

# watercolor

(it's easy, really)



# dive on in, the water (color)'s fine...



## Swordwhale Walking: Illustration

Teanna Byerts

[www.geocities.com/swordwhale](http://www.geocities.com/swordwhale)

[www.myspace.com/swordwhale](http://www.myspace.com/swordwhale)

717-309-1291

**It's not as hard as you think, but first  
*you need some stuff...***

**Drawing board:** a piece of mason-ite. The tool-savy can buy a big piece at the hardware store and cut it to size, the rest of us can have the store cut it down; whatever size you want to work on... an inch or so larger than your paper on all sides. On a board, you can tilt and turn your art (to allow the watercolor to run in interesting directions), or you can easily carry it on location.

**Paper:** rough, smooth, in between, it should be as heavy as you can afford; thin paper wrinkles and puddles the water, heavy paper holds up to corrections like erasing, and washing off color. Rough gives you interesting textures for landscapes but no detail. Smooth (my favorite) allows you lots of detail. I like individual sheets better than watercolor blocks

or books; you want to be able to tape or staple your paper to the board.

**Tape:** to fasten your paper to the board; prevents wrinkling.

**Brushes;** No chipmunk tooth-brushes! Round, square, large, small, it doesn't matter, as long as they are soft, springy and hold their shape. I use a few rounds from 00 to size 10. If you have sizes 1-4-8, you have a good start. Try sponges or sponge house painting brushes for large areas on your paper. Toothbrushes and spray bottles for spatter effects, fan brushes, stiff brushes, rags or towels for textures.

**Paint:** In tubes. None of those pan sets please, they're awful. A few



You need GOOD brushes, not the chipmunk toothbrushes that come with many kids' boxed sets. Soft, springy, they should keep their shapes.



good tubes (see palette pages later) are not expensive and give far better results. They last for years too. Many companies like Winsor-Newton or Grumbacher make student grade colors that are excellent.

**Water:** Something between a small bucket and a large yogurt container will do to hold it. Have a smaller can or better, a squirt bottle, of clean water to mix with your colors.

**Palette:** Art and craft stores sell small round plastic palettes stupid cheap, they work very well. Bigger is often better here, and you can get the Titanic version (that holds a hundred color variations or so) for a reasonable price. In a pinch, egg cartons or laundry detergent bottle lids, or other small household plastics work fine. The point is to have a place to make a puddle of color. It's *water* color.

**Sketching stuff:** Pencils, eraser (kneaded rubber is wonderful) and paper (those sketchbooks that look like bound books are my favorites). Work out your ideas in thumbnail sketches (small ones), then draw on your watercolor paper. You can rough out the basic lines of trees or

mountains and do most of your work in the watercolor itself, or you can draw a very detailed drawing, then color it with your watercolors.

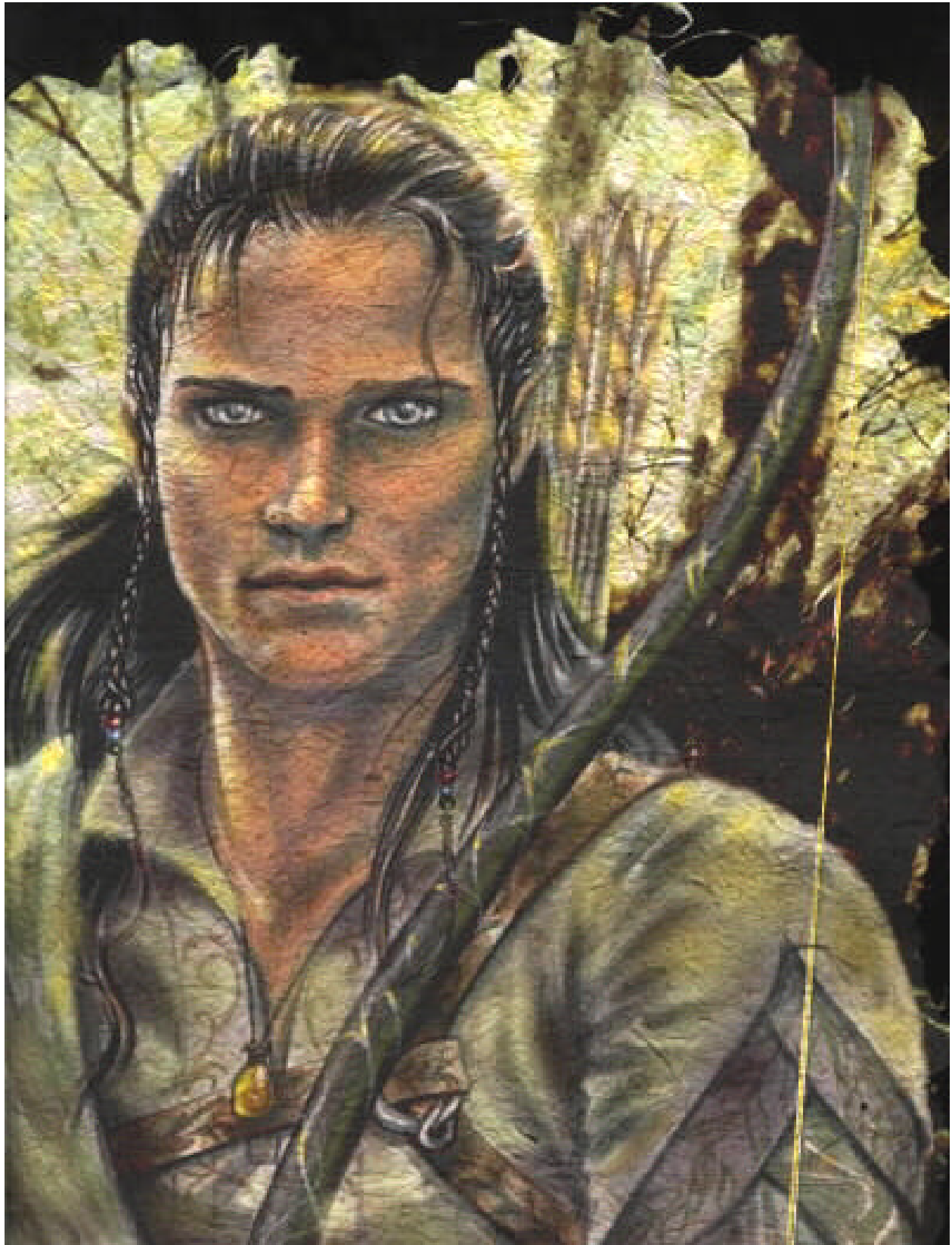
**Binoculars:** Always a useful item if working outdoors, especially if observing wildlife.

**Camera:** Reference shots so you can finish the piece back in the studio. Remember to take color notes on site; cameras lie. Color notes; mix colors that look like what you're seeing. The changing light of clouds or rising or lowering sun will affect this.

**Snacks:** and a waterbottle. And sunscreen, and hat, and windbreaker and bug repellent, and other outdoor survival gear, depending where you are.



**On the water:** If you have a canoe, kayak, or other boat, (or rent one) you could work in the middle of the water (but please don't wash out your colors in the lake, some of them are toxic). Dive slates (available at scuba diving shops) or some kitchen cutting boards are good to sketch on in or under the water. Waterproof throwaway cameras work well for these subjects.

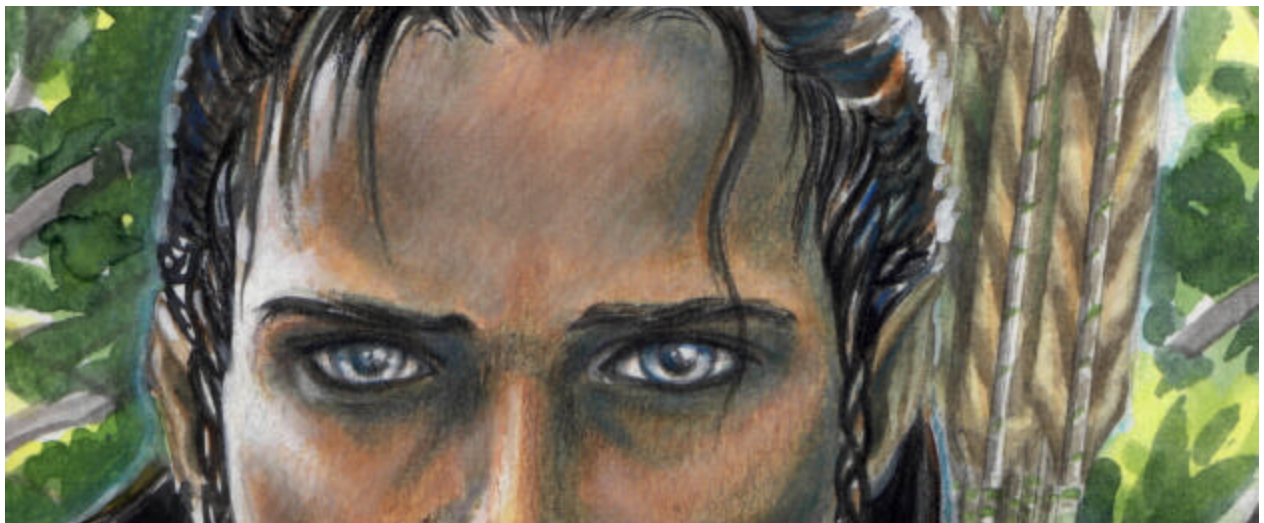


For this character from JRR Tolkien's Silmarillion, I combined several watercolors on Photoshop. The texture is from a rough rag paper.

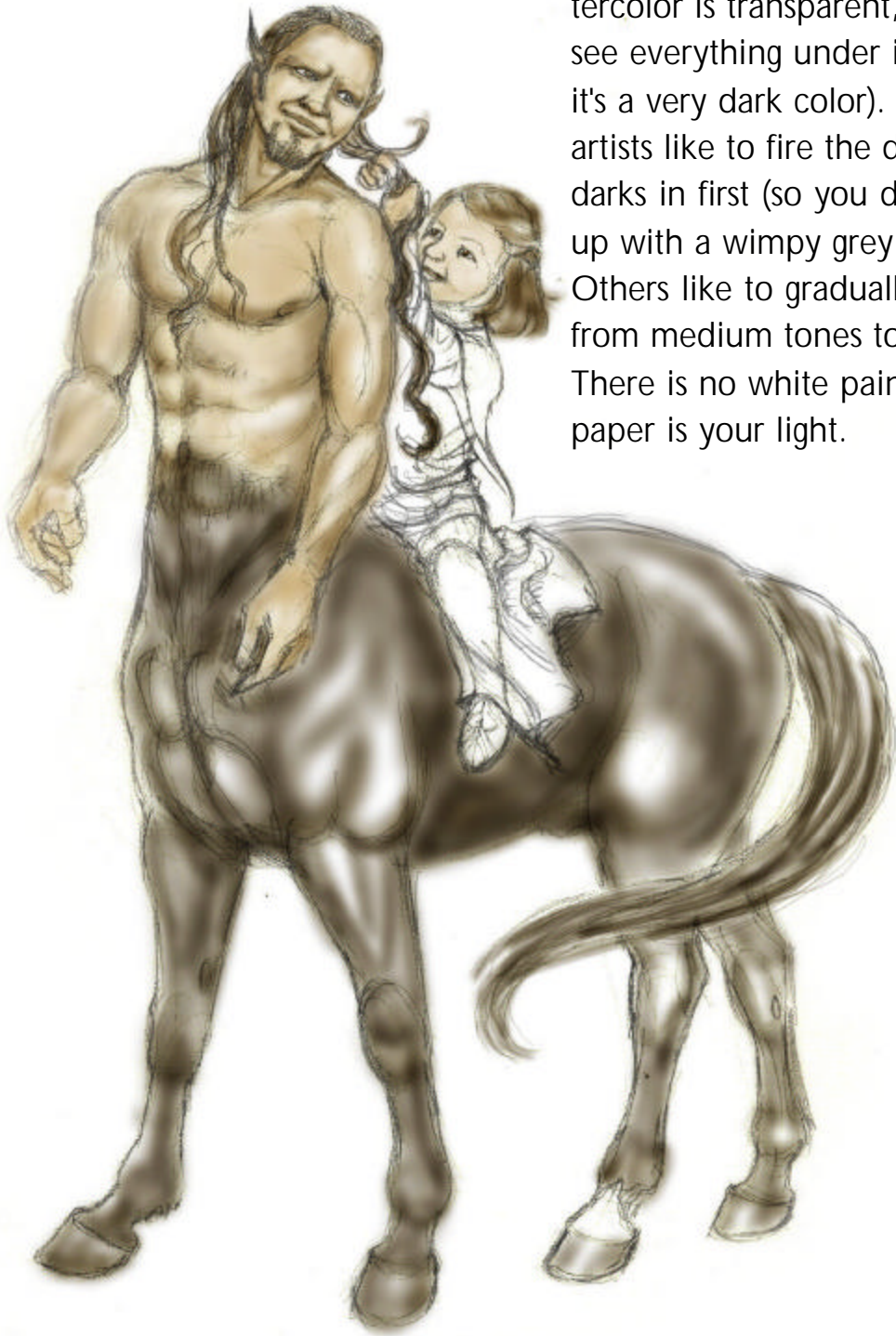




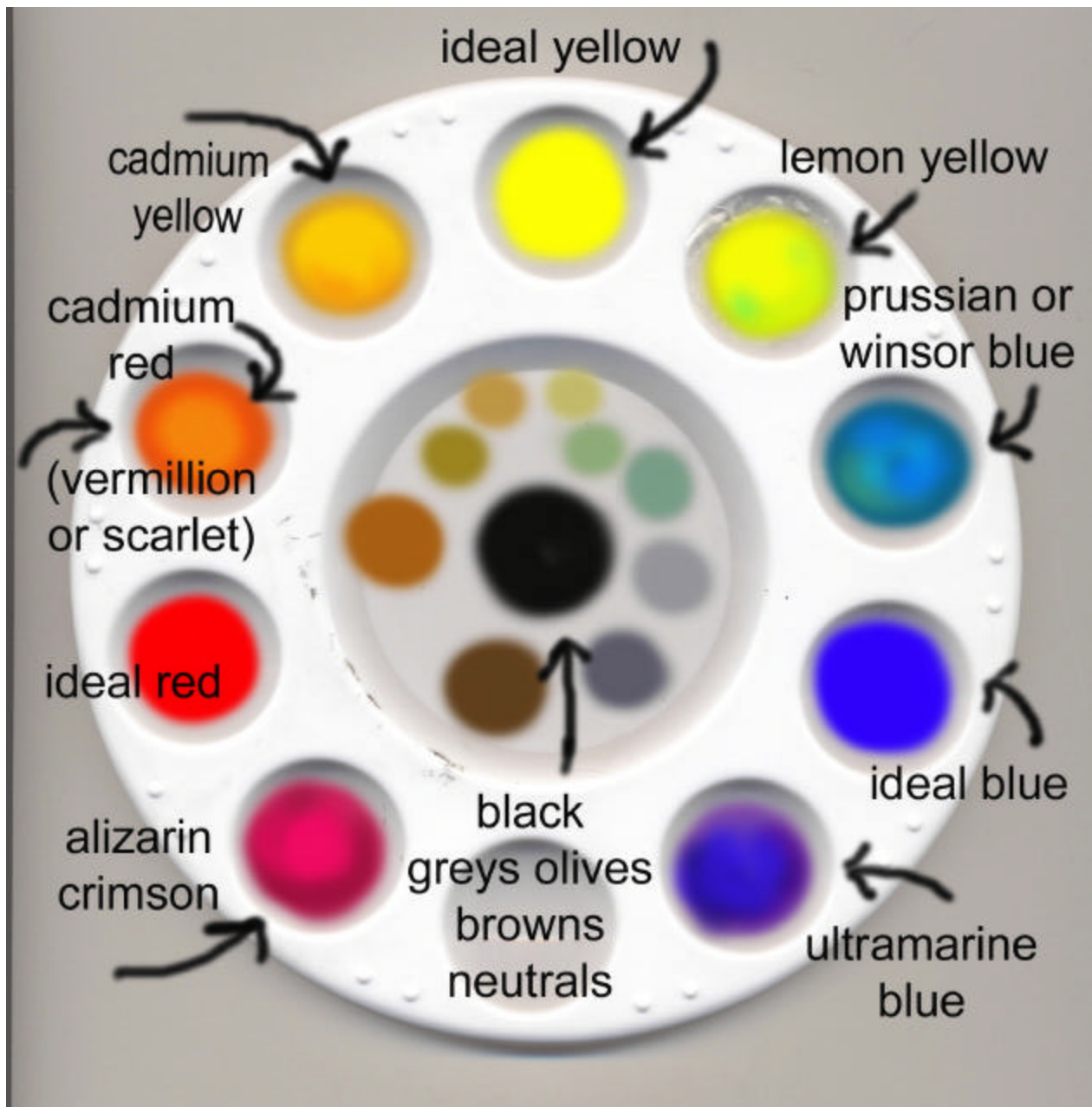
Watercolor can be highly realistic and detailed (like Beleg, below, on his original smooth paper) or light and splashy (like Angel, above, or Beleg's trees). For on-site sketches (sitting outside painting landscapes or wildlife) sketch fast, paint quick and loose. Take photos if necessary for adding details later, or for doing a more finished piece. You can use opaque media like gouache (poster paint), colored pencils (Prismacolor is awesome) or acrylics to enhance (or fix mistakes in) the transparent watercolor.



Start with one color, painting in basic shapes and shadows. Add layers of color. Remember watercolor is transparent, you'll see everything under it (unless it's a very dark color). Some artists like to fire the darkest darks in first (so you don't end up with a wimpy grey scale). Others like to gradually build from medium tones to dark. There is no white paint; the paper is your light.

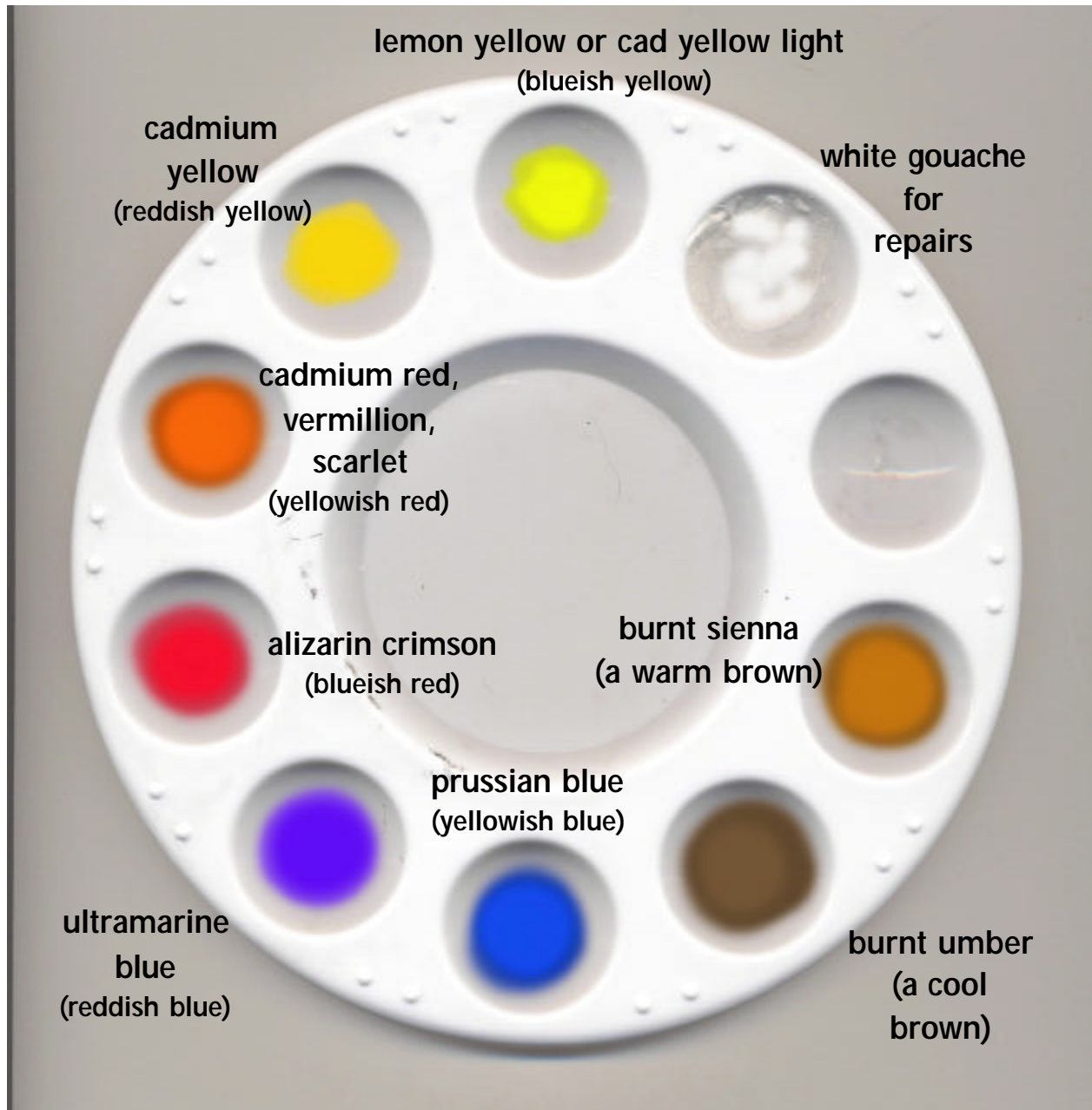






In an ideal world, you could mix all the colors in the universe from red, yellow and blue. Real world paint doesn't contain an ideal red, yellow or blue; the blue will always have a bit of red in it (ultramarine blue) or a bit of yellow (prussian or winsor). The red will always have a bit of blue in it (alizarin) or some yellow (cadmium red, scarlet, vermillion). The yellow will always lean a bit toward the blue (lemon) or toward the red side of the color wheel (cadmium yellow). Mixing a yellowish *blue* with a yellowish *red* will not get you purple, but some thing an art teacher I knew called "monkey vomit violet" because you have actually mixed all three colors.





Rule One: Do not mix white paint with your watercolors. (Use it later, sparingly, on top, to add white bits back in).

Rule Two: don't use Black Paint; mix a living black from blues and browns, or add reds to those.

Rule Three: play... mix stuff and see what you get. Mixing a blueish red (alizarin) with a reddish blue (ultramarine) will get you purples. Mixing any set of colors that includes all three (red-yellow-blue) primaries will get you more neutral tones; greys, browns, earth tones, tree greens...or something awful.



Above: sketched, then watercolored. Below: sketches done on site in Assateague marsh in March. Boy with bow enhanced with acrylics and Photoshop. Don't be afraid to mix media!

