

## **Course Title: Watercolor Comic Illustration**

**Instructor Name:** Willow D'Arcy Harmer

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**Location:** Cascade MAHB 109

**Day and Time:** Thursdays - 6:00PM-8:50PM

**Dates:** Sept. 25 - Nov. 20

**Prerequisites:** comfort with drawing, perspective, and storytelling. We will learn a few drawing skills, so you can be a complete beginner but this class is more about painting than drawing.

### **Suggested references:**

- Understanding Comics by Scott McCloud
- Drawabox.com

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course will guide adult learners through the fundamentals of comic book creation using ink and watercolor. The class will emphasize creation of one's own work and will guide students through ideation, writing, sketching, penciling, inking and painting pages of an original work. The class will include lectures, examples, live demonstrations, and one on one support for each student's need.

**Lectures:** Lectures may be combined and may not be in this exact order, but these are the subjects we will be covering:

- **Liberate Your Creativity: Gesture, Play, and Breaking the Rules**
- **Overview with examples of watercolor comics**
- **Concept and ideation**
- **Printing, Layout Choice, Comic Sizes**
- **Formats and storytelling structures**
- **Balloon and Narration Conventions**
- **Character design**
- **Composition - Relational Impact Dynamics of Art**
- **Perspective**

**Demos:** I will be doing demos in nearly every class to show you how I do comics, however you are encouraged to do it your own way and ignore the demos if you like.

- **Gesture drawing**
- **Ideation sketches**
- **Page composition and thumbnailing**
- **Character Design and Turnaround**
- **Panel Thumbnails**
- **Penciling (erasable pen or preferred tool)**
- **Graphite Transfer of Sketches Onto Watercolor Paper**
- **Inking techniques (pens, brush, digital considerations)**
- **Watercolor demos:**
  - Glazing
  - Wet-on-wet techniques

- Masking Fluid and Masking Tape techniques
- Figures
- Shadows
- Color layering and texture
- Other demos on request!

**Exercises / Student Practice:** These exercises will all be in demos, but you will have a chance to do them at your own pace and will be encouraged to use your own process that works for you on your comic.

- **Timed Gesture Exercises**
- **Rule-Breaking Exercises**
- **Somatic / Nervous System Exercises**
- **Character Design and Character Turnaround**
- **Ideation for story or comic page**
- **Sketching and thumbnailing panels**
- **Penciling selected page(s)**
- **Inking completed pencil work**
- **Watercolor painting, including glazing, shadows, figures, and other demonstrated techniques**
- **Goal: complete at least one page, ideally up to three, following own pace and creative process**

## **MY PROCESS:**

- **Freewriting, daydreaming and ideation sketches:** I start with letting my mind do its thing, and imagine what might be cool or fun to draw, or what might be a story I want to tell or a feeling I want to express. Once I have those ideas, I start doing a variety of ideation, sometimes on paper, sometimes on 3x5 cards, sometimes typed on my computer. Sometimes it's a script, sometimes it's a list of ideas, sometimes it's one line.
- **Page Rough Sketches:** I usually do a smaller, 9x6 super fast (a few minutes per page) rough sketch of what I want on each page. I often do this more than once. The point is to do it as fast as possible, do NOT think about drawing technique or anything at all other than getting the information down on the page. I've been known to draw a page in 2 minutes.
- **Page Thumbnails:** I sometimes skip this process, but it can be helpful when I am not sure about how to lay out the comic panels. They are about 3"x4", and have very little inside the panels, but are more about how the page as a whole is composed and where the page breaks are.
- **Panel Thumbnails:** When I have a complex or tricky panel, sometimes I do thumbnails of that to figure out the composition. This is not necessary but can help if something doesn't look right.
- **Character Design:** I sketch characters, figure out costumes, figure out character facial features, and give my characters personality.
- **Character Turnaround:** I draw my characters in front view, ¾ view, side view, ¼ view and from behind ideally. It's a challenging process that will make the rest of your comic MUCH easier to draw, because you will know what your character looks like from different angles and you don't have to redraw them each time!
- **Page Sketch:** I draw a sketch of the panel layout, this time taking time to get my drawing figured out. This part takes the longest, My usual process is to gesture draw the whole thing quickly, then go back over it using references, or draw a new one using references, and refine the drawing with each pass.

- **Pencils:** This is the finished drawing, but in pencil or erasable ink. Sometimes it's the same as the page sketch. Sometimes I do the page sketch and pencil on the watercolor paper. Sometimes I do both digitally and print them on the watercolor paper. Sometimes I draw them and transfer them using graphite onto the watercolor paper. There's no wrong way to do it.
- **Inking First Pass:** Sometimes I paint before I ink. Sometimes I do minimal inking before I paint. I'll let you decide which works for you.
- **Masking:** Sometimes I mask out my balloons and other parts using artist tape, masking fluid or a masking pen. These parts will stay white and clean edged.
- **Flattening Color:** This is just painting in the local color of everything, using more or less water for highlights and shadows.
- **Shading, glazing and highlights:** I then sometimes go back over the paint with glazing (wet on dry painting so you can see through one color and they mix optically.) I add shadows, and some pops of highlights plus clean up mistakes with a white posca pen.
- **Final Inking, writing and balloons:** I like to finish inking AFTER I paint, as the lines are more crisp when they are on top of the watercolor. Traditional comics are inked first.

## PREREQUISITE

Participants should have a basic understanding of art and feel comfortable with drawing, perspective and storytelling. While professional-quality comics are not expected, this course is not focused on drawing techniques, rather the process of creating and developing a story and finalizing compositions, pages and panels. Optional resources will be provided for those interested in practicing and enhancing their skills independently, as developing proficiency in drawing can take years.

## EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOME

Students will gain an introduction to comic writing, roughing, sketching, composition, construction, color theory, inking, and considerations for printing. Students should have at least one page finalized by the end of the 8 week class.

## MATERIALS

### Required Supplies:

1. **Watercolor Paper:**
  - **Recommended Size:** At least 8x10 or 9x12 - Standard comics are often done on 11x17 but we can work smaller. Hot pressed is smoother and may work better for comics but if you like the classic watercolor paper texture, go ahead and get cold pressed.
2. **Watercolors:**
  - Bring whatever you like! Make sure you have a full "set" of colors. If you have gouache, you can bring that as well.
3. **Colored Erasable Pens:** These can be removed with a hairdryer. Use a lighter color like red, pink, or green.
4. **Palette**
  - Any watercolor palette, preferably segmented
5. **Brushes:**
  - Round - Size 1, 2 and maybe 4 optional - you can use acrylic brushes.
  - Flat - Size 2 and 4
  - Optional:
    - i. Small mop brush
    - ii. Long round or long line brush - size 1-4 (or a liner brush)
    - iii. Any brushes you like! Just keep in mind panels are smaller than a whole page.

- My favorite brushes are Princeton Velvetouch but those are expensive.
- 6. Erasers - white and moldable
- 7. Waterproof Fine Line black drawing pens. Ohuhu are affordable and very waterproof. Sakura are standard but sometimes bleed. Sharpies are too thick but will work in a pinch.
- 8. Sketchbook or Cheaper Mixed Media Paper: For test washes and color sketching. Any cheaper paper will do for practice work.
- 9. Clear ruler with grid - 12 inches
- 10. Paper Towels, sponges, old towel for cleaning brushes and blotting.
- 11. Artist Tape: 1/4" artist tape
- 12. 2 water containers

#### Optional Supplies:

1. White Gouache or any regular (not acrylic) gouache. If you are also in my gouache class, you may bring your gouache
2. White Fine Point Posca Pen - or other white paint pen. The thinner the better.
3. Masking Fluid/Pen:
  - Molotow brand Masking Pen -
  - If using masking fluid, bring cheap brushes or a dip pen for application. Masking fluid WILL RUIN A BRUSH.
4. Wider artist tape to hold down your paper
5. A couple small pieces of high end 100% cotton watercolor paper like Arches or Fabiano - Hot pressed is better for comics, but if you like the rough texture, you can get cold pressed.

Where to get your supplies: I've Been Framed/Art Supply Center on SE 50th and Foster, Artist and Craftsman Supply, Columbia Art and Drafting, Blick, Michael's, or of course online. Jerry's Artarama and Blick are great, and of course Amazon has everything you need.

## GLOSSARY:

### Comic Terms

#### Panel and Page Structure

- **Aspect Ratio:** The proportional relationship between the width and height of a page or panel.
- **Bleed:** Artwork that extends beyond the trim line to ensure images reach the edge of the page after printing and cutting.
- **Gutters:** The space between panels on a page.
- **Layout / Page Composition:** The planned arrangement of panels and their visual flow on a page.
- **Panel:** A single frame or box in a comic that contains part of the story.
- **Panel Types:** Varying panel shapes and sizes used to create pacing and emphasis (e.g., splash, inset, grid).
- **Splash Page:** A full-page illustration, often used for dramatic effect or as an introduction.
- **Storyboarding:** A rough layout of scenes and panels used to plan the narrative flow and timing.
- **Thumbnail:** Small, rough sketches of a page or panel layout used to plan composition and pacing.
- **Timing:** The pacing of panels and pages to control the rhythm and the reader's experience.
- **Transition:** How the reader's eye moves from one panel to the next, which can include moment-to-moment, action-to-action, or subject-to-subject.

### Art and Visuals

- **Flatting:** Applying solid areas of base color in digital comics before adding shading or texturing.
- **Foreshortening:** A perspective technique that makes objects or limbs appear closer or farther away by shortening or compressing them visually.
- **Ideation Sketch:** Quick sketches for exploring story ideas, character poses, and scenes.
- **Inking:** Applying permanent lines over the penciled artwork using pens, brushes, or digital tools.
- **Penciling:** Drawing the final artwork in pencil, which is the stage before inking.
- **Perspective:** The technique of creating the illusion of three-dimensional depth and volume on a two-dimensional surface.
- **Point of View (POV):** The perspective from which a scene is presented.

## Text and Dialogue

- **Balloon:** A container for speech, thought, or narration in a comic.
- **Caption:** A text box used for narration, exposition, or internal monologue, separate from dialogue balloons.
- **Dialogue:** The spoken words of characters, typically contained in balloons.
- **Lettering:** The process of placing all text in a comic, including dialogue, captions, and sound effects.
- **Word Balloon Tail / Pointer:** The line connecting a speech balloon to the character who is speaking.

## Visual Language

- **Iconic Symbols:** Visual shorthand elements that represent motion, impact, emotion, or other abstract effects (e.g., sweat drops, impact stars).
- **Motion Lines / Speed Lines / Action Lines:** Lines that show the direction, trajectory, or speed of a moving object or character.
- **Sound Effects (SFX):** Words integrated into the artwork to represent sounds (e.g., Bang!, Pow!, Zoom!).

## Watercolor Terms

- **Atmospheric Wash:** Soft washes used to indicate mood, background, or distance.
- **Charging:** Introducing one wet color into another wet area on the paper so the colors blend naturally.
- **Color Mixing / Pigment:** Combining pigments to create new hues.
- **Flat Wash:** A smooth, even layer of color that covers an area with a consistent tone.
- **Glazing:** Layering thin, transparent washes of color to build depth and adjust tone.
- **Graded Wash:** A gradual change of tone or color across a wash (e.g., light to dark or from one color to another).
- **Layering:** Applying multiple layers of paint to create depth, texture, and richness.
- **Lifting:** Removing paint from the paper using a brush, tissue, or sponge to lighten an area.
- **Masking / Masking Fluid:** A resist used to protect areas from paint, preserving the white of the paper or a previous layer.
- **Texture / Dry Brush:** A technique using minimal water and paint to create rough, textured strokes.
- **Wet-on-Dry:** Applying paint to a dry paper for sharper edges and more control.
- **Wet-on-Wet:** Applying paint to a wet surface for soft, blended effects.

## Printing Terms

- **Bleed:** The area of artwork that extends beyond the trim line to ensure color or images reach the edge of the page after trimming.
- **Bleed Marks:** Small lines that indicate the outer edge of the bleed area, showing where to trim.
- **Crop Marks / Trim Marks:** Lines that indicate where to cut the printed sheet to achieve the final size.
- **Full Bleed:** Printing that extends to the very edge of the paper, which requires the artwork to extend beyond the trim line to prevent unintended white borders.
- **Gutter:** The inner margin of a page spread, typically near the binding, where pages meet.
- **Printer Margin:** The area around the edge of the paper that a printer cannot print on.
- **Trim Size:** The final dimensions of a printed piece after it has been trimmed, not including the bleed area.