

Painting with Acrylics

Acrylics are a great medium for artists of all styles and abilities.

Acrylic paint is made with pigment, binder (an acrylic binder emulsion) and water. It is a by-product of the plastics industry and cleans up with water.

It is available in tubes and jars and bottles of various sizes. It comes in both student and higher quality (professional) artist grade.

The colour range is wide across the brands. In addition to the basic colours, you can also buy interference paints (shimmer paints that change colour depending on the angle of the light), iridescent (colours containing mica), metallic, and fluorescent and other novelty effects such as glitter and three-dimensional paints with nozzles.

Artists choose acrylics for all styles of painting. It is possible, with addition of mediums to emulate both oil painting and watercolour effects in acrylics. All styles of painting and subject matter are possible with acrylics. It's also quite common for artists to combine it with other media such as watercolour, oils and pastels. Note that acrylic cannot be painted over oils, but oils may be painted over acrylics.

Acrylic is a very versatile medium. It can be painted opaquely as well as transparently; thickly or thinly. Because it dries quickly, it is possible to make changes easily and to apply multiple layers of paint without concern about dissolving the previous

one. In addition, acrylic is virtually odourless, waterproof once dry and it won't crack or yellow with age.

The rapid rate of drying means that plein air painting (painting outdoors), painting wet-into-wet (painting on still-wet paint); blending the edges between areas of colour and keeping paint from drying on your brushes is a challenge.



Acrylics can be painted onto most surfaces. Currently stretched canvas is the most popular support. The introduction of more economical pre-stretched clean-edge canvases (no staples are visible), which are available in a wide range of sizes, and several shapes, means that the finished paintings can be effectively displayed without the additional cost of framing. However, canvas panels, loose canvas, and even paper are also used. Fewer people are bothering to paint on thinline particleboard, which still needs to be sealed and primed before it is ready for use. It is possible to paint on almost any surface with acrylics, provided they are given the preparation appropriate to material used.

Acrylics dry to a flat, eggshell finish. However acrylic mediums can be added to the paint to produce a range of consistencies and finishes, and to give colours brilliance and depth. A medium will help thinly diluted paint maintain its adhesion and improve its flow and 'brushability'. Somemediums

can be used to retard the drying rate of the paint.

Mediums should not be used as a final varnish to protect completed paintings. A layer of acrylic medium picks up as much dirt as paint, but cannot be removed for cleaning. Paintings should be protected with a removable varnish, which can be replaced.

Acrylic and its mediums have powerful adhesive properties and can be used to attach papers and other objects to a painting or collage. Interesting effects can be achieved by adding other materials e.g. crushed eggshell, marble dust etc to the paint and either brush or knife the mixture onto the painting surface.

Some techniques you may like to try include **blending** (merging the edges of adjacent areas of colour); **glazing** thin layers of paint so that the base colours show through; **dry brush** (loading a dry brush with paint for a rough stroke); **impasto** and **knife painting**; **scumbling** (an uneven application of a light semi-opaque colour over a darker layer of dry, opaque paint); **creating texture** with old credit cards, forks, combs sponges and wallpaper paste spreaders; **sgraffito** (scraping through one layer of paint to expose the previous layer); and pouring and dripping.

Other supplies you will want are suitable brushes, palette and painting knives and a palette. Your choice of brush will be a personal matter – but the general rule of thumb is to choose the largest brushes your painting will handle – this makes painting easier. Hog bristle brushes are great for all dry brush techniques such as scumbling where a filbert is the easiest to use. For

applying washes choose a wide brush. For detailed painting, one of the synthetic brushes, which have been developed for use with acrylics, are best. They allow you to create a painted effect relatively free from brush marks, and to complete areas of fine detail.

Pallettes are again a matter of personal choice. For working in a studio situation, a glass palette laid over white paper gives plenty of scope for mixing colours. It is best to lay out acrylics on a white surface to be able to correctly see the actual colours. There are also ranges of plastic palettes available, which allow you to both mix and store unused paint for your next painting session. One of these is the stay-wet palette, which has a well in the centre in which a wet sponge is covered with a refill membrane. The moisture permeates the membrane by osmosis, keeping the paint from drying as you work. It comes with a lid to prevent further evaporation between painting sessions. Another useful palette is available with a set of small colour-keeper jars in which unused paint can be stored. The keeper jars are sold separately.

Framing of acrylics is relatively straight forward especially if the work is on canvas and a mat board is not being used. Glass is not required unless a mat board is chosen. When a work is framed – the choice is critical to the success of the work. We strongly recommend that you consult a reputable framer for advice at this stage.

Information Supplied by:

Impressions

Picture Framers & Art Supplies