

A Musical Exploration into Watercolor Media

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I have chosen watercolor as the topic of my research because of my personal lack a familiarity and a certain level distaste towards the medium. The purpose of this project was to gain a better understanding of watercolor media by looking at its history, properties, and uses within the field of art therapy and art facilitation, through research and musical expression. With this document, I aim to provide a thorough explanation of the research that was the inspiration for the accompanying musical expression, as well as insight into the creative process.

The History of Watercolor Media

Although evidence of the proof of the use of watercolors has been found dating back thousands of years, watercolor media did not gain popularity or recognition as a serious form of artistic expression until the early 1800s (Arthistory.net, n.d.; Parks, 2011). Early humans used water and natural pigments, such as charcoal and ochre, to create visual interpretations of the world around them on the walls of caves (Arthistory.net, n.d.; Haaga & Schwartz, 2022). Watercolors were used by many different ancient civilizations across the world. Egyptians were known to use watercolors to decorate the inside of tombs and the walls of the pyramids. The Chinese used watercolors to depict landscapes and religious icons. During the 15th century, Albrecht Durer began experimenting with watercolor media, and helped to bring attention to the luminous and transparent effects watercolors are capable of (arthistory.net, n.d.; Parks, 2011). However, the use of watercolor was still not thought of as art, rather it was thought of as a means to add tint, or shade to drawings and sketches (Parks, 2011; Wise, 2005). In England, at the turn of the 18th century, technological advancements in papermaking allowed for the widespread use of watercolors. Mr. James Whatman created a new, smoother paper that could withstand the application and layering of watercolor washes without disintegrating (Parks, 2011; Wise, 2005).

Though kept to a small, overcrowded area, the inclusion of watercolor media by the Royal Academy of Art marks the emergence of watercolor as a serious art medium (Parks, 2011; Wise, 2005). As a result, the Society of Painters in Watercolor were formed. According to Parks (2011), “In response, the Society of Painters in Watercolor was formed in London in 1804, and its own exhibitions served to promote and spread the art with considerable energy” (p. 31-32).

Musical Expression

“Mr. Whatman,” is written from the point a view of a watercolor artist arguing with an oil painter who refuses to acknowledge watercolor media as an equal. The first verse refers to a “rising tide of luminosity,” which symbolizes the emergence of watercolor as a serious art medium, as well as the underlying reference to water and color with the word’s “tide” and “luminosity”. The first verse also refers to the royal academy, watercolors translucent effects, and the Society of Painters in Watercolor. The idea for the chorus came to me almost immediately when Mr. Whatman was mentioned in the two articles from Parks and Wise. The second verse gives a brief description of the various examples of watercolors found throughout history. What pleased me the most about this piece was that I was able to get every other line of verses to rhyme throughout the entire song.

The song structure and lyrics to “Mr. Whatman,” the musical expression of the history of watercolors, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Mr. Whatman

Song Structure	Lyrics
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Verse I	<p>Quick to judge you're so hesitant, Towards the rising tide of luminosity.</p> <p>Once a royal affair, irrelevant, Because we're gonna paint this town in our transparency.</p> <p>Can't you see the beauty of iridescent, Or are you afraid of the change in its viscosity.</p> <p>Thought of less and nonequivalent, I might as well go start a new society.</p>
Chorus	<p>Whoa, oh, thank you Mr. Whatman. Whatman, oh, thank you for wove paper. Others tried to find a smoother ride, for coloring in with the tide Mr. Whatman. Mr. Whatman. No makes us paper as resilient as you Mr. Whatman. Mr. Whatman.</p>
Verse II	<p>Thought it was and so evident, By all the appearances speaking historically.</p> <p>Ochre, char, and other natural pigments, Have been found in caves that were drawn so primitively.</p> <p>In Ancient Egypt, their Pharaohs godsent, Painted temples, tombs, and scrolls oh so decoratively.</p> <p>Religious Paintings of Asian descent, Have been around since the 1st century A.D.</p>
Chorus	<p>Whoa, oh, thank you Mr. Whatman. Whatman, oh, thank you for wove paper. Others tried to find a smoother ride, for coloring in with the tide Mr. Whatman. Mr. Whatman. No makes us paper as resilient as you Mr. Whatman. Mr. Whatman.</p>

Properties, Advantages, and Disadvantages

According to Wise (2005), "In the purest sense watercolour is a painting medium which uses pigments dispersed in water and bound in gum, applied by brush to a paper support" (p. 40). A rough and textured finished is preferred to allow for the pigment particles, or grains, to settle within the grooves of the paper (Haaga & Schwartz, 2022; Wise, 205). Although watercolors are

transparent in nature, opaque levels can be achieved through various techniques. Transparent effects are achieved through the application of a wash, or diluted paint, in contrast to a glaze which the application of layers to create an opaque effect (Haaga & Schwartz, 2022; Wise, 2005). Although light is what gives watercolors its transparent effect, exposure to light can cause the purity of the pigments to diminish over time (Wise, 2005). Watercolors are easy to transport, set up, and cleanup. They are also less expensive than other forms of paint and dries quicker too. One major advantage to using watercolor media is that it works great with other art mediums.

Musical Expression

Unfortunately, I was unable to complete a musical piece for this topic. I had a hard time finding inspiration, so I ended up skipping this one in the hopes of finishing it later. However, by the time I finished the other songs, I had made mention to several of the properties and disadvantages, that I was out of ideas.

Art Therapy and Therapeutic Art Uses

I found this topic to be the most inspiring. So much so, that I ended up writing two separate songs about it. One song is about the benefits using watercolor media as an art intervention. The second, is about the practical considerations of watercolor media.

Transparency Therapy

The first verse of the songs starts off with stating that painting is an act of rhythm and repetition that, “can release new understandings” (Haaga & Schwartz, 2022). The act of painting also acts as a form of mindful meditation that allows us to become centered in the moment, free of any distracting or intruding thoughts, allowing for a sense self-awareness that allows new meaning to be discovered through every stroke (Haaga & Schwartz, 2022; Macleod, 2020). As a

recovering addict myself, it is important to me to always include addiction in my research and application, which is why I included the line “that keeps your thoughts off using”. The creative arts has helped me throughout my recovery, by allowing me to be completely emersed in the act of creation, keeping my thoughts clear of any distractions, such as “using” my drug of choice. The act of creating art can provide a visual interpretation of emotions that are either unable to be discussed, or hiding below the surface (Haaga & Schwartz, 2022; Macleod, 2020). The act of painting becomes a form of artistic communication when verbal communication seems difficult. This idea leads right into the chorus, explaining how every brush stroke can provide new meaning (Haaga & Schwartz, 2022). I love the line “every stoke sings us a song,” because of the way it incorporates art and music together, noting the similarities within all Creative Art Therapies. Transparency Therapy was my way of stating that I was singing about watercolors and art therapy. The next few lines of the chorus are referencing the transparent effects that watercolors produce (Arthistory.net, n.d.; Haaga & Schwartz, 2022; Parks, 2011; Wise, 2005), which became the basis for the entire theme of the song. The transparent effects are produced by allowing the light to shit through the paint and reflect off the paper, usually white or cream in color, which allows the pigments of color to glow (Haaga & Schwartz, 2022; Parks, 2011; Wise, 2005). The last few lines of the chorus are meant to represent a client recognizing watercolors therapeutic benefits.

Verse two starts off mentioning the personal transformation that arises from the act of painting, or creation (Haaga & Schwartz, 2022). Through observation and reflection of the art, one gains insight and finds new meaning of thoughts and emotions they did not know existed. This part was extremely fun for me, as I was able to also include the reflective and transparent properties watercolors produce. The next few lines of this verse are discussing watercolors and

the Expressive Theories Continuum (ETC). The act of blending and layering colors can activate the Sensory component of the ETC, while the movement and repletion activate the Kinesthetic and Affective components.

The outro of this songs means a lot to me personally. Throughout my entire professional career, it is important that I can express how the expressive arts helped me through my addiction. Which is why I make the claim, “your love shines on through me”.

The song structure and lyrics to “Transparency Therapy,” are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Transparency Therapy

Song Structure	Lyrics
Intro	
Verse I	<p>Rhythm and repetition, rhythm and repetition That gets your body moving, that gets your body grooving.</p> <p>It’s mindful meditation, mindful meditation That keeps your thoughts from cruising That keeps your thoughts off using Yeah, keeps your thoughts off using</p> <p>A visual interpretation, a visual interpretation Of emotions that are brewing, emotions you’re alluding to</p> <p>Artistic communication, artistic communication When words are more confusing, when words are my undoing Yeah, words are my undoing</p>
Chorus	<p>Every brush tells a story Every stroke it sings us a song Transparency Therapy Let your light shine on, let your light shine on Transparency Therapy Let your light shine down on me, let your light shine on through me</p>
Verse II	<p>A personal transformation, a personal transformation Through reflective observations, reflective validations</p> <p>Emotional exploration, emotional exploration Transparent inspirations, provoking thoughtful conversations</p> <p>Sensory stimulation, sensory stimulation In blending and layering colors, those beautiful vibrant colors</p> <p>Processed information, processed information</p>

	Kinesthetic animating, affective activating Affective activating
Chorus	Every brush tells a story Every stroke it sings us a song Transparency Therapy Let your light shine one, let your light shine on Transparency Therapy Let your light shine down on me, let your light shine on through me
Outro	Your love shines on through me Your love shines on through me

Turbulent Flow

“Turbulent Flow” is about the practical considerations in the application of watercolors in art therapy. To me this song is full of symbolism. Turbulent flow itself, refers to anything that runs perpendicular to the flow of the current. In this case, turbulent flow is referring to anything that runs perpendicular to the creative flow. Watercolors are fluid, less structured and hard to control (Haaga & Schwartz, 2022). Watercolors can be messy, they mix together, they bleed, and they run (2022). Without knowledge of color theory, and experience of painting tools, watercolors may turn cloudy and muddy, and may produce other unwanted effects (2022). Lacking this knowledge, the act of painting becomes less about creative expression as the artists focuses more on controlling the paint than self-expression (2022).

The pre-chorus, “Chroma causations of fluid frustrations,” was another fun symbolic reference to the beauty and brilliance of watercolors. with the use of the word chroma, which means the purity or intensity of color. The chorus is explaining that this song is about what to consider when using watercolors as a therapeutic intervention. Laminar flow means a steady current. So, taking these into consideration will create a steady creative flow. What is discussed in this song, is anything that may disrupt that flow, by imparting creative distractions.

Painting with watercolors, at its core, is simple in nature, but adding layers does add complexity (Haaga & Schwartz, 2022). It takes patience and practice to master watercolor techniques. You have to wait for layers to wash before adding more layers, which one learns

with experience. Without knowledge and experience, it is up to the therapist or facilitator conduct a proper session. By limiting palettes, providing simple compositions, and teaching technique, the facilitator, or therapist, may provide a sense of control in order to be able to focus on the act of creative expression (2022). Baring claims that other considerations are with people with loose ego boundaries, fear of fusion, and individuals with control issues (1997). One other major consideration is that people may worry too much about the final art piece. It is important to stress the importance of the process of creation, rather than the result of creation.

The song structure and lyrics to “Turbulent Flow,” are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Turbulent Flow

Song Structure	Lyrics
Intro	
Verse I	Your unpredictable nature causes turbulent flow It’s fluid, less structured, and out of control It’s messy, it mixes, and it bleeds, and it runs
Verse II	Lacking knowledge and theory disrupts creative flow Becomes less about expression and more of control Turning cloudy and muddy, with unwanted effects
Pre-chorus	Chroma causations of fluid frustrations
Chorus	To consider the flow creates laminar flow Chroma causations of fluid frustrations Perpendicular forces, perpendicular forces Imparting, imparting creative distractions
Verse III	Patience and practice to be one with the flow Directing the current, not yours to control It’s simple in nature unless you’re painting in layers
Pre-chorus	Chroma causations of fluid frustrations
Verse IV	It takes experience and insight to facilitate flow Limiting palettes provides a sense of control Simple compositions and teaching technique
Pre-chorus	Chroma causations of fluid frustrations
Chorus	To consider the flow creates laminar flow Chroma causations of fluid frustrations Perpendicular forces, perpendicular forces Imparting, imparting creative distractions
Verse IV	Loose ego and boundaries rise above the flow Fear of fusion, lost emotional control It’s all about the process, gaining new understanding
Chorus	To consider the flow creates laminar flow

	Chroma causations of fluid frustrations Perpendicular forces, perpendicular forces Imparting, imparting creative distractions
Chorus	To consider the flow creates laminar flow Chroma causations of fluid frustrations Perpendicular forces, perpendicular forces Imparting, imparting creative distractions
Outro	Your unpredictable nature causes turbulent flow Turbulent flow, turbulent flow Your unpredictable nature causes turbulent flow Turbulent flow, turbulent flow Chroma causations, turbulent flow Fluid frustrations, turbulent flow Imparting, imparting, creative distractions Imparting, imparting, creative distractions

Discussion

This entire project incorporates elements of English composition, research and application, music therapy, art therapy, expressive writing, and even dance and movement therapy. To me this is a new way of learning. Not only was I required to present my findings in a paper, but I was allowed to apply my findings into a form of creative expression; expressive writing in the lyrics, creating music, and often found myself moving to the beat of the groove. I learned a lot through the research and developing a paper, but through the music, I will never forget what I learned. I also firmly believe that the musical expression of this project can act as a way of learning for others. For instance, some individuals learn better through visual aspects. This album can teach those who learn better through auditory means. Above all, I want this album to show people struggling with any mental health issues, including and especially addiction, that the expressive arts, in all its forms, are a path to healing.

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