



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE



2026 Online Workshops

New and exciting workshops
are coming your way!



Strathmore Books

A round up of our newest
book offerings.



Artist Spotlight

3 Watercolor Florals, each
with a different brush shape



Art FAQ

What is feathering
& how do I prevent it?

MAIN FEATURE

Acrylic on Paper: Using Sketchbooks as a Visual Diary

By Marianne Vander Dussen



If I had to choose only one mode of artistic expression, it would be sketchbooks.

Several years ago, I was scrolling through Instagram and came across the work of Turkish artist [Gizem Bozkurt](#), who was using acrylic paint in her sketchbook. I was absolutely floored: her work was bold, colourful, and turned everyday moments into magic. I knew I had to try it for myself. I dove into sketching with acrylics headfirst,

and quickly became hooked on the joy and immediacy of painting on paper. Unlike canvas paintings, which often take me weeks (if not months) to complete, creating a sketchbook painting often only takes me a few hours, and allows me to scratch the itch of creative urges while testing out compositions and techniques. As a professional artist, educator, and YouTuber, I don't have as much time as I'd like to turn every idea into a full-scale canvas painting or tutorial.



Sketchbooks allow me to sharpen the saw and keep a sense of novelty in the studio, even when I'm locked in for months on a more demanding project.

Sketchbooks also force me to loosen up and focus more on the energy of colour and brushwork instead of detail. Even though my canvas paintings are strongly realistic, my sketchbook paintings are much more impressionistic. Painting quickly and loosely can be incredibly joyful, especially compared to labouring over small details, and my sketchbook paintings remind me to have fun and not take myself so seriously.



After doing some research for the best sketchbook to use, I settled on the [Strathmore Watercolor Journal](#), which I continue to use and recommend to my painting students. The thickness of the paper, the strength of the binding, and the durability of the cover made it a no-brainer, and my watercolor journal continues to serve as my acrylic sketchbook. The pages don't stick together, since they're so thick and sturdy, so it's great for painting with acrylic.

I also have a well-loved 8.5" x 5.5" watercolor journal that I use to teach color mixing in acrylic. It's the perfect size for charts, notes, wheels, and small-scale studies.

While I practice in both acrylic and oil, the acrylic sketchbook has become a favourite, since this is where I document the landscapes of my home town. Flipping through the pages is like taking a walk through memories, and I feel a strong sense of connection to each image. In this regard, the sketchbook isn't just a tool to practice with, but a sentimental keepsake that I treasure.

Because acrylic colours are so marvelously saturated, I lean into that quality when selecting my subjects. I am especially drawn

to transitional light at dawn and dusk, when colour floods the pages. One of my favourite spreads depicts a local church and a nearby beach at sunset. I photographed them on the same evening, with only ten minutes between the reference photos, so there is a natural harmony between the pages. I love how the light continues seamlessly from one painting to the other.



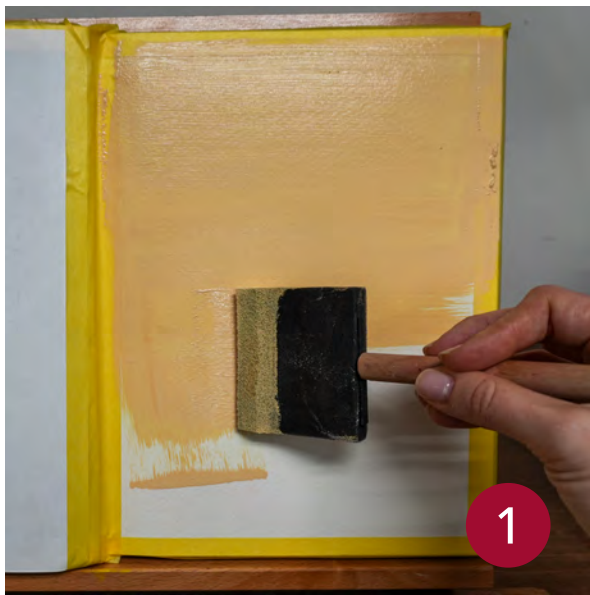
I put my sketchbooks through the ringer, and am constantly drenching the pages with gesso and using tape to create charts or edges. These books can take a beating, so I don't have to worry about rips or buckling while I'm working.

When I first started working in my larger journal, I had no vision for the book, and no technical knowledge of painting on paper. In the time that's passed, this book has become a visual diary of my life, and gives me an excuse to venture outside with my camera in hand to capture reference photos.

“

Sketchbooks also force me to loosen up and focus more on the energy of colour and brushwork instead of detail.

”



I've also developed a workflow specifically for painting on paper, which I'll be demonstrating as I walk you through the process of using acrylics to paint a sunset. One of the most common questions I'm asked on my YouTube channel is whether I prepare my pages with gesso, which I do.

Painting an Acrylic Sunset in an Art Book: Step-by-Step Demo

Step 1: Tape the edges with a delicate strength painter's tape, which keeps the edges clean and prevents the pages from buckling. Then, I add gesso that I thin with a small amount of water and tone with an earth colour, typically yellow ochre. I use a foam brush to apply this since it doesn't leave any raised brushstrokes on the paper.

I add gesso for several reasons. First, because it's a cheap way to tone the paper with a little liquid acrylic, since I prefer to work on a toned surface. Second, because it seals the tape, and prevents bleeding. Third, I do find that it adds just a little extra dry time. Not much, since the paper fibres are naturally more absorbent than canvas, but enough to give a little bit of an edge for blending.



Step 2: Then I block in my subject. I typically move from back to front, from dark to light. In this particular reference photo, the sunset sky gradient is blocked by a large cloud formation, but since I work in layers, I like to place the sky gradient onto the page first before adding the clouds.

Painting a gradient with acrylic on paper is difficult because of the fast dry time. What I like to do to ensure this process is successful is premix all of the colours on a wet palette, then quickly jump between brushes as I move from one colour into another. For this painting, I'm using a limited palette, and mixing my darks by using a combination of burnt umber and ultramarine blue. As you can see, the gradient is hardly perfect, but it will work as a base layer for the clouds.



Adding the foundation of the cloud structure feels a little painful with acrylic, because we're going to cover up a lovely gradient with some streaky clouds. In order to maintain the soft wispy texture, I have to stack multiple transparent layers together to gradually build opacity. That means it has to go through an ugly stage, and even though I have gone through this countless times, I still find myself praying that it'll turn out alright on the other side.

When you're trying to build intensity with your colours, an important principle to bear in mind is opacity, which is how transparent your paints are. If you're trying to get a very vivid, high chroma colour on top of other colours, you may need to layer in an opaque base with titanium white to help create a layer for the glaze to rest on.

That's what I did with the rich, intense coral on the cloud, which is the focal point of this piece. Before adding in my final coral colour, I put a pastel pink on the cloud structure, waited for it to dry, then glazed over it with the hot coral colour.

Step 3: Once the first layer of the sky is in, I sketch the beach with a simple line made from pure burnt umber, before adding the darkest part of the water and beach. Since both are so dark, I add a faint outline of reflected colours where the water meets the sand, just as a reference point. It feels so good to have the first layer in, since I can now read my values much better and make better decisions about my colours.

Step 4: For the second layer, we'll add in the clouds. I start with the dark purple colour and dry brush them in swirls, with larger movements at the top for proximity and smaller, tighter strokes near the horizon line. I love using brushwork to emphasize depth, and there's nothing quite as satisfying as dry brushing clouds onto a sky.





5

Step 5: Finally, it's time to paint the water. This is where I tend to be the loosest and most impressionist. I could easily spend hours painting every detail of the water, but I always have to ask myself, to what end? This is just a sketch, so instead, I focus on the light on the surface and the movement of the waves. Since acrylic tends to leave hard edges, I keep multiple brushes loaded with different colours ready, switching between the brushes to keep the edges soft and maintain the feeling of water.

Now it's time for my favourite part: taking off the tape and seeing the final spread! I'm thrilled to have this dramatic sunset join my collection of landscapes. I hope you found this walkthrough helpful, and feel inspired to give acrylic painting on paper a try. I love my acrylic sketchbook as a collection of dazzling memories, and you'll be amazed at the beauty that you'll find and capture in your own backyard. Happy painting!



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Marianne Vander Dussen is a Canadian painter, educator, and YouTuber working primarily in acrylic and oil. Her work focuses on flowers, landscapes, and birds, and is inspired by close observation of the natural world. Through her paintings, she explores colour, light, and atmosphere with a balance of realism and expressive brushwork.

In addition to her studio practice, Marianne teaches painting and shares her knowledge of technique and colour theory through her online courses and YouTube channel. Her work as an educator is grounded in making painting approachable while encouraging artists to develop confidence through step-by-step instruction.



Strathmore® ONLINE WORKSHOP SERIES

Join us for Strathmore's FREE 2026 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 art topics. After a lesson releases, it remains on the site for viewing the rest of the year. #StrathmoreWorkshops

Share all the fun on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) using #StrathmoreWorkshops

Workshops start February 2 and continue through December 31, 2026



Workshop 1 Radiant Figures: Drawing with Drama & Light

Instructor: Justin Maas

Start Date: February 2, 2026

In this workshop, you'll learn the fundamentals of drawing the clothed figure and creating a compelling figurative portrait. Topics include working with a model, choosing references, blocking in the figure, and using values, contrast, and highlights to build a dynamic composition. Using just a few pencils and toned paper, you'll discover how to create a captivating figure drawing.



Workshop 2 Painting Faces & Florals: A Stylized Watercolor Series

Instructor: Jane Beata

Start Date: July 6, 2026

In this four-part watercolor series, you'll learn to paint expressive portraits with loose florals, starting with simple studies and moving toward a finished piece. You'll explore composition, limited palettes, and layering while building confidence and developing a more intuitive, personal style.



Workshop 3 The Joyful Sketchbook: Watercolor Movement & Shine

Instructor: Sarah Simon @themintgardener

Start Date: October 5, 2026

Join Sarah for an inspiring watercolor sketchbook series designed to spark creativity and build confidence through drawing and painting practice. Sarah shares her approach to exploring new techniques, developing your personal style, and rediscovering the joy of watching paint move across the page. Perfect for anyone eager to reconnect with your artistic curiosity as you fill your sketchbook with vibrant ideas and creative momentum.

Join us for our free workshops at: strathmoreartiststudio.com

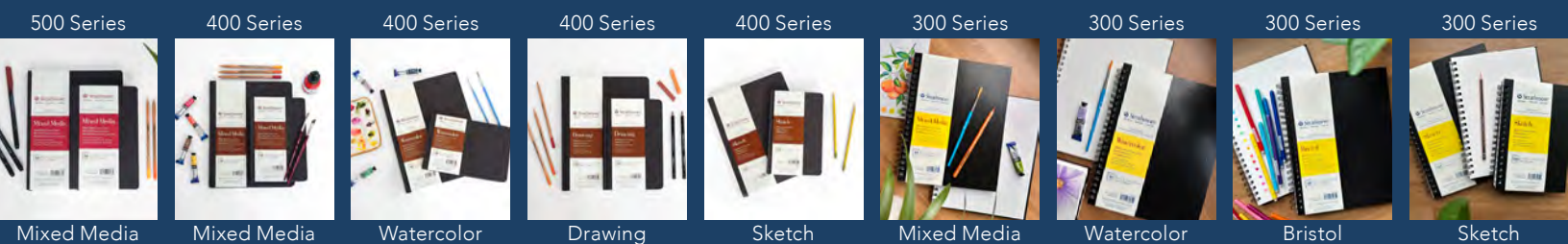


Strathmore® ART BOOKS

Explore our most-loved papers in versatile, portable and convenient book formats.
Choose from sketch, drawing, bristol, mixed media, and watercolor.

Our 400 and 500 Series books feature rich brown covers, lay-flat binding,
and expanded size options, including new landscape formats.
Prefer a classic sketchbook?

Our most popular 300 Series Strathmore papers are
now available in new books with black hard covers and spiral binding.



500 Series

400 Series

400 Series

400 Series

400 Series

300 Series

300 Series

300 Series

300 Series

Mixed Media

Mixed Media

Watercolor

Drawing

Sketch

Mixed Media

Watercolor

Bristol

Sketch



WATERCOLOR FLOWERS BY BRUSH SHAPE WITH JOLY POA

Discover how brush shape can transform your watercolor florals in this 3-part video series with artist Joly Poa.

From loose wildflowers painted with a round brush, to soft poppies using a filbert, and expressive irises created with an angled shader, each lesson breaks down technique, pressure, and movement.

VIDEO 1: Watercolor Wildflowers with a Round Brush



VIDEO 2: Watercolor Poppies with a Filbert Brush



VIDEO 3: Watercolor Irises with an Angled Brush



ARTIST SPOTLIGHT WITH STRATHMORE AMBASSADOR KOTERI INK

BUILDING WORLDS ONE PAGE AT A TIME

Creating a hand-illustrated graphic novel is a marathon, not a sprint. Currently deep into production on his graphic novel *Wrath of the Feral*, Illustrator Koteri Ink is crafting an epic, emotionally charged story with his most intricate artwork yet. With over 300 pages drawn so far, this project represents years of dedication, countless hours at the drawing table, and a carefully chosen set of tools that can keep up with the demands of long-form storytelling.

A PAPER THAT GOES THE DISTANCE

Every page of *Wrath of the Feral* is drawn on [Strathmore 300 Series Bristol Smooth](#).

"I've tried many papers throughout my career, but Strathmore remains my favorite when it comes to quality, texture, and consistency."

For a project of this scale, reliability matters. Across more than 15 full sketchbooks, the smooth surface and dependable performance of our Bristol paper has allowed for clean linework and detailed rendering from the first page to the 300th.

TOOLS THAT SUPPORT THE VISION

While inked linework drives the visual storytelling, Koteri incorporates subtle materials to enhance depth and atmosphere. Lyra Rembrandt Polycolor Pencils are used for light shading in select panels, adding nuance without overpowering the ink, while [Princeton Velvetch Brushes](#) handle ink washes.

[Follow along with Koteri Ink's journey and behind-the-scenes work on Instagram: @koteriink](#)



WHAT IS FEATHERING AND HOW CAN YOU PREVENT IT?



Ink on Strathmore Bristol
Crisp lines, no feathering



Ink on Copy Paper
Fuzzy lines, heavy feathering

WHAT IS FEATHERING: If you've ever worked with pen & ink, you may have heard artists talk about feathering, or perhaps you've experienced it yourself. Feathering refers to ink spreading outward from where it was originally applied, creating fuzzy or jagged edges instead of crisp, clean lines.

HOW TO PREVENT IT: The best way to avoid feathering is to start with the right surface for pen and ink. Papers such as Bristol, Marker, Drawing, and Mixed Media are specifically engineered to accept ink. At Strathmore, these papers are tested during manufacturing to ensure they deliver clean, controlled linework.

A key factor is surface sizing - a special additive applied to the paper that allows ink to sit on the surface rather than soaking in too quickly. Without proper sizing, ink spreads unpredictably (think of how ink behaves on paper towel versus quality art paper). Papers not designed for pen & ink, like newsprint or copy paper, don't receive the same treatment and may produce inconsistent results.

Check out our top recommendations for papers suitable for pen & ink:



Bristol



Drawing



Marker



Mixed Media