

Intro:

For this painting, we'll be using a vibrant palette of watercolor to capture one of the farm's most iconic animals—the rooster. With his colorful plumage and commanding demeanor, the rooster is an inspiring character to paint. Let's take a look at the colors for this project.

Italian Burnt Sienna is a rich, reddish brown. Because this pigment is made from natural sources it has a wonderful, earthy finish with distinct granulation as it settles into the texture of your watercolor paper.

Permanent Red is an extremely bold and powerful. This mid-range tone has a dark value at full strength and is perfect for mixtures where you need a smooth, true red. In lighter applications, Permanent Red washes out to a soft pink.

Phthalo Green is a lively watercolor with brilliant transparency. This useful shade has a warm tone and does not granulate, resulting in a smooth finish and bright color. Highly pigmented and staining, it is assertive in mixtures and, when dry, will not lift from your watercolor paper.

To begin the rooster painting, create a very dark, nearly black, mixture. Start by moving some of the Phthalo Green paint to an empty well on your palette. This is a very strong color, so we'll balance it by mixing in some Permanent Red. Combined, these two colors will make a very dark neutral tone. You may need to adjust your color by adding more red if your shade looks green, or by adding more green as I am doing here. By adding a touch more Phthalo Green I have made a shade that is a very deep gray.

Using a round watercolor brush with a pointed tip, carefully paint the rooster's eye with this dark shade. Also, start making some outlines in the darker areas of the painting. Use this mixture on the bottom of the beak and around the top part of the head.

This color is very important as we move to the bird's tail. Use this deep color to fill in the darkest areas of the painting. There is a white section of feathers where the tail meets the body of the bird, apply a dark shadow right under this area. Also, use this shade on the bird's tail. We are filling in the negative space of the rooster's tail. What that means is that we are working around the feathers of the tail, painting in all of that background structure on the bird. Later, when we paint in the tail feathers, these dark areas will provide contrast and depth in the painting. Follow the line drawing to fill in around the shape of each feather, adding details to the shape of the predominant feathers.

Also, using this dark color, paint the underside of the tail feathers on the back part of the rooster. This will look like a shadow under the feathers and will give more structure to the bottom of the bird.

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While these first dark layers of paint dry, mix a touch of the deep gray shade into the Phthalo Green watercolor. Adding this small amount of gray takes away some of the brightness of the Phthalo Green, giving us a natural color for the feathers on our rooster. Use this color on the lower part of the rooster, painting over the details of the line drawing that show where each feather on the wing is placed. You should still be able to see these lines faintly though the wash of paint. We'll come back in later to add detail in this area. Work around the feathers that make up the top of the bird's body, blocking in the lower wings and body only.

Next, put a small amount of the Italian Burnt Sienna in an empty well on your palette and mix in a touch of the dark tone to gray it down. Use this shade to paint in the bird's breast, working the color around the line of feathers that make up the rooster's head and neck. Once you have applied color here, use a damp clean brush to blend the brown into the green paint. This technique is called painting wet-into-wet and will allow us to make a nice transition between the two colors.

For the rooster's feet, add water to the dark mixture on your palette to create a soft gray wash of color. Using the light gray, fill in the feet and pull the color up the legs to the body of the bird.

Once these first layers of color are applied, give your painting a chance to dry before continuing to work. This way, colors painted next to each other will not run together.

Now that the painting is dry, use a mixture of Italian Burnt Sienna and water to add color to the rooster, starting with the head. Work around the details of the face by following your line drawing around all of the structures surrounding the beak and eye. Pull the color down from the face using the point of your brush all the way to the rooster's body.

When you have blocked in color on the head, rinse the brush and dry it slightly. Use this brush to pull out some color near the center of the head, creating a highlight. For a softer looking shape, blend around the edges of the highlight with your brush. This gives shape to the head.

Using the same color, work your way down the bird's back, painting in the feathers that overlap the lower body of the rooster. Keep your brush loaded with paint and fill in these areas using quick strokes of color. Once you have filled this in, we'll create a similar highlighted area to add contour on the back. Rinse the brush, dry it slightly, and pull it through the center of this area to remove some of the paint. Remember to blend the edges if necessary.

Now let's add in some of the details of the face. Mix a little water with the Permanent Red on your palette to get the paint flowing. You want a strong mixture, with a high ratio of pigment to water in this mix. Add this bold color to the comb on top of the rooster's head. You can use the point of your brush to outline this area, then fill it in. Those black lines we made earlier will create a nice shadow to this red. Move down the head, around the eye and beak, and into all of the structures on the bird's face.

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To add more depth, you can take a clean damp brush and pull out a soft highlight on the top of the comb.

Now, using the Italian Burnt Sienna, add a bit of color to the beak.

For the tail feathers, load your brush with Phthalo Green. We'll take advantage of the vibrant and bold nature of this watercolor to produce some really dynamic feathers. Begin at the base of the tail and paint in the feathers that we left white earlier. You can even overlap some of the dark gray we painted as you work your way down the tail. These feathers are often iridescent on the rooster, so the Phthalo Green is perfect color to capture some of this brightness. As you paint these areas, fill in the shapes of the line drawing by using the tip of your brush for control. You will need to reload your brush with color as you fill in the feathers. If the paint becomes stiff, add more water so you have a smooth, workable paint to fill in the tail.

Next, working with the dark mixture we made earlier, add structure to the wing feathers by tracing over the line drawing with this color. As you move up the bird, add some of the Italian Burnt Sienna to the mixture and tap your brush on the bird to add some texture and small feathers. Also, streak this color along the line drawing on the neck and back of the bird to add shadows to the feathers that we placed earlier.

Use a light wash of gray to put some color on the white feathers near the base of the tail.

To finish the feet, add details with the gray-brown mixture. The tip of your brush can be used to create tiny claws. Also, add shadow on the back of the legs and make small dashes up the legs for added texture. Continue with the color on the bottom of the toes for a shaded effect.

Finally, add the last details of the tail feathers by using this color to make a few streaks of color down the center of the main feathers.

Closing:

Brilliant tones, and powerful neutral mixtures, are the keys to painting the captivating rooster.