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Drawing Surface of the Year
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10 Useful Art Hacks

Fun and creative ways to
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MAIN FEATURE
Painting What I Love

By Kelly Eddington



Mirror: My mother gazes at Belle, who resembles her. I enjoyed the contrast between baby skin and mature skin.

I began pursuing watercolor painting full-time nine years ago. Hoping to attract patrons, I created a website for myself with the tagline that said, "Painting What You Love." For several years, I divided my time between producing a body of my own work and painting commissions gleaned from my website.

I searched for my niche in the world of watercolor, and I quickly discovered that any subject I considered painting was already being produced by highly-respected veteran artists. Flowers? Rusty old cars? Venice? Glass? Quilts? Forget about it. I came up with novel and challenging subject matter I hadn't seen other painters tackle (fishing lures, antique jewelry, metallic bows, yarn), but after a while those paintings felt like academic

exercises more than anything else. Where was the heart?

Meanwhile, no request was too strange or banal for this small business owner. But I was truly stunned by a lot of the requests I accepted: a fantasy collective of deceased grandparents, an elderly man surrounded by fawning Betty Boops, imagined newborn twins based solely on an ultrasound image, a tombstone design involving insects, a surprise wedding portrait where I had to invent the bride's dress, and literally dozens of dearly-departed pets, many of which were based on small, blurry reference photos. To save my sanity, I learned to say no to bizarre or uninspiring commissions, and I pivoted from "Painting What You Love" to "Painting What I Love," and that is my family.

Figurative work and portraits have always been the most challenging and interesting subjects for me ever since I began painting as a teenager. I have a YouTube channel devoted to speed paintings, and my most popular videos involve portraiture. I also have a long-time side gig as an illustrator for a U2 website that further honed my skills as a portrait artist, and as weird as it is to write

My paintings tell the unique story of my family, but I think our connections with each other are universal. Over the past five years, the top story in my family has been the births of my sister Emily's children. As Belle and Eve have grown from babies to beautiful little girls, I've painted quiet and emotional moments in their lives, either by themselves or with loved ones.



Wrapped Around Her Finger: Belle sits with Tyler, her big father, before they went outside to play in the swimming pool. Tyler seems enchanted by his tiny fairy child.



Arrival: My sister Emily minutes after giving birth to Eve. They reminded me of a modern-day Madonna and Child.

this, I know the faces of four Irishmen I've never met as well as those of my family. I am addicted to that magical moment when a series of transparent paint layers and textures comes to life as a recognizable person.

While painting loved ones (and myself) can seem challenging, these are faces I understand better than anyone else's, so I can always tell if something seems off. Family resemblances are fascinating. In the beginning stages of a portrait of my aunt, I saw my grandmother's face. When I paint my sister, I know I'm on the right track when she starts to look like me.

Having an aunt who paints has made the girls appreciate art in a way most children cannot. My paintings are all over their house, and Belle and Eve talk about them a lot. I think they must assume that every child has someone in their lives who is an artist, and they were able to identify themselves in my work before they were two years old. Art is important to me, so it's important to them, and they color and draw every day.

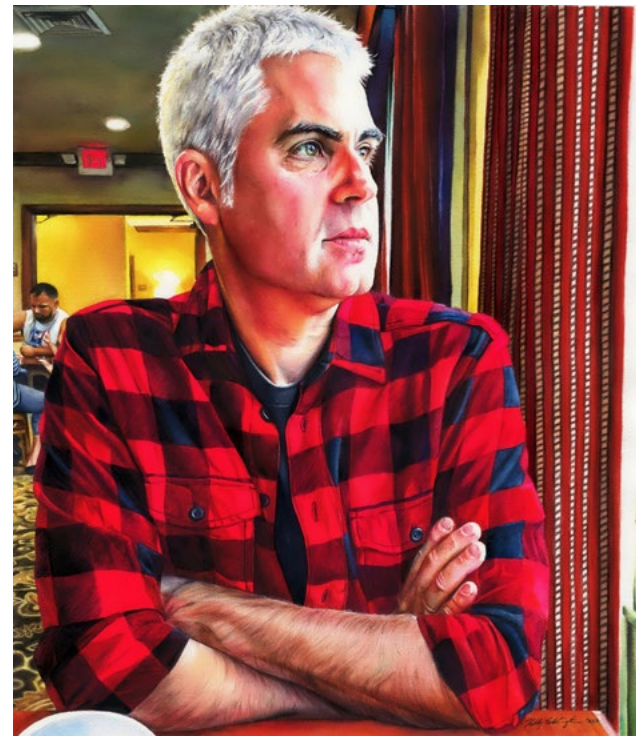
When I visit Belle and Eve and their parents, I make sure my camera (a.k.a. my iPhone) is handy at all times. I take dozens and even hundreds of pictures of the girls and other family members throughout their busy day. I never pose them. My goal is to capture

"I am addicted to that magical moment when a series of transparent paint layers and textures comes to life as a recognizable person."

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Painting You Into Existence: This is me painting Jeff. I had to wait until I was nearly 39 years old to meet him, and sometimes I think if that hadn't happened, I would have had to paint him into existence.



The Man I Love: My husband Jeff sits in the complimentary breakfast room at a random hotel. I've always love painting plaid, and I tried to mimic the texture of flannel here.

them during an interesting and spontaneous moment, preferably in an area of the house where the lighting is dramatic and natural. That's rare, so I do what I can. I shoot at the girls' eye level or lower, often lying on my stomach or crawling around to get a good shot, and none of this phases them. If I'm lucky, a gut feeling tells me when a scene is special, and I take as many photos as I can, including close ups of faces, hands, and other details throughout the room that I may be able to use later.

Once I'm home, I sift through the photos in search of gems. When I land on one, I fiddle with it on my computer, moving things around or adding elements from other photos to create a composition that pleases me. If I want to paint multiple figures, I rarely if ever find a single photo where everyone is looking their best. So I "Frankenstein" a

figure from a different photo into the original. Highlights and shadows are enhanced and colors are saturated. I straighten the verticals in the background--windows, furniture, and things like that--or else I'll take care of those as I paint. My reference photos resemble crazy quilts, but I can smooth everything out through the magic of watercolor.

I spend a fair amount of time drawing 4H pencil outlines of my entire composition on Strathmore's 500 Series Gemini watercolor paper (300lb, cold press). I concentrate on the main shapes before zeroing in on the details, such as folds in clothing, locks of hair, or background patterns. I attach my paper to a board with blue painter's tape and use a T-square to work out any background verticals. Then I'm ready to paint. I've been using around fifteen of the same watercolors for almost two decades. Because of this

limited palette, I know these colors so well they're like old friends, and I understand how they interact with each other. I rely on this knowledge to mix the colors I am looking for, and I always begin with the most difficult face in the painting.

I rely on wet-into-wet painting techniques when I paint children's portraits. I mask off the whitest highlights, "paint" the entire face excluding the eyes with water, and drop in whatever colors I've mixed for the skin. For light skin, I have watery versions of peachy-



It's My Party and I'll Read If I Want To: Eve takes a break from opening presents to read a new book. I enjoyed painting the stretched yellow tulle of her skirt.



Dress for the Job You Want: Eve wears a Snow White dress on her second birthday. She stands in front of the closet she and Belle share, and it is packed with clothes, shoes, and accessories.



The Sisters: Eve is opening birthday presents as Belle watches. The two girls love each other and share everything, so Belle has a keen interest in any new toy that enters the house.

Pretty much every watercolor exhibition I've attended includes at least one or two paintings of the elderly. I love painting older people because their skin has fascinating details and textures for me to sink my teeth into. But what about perfect, chubby faces and soft little arms and legs that look like they're made of hot dog buns? I find this skin difficult to portray, and not everyone can pull it off. Sometimes I wonder if that is why so many watercolor artists choose to paint timeworn faces. They're certainly more forgiving. When painting skin, most watercolor artists apply multiple glazes (or layers of paint). Glazes have noticeable borders that can read as lines, and a clever painter can make these borders coincide with shadows or wrinkles. But how does an artist paint unwrinkled skin?

pink, yellow, and cerulean blue ready to go in three palette wells. I use these colors to establish warm and cool areas of the face and allow them to dry. Most of the time I do a second wash of wet-into-wet color, again coating the entire face with water and dropping in color. While wet-into-wet is difficult to control, the water encourages the paint to blur in ways that mimic young skin, and noticeable borders are eliminated.

Next, I delve into what I consider the heart of the painting—the facial features—because if I can't capture them, what's the point? The most important parts of the painting are usually in the foreground or middle ground, and I begin with those and proceed from front to back, although every painting poses unique problems.

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"...I like the idea of two little girls beginning their lives knowing they are important enough to be the subjects of paintings. Imagine a world where every child felt this way."



At the Big People Table: A wide-eyed Belle watches everyone talk at a family celebration. Live music was playing downstairs, and it was all very exciting.



Too Many Choices: Toddler Eve laughs at the spilled crayons she has to pick up before she can have lunch. Creating smooth skin on a double-life-size scale was difficult.

My paintings take weeks to finish, so I post in-progress photos or videos of my work to social media as I go, along with anecdotes about my subjects and my process. This invests my followers in the painting as it is revealed slowly over time (and can lead to future commissions that I actually want to paint).

Over the summer, my painting of Eve laughing at crayons was part of the Transparent Watercolor Society of America's annual exhibition. I attended the awards presentation, where I was thrilled to meet juror and watercolor legend Laurin McCracken. A straight-shooter, Laurin told me my painting was accepted for the show "by the skin of its teeth." He thought my subject matter was "way too cute," but at the same time he wanted to know the story behind it, and he was extremely complimentary regarding my skills as a painter. I shrugged and found myself defending my painting's cuteness because at that point in my life, whenever I visited my nieces, I simply drowned in cuteness. It was unavoidable, but obviously it would not last forever. Laurin laughed and agreed.

I think I would regret it if I did not document the fleeting moments of innocence and sweetness in my nieces' young lives. A baby brother entered their world last month, so I don't see this series ending anytime soon. While a portrait of a grizzled old fisherman, for example, might possess more gravitas than a toddler in a Snow White dress, I believe children are valid and worthy subject matter. And I like the idea of two little girls beginning their lives knowing they are important enough to be the subjects of paintings. Imagine a world where every child felt this way.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



"I have never seen watercolors with the technical mastery Kelly Eddington commands. There is also so much heart and such an embrace of color," said film critic Roger Ebert, one of Kelly's earliest fans. She demonstrates techniques and narrates her painting process on her YouTube channel, Kelly Eddington Watercolors. The channel has over 210,000 subscribers and nearly 13 million views. Strathmore recently released two instructional watercolor pads with lessons and videos created by Kelly as part of [the Learning Series](#). A former art teacher now painting full-time, her award-winning work is in private and public collections throughout the world. She lives in a house made of styrofoam and steel in rural Missouri with her husband Jeff and their two cats.

See more of Kelly's work on her [website](#), [Instagram](#), or [Facebook](#) page.

EXCITING NEWS!



We are thrilled to announce that for the second year in a row we have won *Colored Pencil Magazine's* award for ***Drawing Surface of the Year!***

A huge thank you to the many artists that voted for our **400 Series Bristol** to be selected as their preferred surface for colored pencils, and to all the artists who entrust our papers with their work.

Strathmore 400 Series Bristol:

- Available in smooth and vellum
- Weight: 2-ply, 3-ply and 4-ply
- Available in multiple pad sizes and full-sized sheets

Learn more about Strathmore 400 Series Bristol paper [**HERE.**](#)

10 Useful Art Hacks

We've compiled a list of some of our favorite art hacks. These are especially great if you're a beginner or if you're just looking for some fun and creative ways to spice up your art.

1. SPLATTER

Using your brushes or an old toothbrush to splatter paint onto a piece is one of the easiest ways you can quickly enhance it. Whether it be white stars

in a night sky, brush in a landscape, or freckles on a face, the random markings of paint splatter can add just the right touch to any piece.

Method:

Mix the proper ratio of paint to water so the splatter shows up, but it liquid enough to sprinkle randomly. Tap two brushes together or use an old toothbrush and swipe your finger across the tip to splatter the paint onto the paper.

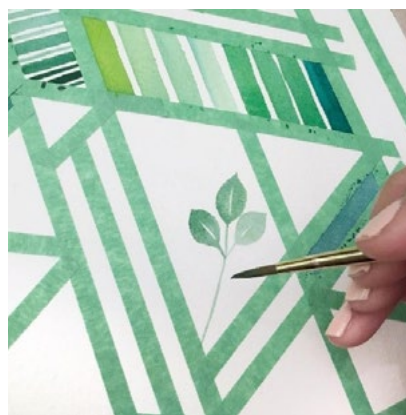


Demonstrated by Steve Mitchell. See the full video lesson [here](#).

2. TAPE

There are countless ways to use tape when creating art. Whether you're adding a simple aesthetic

border with crisp, clean lines, or you're creating special designs, it's time to get creative with tape.



Leslie Tieu using 1/4" tape to create geometric watercolor patterns. See her Instagram profile [here](#).

See the rest [HERE](#)



Lyra Rembrandt Polycolor is a complete line of premium, oil-based colored pencils. All colors are resistant to both water and UV rays, making them a perfect choice for artists. Lyra Rembrandt pencils are made from the best PEFC-certified cedar wood, and contain a large 4mm core for better performance. The creamy oil-based cores glide across surfaces smoothly without any wax build-up. The full range of 78 colors allows artists to blend endless varieties of shades, hues, and muted tones.

- 78 Bright & Vibrant Colors
- Real Pigments for Lightfastness
- Large Lead Diameter
- Made in Germany

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Germany

FAQ:

Which of your papers can I use with a light box?

First, let's cover what a light box is:

LIGHT BOX:

An artist light box is a rectangular surface that lights up to illuminate a piece of paper for tracing. Artists use light boxes to transfer and trace drawings from one sheet of paper to another. Light boxes are perfect for using a base drawing or image and making new copies with art materials, or making minor changes to a design. Prior to computers, they were often used in animation as they made it easy to make small changes to a base design.

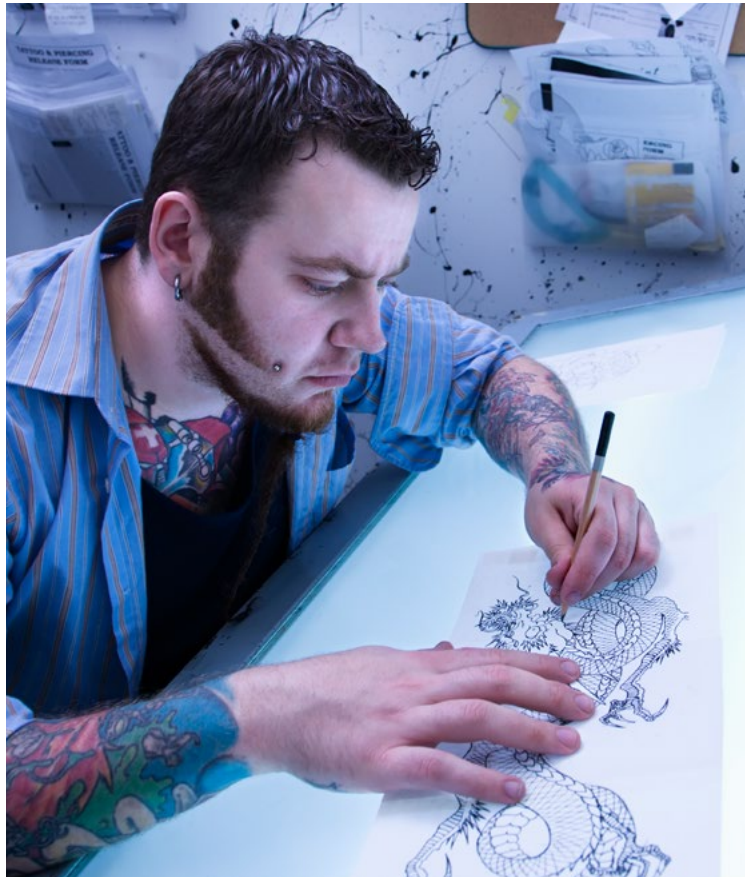
So let's get back to the question. Which of your papers can I use with a light box to trace a design?

ANSWER:

There is a wide range of paper types that an artist can successfully use with a light box. Our top recommendations are:

- Sketch paper
- Drawing paper
- Bristol paper (in a dark room)
- Mixed Media paper (in a dark room)

One may understandably think only thin papers can be used with a light box. While lightweight papers like Sketch and Drawing work wonderfully with light boxes, heavier weight papers can also be used under the right conditions.



To successfully use heavier papers with a light box, simply turn the lights out in the room. In a dark room, the light coming through the light box is enough to show an image through a heavier sheet of paper like Bristol or Mixed Media.

The main consideration an artist should make when choosing paper to use with a light box is the type of medium(s) they will ultimately end up using for their artwork. If the intention is to trace an image and only use graphite on the finished piece, Sketch or Drawing paper is sufficient. If the intention is to create the finished piece in pen and ink, Bristol Smooth would be a good choice. If watercolor, ink, colored pencils, and a range of mediums are

going to be added to the final piece, Mixed Media paper would be ideal.

Papers that don't have a large amount of texture are best because you want a smooth surface to trace on. For example, a cold press watercolor paper has a lot of texture and doesn't allow for your marker, pen or pencil to glide smoothly on the paper while tracing an image.