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Long before the establishment of the British and American schools of watercolor in the 18th and 19th centuries, it was the primary medium used in ancient Japanese and Chinese painting. Also, during the European Renaissance, wildlife illustrators often produced watercolor paintings of flowers, plants, and animals. The luminescent, dreamlike quality of watercolor and its easy accessibility have made it a popular medium among professionals and hobbyists alike. However, working with watercolor is notoriously unpredictable, and producing exquisite works demands an expert eye and a level of flexibility and spontaneity that only comes with a true mastery of the art. Browse our selection today! The first watercolor paintings originated in Paleolithic Europe caves, where people documented wildlife with natural pigments. The medium became the dominant art form in China as early as B. Chinese, Korean, and Japanese literati, or scholarly gentleman, painters typically stuck to a black or brown color palette, experimenting with different brushstrokes and ink wash densities to create portrait, landscape, and calligraphy scrolls. In the Middle Ages, the medium was used to color illuminated manuscripts. By the Renaissance, more artists began experimenting with watercolor pigments as paper became more readily available. Fine art watercolor paintings arose in England in the s, as artists formed several painting groups and established the medium as a serious art form. By , America also had its own artist organization, the American Society of Painters in Watercolor. Today, watercolors are usually brushed onto damp paper or fabric, though older practices involved the use of vellum as a canvas. The translucent colors are often paired with an opaque body color called gouache. The basic technique for creating watercolor paintings is through the use of complementary washes and glazes. The former lays down a solid area of color while the latter acts as a screen, allowing the wash to shine through. Some painters use the wet in wet approach, which requires the addition of paint or water to an area of the work that is already dampened with these elements. Joseph Mallord William Turner is credited with inventing the method of pouring color on parts of the surface and then brushing or tilting the surface to freely mix these colors. On the other end of the spectrum, the dry brush technique allows artists to pick up fresh paint with a slightly moist brush to create hatched strokes. Some artists sprinkle salt on wet paint to get a dabbled, imperfect effect. Many watercolorists stick to a minimal palette, instead focusing their attention on the play of different densities and tones in their compositions. Korean painter Jeong Seon, though considered to follow the Southern School style, experimented with wrinkled brushes and bold strokes. Winslow Homer is also celebrated for his watercolor marine compositions. Modern painters also appreciated watercolors.

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