

My dearest watercolourists,

I loved how excited you were about creating our first Christmas Card so the wait is over! Let's start our first design!

You will need your watercolour paints, some watercolour paper, one very thin brush and one medium brush, fresh water and optional salt and cotton.

Before I begin talking about last Monday's session I want to remind you that our next designs are created collaboratively by us all. So I invite you to send me images of cards that inspire you or elements that you find lovely in a Christmas or winter card; maybe you created a card or receive one that you might want to recreate or redesign. I will gather all the images, and during our zoom call, we can all go through them and chose elements or designs that we like. I am looking forward to receiving your images!

Now, back to our clumsy snowman card. I thought a clumsy and pretty well tangled snowman is an appropriate representation of this unusual year.



Start by folding your paper

I sketched the design for my Christmas card in pencil on a separate piece of paper. Once I was happy with the image it was time to transfer over to a blank watercolour paper and create the outlines.

Place the composition in the centre of your folded paper allowing some space for your handwritten note.

The way I approach this image is similar to all the previous compositions we have created. I use watered down paint to make a rough sketch. I sketch the snowman and the letterbox, aiming for one element to be taller than the other, as keeping them perfectly symmetric may not look as visually pleasing. The letterbox is a tube with a lid and the snowman is formed of three progressively larger circles! Nice and easy. Reflecting back, it may have been a better idea to use watered down blue to sketch the snowman and red for the letterbox. I recommend you try that instead.



Next, add a few more details, such as a pan to serve as our snowman's hat and some snow to cover up the top of the letterbox. Also add some wavy lines to suggest the ground being covered by snow.



Once you are happy with your composition, we will add the background. Use watered down blue and spread it in either an oval shape or from you paper's edge to edge depending on your personal taste. Use your larger brush. We experimented with sprinkling salt on top. That should then look like it was snowing. This step had various degrees of success.

If you feel adventurous, try applying your layer of thin blue then sprinkle salt on top. The salt should absorb the pigment and the water leaving you with a delicate dust-like pattern. However, there are variables involved here, such as how absorbent your paper is, how large the salt crystals are and how pigmented the layer of paint is. After you apply the salt you need to wait for the layer to dry then dust the salt away- maybe over a sink. This is a bit of a messy job and at the end you may not fully like the effect or it may not fully work. You might like to try it out first on a separate piece of paper and, if you experiment is successful, move over to the main card. If not, you can skip the salt altogether. If you would still like to add some pattern to your background, you could use a cotton bud and randomly stamp it to suggest a less uniform background.



Next, begin to fill in the letterbox with a thin layer of red. Using the same red paint the snowman's hat.



Now I have a confession to make, I do not know for what reason, but I was utterly convinced that the top of the letterbox is not red, but black. So in this creative-imaginative and fictive wintery scene my top of the letterbox is black. My partner had one look at the card and asked why the top isn't red. After I explained that he is, of course, wrong, I did check and letterboxes have of course, red tops. So oops! Let's say for this card I indulged in the black-top-letterbox artistic liberty.

Anyway back to work!

If you would also like to paint the tops black, please join me. But you shouldn't stop here, if you want this image to have any other colours please do play around and express your creativity! Your letterbox can be any colour you would like! You can also always add more to this compositions. Maybe a robin on top of either the letterbox or the snowman or any other element!

There is no right colour, nor right way of approaching this image. As long as you enjoy the process and the result, you are on the right path!

If you want to fully reference the real live letterboxes, paint them red altogether. Remember to use a thin layer at this stage.



Let's give our snowman some arms! Use your thin brush now. We have been working on painting branches and trees for a while now and we all know the drill. Nice thin and fluid lines which are wider at the base and thinner at the top. They diverge into thinner and shorter lines that are also wider at the base and thinner at the tips.

At this stage we can also add the fairy lights line tangled around the letterbox.

As I mentioned before, I do not normally recommend using black out of the tube or box, instead, for darker colours, you can use some brown mixed with a tiny drop of black or even purple mixed with a drop of black. You will be left with a softer, more complex colour that is not overpowering.



Using the same colour continue to tangle the line around the snowman's branches.

You can also think about your snowman's facial expression here. The snowman can be jolly and excited, by adding a smile formed of dark dots- suggesting coal. Or he can be surprised, maybe furious, maybe confused. You can play around with the atmosphere and message you want to send.

In the spirit of this year, my snowman is confused.



Next the proper fun begins! You are still using the thin brush here! Decorate the line with multi-coloured lights. Before you do start please make sure the underlayers are dry! The lights can be in a circular, almond, oval or star shape. They can have all the same size or be different. You can have a systematic pattern of applying colour or just have fun and play it by ear... or artistic eye.

Once you finished decorating the line, using your thin brush, saturate it with red and not too much water and fill in the letterbox. Now, make sure you bring the red close to the lights but leave a few millimetres gaps around the bulbs.

Allow this to dry and then use a totally clean brush with no colour, and disperse the colour around the lights. This will create a slow diffusion of the red suggesting that the lights are on.



Using your medium brush with plenty of water and some blue, add some dimension to your snowman. Add colour to suggest roundness and reinforce the outline.

Ta-daaaa! Your painting is ready! Let it dry completely before adding your handwritten message to frame the card!



I hope you enjoyed this and will give it a try. Let me know what you think!

Kindest,

Ioana