

Watercolor Painting Tutorial in ArtRage 4

www.artrage.com



The reference image used in this tutorial is 'Gateway, Alonnisos, Greece', a traditional ink & watercolor study by Annie Wood. The use of this image is for educational purposes only. Please contact the original artist if you wish to make use of her painting. <http://www.anniewoodart.co.uk/>

About ArtRage

ArtRage is a natural media painting program that allows you to work with oils, watercolors, pastel, chalk, pencil, palette knives, canvas textures and more. It offers uniquely realistic textures and media blending effects, including a more realistic color blending mode than any other digital art program.

The different tools are highly customizable and allow you to get very realistic traditional results very easily. While ArtRage is probably best known for its oils, the watercolor tool rewards exploration and was developed using feedback from experienced traditional watercolor artists.



This tutorial uses the desktop software, ArtRage 4, which offers the most advanced range of features, but you can find the watercolor brush in other editions such as ArtRage Lite and our Android and iOS apps as well.

'Gateway', the original watercolor painting featured in this tutorial

ArtRage was created by Ambient Design, a tiny, dedicated, and inspired software company based in New Zealand.

Learn more at **www.artrage.com**

Annie Wood

Annie Wood is the artist of the original watercolor painting used for this tutorial

I am a local painter based on the Dorset/Somerset border. I gained my degree in Fine Art at Bristol in the late 1980's and then worked in publishing as an illustrator and then as a demonstrator and reviewer of fine art techniques and mediums.

Primarily a landscape painter, I am passionately committed to the environment and its local, natural history. I gradually became more interested in the healing nature of art and creativity working in the adult mental health field running art groups before studying for my post-graduate degree in Art Psychotherapy at Goldsmiths College, University of London. The experience of this coupled with extensive travels abroad renewed a desire to pursue my own artwork as a landscape painter and explore more fully the healing potential of working directly outside from nature ~ an aspect I am now developing running small group retreat days.

I seek out particularly secret and hidden away places in the natural world where I work on site initially creating preparatory studies which are then distilled and transformed back in my studio. I see my painting as a way of creating visual poems and am keen to transport the viewer into a dream-like space where they can find refuge and perhaps discover resonances with deeper issues in their own inner lives.

More recently, drawing on my training and experience as an Art Therapist, I have been running day workshops aimed at guiding people to 'Draw Closer to Nature' using a variety of fine art – journaling and mixed media techniques.

I have exhibited widely both in the UK and abroad and my paintings are held in private and public collections in Brazil, USA, France, Italy and the UK.

My studio is open throughout the year for one to one tuition or by appointment. More information on the day retreat courses mentioned above can be found either on my website or by contacting me direct.



'Greek Inn', the companion piece to 'Gateway'

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General Tips for ArtRage Watercolors

Watercolors are a tricky tool, they're unpredictable and changeable and translucent. They can always, always, be added to or blended further in ArtRage, so if you don't like the look of it, just keep working.

The process of using them tends to be different to other tools as well. You have to keep building up the paint, layering, blending, thinning, spreading... the paint changes the longer you work.

Some rule of thumb tips:

- Use a paper grain preset for the background, not a 'canvas' preset or other grain
- You can import your own photos of papers/other people's custom canvases as traditional paper textures if you don't think the existing options are interesting enough
- If you need a defined edge of pigment, turn Paper Wet off, and set Thinners to around 50%
- If you need 'dry brush' texturing at the end of strokes, turn Loading down
- If you just need to lay a lot of blended paint down without effects, turn Paper Wet on and Loading up and Thinners down
- If you need to mix in and blend colors, turn Color Bleed up
- If you need a lighter area inside a darker area of paint, turn Thinners up and dab inside it
- Use the palette knives
- You can use Insta Dry to lay down paint exactly where you want it then blend it later
- If you need to build up visible, defined, layers or edges, turn Insta Dry on, Paper Wet off and Thinners up around 50%.
- You can use separate layers instead of Insta Dry.
- Always use the watercolor layer blend mode for any extra layers, unless you have a reason not to.
- Run a wet paintbrush along the edges of existing paint to soften and blend the edge
- Dab a wet paintbrush inside existing paint to add new color blends and patterns and effects
- Scrub away with a large wet paintbrush with high Thinners to create a fade out to nothing
- Duplicate the layer for a stronger pigment build up, then merge it down for a single layer of solid paint
- Did I say use the palette knives already? USE THEM.
- If something isn't working, change the settings and try again
- Everything listed here can change depending on what you are painting over and what you actually want to do
- Test stuff on the Scraps before messing with your existing paint
- Switch Real Color Blending on and off for nicer or more predictable digital color blending results
- You can set Thinners and Color Bleed to react to pressure in the Stylus Properties

The Tutorial

A Step by Step Painting Tutorial

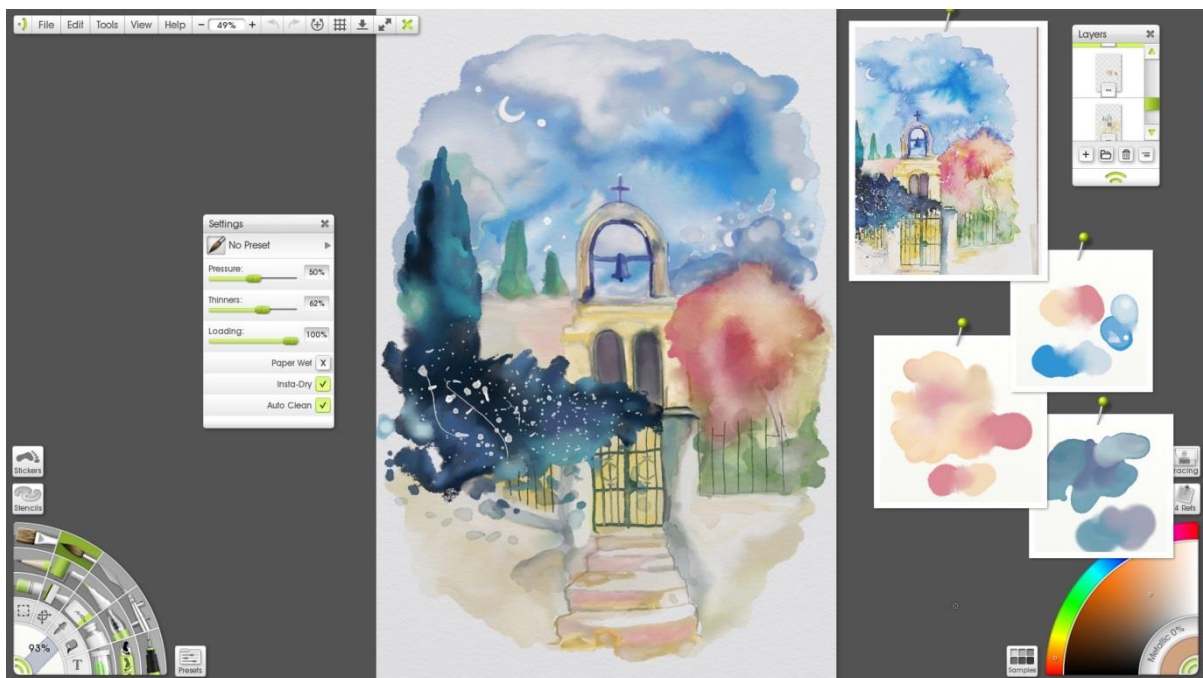
This tutorial uses the original 'Gateway' painting as a reference and demonstrates the process for copying the effects of watercolor using the watercolor tool, palette knife and a few other ArtRage features.

Part One: References and Sketch

First, lightly sketch stuff out in pencil to get a feel for the image and give yourself a guide to work from.

I was deliberately 'loose' with my sketch as I'm not trying to exactly copy the original and I want to bring my own 'feel' to it. I also ended up not really using the sketch much after I got started, but it helped me define the first areas of paint.

If you haven't really painted with watercolors before, then you probably want to find some references showing you the effects that you want to create. You don't have to copy them closely, but they will help enormously when you are trying to figure out what results you actually want and which effects are 'realistic' looking.



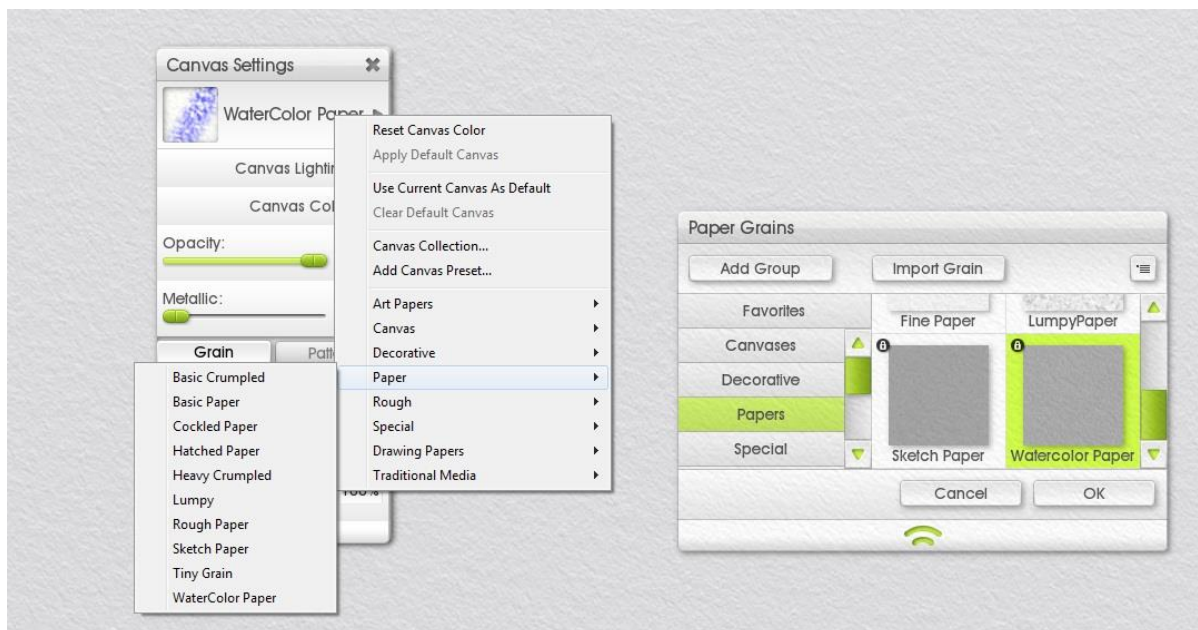
Below you can see that I've tested out a few color mixes on Scraps (found in the References menu). They helped me figure out what the colors would actually do when I blended them, and whether I needed to mix them directly or just go over them with a palette knife afterwards.

You can stop and test stuff on the scraps at any point. I don't always show you when I did, but I was testing stuff through most of this tutorial.



Two: Canvas

Go to the Canvas Settings to set the canvas color and grain (texture). You can use a default paper preset or a custom one. It's generally best to stick to specific watercolor and paper canvas options as watercolor doesn't work very well with rougher canvases.



In this example, I'm actually using a custom Parchment preset from

<http://www.silicongraffiti.com/juz/index.html>

I didn't bother changing the background color for the first half of the painting because I wanted to see what I was doing, and I wasn't sure what it would look like at the end yet. I came back and changed it a few times to check what it would look like at different stages.

But for the final result, I picked the paper color from the reference image – when you have the color picker open, you can click anywhere on the screen to select a color.

Three: Start Painting!

Sky

I'm starting with the sky because with watercolors you usually want to work from the background up, as the paint is always a bit see through so will be affected by what you have behind it.

Pick up your brush, set Loading up to 90-100% and Thinners down to 0-20%. If you leave it around 90% and 15%, respectively, it's easier to get the edge effects when you run out of paint and reach dry paper.

Then just block out the general shapes of the different areas of color.

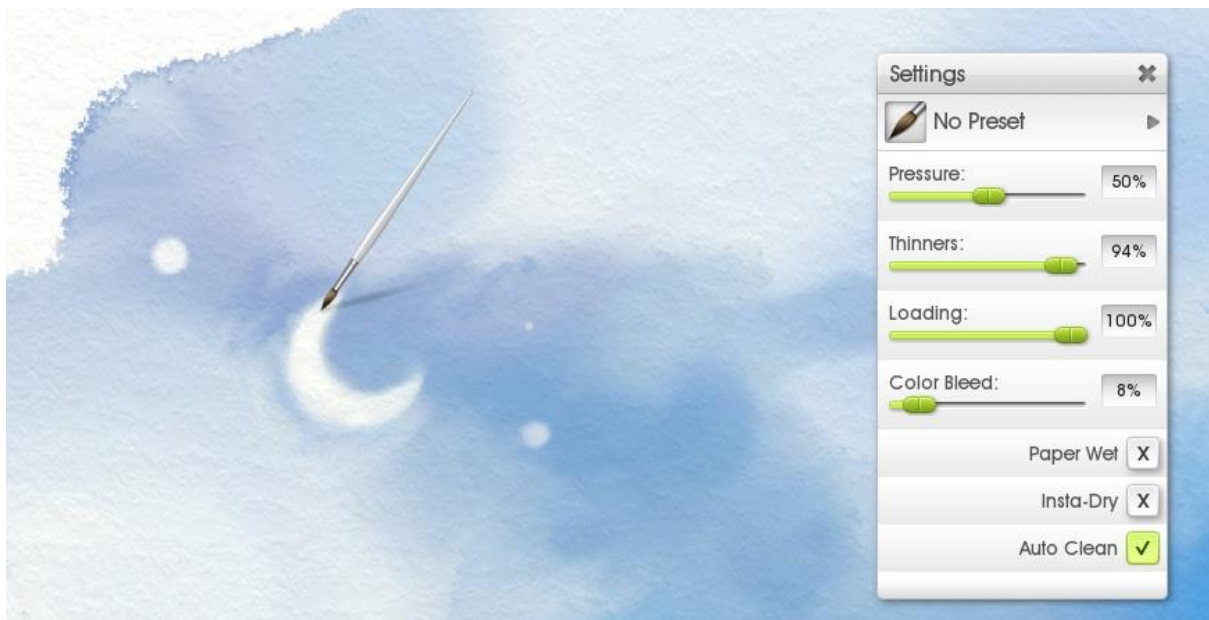


Then select the Palette Knife tool. For this one I used the Harsh Chaos preset. Whether you use presets or just tweak the settings sliders around is up to you.

Then just blend everything together! Don't worry if you mess it up – you can keep working, and this is just the base color.



I jumped ahead a bit and added the moon next – I should have waited until later really!



I painted the moon just using very high Thinners to push the paint around. The same for the white stars around it – just dabbing in the existing paint, mostly.

Now, back to the sky. Just start adding smaller areas of color, blending them in with your wet brush ('Insta Dry off') or with the palette knife.

This is just blending with a wet brush into the existing paint...



And this is after it has been softened up with the palette knife.



I want to darken this patch of sky, so I just add a lot of dark (high Loading, no Thinners) paint with Insta Dry on.



Then I blend it in with a wet brush ('Insta Dry off').

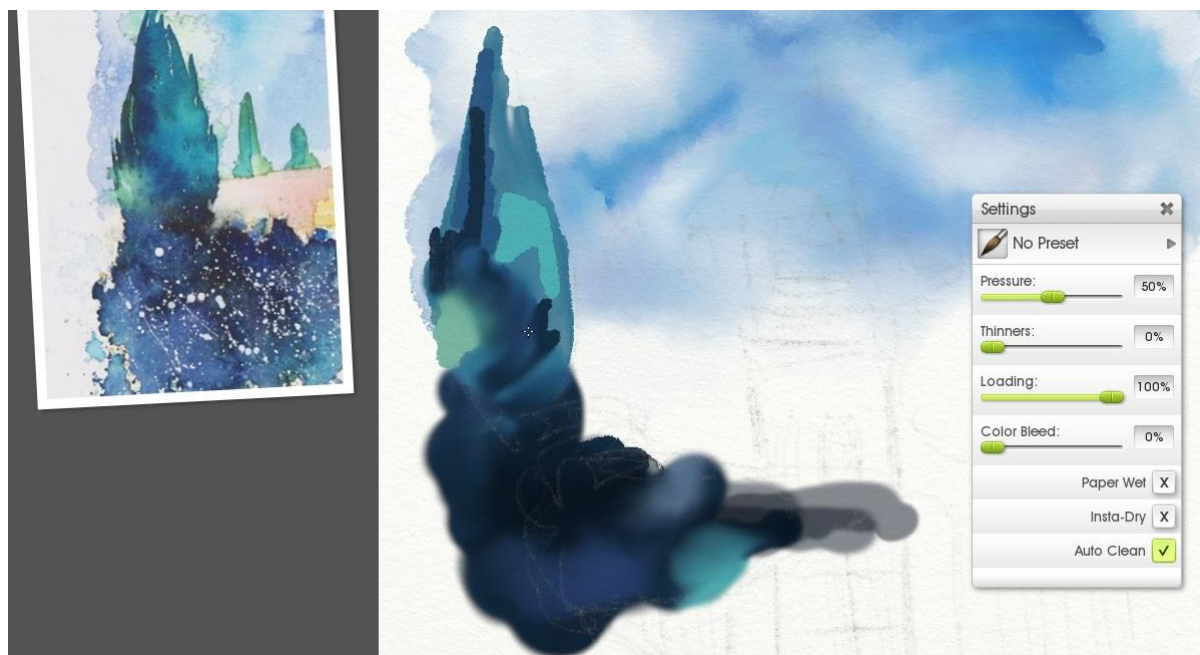


Done! Well, not entirely, I came back a few times during the rest of the painting to touch up spots and apply techniques I just remembered or figured out as I painted. But most of the changes are subtle and the techniques are already covered in the rest of the tutorial. You might be able to spot changes though!

And anyway, it's time to move onto the next step and create a new layer for the tree and the creeper growing over the wall below it.

The Tree and Creeper

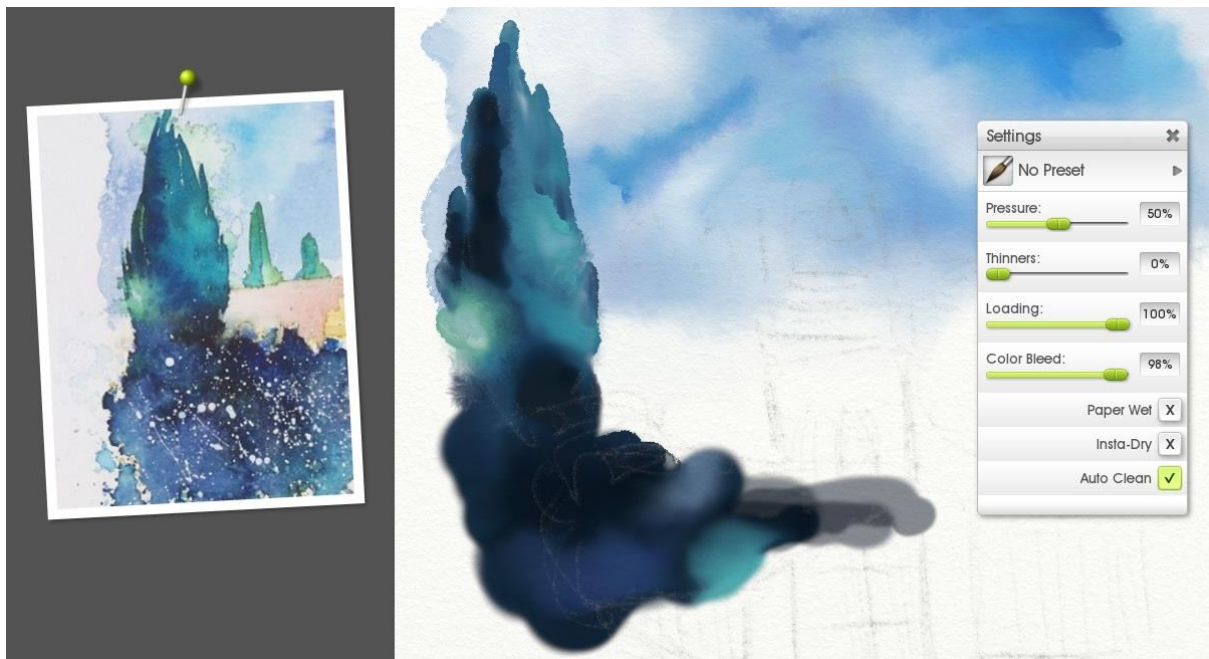
I quickly paint the tree and the creeping leaves below it. I use very high Loading and no Thinners to let me block out the colors quickly and create the shape of the plants. I paint them at the same time because they merge together, so there is no point worrying about where one ends and the other begins.



For the tree, I leave Paper Wet off because I need some fairly sharply defined color, but for the leaves I turn it on so I can blend it together as I work.

Last of all, I dab the highlights and shadows so that they don't get buried or blended under the rest of the paint.

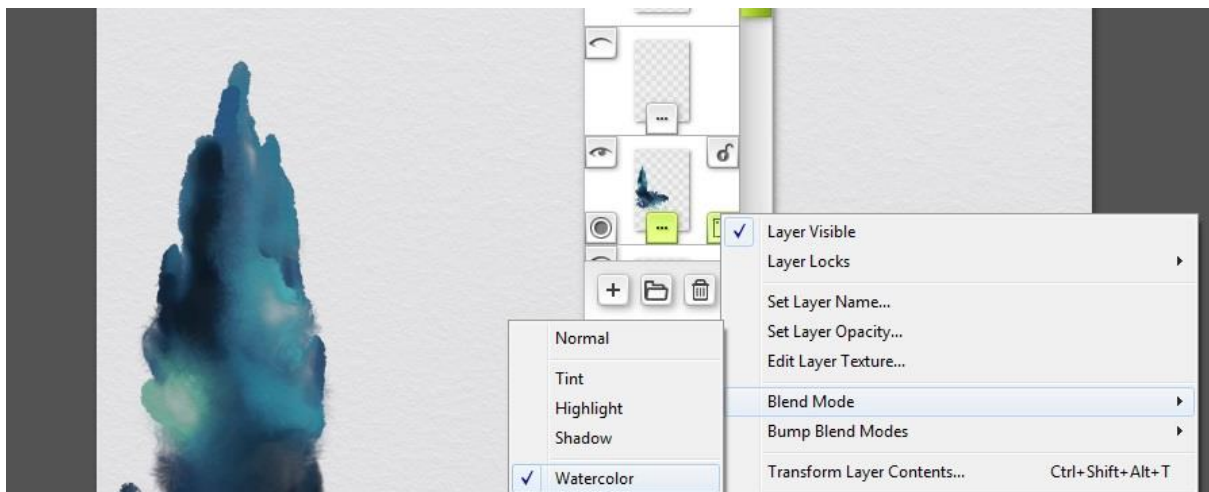
Then it's time for the fun part – I blend it together with the Wet palette knife again, using the Harsh Chaos preset, and define the edges of the tree with further brushwork (with Paper Wet off so that there is a pigmented edge where the paint meets the dry paper).



Watercolor Blend Mode

Now, it's time for my favorite ArtRage watercolor trick (well, one of several): Watercolor layer blend mode!

Go to the layers menu and open up the menu for the tree layer, then go to Blend Mode > Watercolor.

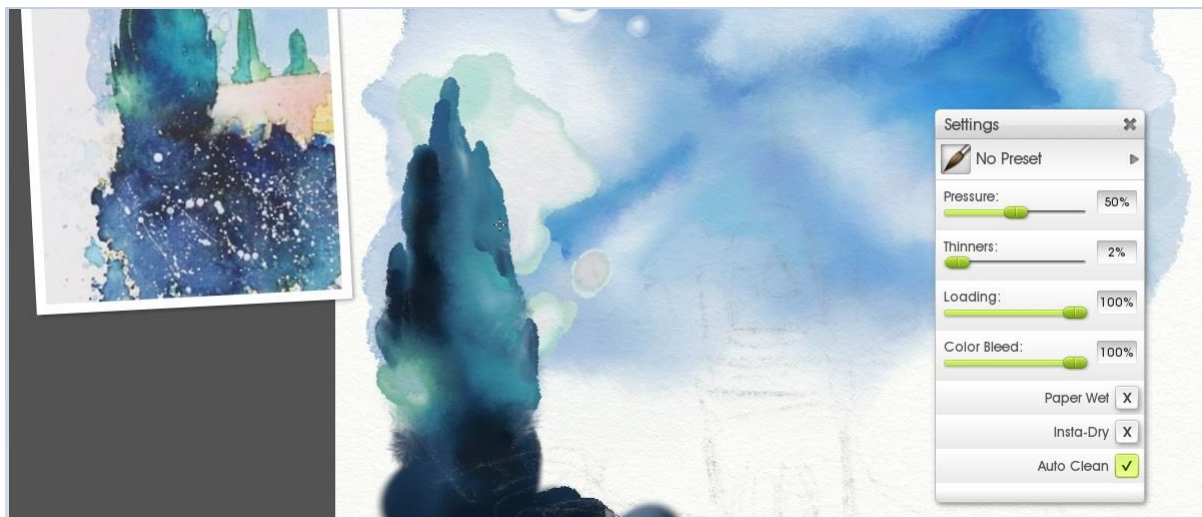


It makes a subtle but very important change to the way that the layers interact and which colors show through from below, so that it is much more realistic. In other programs you would use the 'Multiply' blend mode for this purpose, but the Watercolor blend mode was designed specifically for ArtRage's watercolors.

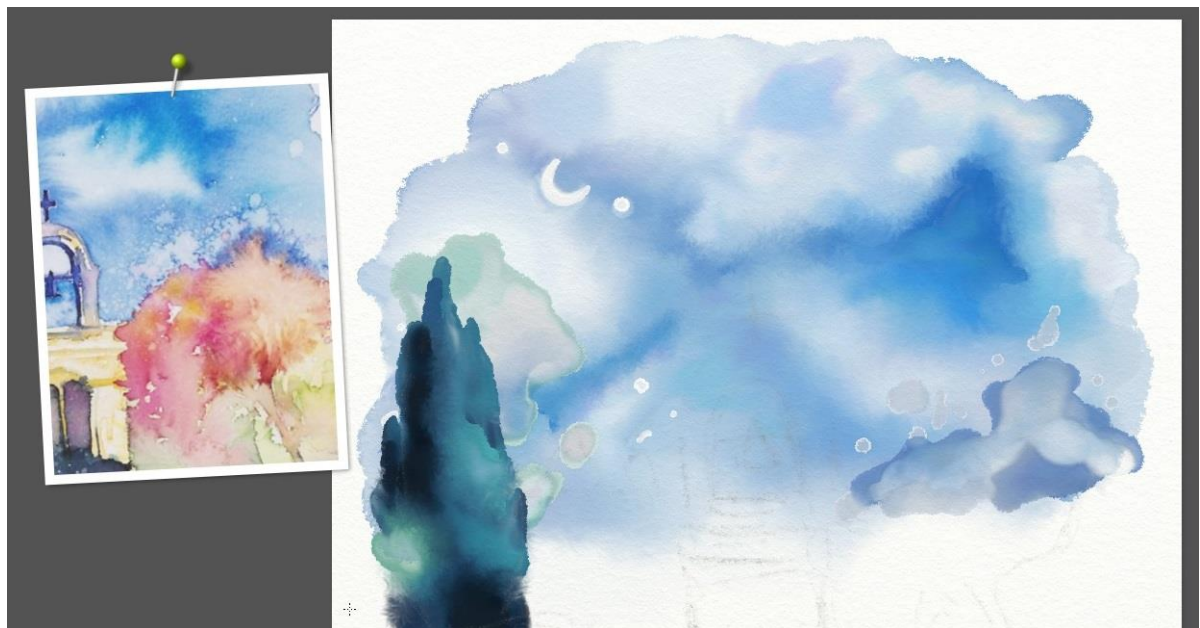
I've actually set every layer in this painting to use the Watercolor blend mode, and you might spot some of the screenshots changing from before and after. Most will be from after, as I want to see what I'm actually working with! (I went back and changed the sky much later once I had enough of a painting to decide which way worked best – can you spot when?)

Finishing the Tree

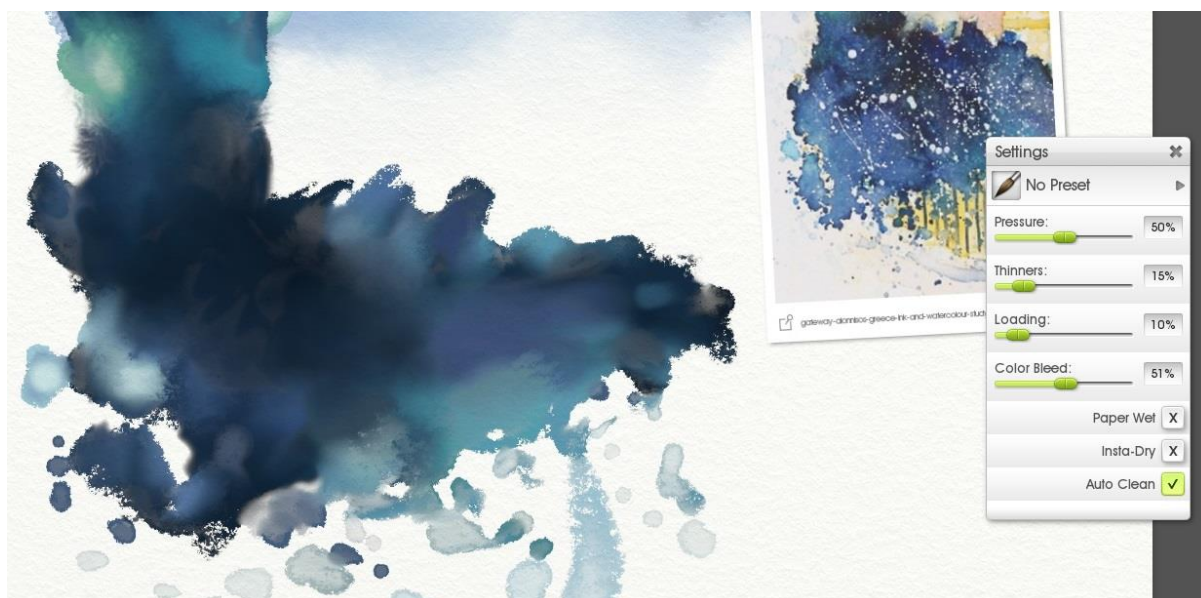
Then it's time for the little extra blobs behind the trees and in front of the sky. These are pretty easy – paint a blob using the darkest color then push paint from the middle outwards using high Thinners.



Then switch Watercolor Blend Mode on... see the green bit behind the tree? It looks different now!



Finally I go back and add all the fun splattery edge dabs to the creeper.



Here the trick is to vary the settings a bit to get different effects,

I used very low Loading to get the frayed leafy textures and the short spiky strokes out from the main part of the leaves and high Thinners to get the areas with a clear edge and a more translucent center.

I left Paper Wet off for most of this, but I did mix up a bit more paint into the bulk of the leaves to get the colors a bit closer to the original reference, and I blended over some of the edges with a palette knife or wet brush ('Insta Dry off') to get it all a bit smoother.

White Flowers

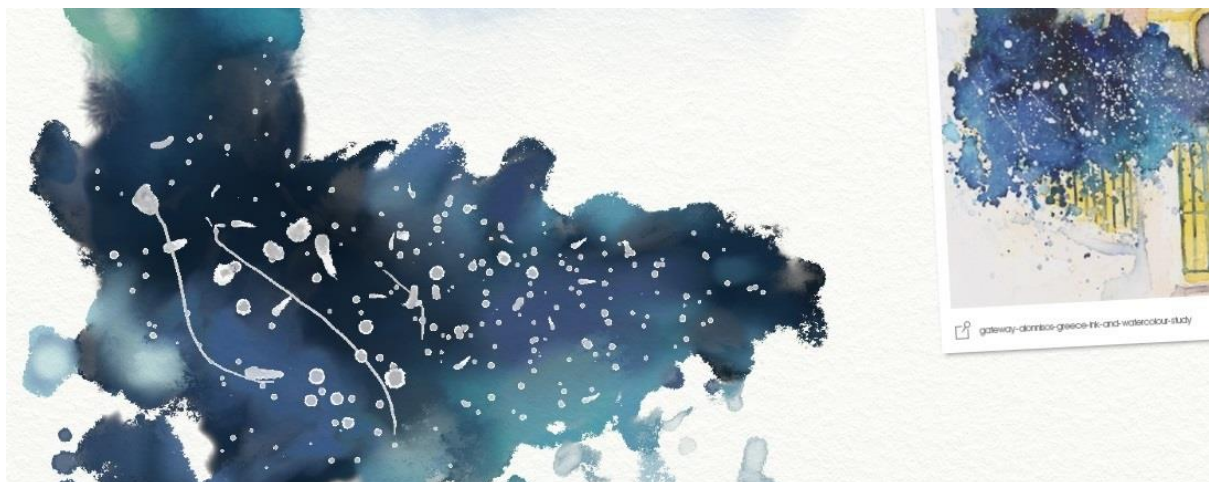
The white flower spatter is actually very easy! Just turn Loading right up, and Thinners off, and start dabbing away and painting in a couple of light streaks – make sure they start in an existing blob.

Just remember that it's meant to be spatter, so dab straight down to get nice round spots.

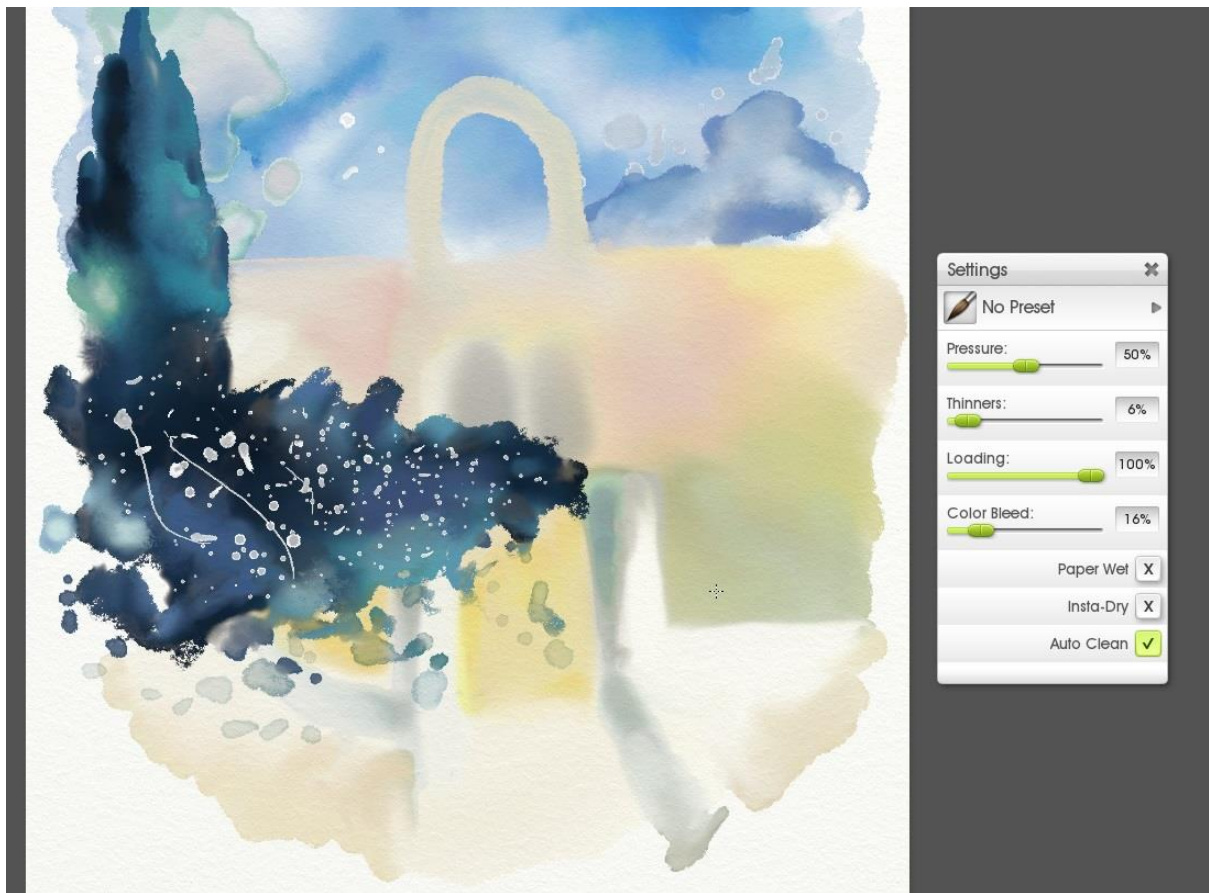


Once it's done, set the layer to the Watercolor Blend Mode

This layer may actually not have needed it, as very solid pigment wouldn't show any of the layers below – it's probably a personal preference for this layer. But I decided to use it, and you can see the difference it made in the image below.



Now it's time to block out all the stone work on a new layer above the sky but behind everything else. Here I used Paper Wet with high Loading and low Color Bleed to lay down a lot of color quickly with some blending. I went back and touched up the colors several times to get the lighting and 'pattern' of hues right.



For the edges around the bottom I actually turned Paper Wet off, and then went over the inside with Paper Wet on. I drew the arch way, alcoves and white columns over the top of the yellow background with Paper Wet on, then added the shadows with Paper Wet off and blended a bit as needed with the palette knife on Wet.

I could have used much higher Thinners and blended it out to a much fainter wash, but I wasn't sure what I wanted right then, and I could always change it later.

The Gate

Now it was time to add the gate. I added a new layer under the creeping leaves and over the yellow background.

At this point I decided to switch Real Color Blending off, because I wanted to blend paint on the same layer to add shadows, but I didn't want blue and yellow making green.



The 'default' color blending uses the same color mixing algorithms as other digital art programs and doesn't always give the same realistic results. In this case, blue and yellow mixes to a sort of greyish color instead.

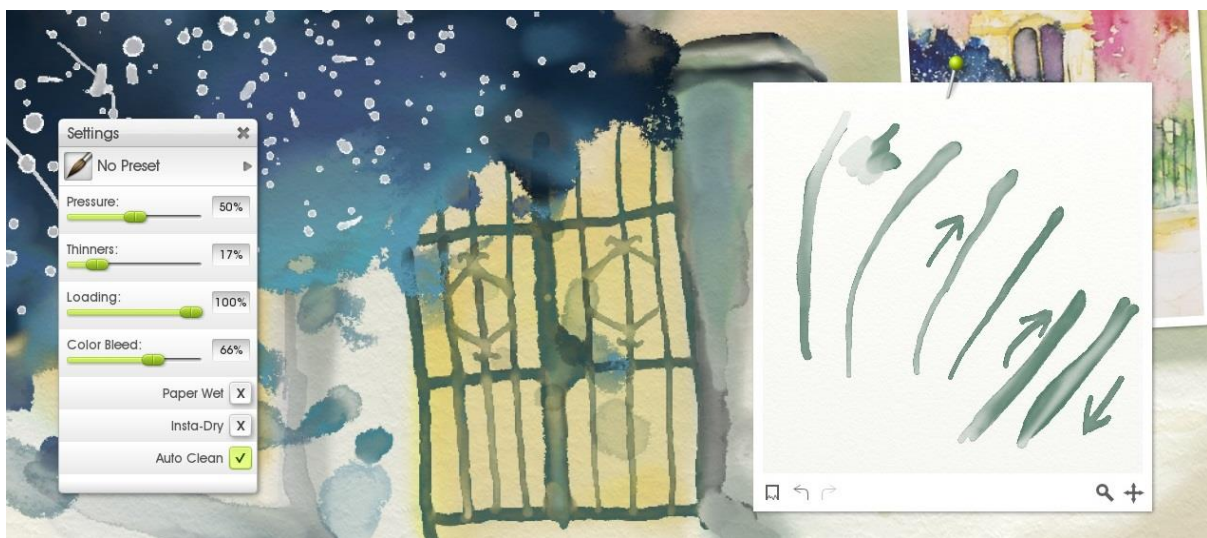
Of course, I then went and added a new layer *anyway* so I didn't actually need to turn the Real Color Blending off, but it was an option I was playing with.



I painted the gate on a new layer and added shadows to the columns at the same time. Initially I used a thin Insta Dry wash on the columns, then lightly blended with the Wet palette knife and softened the edges with wet paint.



Before doing the railings I did some quick testing on a Scrap to see what difference Thinners and stroke direction make, and whether it's better to paint inside a stroke with Thinners or paint over a thin stroke with more paint.



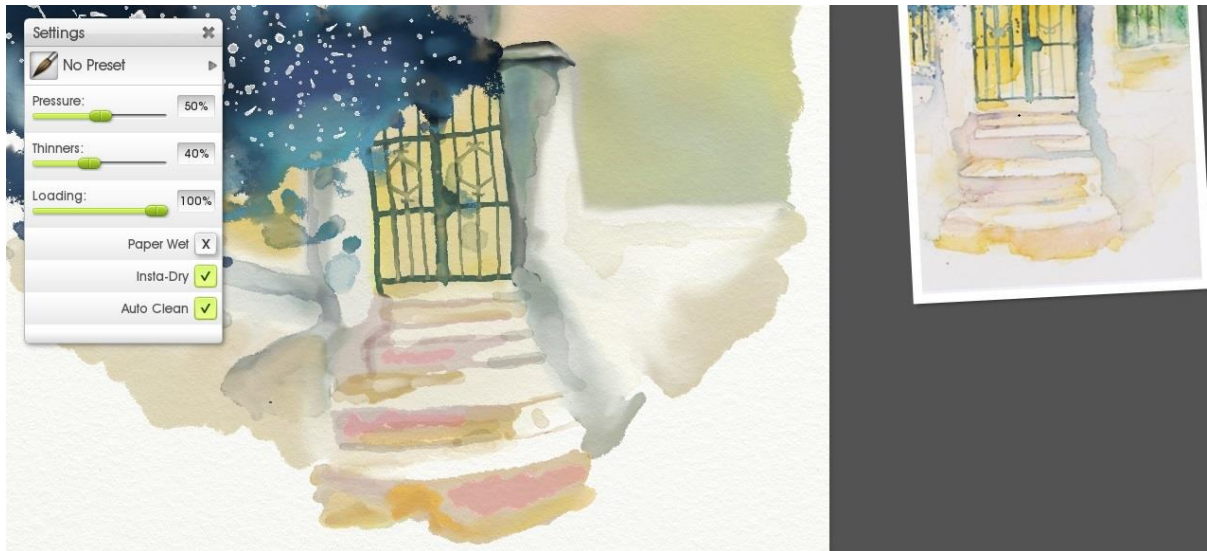
Paper Wet is off, to get better edges, and Insta Dry is off, so that it blends nicely every time a vertical stroke crosses one of the horizontal railings.

Then I just drew thin lines down across the gate, touched up the center bar a bit by adding some more touches inside it, and darkened some of the shadows

The Steps

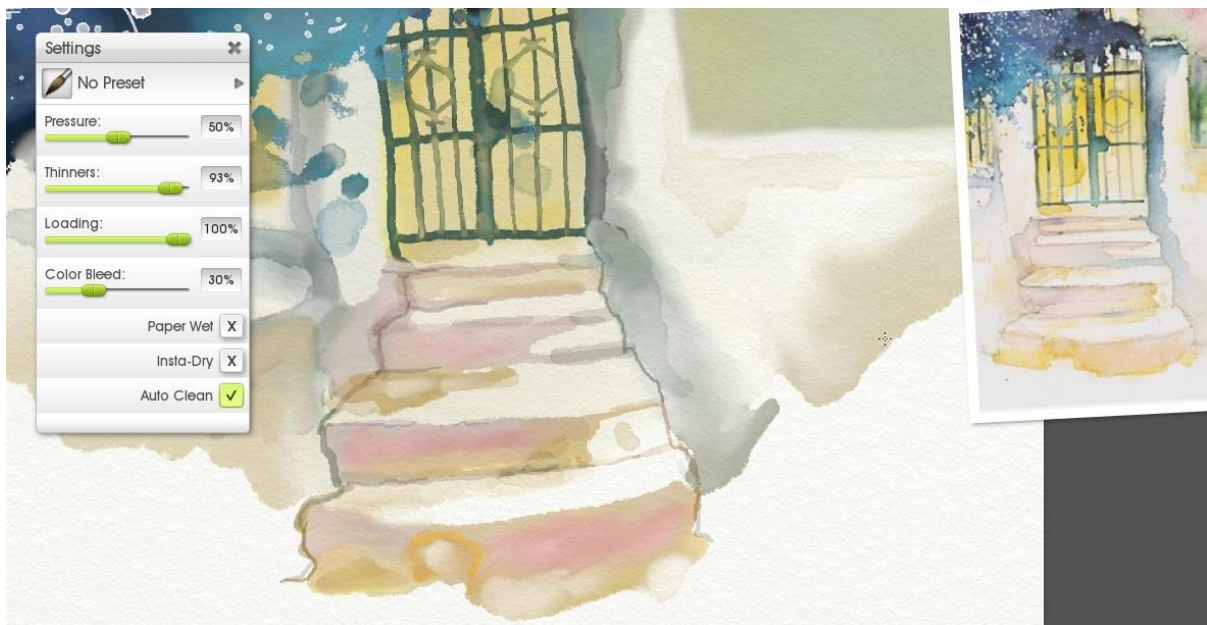
The steps are on the same layer as the gate, above the background.

They may look complicated, but it's just a matter of building up until you have enough detail. I paint them exactly the same way I did the tree. Block out the main areas of color using wet paint on wet paper with high Loading.



Then I increase the Thinners a lot and turn on Insta Dry to get the more delicate patterns and shadows.

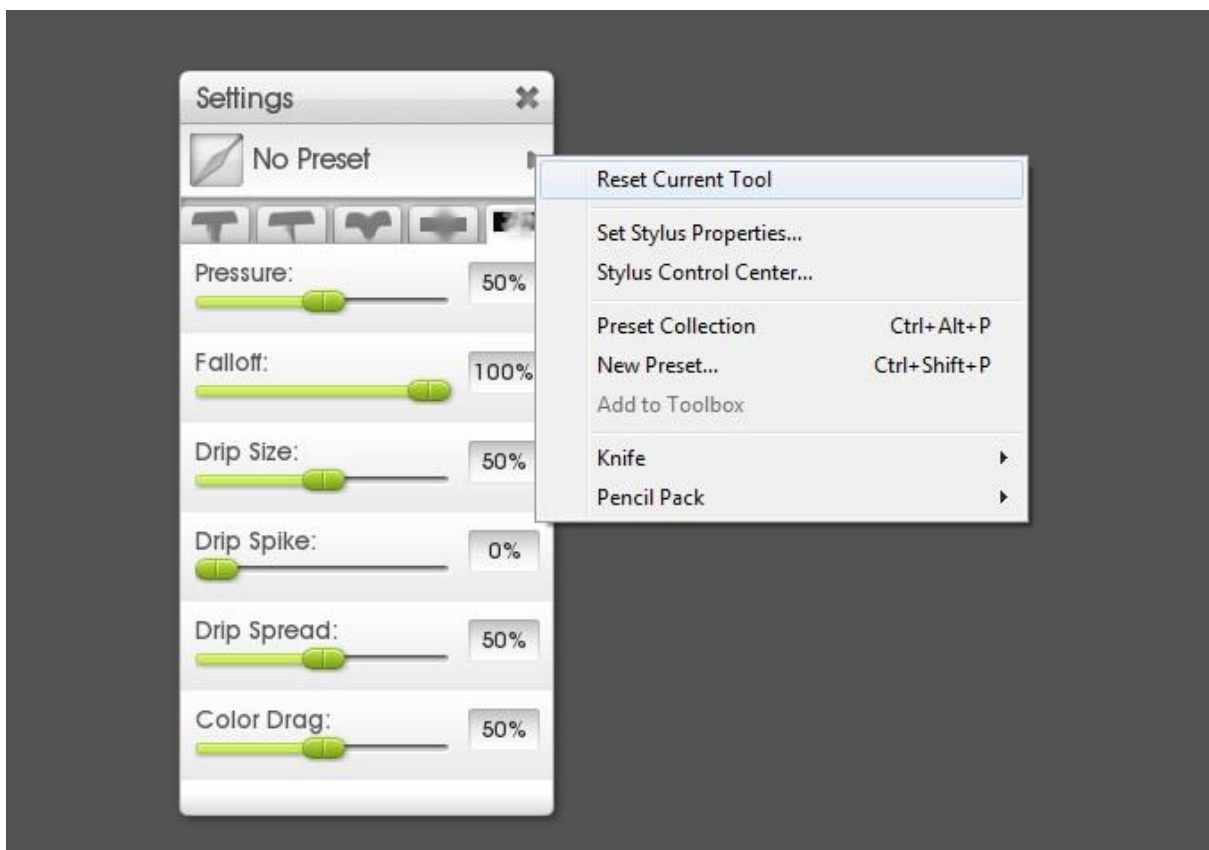
Finally, I turn Insta Dry off, increase the Loading, and use a very small brush to detail the edges of the steps themselves.



The archway is just more of the same. Paint in the main arch with thicker wet paint, then details over the top with dryer or thinner paint, and blend lightly as needed.



For the blending, I used the default settings for the Wet palette knife.



For the cross, I painted it in white first, and then painted inside it with dark purple, so that it would blend around the edges and look like I outlined it.

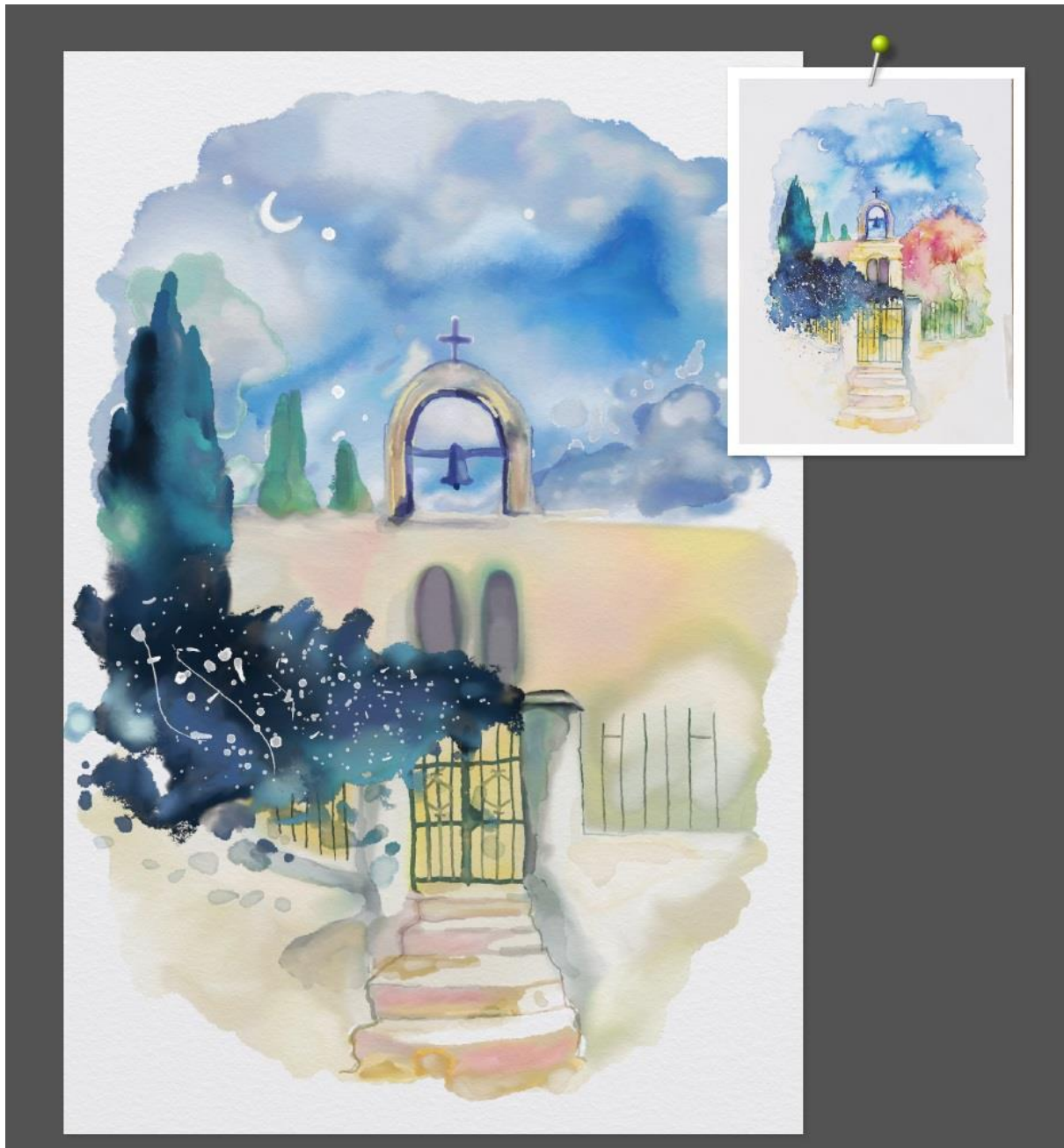


You need a pretty high Loading and low Thinners for this or it will blend too much with the white, or push the paint away too much.

Pause for Breath

Let's take a step back and look at what we have so far. Almost looks like a real painting! Watercolors change a lot as you work with them, and building up layers over time can make a big difference.

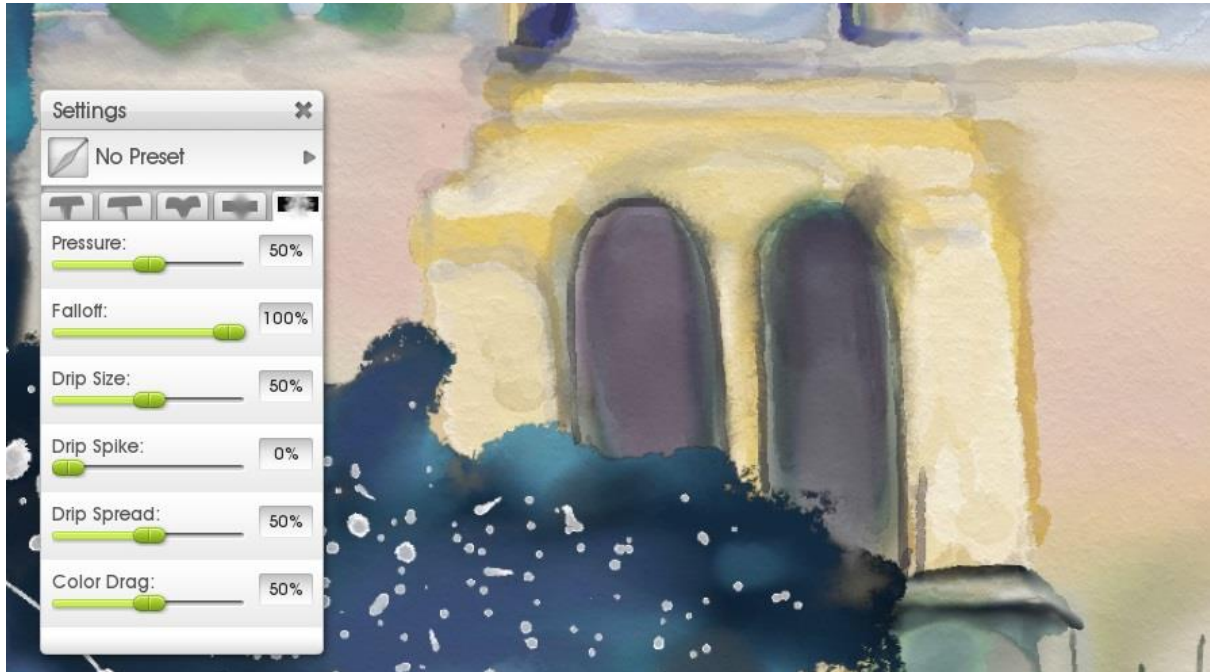
But it also helps to step back and spot problems... It was at this point that I realised I was painted everything tilted sideways so I went to Edit > Transform All Layers and rotated it until it was nicely vertical and centred.



The Alcoves (Entranceway)

Now it's time to paint the bit of architecture just behind the gate. This goes on a new layer over the background and behind the creeper and the gate.

First, lay down solid paint for the main highlights and shadows. In this case, the light yellow and the darker yellow. The purple/grey shadows can come later.



You can use Paper Wet and blend as you go, or go over it afterwards with a palette knife – up to you! I like lightly going everything with the default Wet palette knife just to blend it all nicely.

Then it's time to add shadows.



Here we need to get a few different effects.

- Definite edges: go over the edges with Insta Dry (or a new layer), then go over one side again carefully with Thinners to soften the edge into the rest of the paint.
- Or just turn Insta Dry on and use high Thinners to get the overlapping shadows and textures
- I also lightly went over the dark alcoves to add some colors closer to the reference. Here I used the same Insta Dry and high Thinners for a delicate wash
- Lightly blend some of it with the Wet palette knife at the end to soften things slightly, but don't over blend or you'll lose all the texture

The Red Tree

The tree is just more of the same. It's a bit trickier and I'm getting bored with this painting so I didn't keep going as long as I could have, but the basic process is:

Lay down solid base colors (the colors in the darker parts and the edges of the tree) with low Thinners and high Loading.

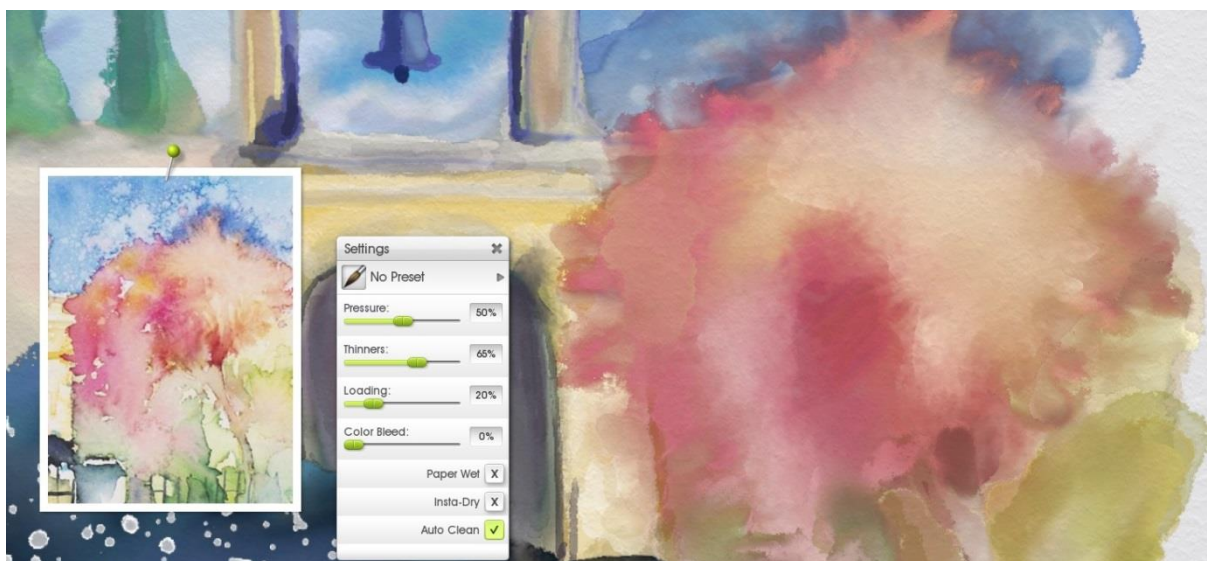
Turn Paper Wet on and choose a lighter color to start blending the inside areas. Blend almost up to the edges to get the 'edge effect'.

Lay down some additional solid areas of paint and fetch out the Harsh Chaos palette knife preset for fun spiky bleed effects. Set it really, really large (hold Shift down and drag right on the canvas to go all the way up to 500%) and dab gently to get a few big spikes, then turn it down to finish blending. Tidy up the softer areas with the default Wet palette knife settings.



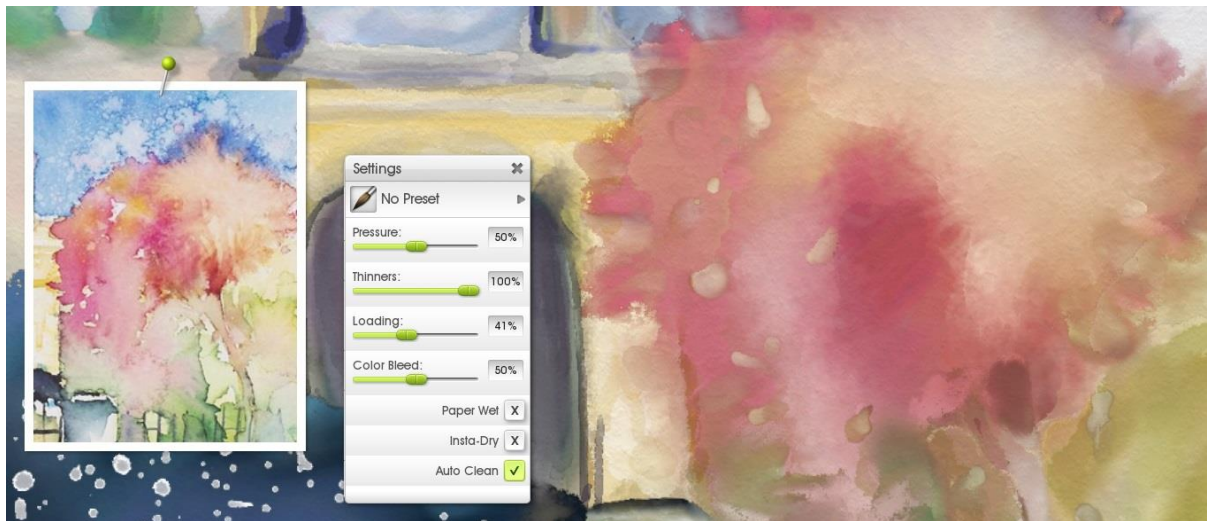
Repeat as needed until you like the overall way the tree looks.

You can create the feathery bleed effects by turning Loading right down and turning Thinners up – so you are adding a small amount of watery paint to pull the edges of the tree's pigments out to where the paper texture can show through. It works best if you're blending out from paint to no paint (which is why separate layers can be very helpful!).



I've done this all around the tree.

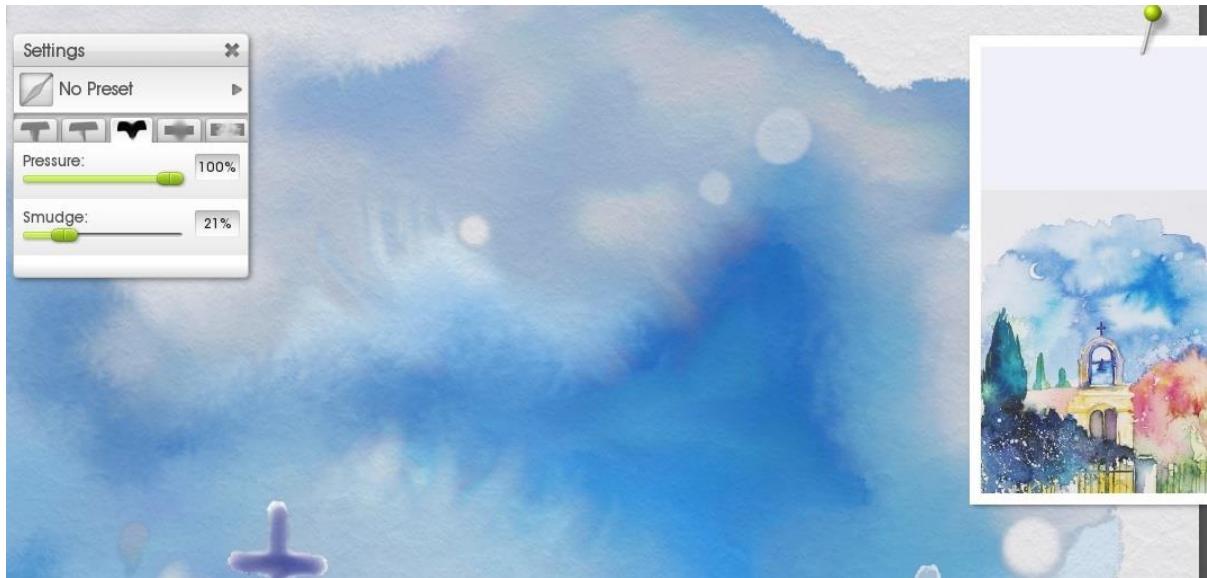
And then I increase Color Bleed so I can make nice splodges of watery paint inside the tree and around the edges to create the dappled lighting / 'break in branches' effects. Increasing Color Bleed means that the existing paint will blend nicely and you can use it to vary whether you get big empty splotches or just slightly paler splotches.



Final Touch Ups: Sky

Finally, I go back to the sky again for a bit more blending and 'building up'. I add some more blobs of solid paint then blend it out into the rest of the sky using the Wet palette knife. I also throw in a few extra dabs with the Paper Wet on and a good mix of Thinners and Loading for the spots around the sky.

I also use the Soft palette knife to 'pull' out some streaks to create a bleed effect – those long soft wisps coming out from the clouds. I probably should have used this more earlier, but it's easy to get stuck using just the same tools over and over!



Aaaand done!

