



Watercolor Live from Paris- Instructor: Alex Hillkurtz

Drawing America

Overview of Lesson:

This week's lesson is about creating a *center of focus* in an asymmetrical composition. Viewers of a painting tend to read an image like one reads a book, that is, reading the different elements of the image in a certain order. As such, it is important to think about where we concentrate detail, as this becomes the "starting point" for the eye of a viewer. We can guide the viewer's eye around the image by thinking about creating a center of focus via the *rule of thirds*—a compositional tool for asymmetrical compositions (see examples below). This week's lesson also addresses creating depth via treatment of the foreground/background (see examples below).

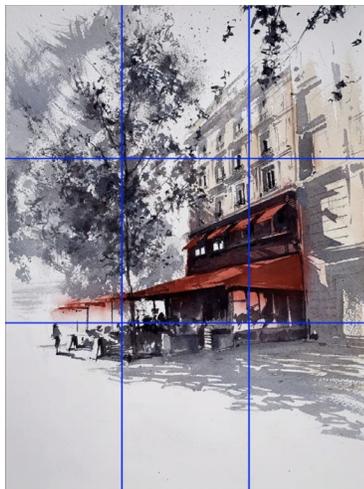
Rule of Thirds: Divide your image into thirds both vertically and horizontally.

Please place the center of focus for the painting on one of the four intersecting points.

Contrast and details: Use contrasts of tones and value, as well as level of details, to draw in the eye of the viewer.

Atmospheric perspective: Objects closer to us tend to be warmer and more saturated. Objects further away are cooler and more muted.

Example of the Rule of Thirds:



Above: This is an asymmetrical composition where the detail is focused at one of the intersecting points (where the people are sitting), and the color/detail is concentrated at the bottom third of the painting.



Above: In this painting of a cafe in Porto, Portugal, the detail of the cafe is slightly off-center, creating a pleasing composition. The highest area of contrast is concentrated in one area (with the shadows and the white ground).

Examples of Depth:



Above: In the background, elements are slightly more out of focus. In the foreground we have very well-defined edges, a lot of contrast/saturation, and warmer colors. This is a typical way to depict atmospheric perspective.



Above: Something dark and well-defined in the foreground is a good way to add depth to the piece, as with this above image. Because the layers here (foreground/background) create a clear sense of depth. (This image was created background to foreground—the instructor worked his way forward and ended with painting the foreground element.)

Instructor Example:



Begin by dividing the reference image into thirds. Think about establishing depth by painting buildings further away as softer and less detailed, and closer buildings in more detail.



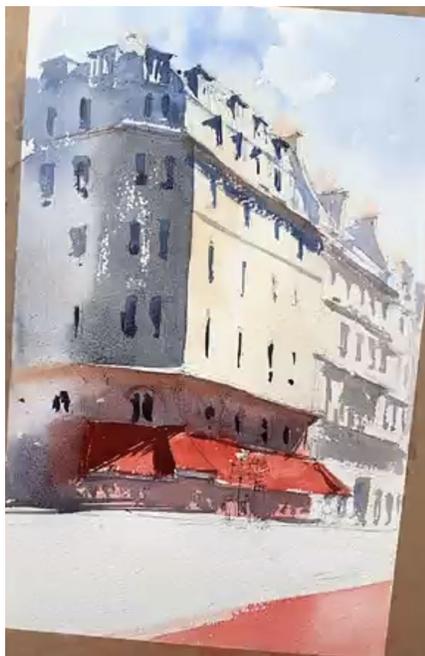
Above is an example of how last week's image can be divided up into thirds. One of the points of intersection of the three lines should be thought of as the "focal

point” of the image, where the detail is most concentrated. Having the center of focus off-center creates a sense of play, and makes the image more dynamic.

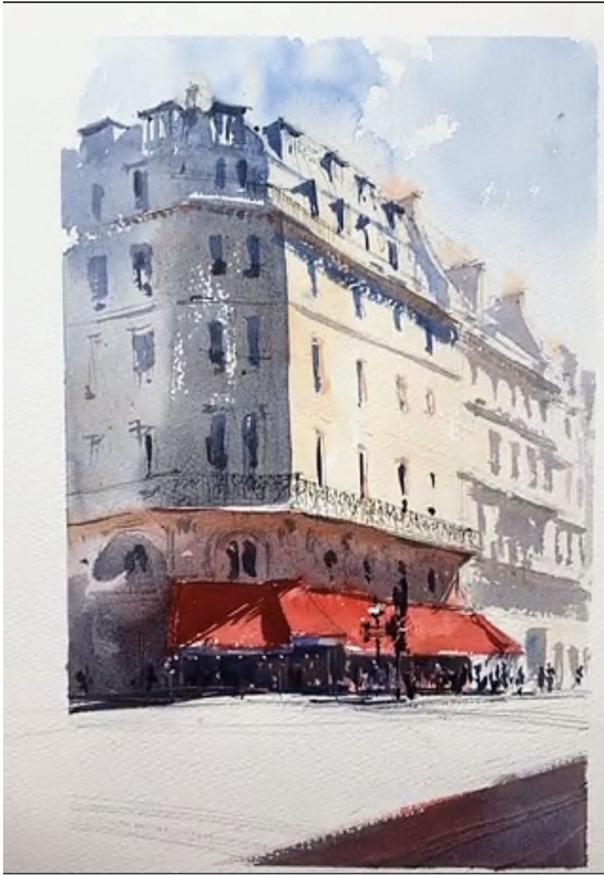
The cafe in the sample image is one third of the way up the page.



In painting, the instructor focused here on the focal point of the awning and pedestrians, concentrating the detail, shadows and contrast in that portion of the image.



Final image:



Homework:

Paint an image with depth and a strong center of focus.

1. Depth: Find a reference image that displays depth - utilizing either linear perspective, atmospheric perspective, or both.
2. Center of focus: Use the rule of thirds and the idea of contrasts and details to create a strong center of focus.
3. Combine these concepts with past weeks' lessons to complete the painting.