Drawing & Painting Leaves

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If anybody says painting leaves is easy….

….. They're lying!

….but there are ways of making it less painful

Leaves present challenge with their diversity

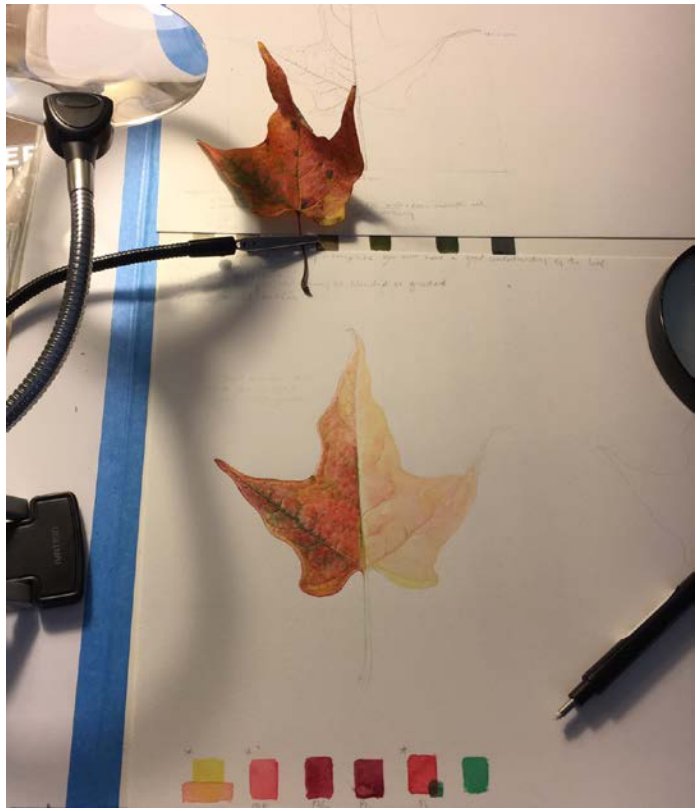
- Shape – many and varied. Simple and compound
- Colour – not all green! Blue/grey to yellow to red and brown
- Texture – shiny, hairy etc
- Detail – venation, leaf margin etc.
- Pattern – variegated, spotted etc.

Further complicated by…..

- Interaction with light
- Perspective
- Twists, turns and bends

So what's the best way to 'tackle' leaf?

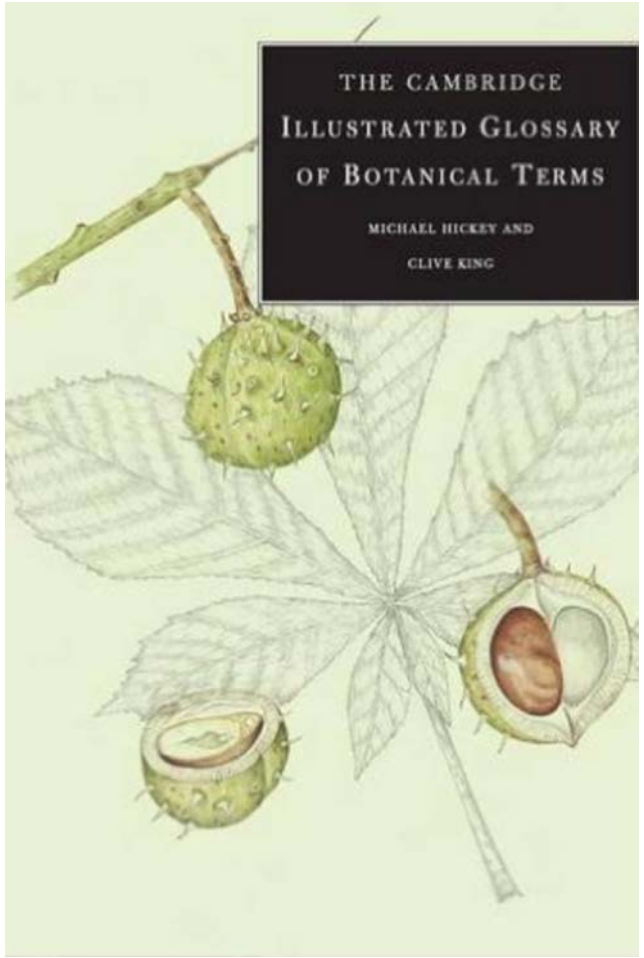
- GET TO KNOW YOUR SUBJECT! That means do your research
- Take your time
- Don't worry about getting it right first time
- Have a system and work out your approach
- Don't over complicate – practice makes perfect!



Observe properties

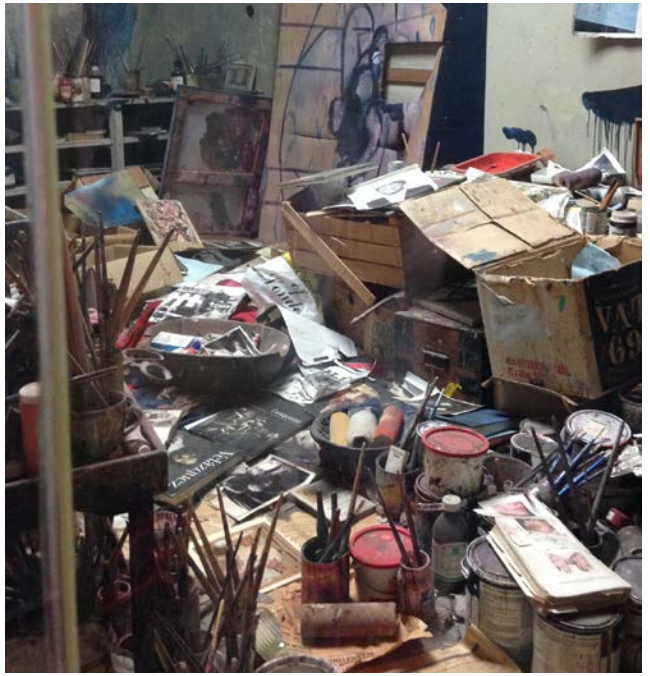
- What do you see?
- Use teaching aids – good reference book
- Create a leaf library info to assist you to learn about leave types and their key features. These include:

- Leaf shape
- Margin
- Base
- Tip
- Venation pattern

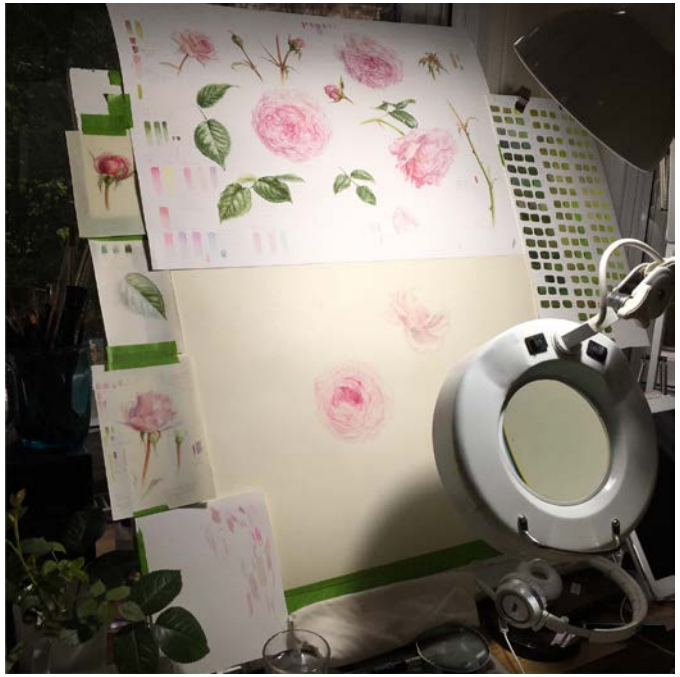


Set up subject and the workspace

- Use directional lighting
- Organise you subject and workspace so that you are comfortable and can see



Francis Bacon's studio X



An organised workspace

Light the subject

- Use a lamp positioned on the left or right of the subject. Light according to handedness

- Left side for right handed
- Right side for left handed

Materials

Good brushes

- Rosemary & Co Spotters, series 323 kolinsky sable , size 1, 2 & 3. Perfect for dry brush
- Rosemary & Co Short flat, series 56, size 1
- Winsor & Newton kolinsky sable miniatures, series 7 size 1-3, great for detail.
- Pointed or round sable brush for washes, sizes 4-6 e.g. da Vinc, W&N or Raphael.
- Pro Arte, flat shader Masterstroke size 0, good for lifting and tidying

Materials continued

- Sharp pencils!

- Artist watercolour paints of choice as previously described but don't limit yourself for the sake of it. Mix from primaries, you can do pretty much everything with these colours:

  - 4 yellows
  - 5 Blues
  - 5 Reds

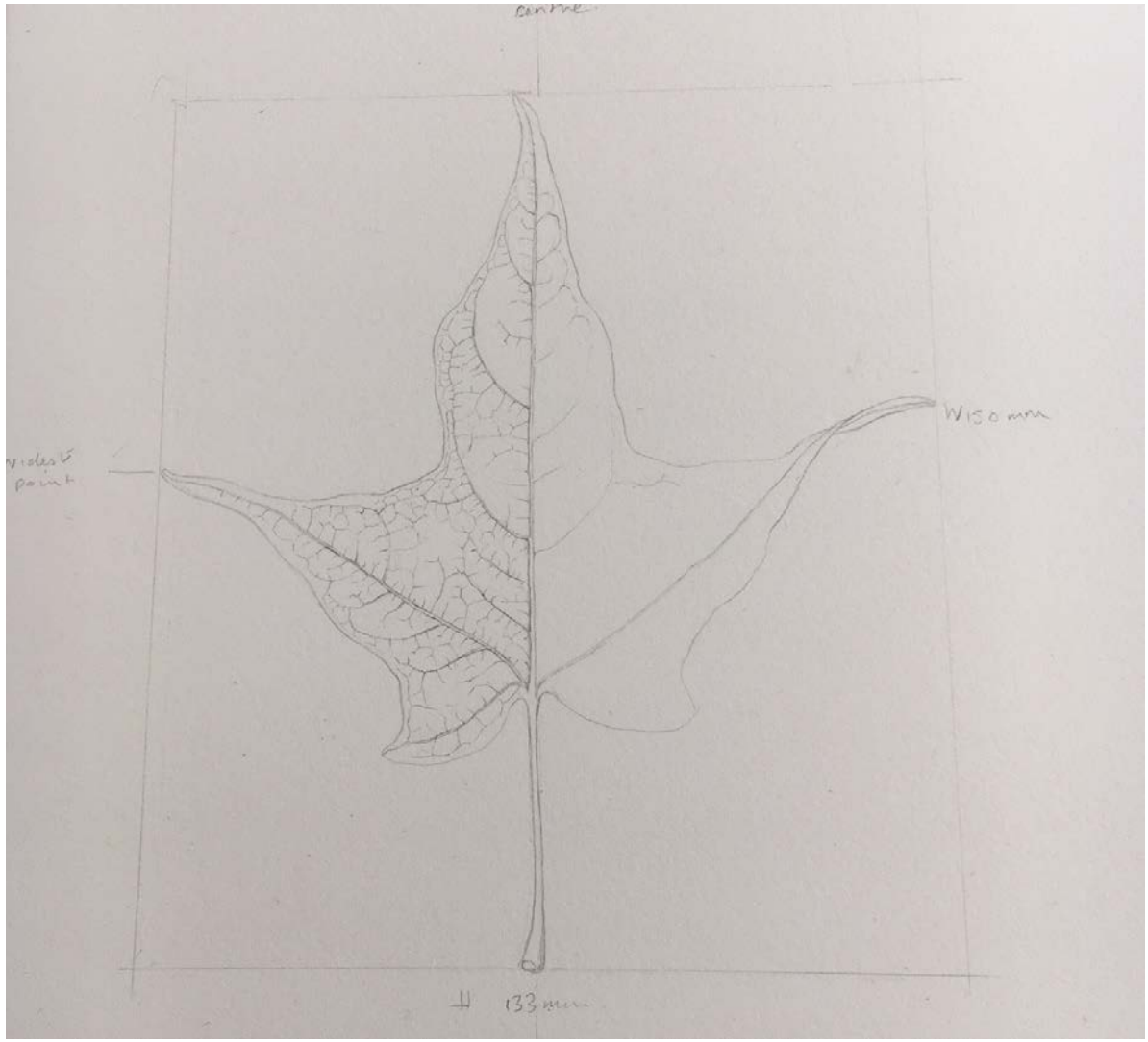
  - She next slide for details

Suggested Palette

- BLUE: Cerulean blue (PB35), Cobalt blue (PB28), Indanthrene blue(PB60), Winsor Blue green shade (PB15) and French Ultramarine (PB29)
- RED: Permanent Alizarin Crimson (PR206) or Permanent Carmine, Permanent Rose(PV19) Scarlet Lake (PR188), Quinacridone magenta (PR122) and Permanent Magenta (PV19).
- YELLOW: Transparent Yellow ((PY150), Winsor Yellow (PY154), Winsor Lemon (PY175) Lemon Yellow nickel titanate (PY 53)
- A couple of extras: Cobalt violet (PV14) and Violet dioxazine (PV23)
- Note: these are just suggestions from Winsor & Newton but you can use alternatives, just cross check pigment numbers. We will also have some tubes of paints available to use

Measure and Draw

- A portrait is the best place to start
- Measure height and width. Widest point is important In identification, mark out with a box and centre line
- Accuracy is key for plant identification



Identify colour mixes first

- Basic Hue, if you can't 'see' the colours, use white card with a small hole cut in the centre to observe The plant

- Look for any underlying colour, such as yellow, or blue in shiny leaves, work in order of the colours

- Blend or grade where necessary but keep in mind what happens when some colours mix e.g. Green and red can make dirty brown if not handled well. Perhaps dry brushing red on top is better in some cases

Colour Mixing

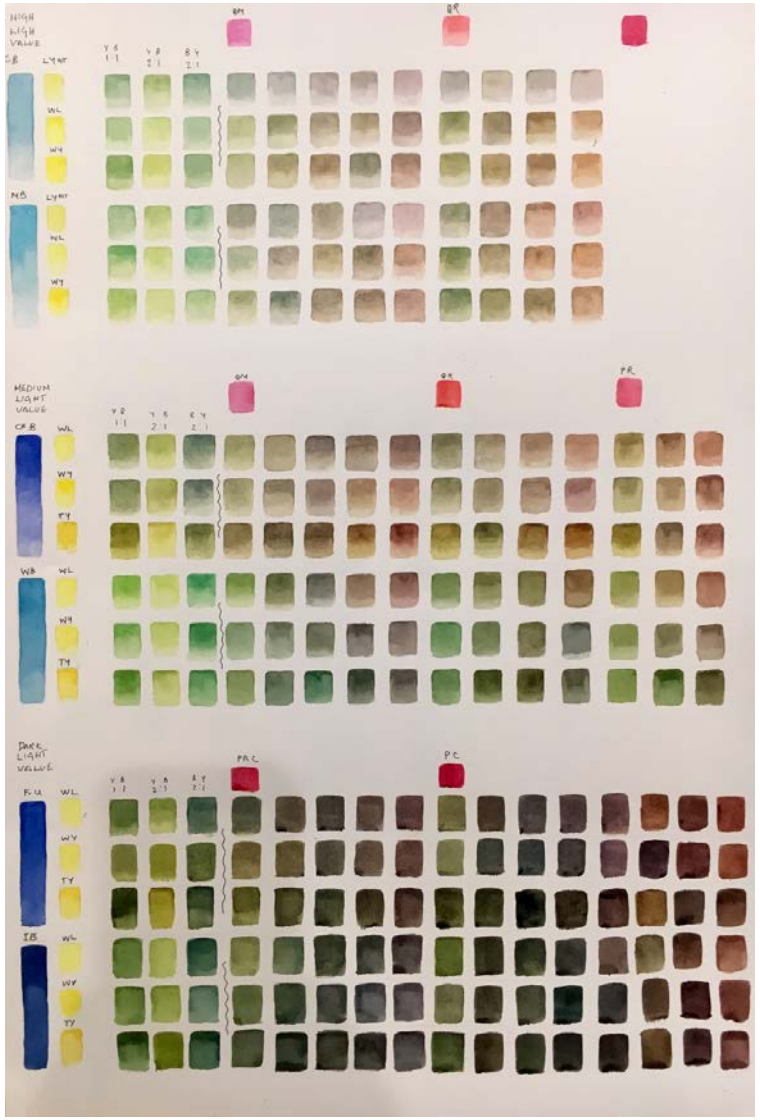
- Work it all out in advance

Mixing Greens and Browns

- Greens should be mixed from: Blue + Yellow + small amount of Red
- **The best method for mixing greens is to use the tonal value of the blue to determine outcome, start with a 1:1 ratio of blue and yellow then adjust to suit add a small amount of the red:**
- **High light value blue** e.g. **Cerulean** + Lemon Yellow Nickle titanate + Quinacridone magenta = **height light value green** (see image right)
- **Mid light value blue** e.g. **Cobalt or Winsor Blue** + Lemon Yellow + permanent rose = **mid value green**
- **Dark value blue** e.g **Indanthrene or French ultramarine** + Transparent yellow + Permanent Alizarin crimson = **Dark value green**
- Increasing the red will make more grey or earthy greens until brown is made, play with ratios of the 3 colours, you can make lovely black colours with the dark colours too. See next slide

Example of a high light value grey green mix, Using lemon yellow nickel titanate +cerulean To make green then add quinacridone magenta to make a grey green mix suitable for this Stachys leaf

Green and Brown Colour charts



Greens mixed using blue as the predominant colour, creates a range of greens of different light values, light greens (top) mid greens (middle) and dark greens (bottom) when red increases to the point where it become more dominant than blue the browns are created. Therefore all greens and browns and even black can be achieved this way

Techniques and Process

Varies depending on leaf but a basic approach

Draw outline lightly – minimum detail

1. First washes. Wet first With clean water, apply underlying colours may be wet-in-wet, blended or overlaid. Work in sections to make manageable. Remove pencil when dry. Keep your eye on the light direction at all times. Bias colours to warm and cool variations

This oak leaf is painted with just 4 colours. First an underlying wash of cerulean blue, followed by a mix of scarlet lake, French ultramarine and transparent yellow to make the basic hue which is a mid value brown. The colour is biased from warm browns with more red (upper right) to a cooler brown on the left side (more blue in the mix)

Techniques and Process

2. Paint around veins where necessary. Keep an eye on the light and shade to guide you. Check veins are the correct width note: they are seldom white.

3.Build depth of colour with further washes

4. Dry brush final layers to build depth .

6. Add fine detail, e.g. Markings and fine veins

Clean any edges etc. A flat synthetic brush such as a Pro Arte Masterstroke shader, size 1

A Bit More, extract from my online course

- The following page briefly covers how to deal the subject of observing leaves in perspective.

- As you have no doubt found, drawing and painting a leaf portrait is easier that drawing and painting a leaf in situ on the plant, however many of the same principles of measuring apply.

Perspective in brief

Observing the effect of Perspective and Foreshortening

Using a fairly firm leaf that to observe the effect of perspective, i.e. a leaf that doesn't eilt too quickly, shiny leaves are best because this adaptation has evolved to prevent water loss – so they don't droop. E.g. Laurel or rhododendron leaf.

If you look at the leaf at different angles you will see how the size and shape changes as the leaf tilts away. Note that the width remains the same and the height changes.

i) The leaf portrait, pretty much 'face- on here' but with a slight curve of the rib and tip. This is the type of view drawn in part 1.

ii) Tilted away, **observe the change i.e. shortened** in the height. The mid rib remains central and the **widest point remains the same here** but the **curve is more acute**. The overall shape is square.

iii) Tilted to approximately 90°. The **shortening is significant** but the **width and position of the mid rib stay the same**. The overall shape is rectangular and landscape.

iv) When the leaf is viewed from the side and rotated the situation is the same. You can see in the above images that the length of the leaf remains but the height is shorter. The leaf may also be coming forward, twisted or bent over but the same rules of perspective apply.

Measuring

The best way to measure the height and width is to use either to use a **transparent ruler held next to the subject or your thumb held against your pencil**. **Hold the pencil vertically at arms length and close one eye, use your thumb on the pencil to guage height and width (Fig.3)** and **move the pencil around to judge the angles** (Fig 4.)

Figure 3. Measuring with the pencil

Try to think about the subject sitting within a more formal shape, so the shortened leaf fits into either rectangular, triangular or square shapes for example.

For leaves **always start with the mid rib** and the the outer border of the simple shape (as you did with the leaf portraits previously). Make light pencil marks initially. Againyou're your pencil and thumb to judge the angles of the curves.

Figure 4. Identifying angles using the pencil

The situation becomes slightly more complex when the leaf is bent, twisted or angled but by **putting in the mid rib first** you will keep track of the line of contiuation where it dissapears and reappears (fig 5).

Bends, Curves and Twists

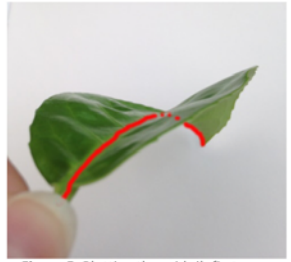


Figure 5. Plotting the mid rib first

Inevitably you will encounter more complex overlaps in a drawing of a plant. In this case draw the subject in the initial sketches as though all parts are transparent . I know we have discussed drawing only what you see and this might seem a little contradictory at first. But in this case you are simple drawing each part in full on top of the other parts, this will help you to gain a better understanding of the perspective and achieve better connections and continuation between leaves and stems etc. you will know whether or not your drawing makes sense! You are still only drawing the actual shapes and line seen but continuing the lines in overlaps. Think of this sketching process as a **skeleton drawing**. This approach is particularly useful when planning a drawing where there are many overlapping leaves, stems and flowers etc. All too often potentially good work is ruined by misaligned lines, such as in leaf bends or where stems dissapear and reappear from the pedical through to a flower's stigma.

OK..... You're ready to start!

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