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HISTORY OF WATERCOLOUR AND TECHNIQUES

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Abstract

Watercolours are a type of paint that can be mixed with water to create translucent layers of colour on paper. You can also call a painting made this way a watercolour. Anyone can paint with watercolours, from toddlers to professional artists. Historians believe that watercolour painting has been around since Palaeolithic cave paintings, but it was during the Renaissance that watercolours gained popularity as an artistic medium. It was particularly common for illustrations in books and botanical guides to be made using watercolours into the 19th century when John James Audubon began his well-known watercolour bird illustrations and field guides.

Watercolour paint consists of fine pigment particles suspended in a water-soluble binder (adhesive substance). It is usually used on paper. As watercolour is semi-transparent, the white of the paper gives a natural luminosity to the washes of colour. White areas of the image often are merely left unpainted to expose the paper. Watercolours are sold as cakes of dry paint or as a liquid in tubes, to which water is added. The paint can be applied in various techniques such as wet-on-wet and wet-on-dry to obtain different effects. The binder usually used for watercolour consists of gum, glucose, glycerine and wetting agents.

Watercolour paint is a translucent art medium. Watercolour is basically a coloured pigment in a water-soluble binder. The paint dissolves when you add water allowing the pigment to spread with a brush.

Keywords - Translucent, Pigment, Binder.

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Introduction

Watercolour art refers to any works of art made using the medium of watercolour. Watercolor also refers to the medium, a water-soluble paint that has transparent or translucent properties. Many people describe watercolours as being “soft” or “light” because the pigments in watercolours are often not as bright as acrylics or oil paints.

Watercolor contains pigment particles combined with a binder from natural sources like gum, glucose, and glycerine. It is water-soluble. Watercolours are sold as cakes of baked colour or as a liquid in containers, in which water is combined for activation. Watercolours are non-toxic and safe as compared to other mediums, such as oil paints. This non-toxic property makes watercolours accessible for children. Watercolour is also used in illustrations, drawings, and mixed media artworks. Watercolour paint is a translucent art medium. Watercolour is basically a coloured pigment in a water-soluble binder. The paint dissolves when you add water allowing the pigment to spread with a brush.

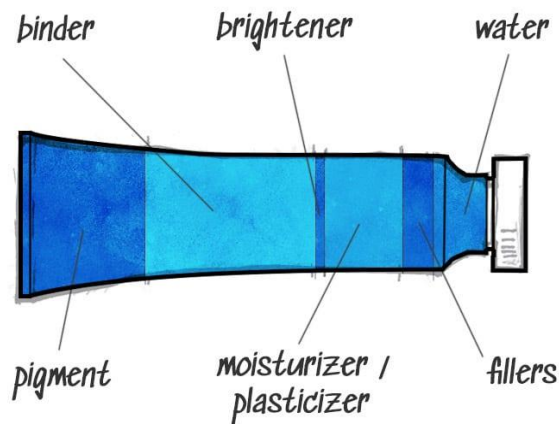
What is watercolour paint made of ?

Watercolour paint is made of a few simple ingredients, but the two main components are the **pigment** (this provides the colour) and the **binder** (usually gum-arabic). First and foremost you have the very finely ground coloured pigments. There are over 100 pigments used in artists' watercolour paint. These can be natural or synthetic. Some of the natural pigments are hard to acquire, which makes certain colours more expensive. The quantity of pigment in the paint can also vary depending on its grade or quality. Most manufacturers offer two qualities of watercolour paints – professional grade or student grade. With student grade paint the cost is lower because some of the expensive pigments are replaced with moderately priced alternatives. The proportion of pigment in paint varies between 10% and 20%.

The **binder** in watercolours is traditionally gum-arabic, but some brands use a synthetic binder. The job of the binder is to help the coloured pigment attach and “bind” to the watercolour paper. The binder also helps produce a brighter colour by holding the pigment particles together on the surface of the paper. Binder is a transparent substance and in general makes up about 50% of the paint.

Gum arabic and synthetic binders tend to dry relatively quickly. Watercolours made only with pigment and gum-arabic will dry to a hard block. For this reason watercolour paint includes a moisturiser and a plasticizer to help extend the life of your paint but also to make it softer and easier to dissolve. These additives also prevent the paint from drying too quickly so that watercolour washes can be applied more easily. The type of moisturiser used is often glucose (for example corn

syrup) or sometimes even honey! The plasticizer used is usually glycerin, and makes up about 20% or less of the paint.



A small amount of **brightener** is sometimes added to watercolour paint. This is usually transparent or white crystals which enhance the colour of the pigment or adjust the lightness of the paint when dried.

Other **fillers** enhance the handling or colour appearance of the paint. These colourless fillers are necessary to improve texture and provide a smooth

and easy to handle consistency. They also modify the way pigment sticks to the paper to prevent it from 'lifting off' the surface when you apply new layers of paint. Sometimes fillers are added just to reduce the proportion of costly pigment in the paint.

Water – yes, depending on the type of watercolour paint supplies you buy, they contain a certain amount of water. Watercolours are available in the form of cakes, tubes or in liquid form. Cakes are hard and have a low water content. Tubes contain soft paint with more water content.

A Brief History of Watercolour Paintings

The need for artistic expression has been accompanying mankind since time immemorial. In the past, colours soluble in water represented the easiest way one could paint and over time, these colours have evolved into one of the world's most renowned painting methods for artists.

Ancient Times

The knowledge of grinding pigment and dyes with water is very old. It can be found in the earliest manifestations of human culture as the simplest decorative technique, dating to the cave paintings created with fingers, sticks, and bones. Prehistoric humans in the Palaeolithic ages painted the walls of their caves with mixtures of ochre, charcoal, and other natural pigments. Watercolour art dates from Stone Age cave painting when early Palaeolithic man first painted pictures of animals and humans on their caves. Examples can be also found in ancient Egyptian times when water-based paints were used to decorate walls of temples and tombs or to illustrate manuscripts made of papyrus like the Egyptian Books of the Dead. Watercolor has been a dominant medium in Chinese, Korean and Japanese painting, where decorative objects like hand fans, lamps, shades, and hanging images were enhanced with the paint. In Asia, traditional Chinese painting with watercolours developed

around 4,000 B.C., primarily as a decorative medium, and by the 1st century A.D., the art of painting religious murals had taken hold. By the 4th century landscape watercolour painting in Asia had established itself as an independent art form.

Advances in Watercolor Painting in the 15th and 16th Centuries

Watercolour painting emerged in Europe during the Renaissance period with advancements in papermaking. While early European artists prepared their own watercolour mixtures for fresco wall painting, this was soon applied to paper. With an increase in the availability of synthetic pigments, printmaker and Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) developed new methods of working with watercolour paints, highlighting the luminous, transparent effects it offered and inspiring other artists to experiment. His early watercolour paintings focused on depicting topography, but over time he placed much greater emphasis on capturing atmosphere. He also produced highly realistic nature studies, typically combining watercolour and gouache on paper. This trend was picked up by Hans Bol (1534–1593), who founded an important school of watercolour painting in Germany as part of the Dürer Renaissance.

19th Century English School of Watercolourists

Today, watercolour painting is commonly associated with the achievements of the English school of landscape painters (especially Paul Sandby, an English map-maker turned painter (One of the Founders of Royal Academy), Thomas Girtin (who pioneered its use for large format, romantic or picturesque landscapes) and JMW Turner (a technical innovator and Romantic landscape artist who experimented with available synthetic mineral pigments). This group was active from the late-18th century to the mid-19th century, the so-called Golden Age of Watercolour. Initially the artists restricted their paintings to tint washes. This is a drawing made in ink or pencil, and a brush and water is used to spread the ink to create a tint effect. A restricted range of colours were allowed, but the overall effect was quite monochromatic. By the mid-1800s, English art society had seen the formation of the Society of Painters in Water Colours (1804) and the New WaterColour Society (1832).

The unique effects of light and freer brushwork created by the English school of watercolour painting caught the attention of the early Impressionists and influenced their work. In the 19th and 20th centuries, watercolours emerged as a medium used by many prominent artists. American artist Winslow Homer used watercolour paints to explore the beauty of the natural world. Paul Cézanne used a technique of overlapping watercolour washes in some of his still life paintings, while Vincent Van Gogh used watercolour techniques to create remarkable art forms. German abstract painter Wassily Kandinsky and Swiss Modernist Paul Klee are both notable 20th century watercolorists.

Above all, watercolour painting is versatile, alternately offering rich, vivid tones or soft, soothing forms.

Advantages of watercolour painting

Watercolour is very different to acrylic, oil and gouache. Each of these different paint mediums require different techniques. Water dries quickly, which often means the artist needs to make quick decisions! As a result some people find watercolours challenging.

- **It's a water-based medium** – This seems obvious, but this makes watercolours much less messy than oils or acrylics. Watercolours do not have a **strong smell**.
- **They dry quickly** – since you can move on quickly to the next steps in your project. A lot of artists (myself included) sometimes use a hairdryer to make the drying process even quicker!
- **They are easy to work with** – watercolours are pleasant, easy to mix and apply, and one of the simplest mediums for any artist.
- **Portability** – watercolours are light and easy to transport. Fantastic for sketching “en plein air”.
- Your paint brushes can be easily cleaned with soap and water.

Not much waste. If you have paint left over in your palette, it will dry up. But you can easily recover the paint next time by adding water.

Transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque, and opaque.

Fully transparent watercolours give a brighter and more luminous result because they allow light to pass through and reflect back off the white surface of the paper. Professional artists recommend using almost exclusively transparent paint for the best results. Opaque paints are thicker and chalky in appearance. Most watercolorists who use opaque paints only use them in moderation.

Colours

There are many many different colours to choose from and there are many beautiful pigments and paint formulations out there. Watercolour manufacturers give their paint some very romantic names – Scarlett Lake, French Ultramarine, Vermilion. But the names are just for marketing purposes. A name does not recommend that you get the same colour from one brand to another. If you remember from earlier, what provides the colour is the pigment. So the final colour of the paint depends on the pigment concentration and the mix of pigments in each paint's recipe.

Also, single pigment paints produce more lively and vivid colours than several pigments mixed together. This is why, when you mix a lot of different watercolour paints together you tend to get a slightly dull result.

NEUTRAL COLOURS

Neutral colours in art are any colours that have been desaturated to remove the hue. That is to say,



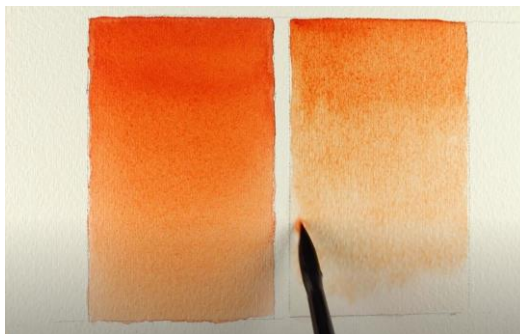
they do not appear to have a particularly strong colour appearance. White, black, and grey are all examples of neutral colours.

Neutral tint is a special kind of grey paint used mainly by watercolour artists. It is a mixture of pigments that

produce an unsaturated grey and is intended to gently tone down brighter colours. It is said to be neither warm nor cool in colour temperature. Hence the term “neutral.”

Watercolour Techniques

1. **Wash** - It is a basic technique that builds the first layer of colour on a large area that needs to be covered.



Wash is of two types-

1. **Flat wash** - first you need to wet the paper thoroughly and apply an even layer of diluted paint all over the area.

2. **Gradient wash** - The wetting of the paper is the same as the flat wash but the colour applied gets lighter from top to bottom. This is a relatively easy technique that takes a little practice and patience to get right.

These two are useful for areas that require smooth colour like sky or water bodies.

2. **Wet on Dry** - This is a common and beginner's technique in which diluted paint is applied on dry



paper to colour a defined shape with solid edges. This technique is suitable for both detail work and larger areas. That allows the semi-transparent nature of the watercolours to really shine.

3. **Wet into Wet** - This is a blending technique of watercolours in which wet colour is used on a wet



paper or a wash so that the colour spreads evenly. Details can be added later when it dries. This will create a lovely feathery technique that offers a lot of artistic possibilities. This will also create the two colours fusing and forming a soft middle tone.

4. **Dry Brushes** - When painting with a dry brush, you will create an interesting scratchy texture on



the page. In this technique, paper is absolutely dry and the brush is slightly damp with colour loaded generously on it. This is another fun technique for beginners to experiment with. Fan brushes or Hog hair

brushes work well in dry brushing. For best results try a few strokes on a rough paper before applying the pain on your artwork.

5. **Preserving the Whites** - This is a little difficult technique but once you get some practice with the medium , you will realise that the areas that have to be left light or white look best when left untouched with colour. For this, you need to keep the highlights in mind at the time of first drawing only. Masking fluid works very well in this technique. Apply it on the areas that need to be left white and rub it off when the painting is finished.

6. **Masking** - Watercolour can be difficult to control, but masking tape acts as a barrier to the paint,



so that when you peel it off, the canvas is still white underneath. This is very useful for beginners who are still learning to control their brush. You can also use masking fluid in much the same way, placing the fluid with an old brush on the areas you'd like to keep free from paint and leaving it to dry. You can then paint as

normal and peel away the fluid once you have finished.

7. **Salt** - Adding a little salt to your wet paint creates texture by soaking up some of the surrounding pigments. When you are a little more confident in your painting ability, you can practise using different sized salt grains.

8. **Sponging** - You may have used sponges to paint with acrylic as a child, but they also work really well with watercolours to create interesting textures. Different styles of sponges will have slightly different finishes, so play around with a few.

9. **Splattering** - Splattering can be messy and difficult to control, so might not be suitable for those just starting out. There are three ways to use this technique: tapping, flicking and with a stencil. The stencil method will give you the most control over your final design, while tapping your loaded paintbrush with your fingers is the messiest option. Using your fingers to pull back the edge of the bristles so that the paint flicks at the page is a lot of fun.

10. **Layering** - Layering means building up of multiple layers of the same colour in darker tones over the previous lighter ones to create depth and details.

We talk about two famous Bengali Watercolor artists who explored in all mediums – drawings, watercolours, oils, mixed media, installation and sculptures.

Paresh Maity (“William Turner of India”)

Paresh Maity is one of the finest Indian watercolourists in the Country today. He is a prolific painter in a short career span. Paresh Maity is a maverick artist and his adventurous, experimental personality has prodded him to explore in all mediums – drawings, watercolours, oils, mixed media, installation and sculptures, photography and filmmaking. There is the unmistakable ‘soulfulness’ of mood and memory, sweep and splash of colours and the transparent depth of his watercolour that makes Maity’s artistry a wonderful coalescence of art and thought. He weaves into his psychological stream the many faces of nature — the colours of the sea and the pitter-patter of raindrops. Nature has always been a part of his psyche and surroundings. Paresh’s uniqueness lies in his rediscovering the charm, flavour and magic of India in his paintings. He has done a series of works on almost all facets and destinations of India and then across the seas to London, Venice, China and Japan. He has painted them all.

Watercolour is the most difficult and oldest medium in the field of painting as there are many limitations. The size of the art work is a big challenge especially when done on a large scale. The application has to be timed and finished before the colour dries.

Paresh Maity was born (1965) in Tamluk – a small town in West Bengal – of great antiquity with a remarkable heritage of terracotta art. While in school he made clay images of gods and goddesses and sold them to earn money for his education. He started painting watercolours of river scenes while still at school and then then oil painting thereafter. He mastered the technique of oil painting at Government College of Art, Kolkata. His single minded determination to acquire formal training paid off when he came to Delhi to join the College of Art in New Delhi. A prolific painter, Maity

has 81 solo exhibitions in 40 years of his career. He is also known for one of the longest paintings



in India called The Indian Odyssey, stretching up to over 850 feet on display at T3 Terminal at Indira Gandhi Airport, New Delhi. He has held over 80 solo exhibitions all over the world and also participated in innumerable group shows in India and around the world. He travelled all over India, and anywhere he went, he painted nature but felt that his understanding of it was never enough. At the onset of the 90s, figures



started to appear in his works as opposed to the traditional landscapes from his early years. Figures of men and women, animals and birds became part of his watercolour, a medium which he had come to master. Paresh despised the harsh side of life which reflected in his paintings which are all soft and soothing.

Paresh Maity has mastered the art of handling watercolour. He started doing watercolours at the age of 10 and since then it has been 40 years, he has been doing watercolours very passionately and has been experimenting with the medium. He has won many recognitions for his watercolours nationally and internationally including the 'Royal Watercolour Society Award, London' in 2002. The audience will experience his watercolours from his childhood.

Paresh is an instinctive master of watercolour, a notoriously difficult medium and has the ability to interpret light in terms of pure colours. It is hard to classify his work within any particular tradition of watercolour painting. He has progressed from an early realism to a more moody expressionistic and atmospheric style.

As renowned poet and writer **Gulzar** says:

“He comes across as a great traveller. Sometimes it reminds me of coal mines and Potato Eaters of Van Gogh in Oil. Even his paintings of European Landscapes carry the feeling of Past and History. Paresh has a mood of Nostalgia, which travels with him.”

The exhibition is accompanied with the release of a major book entitled '**Paresh Maity: World of Watercolours**'. The book showcases his journey with Watercolours spanning 40 years. This publication is a most comprehensive and illustrated book talking about Watercolour and the possibilities in this medium. He is the recipient of various awards including the Award by Royal Watercolour Society London, Hall of Fame in Mumbai, Shera Bangali Award, Kolkata, Dayawati Modi Foundation Award, New Delhi, and was awarded the Padma Shri by Government of India. Seeing their works sparked in him the desire to be like them; he wanted to be known as a hardworking artist.



In step with Picasso, others overseas masters who have been great inspirational factors are Van Gogh, Monet, Manet, Henry Moore and Turner, of course. The art scene is very colourful, dynamic and global. He has a strong gut feeling that it will occupy a huge platform in the world. Paresh Maity drawn by folk art, old miniatures and the sculptural tradition. Like the Spanish master Picasso, Maity too has demonstrated his mastery of the craft in styles as different as landscape, still life, figurative art, expressionism, impressionism and abstracts.

Painter Paresh Maity's colourful Odyssey at new New Delhi International Airport

Renowned painter Paresh Maity has brought off a real coup. He has created the biggest painting of his life and probably the longest in India. It stretches up to over 850 feet and is surely one of the most monumental paintings in the world. "The project started four months back in mid-March 2010. The proposal came from GMR Infrastructure and civil aviation minister Praful Patel. They invited him to visit Delhi's new international airport which will be the third largest in the world," He went sleepless for a few days trying to visualise the magnitude of the artwork. They asked him to show them some layouts of the final painting. He conceptualised creating an India which is so incredible. The Indian Odyssey ranges across the diversity, colour, richness, beauty, culture and art, music, dance and literature, amongst other facets of the country. Celebration showcases the joyous spirit of the country. The Indian Odyssey starts from Bengal and spreads across Assam, Orissa, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Kashmir and few other regions. In the same breath,

Celebration portrays the mirth of Indian life and culture. Obviously, the magic of Maity's use of colours came into full flow. He was fired by the colourful life and culture of the country, its people, places, festivities, music, dance and harmony and architecture.



Maity is also known for his Bold, Graphic and Vibrant paintings. Modelled after a Jackfruit, Maity's giant installation depicts Urban Life.

Sudip Roy

Sudip Roy is an Indian artist, pursuing arts in the Government College of Art & Craft, Kolkata. Works of Sudip Roy include pencil sketches and water colours, charcoals and a heady series of landscape done in limped line drawing. Roy over the years mastered the art of water colour and moved from landscapes to studies of architectural facades and association of people in historic temples and monuments. His subjects remained architectural and figurative for the most part of his life until he shifted to moody momentousness. He started doing large, abstracted works, which reflected the times of the day.

Sudip graduated from the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Calcutta in 1983. He has been a recipient of several awards including a Gold Medal from the Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta in 1979 and an award from AIFACS, Delhi in 1991. He has presented his work as a solo artist in several cities across India and has also been a participant at group exhibitions in India as well as abroad.

Sudip Roy was born in Baharampur, West Bengal and came to study at the Government College of Art & Craft, Kolkata. At college, he was known for attracting the attention of early collectors for his stylistic distinction in watercolours and expressionist drawings. He began his career as a young artist painting portraits and bold impressionistic landscapes, and architectural studies. Drawing upon those influences, he eventually forged the style of modern painting for which he is best known, a successful reinterpretation of traditional lean lithe iconography by way of crisp, clean, modernist lines. He went on to become one of the most celebrated modernists in the history of Indian painting because he had gone through myriad methods including the wash paintings that called for more than a thousand sweeps of wash effect.

Wash Paintings

Sudip did wash paintings during his college days and though it spells great labour and time he has continued to do a number of washes that have caught the attention of collectors and art lovers alike all over the world.[8] His wash paintings included a series of Christs that were done with the quasi abstract feel and the romance of realism born of the vignettes of Da Vinci and Renoir and Reubens. The wispy softness and the strength of the subject are what has always set him apart-this is why his Christ was among the award-winning works at the Florence Biennale.

Abstract

He began on a series of abstractions that were created by listening to music. His understanding of the abstract expressionist movement in the West and his deep feeling for the flowing notes of a raga is what made him create a series of abstracts that looked more like billowing colours blowing in the wind with tiny formations of ideations and imageries that seemed to float in his retinue of rhythms.

He went on to become one of the most celebrated modernists in the history of Indian painting because he had gone through myriad methods including the wash paintings that called for more than a thousand sweeps of wash effect.

Promotional work

He is the first Indian artist who created and painted the BMW for the German company. Blended as a moody spring of contour and colour the BMW became an enduring symbol of a BMW art car. Sudip has collaborated with Audi. Roy painted live to promote Tanishq Jewellery in the year 2002.

Paintings -

Artist Sudip Roy's watercolour wash, builds the entire composition around a shade or two of earthly colours blending most naturally with the rest. His paintings concentrate on slices of everyday life'. He is well known for his realistic and impressionistic, figurative works. But here in the present series the artist explores the unbounded periphery of abstract expressionism in equally strong style and accent.



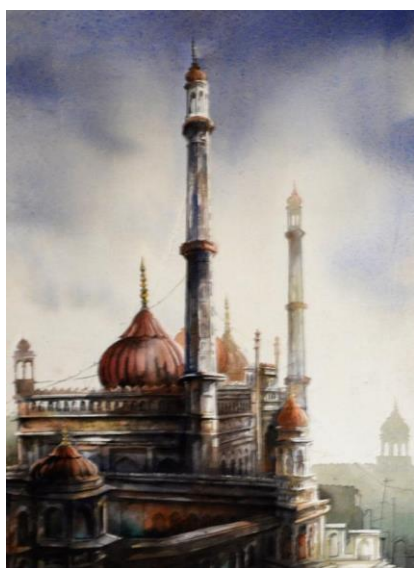
Women in Blue

Medium: Watercolor on Paper

Size: 55.88 cm x 76.2 cm

Sudip Roy's strength lies in his realistic rendering of everyday things in life. He takes inspiration from the people and objects that he sees around him. His style is such that it makes even an inanimate object appear extremely sensuous. His work is a celebration of our daily lives showcasing the ordinary things that one would normally overlook as routine and unimportant. Sudip works in oils as well as water colours.

His control of shade and light gives a wonderful depth to his work making it seem extremely real.



Bara imambara

Size : 24 X 30 in | 61 X 76.2 cm

Medium : Water Based Medium on Paper

Style : Impressionism

Sudip Roy needs no introduction with water colour and Monuments being his forte. Charulata to modern abstract has been a journey for him. He keeps experimenting and believes an artist must evolve his artwork.

Charulata

Size : 19 X 25 in | 48.3 X 63.5 cm

Medium : Watercolour on Paper

Style : Impressionism



Artist Sudip Roy's watercolour wash, builds the entire composition around a shade or two of earthly colours blending most naturally with the rest. His paintings concentrate on slices of everyday life'.

Charulata enthralled Sudip Roy so much he painted a series of woman owed, ample form a poignant, sensual depiction of a lady and the crimson make for a sensory cornucopia, replete with possibilities of the sexual, but is also a faithful representation of contemporary social reality. Rendering through a gestural application of paint, combining boldness and fragility as the artist says: Shyness is an ornament. The folds of the garments are rendered with accuracy and assurance, with highlights here and there, creating vivid depth and volume and much movement for the eye to take in.

The Charulata series was a series that was born out of the story by Rabindranath Tagore but one that went beyond because the modern-day woman is one who doesn't care about the stranger who rings the bell or knocks at her door. She is depicted as a graceful feminine being who throws her pallu in careless grace and stands with vegetable-stained hands at the doorway.

Conclusion

Watercolor is a versatile and expressive medium that has been used by artists for centuries. Its unique properties allow for a wide range of techniques and styles, from delicate washes to bold, expressive strokes. Watercolour can be used to create landscapes, portraits, still life, and abstract art, among other genres. To use watercolour effectively, it is important to understand the properties of the medium and practise various techniques, such as wet-on-wet, dry brush, and glazing. Patience and practice are essential, as watercolour can be challenging to control and mistakes are difficult to correct. While watercolour can be challenging to master, with practice and experimentation, artists can create stunning works of art that showcase the medium's beauty and versatility. Whether used

alone or in combination with other mediums, watercolour is a medium that offers endless creative possibilities for artists of all levels.

Overall, watercolour is a rewarding and enjoyable medium for artists of all skill levels. With its unique qualities and endless possibilities, it is a medium that continues to inspire and captivate artists today.

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