

Create seamless backgrounds using masks

Have you ever painted a wonderful flower and then couldn't decide what to do with the background? Here are a couple of solutions.

Today we will explore several backgrounds that use adhesive masks.

The first mask we will use is made from Contact or shelf paper and applied to Arches Watercolor Paper.

The next mask is made from Masking Tape, sometimes applied over a painted flower on Arches Watercolor Paper.

The last mask is made from Shelf paper and the background is applied to Yupo Paper.



Adhesive Mask cut from Contact paper. Leaves masked with Frisket or Julie's Jungle Juice. Background painted with 3 colors OVER the masks.



Adhesive Mask made with Masking Tape. Background painted with roller and gouache.



Adhesive Mask cut out of Contact paper. Background painted on Yupo paper.

Create seamless backgrounds using adhesive masks – Part 1

How to make a Shelf Paper Mask

Cut a piece of shelf paper with an adhesive back the size of your flower and place it on top of your artwork. On a light table or a window, trace the outline of your flower, stems and leaves with a black Sharpie marker. Cut around the flower edge with an X-acto knife. When finished, remove the backing from the shelf paper, exposing the adhesive side. Place the mask over the pencil drawing of the poppy on the watercolor paper.

Before you paint, burnish the mask edges with a metal spoon to get a tight seal. This keeps the paint from creeping under the mask.



How to make a Masking Tape Mask

After you have traced your drawing on watercolor paper, place several 2" wide strips of masking tape over the drawing to cover the flower area. Cut around the flower edge with an X-acto knife, removing the extra tape as you cut. Now you are ready to paint the background. This method is faster and easier than using a shelf paper mask, but you cannot re-use the masking tape like you can with shelf paper.



There may be times when you want an interesting, varied background, and you want it to fade into the background. In the printing world, we call this a screen, and they range in value from 0 to 100%. I am looking for about 30%. Check out the formula for Julie's Jungle Juice. I painted this mixture onto the watercolor paper before I painted the background. You can see the light yellow leaves on the Hibiscus flower in the photograph above. The leaves in the flower on the left were masked, so they will be painted when the background is complete.

Create seamless backgrounds using adhesive masks – Part 1

By spending time creating your mask before you paint you will be able to paint your background quickly with strong, fluid colors in less than 10 minutes.

Before you Paint

Decide on a color palette. Practice on scraps of paper. I chose an analogous color scheme, using reds, violets, blues with yellow and blue-greens.

Paint Colors:

Reds: Perm. Rose, Quin. Magenta, Opera

Yellows: Aureolin, New Gamboge, Quin. Gold

Blues: Indigo Blue, Cobalt Turq.

Paper: 300# or 140# Arches Watercolor



Mix the background colors

1. First, I really soaked my paper with clean water before I put any color on the paper.

2. I squeezed indigo blue, cobalt turq. and perm. magenta into three different areas on my butcher tray palette. I diluted each paint color with a 1" brush, making a thick, soupy mixture for each color. I used a brush for each color, to keep the colors as pure as I could.

3. Using a 1" flat, I began dropping in Cobalt Turquoise with diagonal strokes. Then I added some magenta, and some indigo. This took less than 10 minutes.

While wet, I added more paint because I knew the background would dry too light for the look I wanted.

Then I threw on some salt here and there, dried it off with the hair dryer and brushed some clear water over any places that looked like they had color transitions that were too abrupt.

A Note about the leaves and stems

In this painting, I applied Frisket with an old brush to the leaves and stems.



Background WITH Mask



Background WITHOUT Mask

Create a background with masking tape – Part 2

There are times when you may want a flat area in your painting, like a sky or a background that does not detract from the rest of the shapes and objects in the work. This can be easily applied with gouache paint on a sponge roller.

Note: In the painting pictured, I painted the flower first because I didn't know how it would turn out, and I didn't have a clue as to what I wanted to do with the background. (Figure 1)

When the flower was finished, I looked at it for a few days, and decided to tape off the edges of the flower with masking tape, and cut around the flower edges with my trusty X-acto knife. (Figure 2)



Figure 1

I mixed Indigo Blue with Alizarin Crimson gouache on a butcher tray, got out my sponge roller and rolled on the gouache. Remember to always pull the roller away from the taped edge for the best results.

Don't push the roller towards the masking tape because you don't want paint creeping underneath the tape. (Figure 3)



Figure 2

This process took about 15 minutes, and I'm happy with the result.

The background with a single value and color made a nice contrast to the many values and colors in the flower.



Figure 3

Create a masked background on Yupo – Part 3

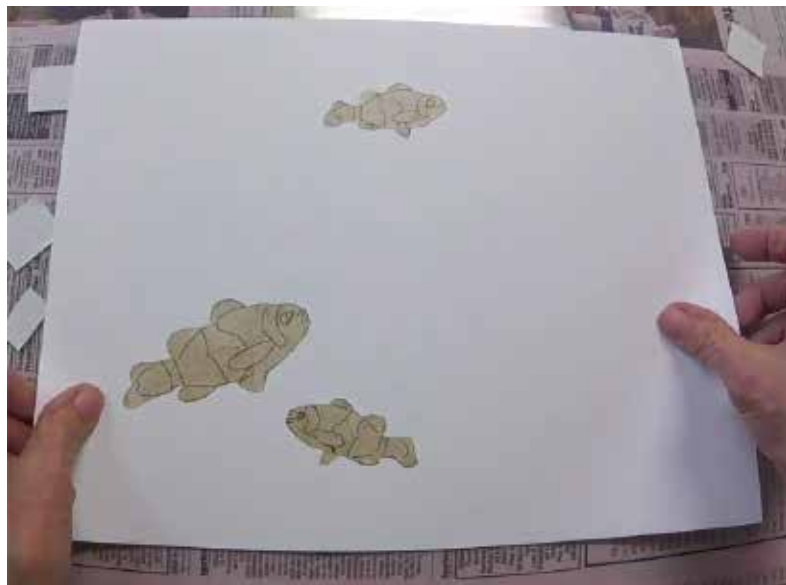
1. Make an Adhesive Mask

Cut a piece of shelf paper with an adhesive back the size of your flower and place it on top of your artwork. On a light table or a window, trace the outline of your fish with a black marker.

Cut around the fish edge with an X-acto knife, trying to keep a light pressure, so you can easily free the mask from its backing.

When finished, remove the backing from the shelf paper, exposing the adhesive side.

Apply the mask on your Yupo paper in an interesting design.



Before you paint, burnish the mask edges with a metal spoon to get a right seal.

This keeps the paint from creeping under the mask.

2. Mix up your Background Paints.

Limit your paints to four colors. I used:

any dark Blue

any Yellow

any Turquoise

Leaf Green

Use a 1" flat brush for each color, and a water container for each color to keep your paints from turning to mud.



Create a masked background on Yupo – Part 3

3. Paint the Background

Cover your paper with juicy paints, place your colors randomly. You want to let the colors mix by themselves as much as possible. If you let the brush mix them, you are likely to get mud.

The more paint you put on your paper, your value will go towards 10 on the value scale.

The less paint you put on your paper, your value will drift towards 1 on the value scale.

Spray and tilt your paper until you get an interesting transition of the colors.

Stamp a second piece of Yupo on top of your original Yupo paper that you just painted.

Carefully lift the second piece and place it on newspapers to let both paintings dry. Now you have two paintings instead of just your first one. Save the second painting for another project.

Set your two paintings aside to dry. They will dry easier in low humidity. This is a good fall/ winter project unless you are in an air conditioned space in an area of high humidity.



4. Paint the Fish

When the masked paper is dry, remove the fish masks by lifting them off with an X-acto knife. Save the fish masks for another project by sticking them onto freezer paper.

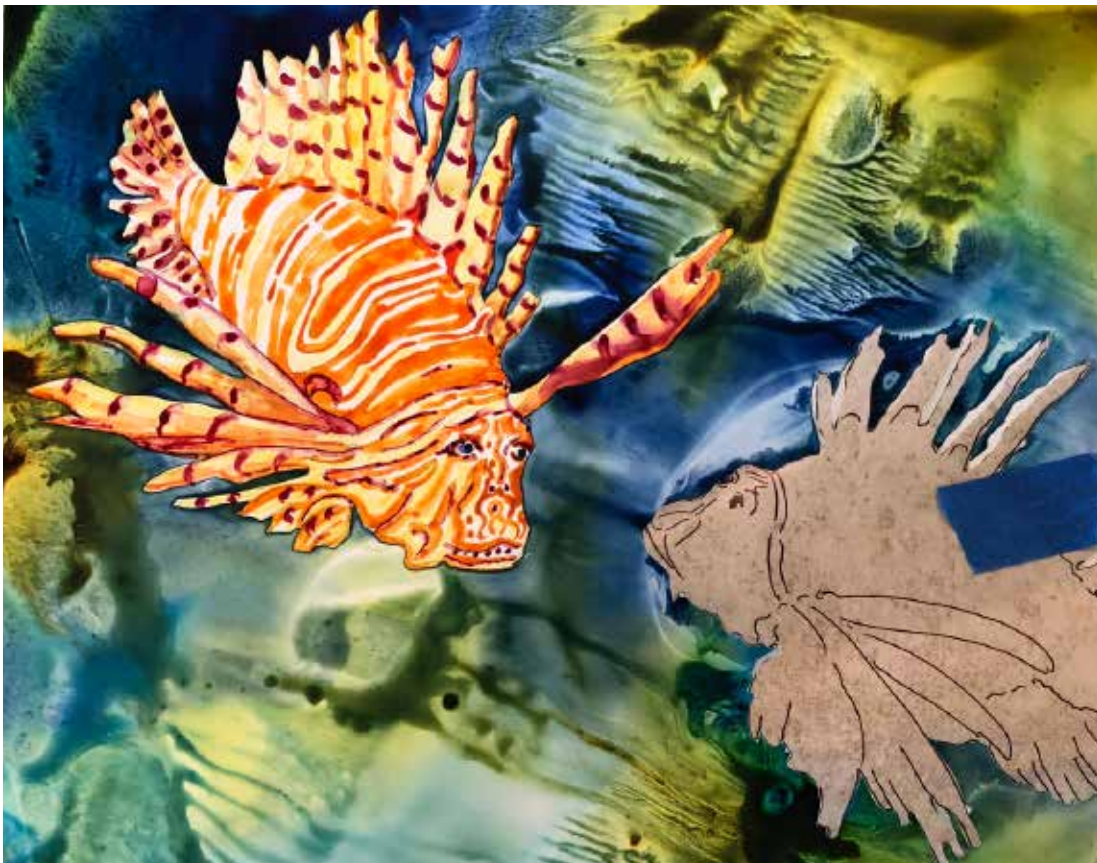
Paint the fish images you have saved. When the painting is dry, spray the entire painting with varnish to protect it from water. You can frame it, or glue it on a cradle board.

POSITIVE MASK



Samples using a Positive mask:

After the background is painted and dry, remove the mask and save it on freezer paper. Paint your fish in any color you want. I was going for complements – orange next to blues.



NEGATIVE MASK



Another Use for the Negative mask:

Apply the NEGATIVE MASK to the second sheet of Yupo you saved, and carefully lift and add the paint off the painting only within the mask. I used the paint colors within the mask, lifting paint where I wanted whites and adding yellow-green paint. It's a lot of fun! I was trying to keep the fish the same color as the background.

