middle when the "ugly stage" is reached. Anyone who works with watercolor or gouache will know what I'm talking about. It is only by pushing through the ugly stage that the final image can be reached. But to the inexperienced, this can be enough to give up on a piece or art in general.

In order to see more consistent improvement a more reliable fuel must be used in addition to inspiration, and that is establishing a routine. I'm no rocket scientist, just a chemist, but here's my space shuttle analogy. Inspiration is like the external booster engines of a space shuttle. They provide an initial burst that is strong enough to overcome gravity in order to reach orbital altitude. The fuel used is powerful but extremely fast burning. During the ascent the external engines run out of fuel and detach only to fall back to the surface. If you don't have a main fuel supply then the

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shuttle will also fall back to the surface before escaping the atmosphere, never reaching the destination. A routine is like the fuel supply for the main engines on the shuttle which take over after the booster engines detach (or after the inspiration has faded). These burn at a more steady and slower rate, but a little goes a much longer way since the force of gravity is much weaker beyond the atmosphere. That's not to say that inspiration isn't necessary or a complete waste; those booster engines that fell back to the surface are usually recovered and reused for future missions. It is by combining inspiration with a steady routine that keeps one going on a consistent path, at least in my own experience.

"When I was starting off, I gave myself easy weekly challenges with a specific subject matter that I would complete around the same time every day. By having my subject matter already predetermined and time set aside to work, all there was left to do was draw."

When starting something new or starting after taking a long hiatus, it can be difficult to get into a routine, especially with art. When I find inspiration, I have to try to capture the momentum it provides to help get into a routine easier. When I was starting off, I gave myself easy weekly challenges with a specific subject matter that I would complete around the same time every day. By having my subject matter already predetermined and time set aside to work, all there was left to do was draw. Every week I would try different subject matter until I finally tried drawing portraits, which turned out to be my favorite subject matter to draw. Don't get me wrong, I am certainly far from perfect and miss days of drawing. I am not 100% consistent 100% of the time, especially since I am not currently a full-time artist. It's just that having a somewhat consistent routine enables me to get back into drawing much easier after short lapses than if I was starting after a long break.

After learning about the importance of a routine, I found that other sources of inspiration came in the form of experimenting with new materials and mediums. Until this point the only tools I used before were pencils, ballpoint pens, and plain white paper. That's when I came across Strathmore products. Since they were widely available and affordable, I was able to try out a number of different papers without breaking the budget, which is very important when living on monthly graduate student stipend.

The paper that first caught my eye was the *400 Series Toned Tan sketchbooks*. My favorite thing about mid toned paper is the ability to work in either direction in terms of the value scale. I could go darker just like with white paper, but what really makes it distinctive to me is the ability to put in highlights which help the image to pop off the page. When working on white paper, the white of the paper tends

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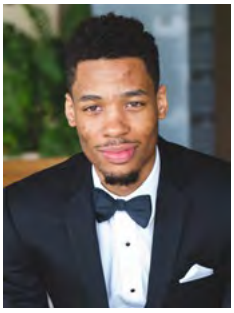
to be the lightest value so you can only add darker values. I like to use a mixture of white charcoal and white gel pen to accomplish different lighting effects on toned paper. For soft and subtle highlights and gradations I use white charcoal since it is easily blend-able with a cotton ball or finger. I usually save white gel pen for sharp highlights like the glare in the eyes or for rim lighting. For shading I prefer using grayscale markers, but I am always careful to use scrap paper to protect the next page from ink bleeding.

"I just want to encourage and remind anyone reading this that it is never too late to start creating art or get back into making art."

In addition to drawing, I also love painting with watercolor, and more recently gouache. For watercolor paintings I've learned that paper plays a huge role in how the paint behaves. I like watercolor paper that can withstand multiple washes and absorb a fair amount of pigment and water so I usually reach for Strathmore 500 Series 140 lb. cold press *Ready Cut Watercolor* sheets. For quicker sketches and practice I like to work in my *400 Series Watercolor Art Journal* with Aquafine watercolors by Daler-Rowney. On the other hand, I find that the opaque nature of gouache makes it more versatile for use on various types of papers including colored paper like the *400 Series Toned Tan and Toned Blue Mixed Media pads.* By combining gouache with colored paper, I can really get vivid images that seem to pop off the page more so than watercolors. Overall, I am excited to continue experimenting and practicing to improve my skills.

I don't know what future holds, but I do know that I will make sure to keep art a part of it. I am grateful that I have been blessed with new unexpected opportunities, as well as a loving wife that is very supportive. And while I still have so much to learn, I just want to encourage and remind anyone reading this that it is never too late to start creating art or get back into making art. You just need the right fuel to keep going. Thanks for reading!



ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Jordan Rhodes is currently a Ph.D candidate in the Department of Chemistry at Vanderbilt University. In his leisure time, he creates art which primarily focuses on portraiture. Jordan is expected to graduate this year and will be pursuing art related opportunities in the future. To explore more of his art please visit his *Instagram page* at @jmr_art.

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Strathmore

TRAVEL SERIES

NEW!

artwork by Sara Prentice

Designed to Meet the Needs of On-Location Artwork

TRAVEL JOURNALS

Perfect for Urban Sketchers, each journal features a soft silicone band to keep them secure and saddle stitching in a complementary aqua color.

TRAVEL PADS

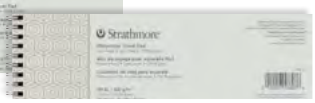
Perfect for plein air painting with 3 pad sizes, all in landscape format. All pads feature heavy duty chipboard backing and durable flip-over or spiral bound covers.

5.5"x 8"

7"x 10"

8"x 10"

6"x 8"



3"x 9"

All Travel Series Products Feature Premium Watercolor Paper That Is:

- Cold Press
- Heavyweight, 140 lb. (300g/m²)
- 100% cotton
- Acid free and archival grade

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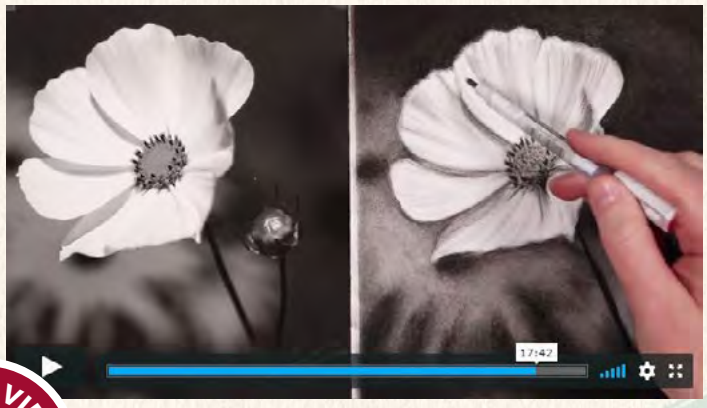
Strathmore® 2019 ONLINE WORKSHOP SERIES

FREE Online Workshop: Realistic Drawing With Charcoal

Join artist Kirsty Partridge as she guides you through free video lessons in this four-part charcoal course. Follow along to a sampler of popular subjects and break them down into approachable and achievable steps.

Lesson 1: Materials & Basic Techniques



Lesson 2: Floral Still Life

VIEW THE VIDEOS

Lesson 3: Realistic Animals in Charcoal

Lesson 4: Drawing Portraits with Charcoal

About our Online Workshops

Strathmore's Online Workshops feature free video lessons and downloadable instructions created by experienced artists. Follow along in the online classroom as instructors guide you through various topics and demonstrate useful tips, techniques, ideas, and inspirations to get you creating and learning even more about art. Share all the fun on **Instagram** and **Facebook** using ***#StrathmoreWorkshops***

About Instructor Kirsty Partridge

Kirsty Partridge is a self-taught artist who specializes in creating photo-realistic drawings with charcoal and colored pencil, as well as more expressive paintings with watercolor. In 3 years, Kirsty has surpassed 500,000 subscribers on her YouTube art channel, Kirsty Partridge Art. In her videos, Kirsty teaches her drawing and painting techniques for a range of different mediums and subject matters. She made the Realistic Charcoal Drawing tutorials especially for us, so tune in and check them out!

Share all the fun on Instagram and Facebook using **#StrathmoreWorkshops**

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A Complete Solution For Modern Watercolorists

Aquafine by Daler-Rowney offers a complete line of watercolor and gouache products, featuring a wide range of brilliant colors in tubes, half pans, sets, and fluid watercolors. All colors are made in the United Kingdom using traditional manufacturing methods. Aquafine watercolors have recently been reformulated with high quality pigments for superior lightfastness and working properties. Each Aquafine range is made with the same pigments, allowing them to work together seamlessly.

AQUAFINE WATERCOLOR

Rich, free-flowing, transparent color

Excellent tinting strength and working properties

Available in tube, half pans, and sets

48 intermixable colors

AQUAFINE FLUID WATERCOLOR

High degree of lightfastness and intermixability

Use straight out of the dropper or dilute to subtle tone

20 intermixable colors

AQUAFINE GOUACHE

High quality pigments for optimal performance, control, and opacity

Ideal for mixed media as well as for traditional techniques

30 intermixable colors

Aquafine Watercolour

www.daler-rowney.com

What is Gouache Paint?

First, let's start with the pronunciation. It sounds like *"gwash"* and rhymes with *squash.*

Gouache is often described as opaque watercolor. While these two mediums have many similarities, gouache differs from watercolor in its quick dry-time and matte finish. Goauche has a higher pigment content that is ground into larger particles than watercolor. This prevents it from granulating, causing opacity and a matte finish versus the translucent finish of watercolor. The bold, flat, poster-like finish makes it a versatile medium that is excellent for illustration, fine art and lettering.

Below is a side-by-side comparison of artwork completed by Minnie Small in gouache (left) and watercolor (right).

Gouache on Strathmore Toned Blue Mixed Media Paper

Watercolor on watercolor paper

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR GOUACHE PAINTING

The application of watercolor and gouache are similar. If you've been using watercolor paint, aside from the gouache itself you probably already have all the right tools to get started.

Brushes that are typically used for watercolor will work well with gouache.

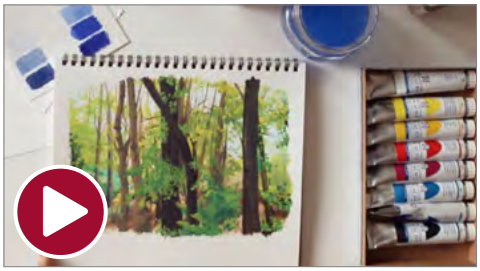
Watercolor and Mixed Media papers are best suited for gouache painting since they are manufactured to handle wet media applications. Sketch and Drawing papers are too lightweight and don't have the proper sizing (additives). A heavier weight paper that is 140lb (300gsm) or higher is ideal to help prevent warping. Selecting a watercolor or mixed media paper with a hot press, cold press, rough or vellum surface comes down to personal preference.

You can mix different amounts of water with gouache as you are using it depending on how opaque you want the final look to be. It can also be reactivated with water once it's dry, which can come in handy if you want to reuse paints that have dried on your pallet, or rework a section of your painting.

INTRODUCTORY VIDEO SERIES ON GOUACHE PAINTING

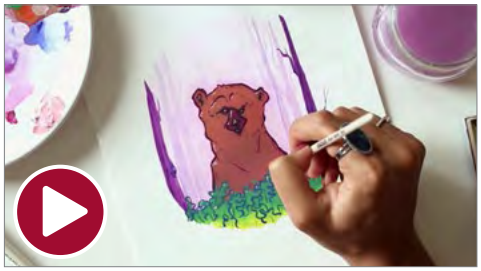
Artist Minnie Small created a helpful series of 3 short videos introducing gouache and demonstrating a number of tips and techniques to get started. Check them out here:

VIDEO 1: Intro to Gouache



VIDEO 2: General Gouache Techniques

VIDEO 3: Gouache Time-Lapse Painting



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