

**Jeremy Serna**  
[jsernaart.com](http://jsernaart.com)  
**GWG Workshop Dec 6-8, 2022**

Jeremy is a self-taught artist. Growing up he liked to copy tattoos from his dad's magazines. He used photos when he did airbrush. He has moved on from a mechanically technical style to do work that is interpretive. He is not a watercolor purist. He loves chaos. He has studied with many artists. He said that Michael Holter out of Plano is an excellent teacher ([michaelholter.com](http://michaelholter.com)). He referred to Joseph Zbukvic ([josephzbukvic.com](http://josephzbukvic.com)) having a method of determining pigment-to-water ratio (tea, milk, toothpaste,...) for use on paper at the different moisture levels (dry to wet) when determining which consistency of paint to use. His current mentor is international artist Alvaro Castagnet ([alvarocastagnet.net](http://alvarocastagnet.net)).

Jeremy's demonstrations were based on what he has found that works for him to make his unique style. He said art is your interpretation and that your brushstrokes should be a signature of you and your style. He practices in his sketchbook daily. That has helped him understand what his brushes and paints will do when he wants to achieve a certain effect. In order to be a better painter, he has to learn from his mistakes.

### Day One

Jeremy discussed watercolor basics we need to master. Application of paint, washes, charging, horizon lines, vanishing points, focal points, lost and found edges, values, broken up lines, amount of moisture in the paper, opposites, brush marks, ... The focal point is what will draw in the eye. He illustrated this with a tic-tac-toe division of the paper. It should not be in the middle, but rather on an intersection. The area below the bottom horizontal line became the foreground.

He emphasized that you should have all of your materials ready before you start. Make sure you have enough paint mixed up so that drying paint doesn't create lines. He did a layered light to dark tea consistency wash using a large hake brush. He said to use the biggest brush you have for as long as you can. Let the brush do the work. He blew the paper dry before his second wash that was of the consistency of milk.

We had several exercises working with washes, value, and contrast. These were for practice, not to be paintings. If you had the urge to "fix" something, stay away from doing it. These exercises were about value. Values are the highway across the painting that brings it together. Colors may take the credit, but it is the values will make the painting.

#### Exercise 1: Tree

- 1<sup>st</sup> Step - Use the biggest brush you have, going all the way across the paper very fast with the first wash of yellow ochre on the horizon line. Work fast. Don't worry about painting safe. Let the brush do the work. He used a gray-blue color for sky above the yellow ochre, allowing them to touch and mix naturally. He misted it if it started to dry out too quickly. Don't fidget and overthink it. Straight lines are boring. Mess it up. The bottom area was painted with sienna. He used a blow dryer to completely dry the paper before the next step.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Step – Mist dry paper. Don't want hard edges yet. Put in tree line on the horizon line with darker paint, letting it bleed into the dampness. Lost and found edges or broken lines every ¼" - ½" through misting, bleeding, dabbed out, scratches, dry brush, splatter, ... Don't go back into water, use moisture on palette for additional moisture. The lower part of the tree line is darker than top. Use darkest dark for trees. Make shadows on ground connected across the painting. Mist, splatter, scratch or use fingers to mess it up. Put in tree leaves pressing down on brush, dabbing, splattering before putting in limbs and trunks with the strongest darks.



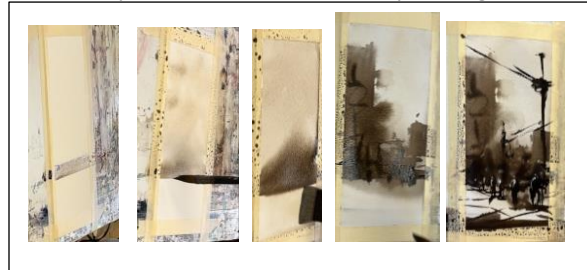
### Exercise 2: Figures

- Divide scrap paper into multiple places to work. We will be making brush marks, not drawing these figures. We made 5 marks with thick paint in the first box. The tops have to all be at the same level. Put dot for head on top. The legs come down at different levels. Make shadows coming from the feet that meet at common vanishing point. We made a horizon line at waistline of the largest figure. One area had a sunset, one had a city skyline and one had contrast of dark, medium, and light.



### Exercise 3: Small City Painting

- Start a third of a way down with a dark color pulled across with one stroke for horizon line. Add water and move up for sky, dropping in dark color and let gravity do the work. To make hard line go away, take dirty water under horizon for a bleed to get rid of hard line. Think in terms of small, medium, and large. Indicate buildings by making silhouettes of their shapes. Don't draw with the brush. Add figures and shadows in foreground. Keep the light vs dark contrast. Highlight the figures with Chinese or Titanium White. Look for a path of darks across the painting to connect everything.



### Exercise 4: Larger City Painting

- Repeat steps in exercise 3 on a larger scale putting in different buildings and letting watercolor do its' job.

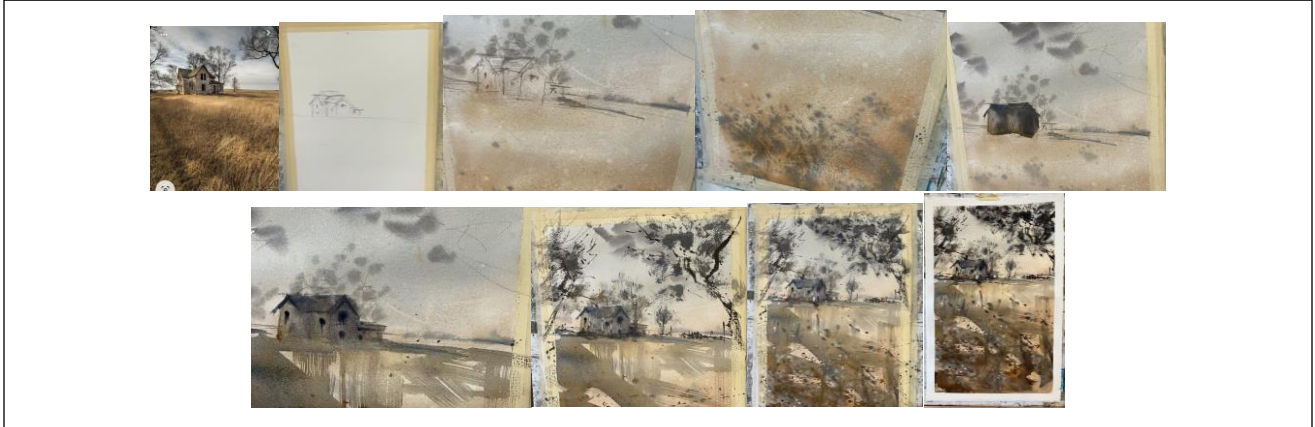
## **Day Two**

Jeremy said with watercolor, sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. Just let it ride. We need to PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE! A German artist said to draw as much as you like but paint (touch it) as little as you can. Learn how to finesse watercolor with the amount of water, the feel of the paint, making brush strokes in one go, and putting miles on your brushes. Do not draw with the brush. Stand up to draw and paint, getting in and out.

### Exercise One: Country House

- 1<sup>st</sup> Step - This will be a yellow ochre painting. Draw the horizon line. Draw in house with minimal detail. With a confident brush mark swipe across the page without going back and forth over it. Add water to brush and push it up into sky. Add color to gray it up for the sky. Slap it on. We don't need safety. This is an underpainting. Add sienna to the bottom portion that is foreground. While it is wet, texture with splatters, spray, spit, ... Drop in darker color for clouds while paint can still move and look fresh. Drop in paint for trees in the distance. Everything needs to touch as it makes it from one side of the paper to the other. Color doesn't matter. The clouds, trees, and texture splatter are all the same value and color at this stage. Allow it to dry.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Step - We will paint Big to Small. Make sure you have enough warm and cool paint to work. Cover the house in one stroke, or as few as possible. Spray to buy time. Wet into wet drip in roofline and shadow sides. Drip water on it for interest. Look for lost and found edges. Add dark shadows across in one go. Connect shadows. Splatter across foreground. Focal point is the house. Drop in color for suggestion of windows without painting windows. Scrape out boards. Tree leaves are splattered in before using brush to add more leaves by pressing down and scrubbing with brush. Add branches with triple ought Rigor brush. Branches get wider as they go down. Tie things together across horizon line with darks. Darken roof to push trees behind house into background. Last step is to draw the eye to the focal point by adding some lines in the foreground directing you toward the house and some spots of red across the horizon line and

painting in sparingly some highlights to the house. Drip and splatter some white into the foreground. Take the tape off of the edges and the crisp white of the edges makes the painting pop.



### **Exercise Two: Plein Air Urban Scene**

- 1<sup>st</sup> Step – Jeremy did a demo of a street scene. He then sent us out to set up, making sure to have paints, brushes and everything ready to go. Look for things that make L, A, H, or Z shapes. Decide why you are painting this? What can you eliminate? Draw in horizon line. Chose focal point. Draw a shape and then the actors. Don't over complicate it! Drop in colors and mix on paper for underpainting in lightest value. Cover the building saving some whites in gaps below it for use later. Drop in some sienna below in foreground until everything is painted. Take advantage of dampness to drop in some midtones on roofline, cars, etc. so they will be subtle with no hard edges. Pull paint down from cars to make reflections. Spray hard edges you don't want as they develop. Spritz to buy time as it dries for lost and found edges. Spit on left side to make it more abstract. Use dark building on left to push things into the distance. Make darks touch across the painting. Splatter building on left to make it a "watercolor painting." Add people and background trees. Put in lantern light poles and signs. Add spots of red and highlights of white for interest.





## Day Three

Jeremy reminded us that a sketchbook will make you a better painter. He said to remember to make have texture by using a variety of techniques such as scraping, spitting, misting, splattering, moving paint around, drips, blossoms, wiping with fingers or paper towels and using paint straight from the tube.

### Exercise One: Church Scene

1<sup>st</sup> Step – Jeremy provided a photograph of a church. He did a demo starting with a drawing that simplified the scene. He reminded us to simplify, make everything out of shapes and to connect everything. He said not to differentiate by color, but rather by value. He reminded us to use the fundamentals that we have been working on the past couple of days. He then had us to do the church in one go.



### Exercise Two: Plein Air Bell Tower

1<sup>st</sup> Step : Jeremy found the horizon line and focal point. He draws standing up holding his pencil like he holds a brush, not like a pencil. He determined dark and light areas. He worked out his composition during the time that he was drawing. He misted the paper before painting the horizon line with Hansa Yellow and whatever was on his palette. He did the sky with a gray mixture from his palette. He dropped in clouds. He needs the sky to be darker to make the bell tower stand out. He put a sienna mixture down below the buildings. He put in flags while it was damp so that it would bleed. He put in shadows that touched. He made sure to have lost and found edges. He used calligraphy strokes to add details on the buildings. He put trees in to help create depth.

2<sup>nd</sup> Step - We did our own plein air painting of the Bell Tower.



Jeremy told us that he mounts his paintings on ½” gator board after spraying his paintings with 3 coats of Krylon Varnish. He next applies a Liquitex Varnish over the top of the painting. He attaches his paintings to the gator board with mat medium or mod podge using a spatula to spread it. He lays his paper over on that with a small overlap on each side. He uses a brayer, pushing out from the center to evenly coat the area and get out any excess. He covers the painting with paper to protect it and clamps it under plywood overnight. He scores the sides with an Exacto knife until the overlap paper comes off. He frames them in 1” floating frames. He buys the gator board at Uline.com and the frames from pictureframes.com.

We wrapped up the workshop by reviewing the skills we have worked on during the three-day workshop. Jeremy does a live demo on Instagram at 9:00 on Saturdays. He will also be in a studio at the Chicken Farm Art Center ([Art Center | The Chicken Farm Art Center | United States](#)) in San Angelo, TX on the first Saturday of the month.