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Learn More About Watercolor Painting Courses

Dreaming of turning your watercolor hobby into something more substantial? Given the right market, knowledge base, and determination, becoming a professional painter is possible.

An Overview of Watercolor Careers

Like anything in today's commercial world, watercolor painting has a marketable appeal that enables driven professionals to earn a living by the brush. Because watercolor is, first and foremost, a fine art, related careers fit within the design industry. These careers often involve working independently of corporate employers, offering creative freedom in exchange for self-employment taxes.

While watercolor painters earn lower-than-average wages (\$53,000 yearly according to BLS.gov), successful artists know tricks to raise their earnings. For example, many supplement their salaries by producing graphic designs, teaching, or selling art materials.

Fine Artist Career

In contrast to other design professionals, Fine Artists create art purely for its aesthetic, expressive, and rhetorical value. They may work with any art medium, including watercolor. The avenues for making money as a Fine Artist are numerous and include:

- Selling original paintings and prints (at live art events or e-commerce markets like Etsy and ArtPal).
- Completing client commissions.
- Lending work to galleries.
- Collecting payments in exchange for rights to their work.
- Winning art awards.

Although some Fine Artists work for commercial studios, 55% are self-employed. This status allows them to choose their work hours and projects. Currently, the job outlook for Fine Artists and Illustrators is similar to other occupations, at 4% annually (BLS.gov).

Watercolor Illustrator Career

Illustrators produce original artwork intended to elucidate concepts and convey stories for books, magazines, and digital media. Watercolor illustrations are also popular in fashion and stationery design. Though many Illustrators work with ink or software, many emphasize watercolor pigments. Some Illustrators maintain full-time work for specific publishing companies, but 71% are self-employed part-timers.

Art Instructor Career

Art Instructors are educators who impart artistic skills to students. They can specialize in any art medium (including watercolor) and may work in a range of settings. Teachers may participate in traditional education roles at schools, community centers, or local studios. Alternatively, they can operate an independent teaching business from their

home or a rented office space. Their classes may involve groups, solo students, and learners of all ages.

Art Instructor salaries vary broadly. Those working in universities and trade schools earn around \$84,000, while those employed in high schools match America's average at \$65,000 (franklin.edu).

Pigment, Brush, or Paper Maker Career

Despite the widespread belief that art is reaching the end of its wick, the watercolor paint manufacturing market is growing by 5%, an annual increase typical of most other industries in the US. Put simply, the demand for painting supplies and materials is growing. For watercolorists, this means it's possible to build a career making custom pigments, brushes, and paper for other artists.

Medium makers are often employed by traditional manufacturers, but may also run independent businesses. Those who do can find success opening a local store and marketing their products to retailers. In addition, e-commerce makers' markets such as Etsy also offer a flexible way to sell handmade art supplies.

America's Top Watercolor Markets

Those open to remote opportunities can build a watercolor career from any location. For in-person jobs, however, some locations offer more opportunities than others. Cities currently leading the US in watercolor art include NYC, Santa Fe, and San Francisco. These metros each cherish long-standing artistic histories and sustain prominent commercial art markets.

New York City, NY

When asked to name the country's top art destination, most Americans will choose the Big Apple. Alongside a thriving art market, NYC encompasses many organizations (like the American Watercolor Society) that are designed to support independent artists. The city's active art community prioritizes networking (facilitated by artist collectives).

Housing 26% of art institutions in America, NYC has the most concentrated museum network of any American city. In total, the city encompasses 1,400 art galleries centralized in the Lower East Side and Chelsea. While these galleries predominantly feature oil paintings and abstract art, many specifically highlight watercolor artists. NYC also has a considerable population of high-net-worth collectors, making it an ideal location to sell and auction original paintings.

Additionally, NYC has a sizable illustration and design market. As a top US fashion hub, Manhattan has a need for Fashion illustrators to support retailers and Fashion designers. NYC's large publishing industry also generates demand for illustrations for children's books, textbooks, adult trade books, and other print works. Due to digitization, NYC also has an increased need for Illustrators to create art for advertising, [web design](#), and tech projects.

The most successful NYC artists hit it big by fiercely competing for top-dollar commissions and gallery representation. Key watercolor employers include:

- Education Providers include the School of Visual Arts, the Art Students League, and community arts and recreation programs.
- Galleries like Agora Gallery and Blue Mountain Gallery.
- Auction Houses like Christie's.
- Publishing and media outlets like HarperCollins, Penguin Random House, and *The New Yorker*.

- Fashion and design companies like Kora Rae Clothing, Ralph Lauren, and Mood Fabrics.
- Tech and marketing startups like G5 Entertainment and Grim Pandas Software.

New York City Artist Salaries

To counter high living costs, NYC's watercolor professionals typically earn over 11% more than in other areas. The chart below illustrates typical incomes (USD) for several watercolor roles as they differ between NYC and the rest of the US.

Job Title	Average Annual Salary, NYC	US Average
Fine Artist	\$38,000-86,000 Ziprecruiter.com	\$35,000-79,000 Ziprecruiter.com
Illustrator	\$35,000-67,000 Ziprecruiter.com	\$44,000-69,000 Indeed.com
Art Instructor	\$55,000-67,000 Glassdoor.com	\$46,000-58,000 Glassdoor.com

Watercolor salaries start on the lower end of this spectrum; for this reason, many entry-level watercolor artists augment their incomes by teaching or juggling another part-time job.

Santa Fe, NM

Notwithstanding its small geographical size and population, Santa Fe is America's third biggest art market (surpassed only by NYC and Los Angeles). This achievement is made

possible by the city's two-million-visitor tourism industry, which feeds local galleries with wealthy art collectors. On Canyon Road, where the city's most prestigious galleries congregate, paintings often sell for over \$10,000. Outside of selling at galleries like Shades of Blue Art Gallery and Adobe Gallery, the second most lucrative way for Santa Fe's watercolorists to make money is at events such as the Santa Fe Indian Market.

The city also offers a solid commission market. Santa Fe's art-conscious business owners often forfeit cheap throwaway art in favor of decorating their hotels, spas, and other business spaces with locally made art. Artists interested in teaching watercolor painting also find opportunities through providers like the Santa Fe Community College, the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, and the Institute of American Indian Arts.

In general, local watercolorists agree that Santa Fe buyers are amenable to watercolor. This city's storied art history emphasizes paintings featuring Native Americans and Southwestern landscapes. Even today, watercolor paintings that highlight New Mexican culture, pueblos, and desert landscapes are the most popular (thematically) with buyers.

Santa Fe Artist Salaries

Coupled with a collaborative work culture, Santa Fe's low living costs make full-time art careers an attainable dream. Artists in Santa Fe share studios and take advantage of public art spaces to cut costs and keep more of their profits. These profits usually outperform other American cities by roughly 15%, with gallery-sponsored Artists capable of earning over \$240,000 annually. Often fluctuating drastically based on monthly demand, the most common salary ranges (USD) for local Artists are as follows:

Job Title	Average Annual Salary, Santa Fe
Fine Artist	\$60,000-79,000 Glassdoor.com
Art Instructor	\$46,000-57,000 Glassdoor.com
Illustrator	\$55,000-73,000 Glassdoor.com

San Francisco, CA

Serving as both a tech center and art hub with a famed history, SF offers watercolorists opportunities in both domains. The city's sturdy traditional art market encompasses numerous galleries with an interest in watercolors (examples include Berggruen and Haines Gallery). Mural art created to mimic the style of watercolor is also popularly commissioned in downtown locations throughout SF.

Meanwhile, tech-forward cryptobuyers seek out digital and NFT art, including minted watercolor scans. Additionally, local tech companies frequently request paintings as business decor or embed watercolor illustrations in apps.

Concept Illustrators play an essential role in digital animation companies such as Pixar (located in Emeryville). Design and marketing agencies also provide temporary illustration roles covering specific projects.

Local artists frequently supplement earnings by teaching at the City College of SF, the Walt Disney Family Museum, and other education providers. Additionally,

watercolorists work in community roles through the San Francisco Arts Commission and artist-in-residence programs.

San Francisco Artist Salaries

Accounting for high demand and living costs, SF-based artists earn 74% above average. Animation Concept Artists are the highest earners. Popular job titles and their most common salary ranges are listed below (USD).

Job Title	Average Annual Salary, San Francisco
Illustrator	\$54,000-92,000 Ziprecruiter.com
Concept Artist	\$146,000-162,000 Ziprecruiter.com
Fine Artist	\$49,000-103,000 Ziprecruiter.com
Art Instructor	\$60,000-74,000 Glassdoor.com

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Alexandra Malouf is a content writer and editor with over a decade of experience. Her content writing emphasizes topics like web design, data analytics, coding, and graphic design. From Brigham Young University, she attained a bachelor's degree in English with

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