

Transferring the Drawing



Artists have various ways to transfer their drawings to paper or canvas. Some watercolorists sketch directly to the watercolor paper with graphite pencil but it can be hard to make changes or erase mistakes without damaging the fibers of the paper resulting in dark areas in a plain wash.

Oil painters can draw directly on primed canvas with charcoal but do not use graphite pencil as that will often bleed through layers of oil paint and show up after the painting is done.

Most artists in any medium create sketches or finished drawings to plan what they intend to paint. Sometimes these are small thumbnail sketches (link to thumbnail sketching article) and sometimes elaborately detailed value studies showing the light, middle toned and darker areas of the composition.

Planning before you paint is almost always a good idea. It helps to think out the ideas and solving problems in the drawing before it is put on the final paper or canvas.



For someone beginning with a small thumbnail sketch, this can take several steps. Generally, the more decisions

made in these preliminary stages, the easier the painting goes once the brushes come out.

Starting with a small thumbnail sketch idea for a painting the artist wants to think about the light and dark areas and how the overall design is to be planned. You can use the computer to help in this process. Scan the thumbnail sketch into a basic graphics program and print it out as large as possible on 8.5x11 paper.



Then use tracing paper over the print out to draw over the sketch, refining lines and thinking about what is going to be in each area. Make this drawing just lines as simple as possible without being too detailed.

Once you have this finished drawing or plan for your painting you can decide on the size of your finished painting and plan how to best transfer the drawing to the final surface. Your method of transfer is often influenced by the size you want your painting.

If you are creating a very large painting or even a mural, you may choose to transfer your drawing by projection. You can use an opaque or overhead projector to put your sketch on a wall or large canvas in a dark room. Opaque projectors have a space to fit a sketch or print to have it reflected on the lighted surface. The space is usually small, about 5x6" so that your sketch should be printed out about that size. You can adjust the size of the projection by the distance from projector to surface.

If your painting will be mid-sized, you can have your sketch printed out at a copy center to the size you wish, or print it out in sections on your home printer. This is quite easily done if you divide the sketch in sections and print them out on separate pages, being sure to keep the size of enlargement the same on each piece. Most graphics programs will let you resize to fit to a page and then be sure that each segment is the same percentage of the original sketch.

Once you have an enlargement the size you want, you have several options for transferring the drawing to paper.



One of the easiest is to tape the sketch or printout to a glass window or doorway, tape a piece of watercolor over it and trace the drawing on the watercolor paper.

If it isn't feasible to trace using a door or window, you can tape drawing and paper to a piece of glass or acrylic and lay it over a florescent light. Do not use a halogen light for this purpose as it gets too hot. An ordinary lamp set under a glass table is another substitute for the traditional lightbox made for the purpose. A lightbox is handy but often too small to be particularly helpful.

Often heavy weight watercolor paper is too thick to trace through so the drawing must be transferred to the paper. Some artists use a transfer paper which is a thin paper thickly covered in graphite. These commercial

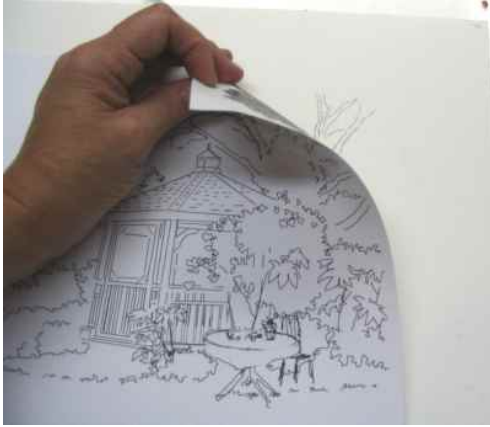
transfer papers are good in some circumstances but can be darker than desired and difficult to erase from the paper later. You can make your own version of transfer paper by covering a sheet of tracing paper with soft graphite pencil and then wiping the paper with a paper towel dampened with lighter fluid. This will dissolve the graphite into the paper and make it a reusable transfer paper which is excellent if not as dark as the commercial variety.

A very simple version of the same method is to turn your drawing over and darken the back solidly with a soft pencil. Then turn the drawing right side up and tape it in position over the watercolor paper.



Go over all of the lines of the drawing thus transferring the design to the paper. Check to make sure your lines are transferring and use a colored ballpoint pen so you can easily see what parts you have done already. Try to push hard enough to get a good line transfer but not so hard as to dent the paper.

Oil and acrylic painters use the same method but with different media. Rather than using pencil/graphite on the back of the drawing, the oil painter will use charcoal. Then, again taping the drawing into position, go over all the lines to transfer the drawing to canvas or board.



Renaissance artists have transferred drawings to canvas by going over the

drawing with a sharp point so to make tiny holes over every line. Then the punched drawing is taped in place and a bag of charcoal dust is pounced over the drawing putting tiny dots of charcoal on the canvas.

Whatever the method of transferring a drawing to watercolor paper, board or canvas, it should not show in the finished painting. The thought that goes into the sketches and preliminary planning creates a strong structure for a good painting in whatever media and a good transfer is one that leaves no evidence of its method.



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