Watercolor Florals with Yao Cheng with CBTV Live

Chapter 1 - Chapter 1
Watercolor Florals
(upbeat electronic music) - Hey everybody welcome to creativebug. We're coming at you live like we always do on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and I'm here with-- - Yao Cheng. Hi. - Yao, if you're familiar with her work, she, well how would you describe yourself actually? - I'm a watercolor artist. - And a designer. - And a designer. I have my own design studio in Columbus, Ohio. And I've been painting since I was really little. So this is something I have always loved to do and I feel very passionate about. - Yao's coming back for a full month of daily challenge, which is amazing. - It's really good. - We're super excited to have you here this week. And if you're not familiar with Yao's watercolor classes you should check them out. They're one of our top selling classes on the site and they're pretty amazing. It's good for beginners and even people who want to beef up their watercolor skills, right? - Yes. - Which is awesome. We thought we would share with you how to do some floral paintings, right? Before we dive into that, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about your approach to how you paint flowers. Are you going for, like, a realistic look? - Yeah, that's a good question. I actually take a more modern approach. It's very loose, it's very expressive, I'm not really looking to paint anything photo realistically. I'm more interested in capturing the feeling, the essence, the energy of the blooms that I'm looking at. - So do you paint from imagination? Do you use a photo? Do you paint from real life? Do you do all of that? - Most of the time I paint from photos. When I have the chance and the weather is nice I like to go outside and observe in real life. But, yeah, most of time I'm looking at something because I'm either referencing it for shape or texture or color. - We have an image we're going to paint today. This is from the recipe book, which is by Studio Choo, they're also on our site. You can check out their floral design classes. And this is a stunning image of dahlias. Why did you pick this one in particular? - I think the colors are just so mesmerizing and I'm really looking forward to painting all of the different strokes and the big blooms. But yeah, I think the colors is what drew me first. - And how did you start painting? You said you've been painting since you were a kid? - Yeah, I don't know. I think my mom took me to a creative drawing class when I was like three or four. And, I don't know, I think it was just happenstance that I just loved the connection of being able to create with my hands something that I don't really know how to describe in words, but I just could relate to on another level with visual imagery. So, yeah, I've just always loved working with my hands I think. - And I'm going to ask one more question before we start. You said that you did study abroad in China. - I did. - And you studied floral painting there. Can you talk a little bit about that. Because you said it really informs your work now. - Yeah, it really does, it's funny because it was such a traditional discipline. The work that I was creating there was a lot of master copies. It was very rigorous. It took hours to create one piece. Everything was very tight, very photo realistic. But what I loved about that training was it taught me how to observe from real life, but also from a photograph. And it was all about capturing the energy and using your brushstrokes. It was very much informed by Chinese calligraphy so there was a huge emphasis on being expressive with your strokes. I think that may be one of the biggest takeaways I have from that time in China, was learning to use my brush strokes to say something. - So expressive, and efficient it sounds like. - And efficient, yeah. - Just watching you paint, like, you don't overwork anything. - I don't, right. It's actually about refining it down to what matters most. So, Yeah. - So if we look at this image how would you start? You don't sketch, I know that. - [Yao] I

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don't sketch, yeah. - [Courtney] Which is, yeah, that's people's painting process. I don't sketch either. So how would you start. Let's just give them an overview before we start. - Usually I like to start with the natural growth of a bloom. So I usually like to start with a stem. It gives me a point of reference. And even in a vase like this where you don't see the stems, because I've been painting florals for awhile I understand that, you know, the generic shape of dahlia stems, so I'll just imagine a few before I start painting the actual blooms. And I always like to start from the inside out. It gives me, again, a point of reference, a center point where all the petals come back to and it just makes the overall feel more realistic and no petal ever really escapes too far and it becomes a little bit strange in shape. - Cool, so how do we start? - I like to start with what I'm most excited about or inspired by, so in this imagery, like, it could be shapes or color, but in this particular imagery I'm most excited about color. So I'm gravitating towards this bloom right here. And usually I start with one and it will inform me about the next piece. That's why I don't like to sketch first, because I like keeping things a little bit loose and open for improvisation as I go. I think it's fun to be surprised. - [Courtney] Yeah, just, like, flow with your process. So you're really in the process. As opposed to the final product. Okay, so if we start. We've got a few round brushes, a small, medium and large here. I'm just going to follow along, you're really going to be watching Yao. So I'm just gonna do what you do. So how do you start? - So I like to have a large round, either a 12 or a 16 for the stem. And I have two go to greens here, a sap green, and a hookers green. And I think I'll probably just start at the bottom and see where it takes us. - [Courtney] Adding some Leaves. - [Yao] Right, I add a few leaves first. Not all of them. Keeping it open and loose and not doing everything first. Not painting all the leaves first allows me the opportunity to come back and add more if I feel like the layouts a little bit off or if I want to add something later on. I'm not sure how many of these we'll be able to fit in, but let's see where it goes. - [Courtney] But I like that too that you can edit. You have the artistic license, as you call it, to edit down or add what inspires you. - [Yao] Right, and I think that comes, just with experience. The confidence that you build with painting many, many, many, many different blooms, different ways, different colors, different variations. You just, you learn these technical skills and the confidence to trust your strokes and-- - [Courtney] And you leave a lot of white space. - [Yao] I do. - [Courtney] And that's, like, such a signature part of your look. - [Yao] It is, it is. I do it because I like to paint really quickly. So being able to leave a gap in between gives me the opportunity to not make, having everything blend together and turn to mush. So it's there for definition, and it's also there to allow me to paint very quickly and continue going. Yeah, actually, I think it's something that they really stressed in the Chinese floral painting class in China was leaving gaps. I think that's where I was first introduced to it actually. - [Courtney] I find it really hard. I'm trying. Trying to do it. Remember we're live, which means you can write in and ask questions. Maybe you're already familiar with Yao's work because you've watched her beginning watercolor series. If you haven't Allie will post a link to that because it's phenomenal. She goes over color mixing and brush handling, abstracts as well as representational florals. So, you do move really fast. Okay, keep going. - [Yao] I do, I think it's because I don't have the attention span to sit for hours. Maybe it's because I was slightly traumatized by the class and how intense it was. - [Courtney] The Chinese painting class? - [Yao] The Chinese painting class. I'm slightly joking, but maybe, maybe a little bit. - [Courtney] Maybe there's some truth to that. - [Yao] Maybe there's a little truth to that. - [Courtney] I am having a hard time fitting even a remote amount of these on to this page. I started way too big. But that's okay, right? You just go with it. - [Yao] Yeah, you just go with it. And I paint in all different sizes and scales. So sometimes I paint in this size, more often than not, I actually, lately I've been painting way, way bigger. Like 30 by 40 big. - [Courtney] Like, on the floor, right? I think, I feel like

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I've seen some of your paintings on Instagram on the floor. - [Yao] On the floor. I have some tables now in the studio because I foresaw that this would happen. I had a table built, part of the purpose was so that I could paint super large if I was in the mood. - [Female Assistant] We have our first questions. Sara asks, how are you fading out to the lighter petals? More water? - Yes, that is the beauty of watercolor, is you don't lighten with white pigment, you lighten with water. So any color that you want a lighter hue or tone of, you just add more water. - [Female Assistant] Okay, next question, Alexis asks, what brand of color do you use? What brand of paint? - That's a really good question. There's a lot of different brands, but I really like the Winsor Newton professional grade watercolor. Their colors are very, the pigments are very saturated out of the tube, so you don't need very much and it's a high grade so I don't feel-- and because I squeeze them out ahead of time and I let it dry overnight, like 24 hours, I don't end up wasting a lot, because what I'm actually picking up is dry. - Yep, totally, yeah. - [Female Assistant] Okay, next question. Rosie asks, I'm coming in late, did you wet the paper first? - No, I did not. I mean, that's definitely an interesting technique you can try, but to get the crisper edges of each petal I start with dry paper. But I like to work on a cold press which has more tooth. - [Courtney] And you pull, right? You pull out with water, and she does this technique called dipping. Can you describe what that is? - [Yao] So when surfaces are wet, and I can demonstrate her on the yellow, on the yellow guy, depending on how wet the surface is you control how far it fades. So the wetter the surface, the more the color will blend. So usually when I dipping, I'm dipping in a deeper color. And you can, to really dramatize the effect of blending. - [Female Assistant] Okay, next question. They're coming in hot. Julian asks, do you try to fix any mistakes or do you find it easier to start over? - I assume you mostly just go with the mistakes this week. - Yeah, I think it's challenging, but I like the challenge. It forces me to work with what I have, and oftentimes I'm pleasantly surprised. I think if you constantly catch yourself wanting to start over you're not giving yourself the opportunity to see where it goes and you're not allowing your mistakes to become something better. So I think, it's a good skill to have and I think ultimately it makes you a better artist. - Yeah it's actually really awesome to watch because if she, you know, is carrying her brush over and a water droplet fell on the page, she'd be there and be like, oh no problem, I'll just pick that up because it's wet. Or she'll just make it a part of the painting. So a green smear can become a green leaf. And I like that you just allow the process to happen. - Right, I think it's empowering. So it's, like, a mistake, it builds your confidence and it allows you to see that a mistake is just another opportunity to make it something else. It's not necessarily a bad thing. Part of improvising is mistakes, things that you didn't foresee happening, but then, usually it takes you somewhere really interesting. More interesting than if you planned it out. - [Courtney] I think that's true. I feel like that's really come to light in watching you work over the past week. - [Female Assistant] Okay, last question for now. Mickey asks, what grade of cold pressed paper are you using? - What grade? I mean, I'm using 140 pound. There's two brands that I like to use. I use an Arches, the Arches brand for landscapes, because it's a little bit toothier, the cold press is a little bit toothier. I use that primarily for abstracts and landscapes. Sometimes florals. But the Fabriano cold press in 140 pound is a little bit softer in it's tooth so it allows the petals to be more, like, my strokes to be more flowing, which lends itself really well to flowers. - Yeah, and she goes over all of that in her beginning watercolor class. So you can check that out too in more detail. And we have these, she's actually cut these down because of the daily challenge that we're filming. These are 7 by 10. And they're cut from the, they're cut from the paper she just mentioned and we've taped them down to a board so that they don't warp. In her regular, beginning class you work on an actual block, so all of the watercolor pages are, kind of, waxed on the edge together. You allow it to dry on

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that block and once it's completely dry you peel it away. So that, I think, will help. Because you do use a lot of water. - [Yao] Yes. - [Courtney] Oh I love this. What's happening here? - [Yao] I don't know. I think-- - [Courtney] It's really pretty. - [Yao] I think I'm playing with different tones of purple here. - [Female Assistant] Next question comes from Marcia. Marcia asks, do you paint what you see, like the picture, or do you interpret what you want? - Both, I think that's why my style is never fully, like, photo realistic. And I think it's something that I really encourage people who take my class or other artists to do. To not, to reinterpret it in their own style. And I think because I get a lot of questions about how do I find my, how do you find your own style, and a lot of that is if I'm looking at a reference I'm only picking out key things. So here I'm picking out the colors and then I'm reinterpreting it back to the style that I like to paint, you know, with the spacing in between the whites and the loose brush strokes, for example. And that's how you make a painting uniquely yours, you know, then you don't have to worry about copying somebodies work or feeling like you're being too close to what they've created. - Yeah, and it allows for that creative freedom, like you were saying. Just like a mistake where you push yourself through that mistake to learn something new, I think the challenge of developing your own style does that too. You discover something about your painting practice and who you are as a painter. - [Yao] Yes, exactly. - [Female Assistant] Got another question. Susan asks, do you like watercolor pens? Do you work with watercolor pens? - [Courtney] I think Winsor Newton has a watercolor pen out, yeah. Have you tried it? - No, I have not. I used to, in the very beginning I tried watercolor pencils and I didn't really like that effect. But no, I've seen them but I've never really tried it. I think what I like about brushes is that there's a lot of different sizes and all the different pressure points you get because the bristles are longer I think gives me more range. - Just because I feel like this is a question we get on creativebug all the time, because we answer all of your questions on our classes. And I find that this is true for your class Yao, but also for August Wren's class, Jenn Orkin Lewis, and for anybody who's using paint brushes, we get a lot of questions about the brushes. So I know that for this you use the Princeton brand and a few different series. Can you talk a little bit about your favorite brushes. - [Yao] Yeah, this is my favorite series. It's the Princeton Art & Brush 4050R. You can find it on their website. I love it because it's a synthetic bristle but it has the right amount of bounce to the bristle. So it's not too soft and it's not too hard and it gives me a wider range of pressure points. It's a really well made brush and it's not super expensive. But the tips can give you, like the one you're using, has a really nice point to it, so you can use the same brush to create a lot of detail as well as make really broad strokes. - So, yeah, thick and thin, which is nice. That's awesome. I was going to ask you another thing about brushes and I can't remember what it is now. You have your brush roll, you kind of go back and forth between a variety of sizes. - I do. - And it sounds like you start with the big brush a lot. - Yeah, I do. I think that's true because you can do so much with a big brush and I think it's frees you from focusing too much on one small area and just adhering to that tiny area. It forces you to make big strokes and move throughout the page a lot faster. I think a lot of times, for beginners especially, they want to focus on one little area, and work it, and make sure it's perfect before they work on other parts of the page, whereas I think what makes a page, an artwork cohesive is that you're looking at the entire surface. You're working throughout constantly. You're not just looking at one area and then moving on to the next area. You're constantly dancing around and moving and making sure everything is in balance and the layout makes sense compositionally. - Yeah, you talk about that a lot. You say you don't sketch but often, before you start a painting, you kind of, with your hands are like, okay I know this is gonna land here. - Yeah, so I'm sketching in my mind, as far as, I'm laying, visually, out in my mind, you know, like, which stem is going where,

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where's the hierarchy if there's more than one stem, is this one going, the taller one going to be on the left and the shorter one going to be on the right, like, there's always going to be a balance happening. And I just think that's something that you can't learn in one sitting. I think it just comes with practice, and playing and not feeling like you can only paint one thing, like this, in one way, or once. So, a lot of times when I create work in my own studio, and for art prints in our online shop, for example, I'll paint five different versions, and being able to move very quickly through a piece allows me the opportunity to not feel fully invested, like, oh my gosh, this one piece, this first one has to be perfect. Because I don't spend, you know, days on one piece I'm able to paint through a lot of different versions. And usually the first version is like a sketch version except it's in color, and I'll be able to build upon that, what I've learned, what I've loved about what's working in that piece and what's not working and then refining it again in the next one. - [Courtney] Yeah, that's awesome. - Yeah, so I always encourage people to not feel like whatever's in front of them-- put so much pressure on a blank piece of paper because you think it has to be this masterpiece, or like your very best work, because most of the time it's not going to be. - [Courtney] Yeah, absolutely. - [Yao] And that's really okay. - [Courtney] How do you know when you're done? Like, what are you doing next with this piece? Is this done? Would you stop here? - [Yao] I think it's almost done, I think it needs a little bit of green and I've been looking a lot at these stalks right here so I might, or I think they called dragon snubs. - [Courtney] Yeah, yeah, yeah. - [Yao] So I might, I might create one over here and, you know, I'm looking at this compositionally now. So there's a heavier, bigger bloom here and this is the focal point and then these are secondary pieces that complement this. - [Courtney] Supporting ladies. - [Yao] Supporting ladies. And then maybe there's another piece that kind of brings the eye back up this way. - [Female Assistant] Our next question comes from Alei, and she is asking, how do you know your painting is finished and besides still lifes, have you painted other things? - [Yao] Yeah, so I paint a variety of different things. It really depends on what I'm inspired by in the moment. I'll go through phases where I'm really into geometrics and abstracts and then I'll go through other phases. I think it happens in phases because it takes awhile to really be fluent in any one subject matter. So it's not like I get to this point in painting this dahlia the very first time I paint a dahlia. You know, this is after, like, painting 20 versions of dahlias. So I think because it takes many, many weeks even of just getting into one subject matter I end up going through phases. There'll be other phases where maybe I'm not painting abstracts but I'm really into landscapes and those are more time intensive but they're really interesting in their own way. - You do some resist stuff with those too, yeah? Which you can also find in one of her painting classes on creativebug. - It's really fun. - [Courtney] They're really fun to watch develop. - [Yao] It's very freeing. - [Courtney] So you're going to add your snapdragon. Oh yeah, pretty. - [Yao] It's not a big guy, but just enough. Yeah, I think we're about to run out of space, so. - [Courtney] I know, these boards are tiny. - [Female Assistant] There is lots of Yao love happening right now. - [Yao] Aw, that's so sweet. - [Courtney] All right, do you think it's done? - [Yao] Yeah, I think I'm gonna just add one last. - [Courtney] So I like that. So even though that leaf, specifically, is not in our inspiration image, you feel free to add it because you want some green. - [Yao] And so if you look back you can understand, you can see the relationship in terms of color and probably this guy over here but everything else I'm assembling in my mind and I'm mixing. I talk about that a lot in the flower challenge. But this is how I make it uniquely my own. I'm not copying anybodies work. I'm reinterpreting things. - [Courtney] Yeah, and it makes sense. I mean, if you don't have access to a dahlia in the middle of winter you need to look at something. So that makes total sense. That's awesome. It's so beautiful. - [Yao] Thank you. - [Courtney] So you let it dry and then you take it off

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the board. - Yes, you want to let it dry completely. I get very excited and a lot of times I don't let it dry completely and then everything's super warpy and not that great. But yeah, you ideally would want this to dry completely. Thank you so much for joining us this week. We're really excited about your daily challenge. We also have another class coming out with Yao. It'll be available later this year. It's another fun surprise. Thank you again for tuning in to our live shoots. We always love your comments and questions and we will see you next week. - Bye. (upbeat electronic music)

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