

Enhancing a Nature Subject With Full-Strength Color

I express my unique vision of nature in watercolors using a vibrant, full spectrum of colors. Rather than premixing colors, I prefer mingling them. I apply full-strength, intense watercolor to unstretched paper, then I add clean water to encourage the colors to blend and blossom in exciting combinations on the surface. Contrast of pure hues allows me to use lots of color without conflict.

my palette LUSH AND VIBRANT

Cobalt Teal Blue • Manganese Blue • Cerulean Blue (Schmincke) • Phthalos: Blue, Turquoise and Yellow-Green • Sap Green • Green Gold • Hansa Yellow Light • New Gamboge • Perinone Orange • Quinacridones: Gold, Sienna, Coral, Pink, Red, Rose (Rembrandt) and Violet (Schmincke) • Carbazole Violet • Chinese White



My Starting Point

I begin with references and sketches that show the shapes of the goldfish so my fish forms will be true to life, even though I'll use creative color to paint them. This tonal watercolor sketch is my map of the value contrasts and placement of shapes in the composition. I use it to make a full-size drawing on tracing paper, which I transfer to watercolor paper when I'm satisfied with my design.



1 First Bold Washes

I immediately apply brilliant, saturated colors to the main subjects. I will key everything else in the painting to these colors. I have sketched the background seaweed loosely in pencil so I can paint it freely. Tinted masking on the fish scales and foreground rocks protects areas to be highlighted.



My Method

I paint spontaneously and creatively with splash and verve, a result of careful planning in the early stages and letting the paint flow freely as I work. Here, I bring two areas of color together, pulling clear Cobalt Blue into an area of Magenta and yellow that has been lightly blended.



2 Choosing Colors That Balance
I lay in the stone shapes at the bottom of the picture and the sea plant at the center, reaching intuitively for colors that balance the composition. More dots and spatters of masking fluid on the background represent flickering light beneath the surface of the water. As I proceed through the painting, I mask painted areas that I want to preserve, in addition to the areas of white paper that I masked earlier.



4 Unmasked: Now What?
This doesn't look like the same picture. Removing the mask creates a new set of challenges. The masked areas seem harsh. Even so, the painting holds together well at this stage. There is a good balance of warm and cool color and the flow of the water and the movement of the fish are working. This is where patience and perseverance pay off. I will continue glazing and painting shapes until I have pulled the painting together into a unified whole.



3 Analogous Background
Now I establish a direction of light with washes of yellow, green and blue-green. I paint and mask networks of sea plants in layers to give depth to the scene. At this point, it's hard to judge what will happen next because of the mask. The central stone at the bottom hasn't been painted yet.



5 Balancing the Fish and Background
After I've painted the rocks and sea plants that were masked, I check the value contrasts throughout the painting and note that I've created the depth I need. The brightly colored fish and warm rocks are clearly distinguished from the cooler, darker background. A few calligraphic touches here and there complete my picture.

Goldfish •
David Daniels, watercolor, 40" × 60" (102cm × 152cm)