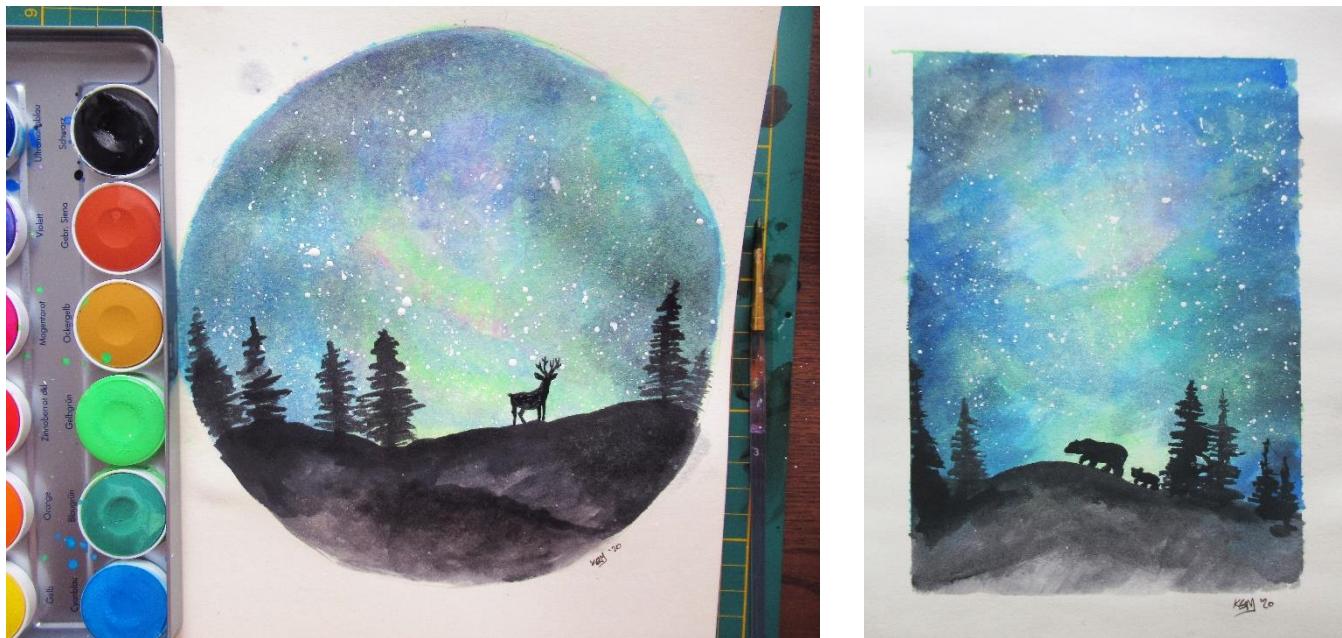


Lesson: Easy Watercolour Aurora Borealis

The aurora borealis (or aurora australis for my south pole folks) is a great first watercolour project for an individual or group because, well, it's pretty and pretty easy to paint. As long as you get a mix of the right colours in the background, some white splatters and the lower silhouettes cover a multitude of sins! And remember, nature isn't perfect. Whether on paper or in the sky, every aurora borealis should be different - that's what makes it so spectacular.



This project is also a great opportunity to educate people about nature and the amazing things the earth can do! Some topics of discussion might include:

- The Aurora Borealis / Australis
- The science behind it!
- Life and research in the Arctic and Antarctic
- Animals and people that survive in cold climates
- The mythology surrounding the Aurora

Supplies

- Watercolour paper
- Paint brushes of different sizes
- Watercolour paints (tablet-style is perfect, use whatever you have!)
- Black and white acrylic paints
- HB pencil

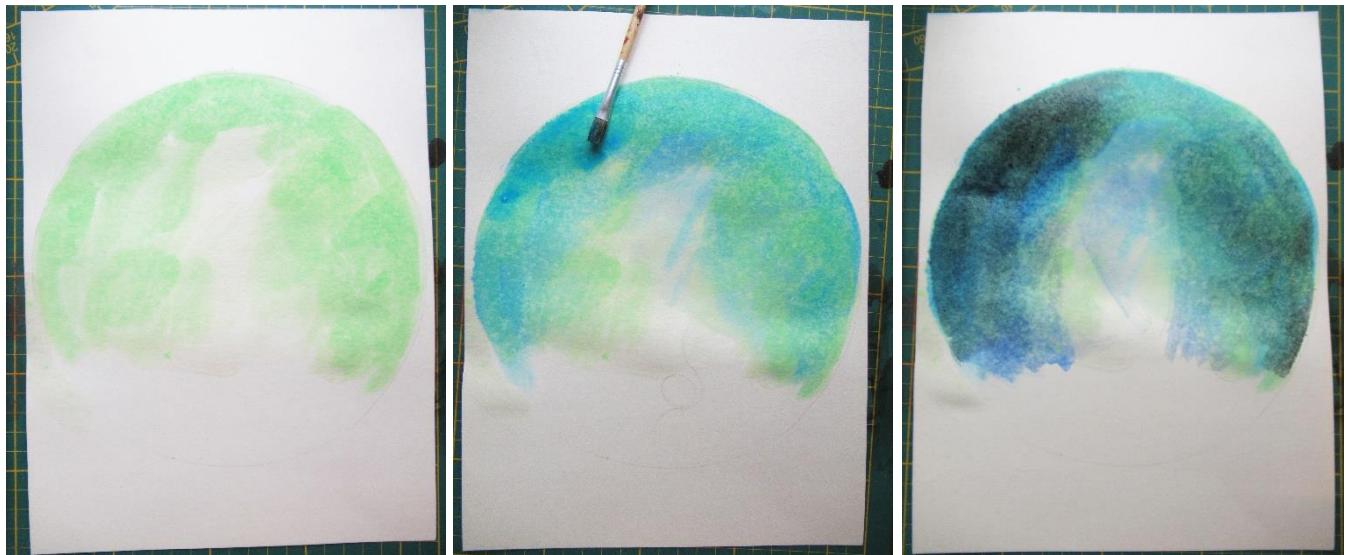
Optional:

- Washi or masking tape
- Something to create a circle shape – a plate to trace around or compass for example

Method

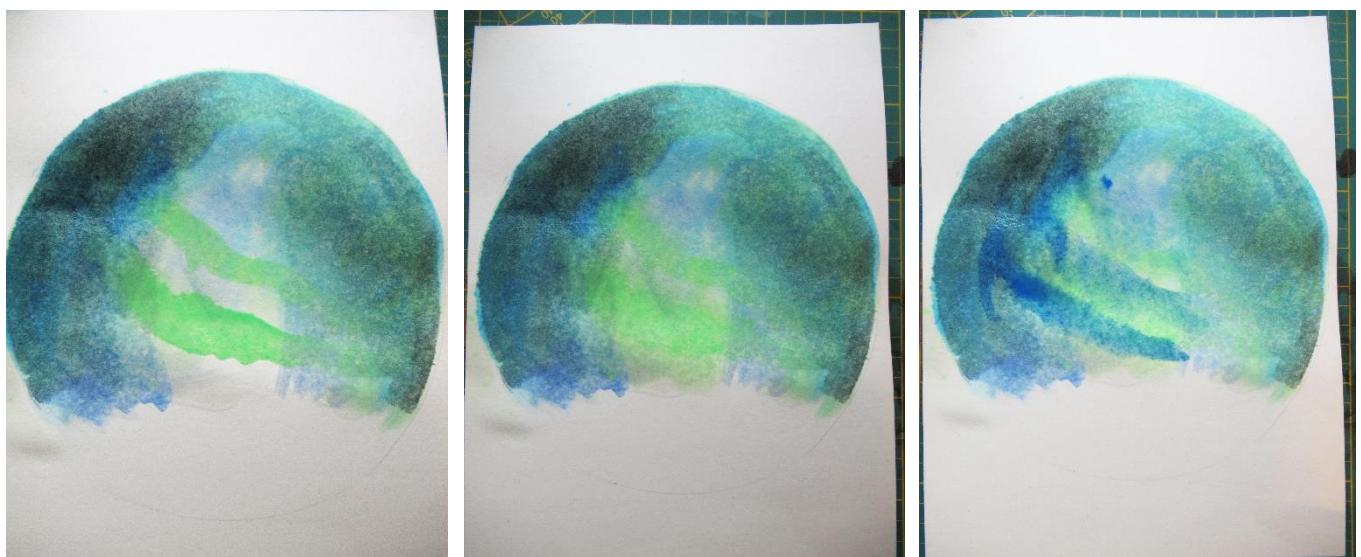


Step 1: Set up your watercolour paper by outlining the shape you'd like to fill. This can be a circle (I traced a trivet with an HB pencil), an angular shape which you can tape off with washi or masking tape, or anything you fancy - use your imagination! TIP - when using washi or masking tape, make sure to do some un-sticking first by repeatedly sticking the tape to your clothing or skin. This will ensure your tape comes off the watercolour paper without any rips!



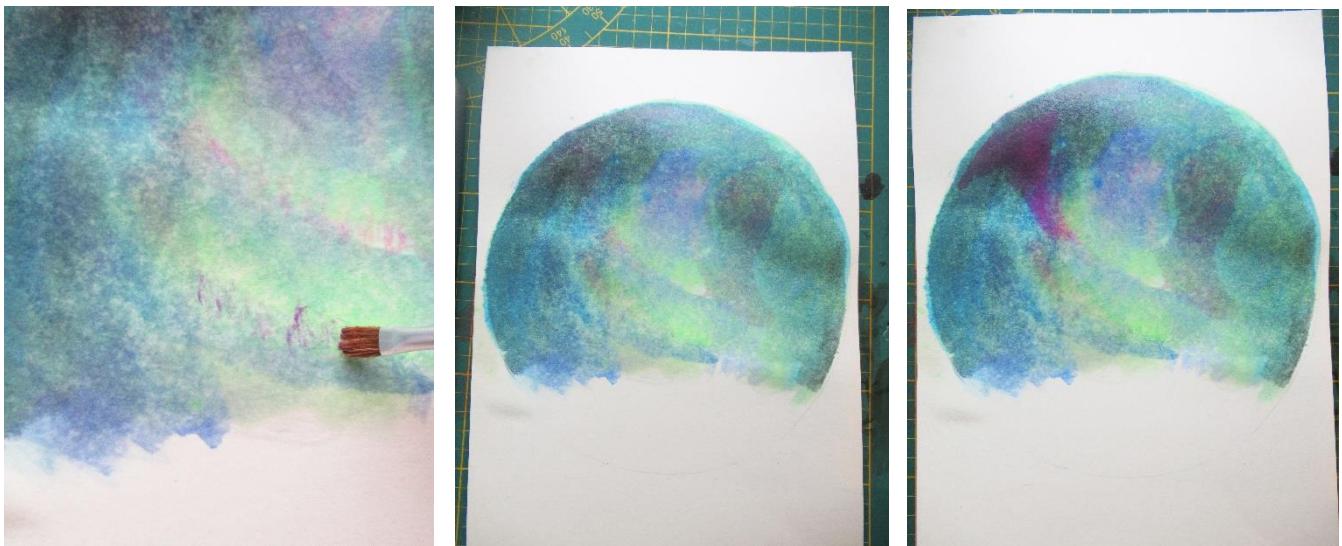
Step 2: Use a light green wash around the outer edges of whichever shape you have chosen. The space in the middle should remain lighter than the rest. Don't worry too much about the bottom as we'll cover that up later!

Step 3: Do the same thing with a light blue / turquoise colour and then a darker blue / blue-black colour. I mixed the black and blue in my palette to make a nice dark colour for the darkest shade (above right). Try to keep the paper wet so that colours will mix neatly and to avoid sharp lines. If you do want to soften lines, never fear! Just add some more water and use a tissue to blend.

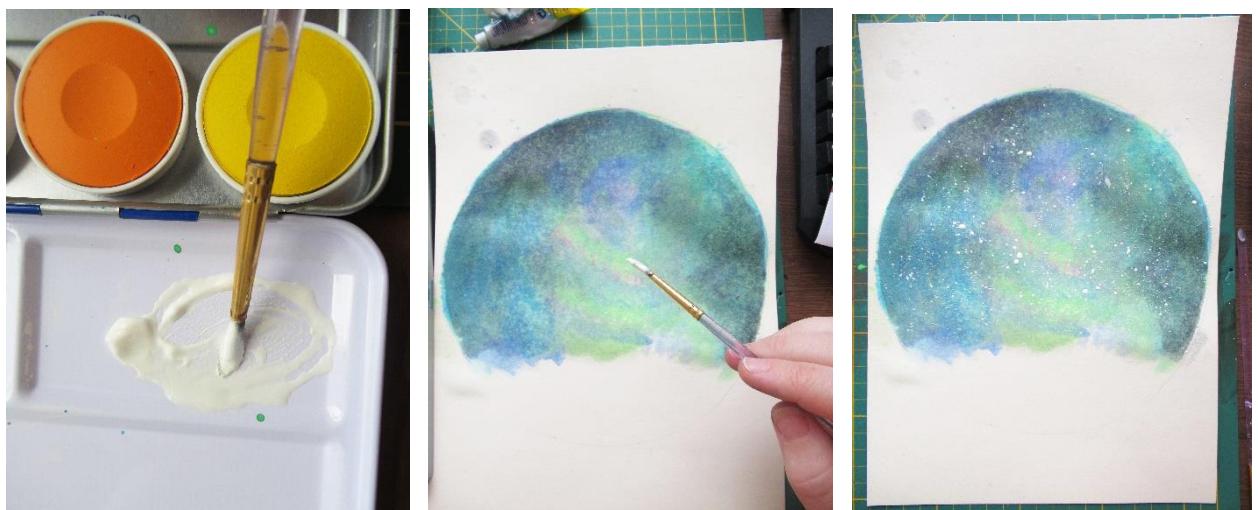


Step 4: Use a light green to add some stripes, softening the edges with a tissue. These could also be bright pink or purple, have a look at some photographs of the aurora and you'll see an amazing range of coloured stripes to inspire you.

Step 5: Add some darker blue or green underneath the lighter stripes you just painted. Use a tissue to blend these out in the same way. This will create some dimension to the stripes and bring them to life.

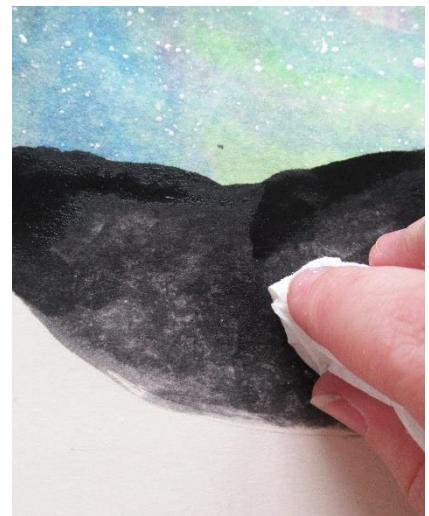


Step 6: Add some purple into the darker areas, again, for added dimension. Feel free to experiment with different colours as well - there are no rules! Make sure to blend with water and tissue as you go to maintain the smooth effect. I added some much dryer pink and purple paint to my stripes (above, far right) and dabbed them with a tissue to soften the edges.



Step 7: Mix some white acrylic paint with water until it is about the texture of runny cream. Make sure you get a good amount on your paint brush, hold the paint brush over your painting with one hand and tap it gently with the other hand. This will splatter some lovely white stars onto your night sky! Try to stay within the outline you have created for yourself and move the brush to different areas to get an even spread of white dots.

If you get a particularly large splodge or one you don't like, use your clean finger or some tissue to gently dab the area and blend it away. One of the best things about watercolours is they are very forgiving! Leave your background to dry before moving onto the next step.



Step 8: Moving onto the silhouette portion of the painting, use your black paint to draw an horizon line that appeals to you. I like having a little flat area towards the middle to put an animal but it's all up to the artist! Continue to paint the slower part of your shape, adding more water to create a gradient keeping in mind it doesn't have to be perfect. Use a tissue to blend or dry where necessary.



Step 9: Using a fine brush, start painting your trees. Use a straight downwards stroke to create the trunk then, holding the brush loosely, gently paint back and forth horizontally to create the branch strokes. I tried to make my trees skinnier at the top and wider at the bottom but like paintings, trees come in all different shapes and sizes!

If you're feeling adventurous, try adding an additional gradient to the black land section (above right) by painting a darker black line across the landscape and adding water as you did in the first layer.

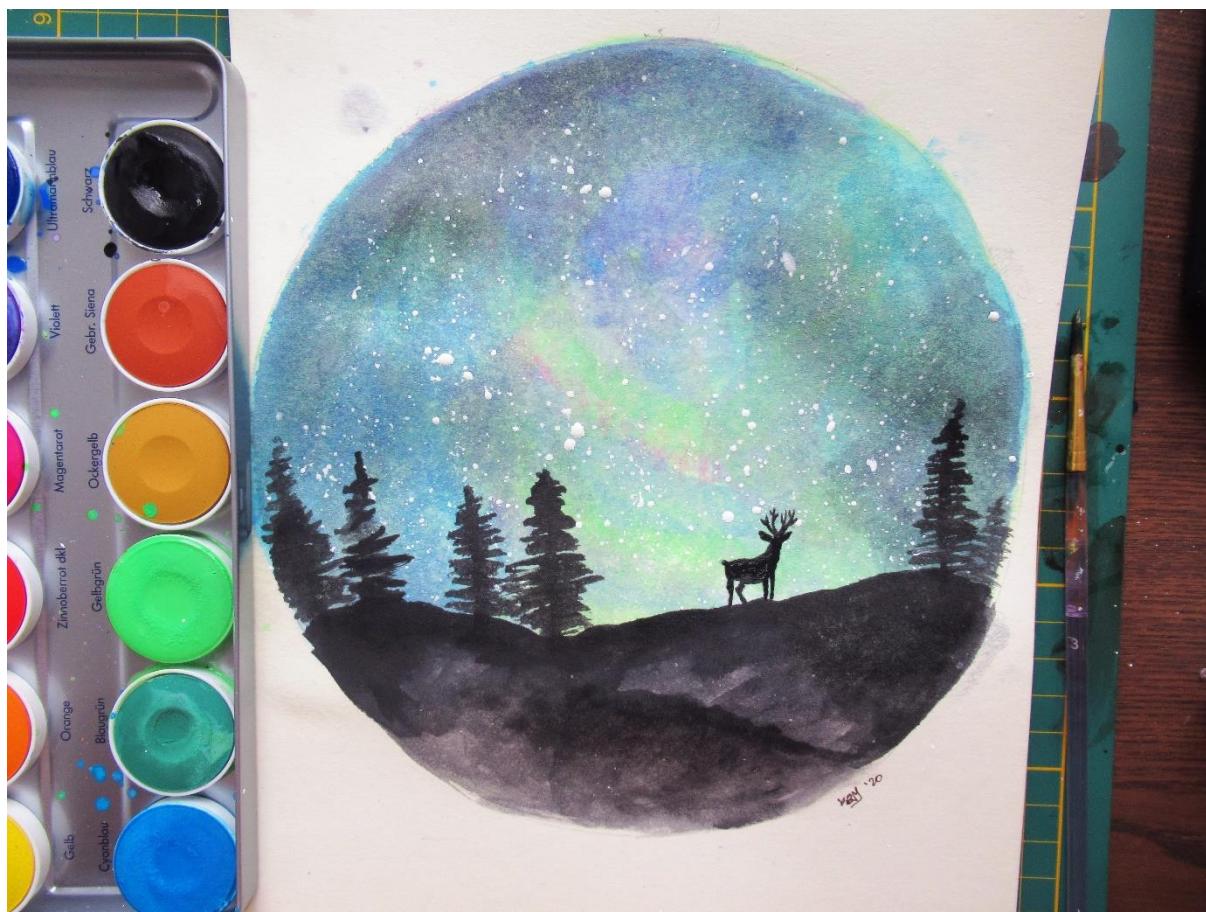


Step 10: Almost there! If you would like to add a little animal silhouette (who wouldn't?!) then now's the time. A quick google search should show you a few or there are some royalty-free options in the 'Resources' section at the bottom of this post. Try to pick animals that would live in the Arctic or Antarctic, or even go for something mythical - artist's choice! For this example I chose a deer which I gently sketched out in HB pencil before using an extra fine brush to fill it in with black acrylic paint. I found acrylic gave me the strength of colour and sharp outline I wanted but watercolour could achieve the same effect.

And *voila!* You have yourself a beautiful landscape watercolour painting! Don't forget to sign and date it when you are finished, I promise you will love knowing exactly when you painted your masterpiece when you look back in the future.



Bonus Step: If your painting is looking a bit wobbly (even watercolour paper can warp), there are some things you can do. While I'm told you can use an iron (please be careful!), my favourite method involves spraying the back of the paper with a little bit of water, covering with a towel and placing some heavy books on top. Make sure you put a blank piece of paper underneath your painting to protect it - normal printer paper is fine - and leave for a few hours or as long as it takes. I find this doesn't flatten my work completely but definitely makes gets rid of the biggest wobbles.



And there you have it! A great watercolour project for beginners and experienced painters alike.

If you have used this tutorial for yourself or your class, please tag me on Instagram!

[@kats_crafternoon_delight_](https://www.instagram.com/kats_crafternoon_delight_)

Or feel free to email me at:

kats.crafternoon.delight@gmail.com

©Katrina Marshall 2020

Not for commercial use.