VOLHA BELEVETS

FREE CREATIVE GUIDE

FROM BLOT TO FORM



The Art of Letting Go

Simple Watercolor Exercises for a Freer, More Expressive Painting

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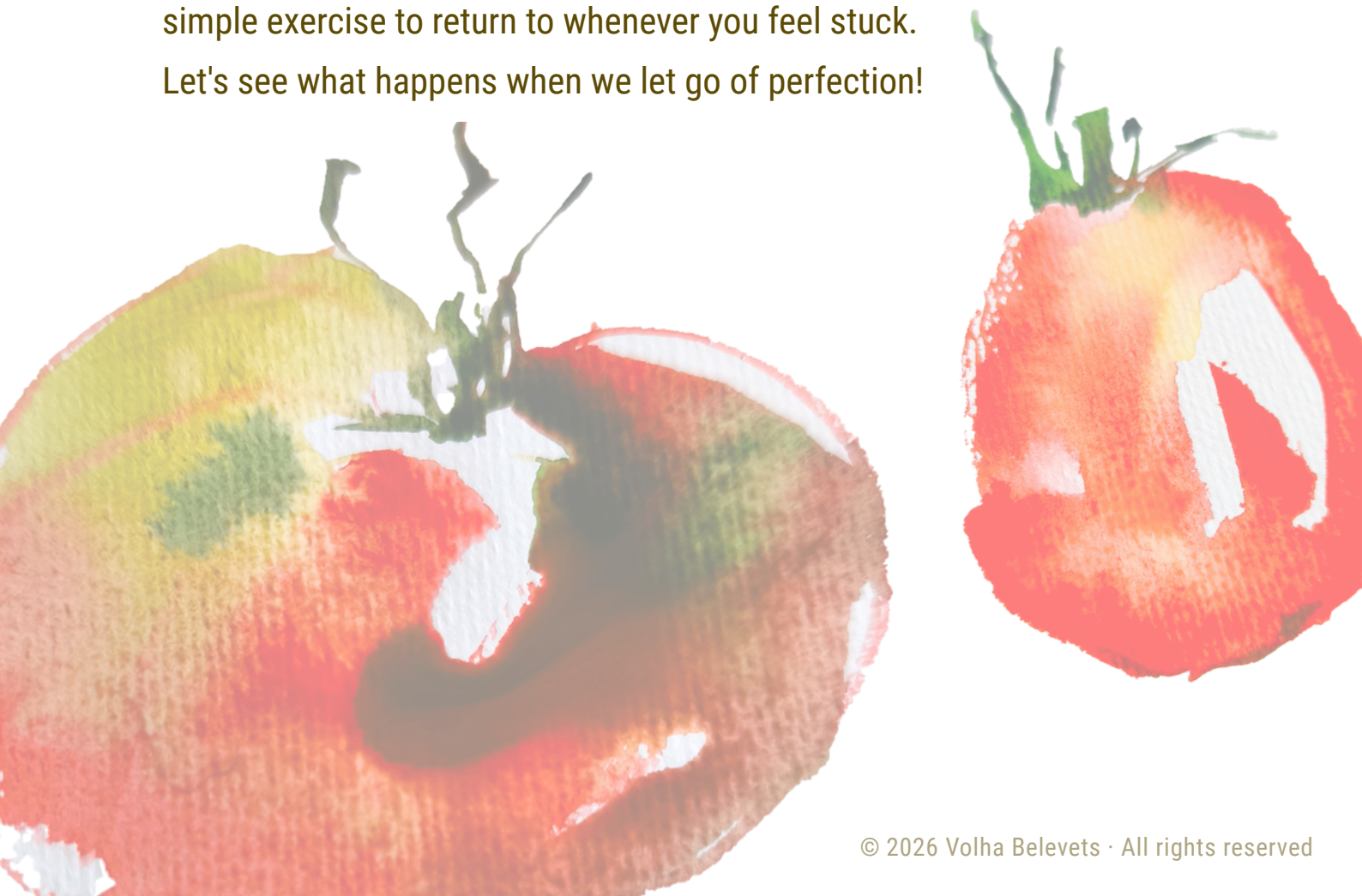
Welcome! I'm Volha.

This isn't a traditional step-by-step watercolor tutorial.
I'm not here to show you how to paint perfect tomatoes. I'd rather share how I think, experiment, and make creative decisions while painting.
Why I choose certain brushes and colors. Why I leave some shapes unfinished. Why I sometimes add bold pencil lines over delicate watercolor washes.
And why I believe a little imperfection can make a painting more expressive.
In this guide, we'll explore a few simple exercises together. You'll discover how spontaneous brushstrokes can become lively shapes — without trying to control every detail.
By the end, you'll have your own page of watercolor experiments and a simple exercise to return to whenever you feel stuck.
Let's see what happens when we let go of perfection!



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What You'll Need

Paper

Watercolor paper, ideally 270–300 gsm. A sketchbook works perfectly well.

WHY do I prefer cellulose paper?
I love the unpredictable blooms, edges, and textures it can create. Cotton paper often gives softer, more controlled transitions, but for these playful experiments, I prefer the way paint behaves on cellulose.





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Brushes

A large round brush, at least 8 mm in diameter. Semi-synthetic, Kolinski, or squirrel hair bristles.

WHY do I choose this brush?
I want a brush that can create a lively, expressive shape in a single stroke. My favorite is a semi-synthetic calligraphy brush — it holds a good balance of water and pigment and responds beautifully to the movement of my hand.

Colored pencils

Watercolor pencils or very soft colored pencils in three shades: bright warm red, deep cool red, and dark green.

WHY pencils?
They let me add sharp accents, energy, and a little chaos to soft watercolor shapes. I can emphasize just a few details without painting everything.

Palette & water

A palette for mixing paint and water, plus a container of clean water.

WHY a white ceramic palette?
I love small white ceramic dishes. They make it easy to see the true colors and mix paint with water evenly. But any simple white saucer will do.

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Watercolors

Scarlet red, burgundy, dark yellow, orange and olive green.

WHY so few colors?
I love working with a limited palette in my sketches. It's simpler, faster, and often more expressive. Fewer colors mean fewer decisions — and more freedom to paint!

AND FINALLY… A COUPLE OF TOMATOES!

Grab a couple of tomatoes from your fridge.

WHY real tomatoes?
To observe their shapes, colors, highlights, and shadows. Real tomatoes have character — they're rarely perfectly round or symmetrical.
And when you're done painting, you can eat them. Nothing goes to waste!



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Let's Start with a Blot!

STEP 1 — Let the Brush Move

I start with loose, rounded brushstrokes, varying the pressure as I move my hand. Sometimes I press harder to create a broad, juicy mark, then lift the brush to leave a lighter, thinner stroke.
I don't try to follow the exact shape of a tomato. I let my movements stop unexpectedly, leaving gaps, unfinished edges, and untouched white paper.

WHY?
Because I want to capture the character of the shape, not copy its outline.
I love the spontaneity of these imperfect brushstrokes. They make the painting feel fresh and alive.
There's no need to complete the shape now. I'll suggest its form later with a few loose lines.









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STEP 2 — Let the Pencils Bring the Shape to Life

Once the watercolor is dry, I pick up my colored pencils.
I start with a few loose lines to suggest the tomato's shape and stem. I don't follow the watercolor edges exactly. Sometimes my lines go beyond the painted area, sometimes they cross it, sometimes leaving small areas of white paper between the line and the painted shape.
Then I add expressive hatching, following the rounded surface of the tomato.
I use brighter reds to intensify the color on the part of the tomato facing me, and darker shades to deepen selected areas on the shadow side.

WHY?
I love the contrast between soft watercolor washes and bold, energetic pencil marks.
The loose outlines give the shape more volume and movement, while the hatching adds depth, texture, and character.
I don't want to describe every detail or cover all the watercolor with pencils. I want the two materials to work together, each keeping its own character.





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TRY IT YOURSELF
With your brush и With your pencils

Play with the pressure, direction, and length of your strokes. Let some movements stop before the shape is complete.
Don't go back to fill every gap. Leave something unfinished — we'll come back to it with pencils!

Let your pencil lines wander a little beyond the watercolor edges. Vary the pressure and direction of your hatching.
Don't try to fix every imperfect shape. Use your pencils to make it more interesting!
And remember — you don't have to finish every line to make a shape feel complete.






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Let's Play with Composition!

STEP 1 — Start with Color and Shape

Now I bring several tomatoes together on one page.
I start with loose watercolor blots, varying their sizes, shapes, and colors. Some are large, others small. Some are bright and saturated, while others are soft and almost transparent.
I let some shapes overlap and the colors flow into each other. I leave white spaces and unfinished edges.

WHY?
I don't want a collection of identical, perfectly round tomatoes. I want variety, rhythm, and movement.
Different sizes, directions, and color intensities make the composition feel more natural and alive.
I also try not to overwork the watercolor. Sometimes the most beautiful effects happen when I simply let the paint do its own thing.



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STEP 2 — Find the Forms

Once the watercolor is dry, I start adding stems and loose outlines. I look at each blot and decide what it needs. Sometimes just a few lines are enough to turn an abstract shape into a recognizable tomato. I don't always follow the painted edges. Some lines extend beyond the watercolor, while others disappear inside it.

WHY?

I want the lines to suggest the forms without making them too precise. The little gaps between the watercolor and the outlines add lightness and movement. They also leave room for the viewer's imagination.



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STEP 3 — Add the Final Pencil Marks

Now I bring in my colored pencils.
I strengthen selected areas with expressive hatching, following the rounded surfaces of the tomatoes.
I use brighter colors to emphasize some areas and darker shades to add depth and contrast.
But I don't hatch every tomato. Some need just a few strokes, while others stay almost untouched.

WHY?

I want to create a balance between detailed and unfinished areas.
If everything is equally bright, dark, or detailed, nothing really stands out.
By emphasizing some shapes and leaving others quiet, I can guide the viewer's eye through the composition.
And I love the contrast between soft watercolor and bold, sometimes slightly chaotic pencil marks.



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A Few Final Thoughts

I hope these little experiments have encouraged you to paint more freely. For me, sketching isn't about creating a perfect picture. It's about exploring shapes, colors, textures, and unexpected possibilities.
I love combining materials because each one brings something different to the painting. Watercolor gives me spontaneity, while pencils help me add energy, contrast, and character.
And the more I experiment, the less afraid I become of making mistakes. So don't worry if your tomatoes look different from mine. They should! Try different brushstrokes, change the colors, let the paint flow, and see what happens.
Sometimes a painting needs another bold line. Sometimes it needs nothing at all.
The real freedom is knowing that you don't have to control everything.

Keep experimenting, and enjoy the process!

This is just the beginning of From Blot to Form.
I'm working on more creative exercises to explore color, shape, composition, and the freedom of combining different materials.
Follow my creative journey on YouTube and Instagram — and stay tuned for what's coming next!

Volha

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