20th August 2005

Hello Gráinne,

I hope you're having a good 2025 so far! I see from your Instagram that you're doing some gorgeous work for your Diploma with RBGE! It's been a bit of a year here, but so far so good, I've done lots of drawing and painting and I'm finally submitting my last pieces of work for this course in Botanical Painting.

Monarch Cooking Apple
Paper: Hobbycraft Watercolour paper 340 gsm

Pencil: Derwent 2H

Paint: Winsor and Newton Gamboge Hue, Alrizion Crimson, Sap Green, Yellow Ochre, Burnt Sienna and Burnt Umber

Paintbrushes: Masterclass 0, 4 and 8 (The biggest brush was used for the big, quick background washes of water and colour at the beginning of the painting!)

Details: Each view of the apple began with a wet on wet wash of Gamboge Hue then Alrizion Crimson. Later, when this was dry, I added layers of Gamboge Hue, Alrizion Crimson and Sap Green wet on dry. I like the texture of the brush on the paper since it suggests the texture and variation of colour of the apple.

The stalk is Burnt Sienna and Burnt Umber. The green skin blemish at the top of the apple is Gamboge Hue and Sap Green. The yellow-brown insect blemish is Gamboge Hue and Alrizion Crimson. At the bottom of the apple, the outer core is sap green and burnt umber, while the inner core is Lemon Yellow Hue and Yellow Ochre.

Reflection: The apple is off the tree in our garden. I painted it later autumn / early winter last year. It was originally intended to be a quick study – hence the less-than-wonderful paper – but I was fascinated by the colours, shape and texture so I decided to work it up for this assignment. I feel that my finished piece has caught the spirit of the apple – if such a thing is possible?!? – although I imagine its imperfect from a botanical perspective, although I'm not sure how, otherwise I'd have resolved the outstanding issues.

Primrose
Paper: Seawhite Bristol Board 240 gsm

Pencil: Derwent 2H

Paint: Winsor and Newton Lemon Yellow Hue, Gamboge Hue, Sap Green, Hooker's Green, Rose Madder and Ultra Marine

Paintbrushes: Masterclass 0 and 4

Details: I drew the elements of the picture in pencil. I applied wet on wet washed. The petals are Lemon Yellow Hue with a touch of Sap Green and Gamboge Hue. The dark centres are Gamboge Hue. The stems are Rose Madder and Ultra Marine. The leaves are Sap Green with more or less Lemon Yellow Hue and Hooker's Green.

Reflection: The primroses in our garden bloomed in February this year! They were gorgeous and I had a lovely time trying to paint them at the time and since then from my earlier work (pencil and paint), the ones I photographed and the ones I pressed. The yellow of my original work looks very bright and lemony in the scan but is very pale and delicate in reality. I thought I'd have a go with Bristol Board which is used by botanical artists like Susan Christopher-Coulson. It was lovely and smooth, but I didn't find it very absorbent, although it is by Seawhite, who I think you recommended as a brand, so perhaps the weight is the issue. I attempted a cross-section element with borderline success. Overall I'm pleased with this though.

Dog Rose
Paper: St Cuthbert's Mill Botanical Ultra Smooth 300gsm (140lb) Hot Pressed

Pencil: Derwent 2H

Paint: Winsor and Newton Rose Madder, Sap Green, Hooker's Green, Lemon Yellow Hue, Gamboge Hue, Yellow Ochre and Burnt Sienna

Paintbrushes: Masterclass 2 and 6

Details: The petals are rose madder wet on wet. The centre is Gamboge Hue. The leaves and stem are sap green wet on wet for the former and wet on dry for the latter. The leaves are also Hooker's Green, wet on wet, in places. The thorns are Yellow Ochre wet on dry. I used masking fluid to protect the surface of the paper for the golden anther and filaments while I painted the pink petals.

Reflection: Dog roses are some of my favourite wild flowers and we always have lots in the hedgerows around our house. I think this is my favourite piece of work. I think the tonal variations could be clearer but I was worried about overworking and ruining it so I decided to err on the side of caution. Using masking fluid was a bit nerve racking but fun and really very satisfying in the end! I've drawn and painted many dog roses over the years. I think completing this assignment, however, pushed me to a new level. Of all the work I've done for this course, I think this is one of my best pieces, alongside the blackberries I did for my last assignment. Interestingly both were done when I had an unexpected block of free time without demands, distractions and worries!

French Beans
Paper: St Cuthbert's Mill Botanical Ultra Smooth 300gsm (140lb) Hot Pressed

Pencil: Derwent 2H

Paint: Sap Green, Hooker's Green, Gamboge Hue and Lemon Yellow Hue

Paintbrushes: Masterclass 2, 4 and 6

Details: A base layer of pale, watery Sap Green for the beans was painted wet on wet, as quickly as possible, then I added layers of more intense Sap Green and Sap Green mixed with either Lemon Yellow Hue or Hooker's Green to suggest the slight line of the shadow and the green "dent" that runs the length of the beans. I used paler washes of those greens for the foliage and beans. I used a mixture of Sap Green and Gamboge Hue for the egg-yolky yellow of the flower tips.

Reflection: I had a lot of fun both growing AND painting these French beans! I think the beans are better than the leaves and flowers. I kept the latter in, though, because I do like the whole composition and wanted to share that!

I hope you have here everything you need to know for this last assignment. I know I still have a lot to learn – it's a bit overwhelming to think how much! I'm looking forward to continuing to learn. I love mixing watercolour and crayon in my general creativity and want to try that in my botanical creativity so that should be fun! I'm so grateful for everything I've learned on this course and for your help and support along the way – thank you so very much! :)

Have a good day and I'll look forward to hearing from you soon!

Best wishes,
Judith