



artist daily
presents

STEP BY STEP PAINTING TECHNIQUES

Learn to Paint with Free
Painting Tips on Making
Corrections, Paint Texture,
and Painting Materials

Priming & Staining

BOTH OILS AND ACRYLICS CAN BE APPLIED TO RAW CANVAS, BUT THE CANVAS WILL ABSORB THE FIRST LAYER OF PAINT, SO IT IS CUSTOMARY TO APPLY A COAT OF PRIMER. THIS ACTS AS A BARRIER BETWEEN THE PAINT AND THE CANVAS. PAPER, WHICH CAN BE USED FOR BOTH ACRYLICS AND OILS, CAN BE PRIMED IN THE SAME WAY.

Priming with Gesso

Gesso gives an inflexible, slightly absorbent surface. Traditional gesso is made by mixing whiting with warm glue size and white pigment. Black gesso is also available; another alternative is to tint acrylic gesso with black acrylic paint. Acrylic gesso has one clear advantage over traditional gesso: it is flexible, and so it can be used on stretched canvas. Smooth boards are usually given several thin coats of gesso, with each coat painted at a right angle to the previous coat. Each coat is allowed to dry and then sanded using fine-grit sandpaper before the next coat is applied. The number of coats required depends on the degree of surface smoothness desired.



1. Using a soft bristle brush, apply a layer of gesso to the surface of the board.



2. When the gesso is dry, sand the surface to remove any brushmarks.

3. Repeat steps 1–2 using brushstrokes painted at right angles to the previous ones. Always sand between coats.

Staining

it possible to work directly onto canvas without any prior sizing or priming. Acrylic paint applied to unsized canvas will soak into the surface, staining the fabric fibers; this stained layer can be sized and

Acrylic paint contains no corrosive ingredients that might degrade paper or fabric, making

then worked on in a conventional manner or worked on without sizing. Always work dark over light, allowing each stain to dry before applying the next. Too many stained paint layers will dull the colors. Raw canvas repels paint, while a flow medium added to a thin-color mix improves absorption. The support should be placed flat, or the thin paint will run. Once the paint has soaked into the fibers, it is impossible to remove, even when wet.



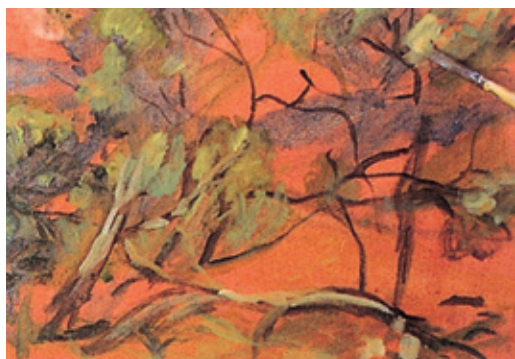
Flow medium has been added to the paint, helping the canvas to absorb the color.

Acrylic paint thinned with water alone can make pools and blobs on coarse canvas, because it sits on top rather than sinking in.

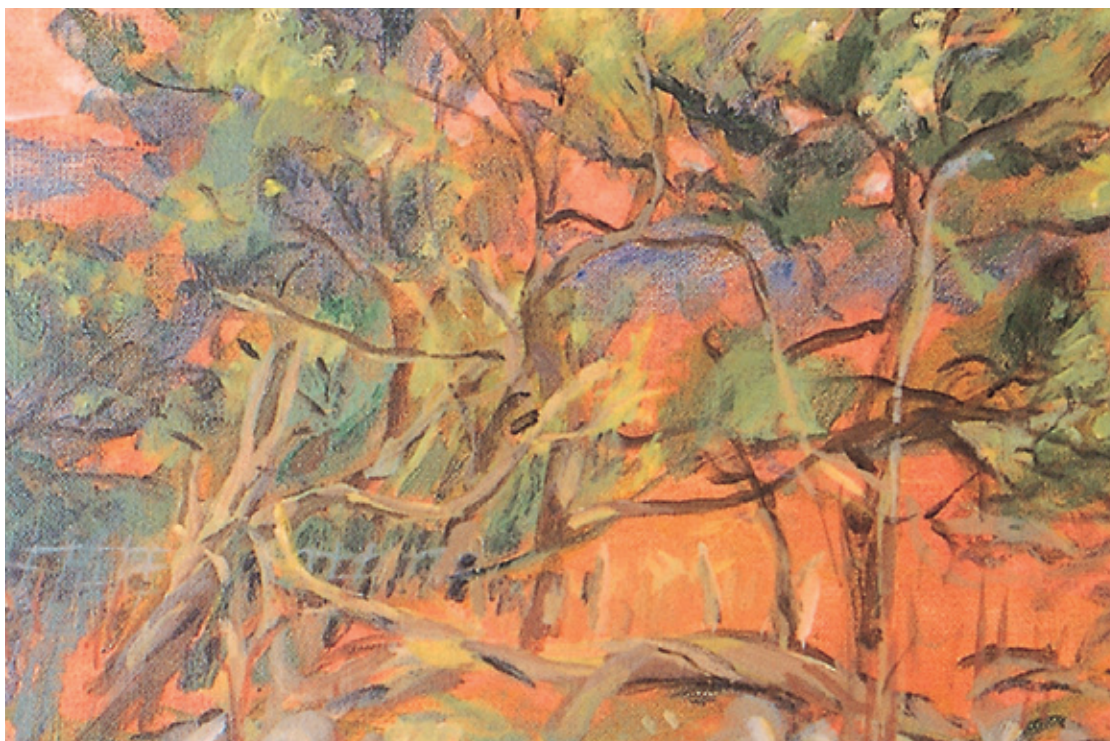
Working over a ground color



1. Because the dominant color in the painting will be green, the artist has chosen a red ground; red and green are complementary, or opposite, colors. He is working with acrylics, but the same procedure can be used for oils. He begins by painting the dark blue-green of the hills, using the color thinly so that it does not obliterate the red.



2. Next, he starts to build up the foliage with a variety of greens, using the paint unthinned. The contrast between the thin and thick paint creates an impression of space and depth, because the more full-bodied paint “advances” to the front of the picture.



3. The finished painting has a lively sense of movement, and the red-green contrast makes a strong impact.

BUILDING UP: *Oil & Acrylic*

THE PROCESS OF BUILDING UP AN OIL OR ACRYLIC PAINTING IS LARGELY AN INDIVIDUAL MATTER. SOME ARTISTS LIKE TO COVER THE CANVAS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, STARTING WITH AN UNDERPAINTING IN THIN, DILUTED PAINT THAT DRIES VERY QUICKLY. THIS ALLOWS THEM TO ESTABLISH THE MAIN BLOCKS OF TONE AND COLOR.

Whether or not you follow this practice, it is always best to begin with the broad masses, concentrating on the main areas of shape and color. If you are painting a portrait, for example, resist the temptation to begin by “drawing” lips and eyes with a small brush. These details should be added only when the main planes of the face have been established. Another golden rule is never to bring one area of the picture to completion before another. Always work over the whole surface at the same time so that you can assess one color and tone against another.



Underpainting

Sometimes known as “dead coloring,” this is one of the various methods of underpainting for oils. The composition is first sketched in thinned paint and a limited color range. When dry, thicker and more finished passages of paint are applied on top.



1. The basic shapes are rapidly but carefully established with loose brushstrokes in well-thinned paint: cobalt blue, Payne's gray, raw sienna, and cobalt violet. The white ground glows through this transparent paint.



2. Having laid the foundations of the composition, the artist begins to develop the fish by building up layers with more opaque paint. More details are defined at this stage, such as the pot handles and the markings on the backs and eyes of the fish.



3. Further definition is given to the heads, and applications of thicker paint give more definition to the dark and light areas. Other details, such as the rim and handles of the pot, are clarified.

Fat Over Lean

This is one of the basic principles of oil painting. It refers to the fact that oil paints containing a high proportion of oil should always be applied over those containing less oil; otherwise there is a danger that the painting will eventually begin to crack. Oil paint diluted with an oil medium, such as linseed or poppy oil, is referred to as being "fat," while paint diluted with turpentine or mineral spirits is known as "lean." If lean paint is applied over fat paint, the lean layer dries first, and the fat layer will contract as it dries, causing the dry paint on top to crack.



4. The transparency and wetness of the eyes are skillfully conveyed through additions of thicker, opaque paint, with the colors carefully matched to the subject.



Surface Mixing

UNLIKE PAINTS, PASTEL COLORS CANNOT BE MIXED IN A PALETTE BEFORE BEING APPLIED TO PAPER. INSTEAD THE COLORS ARE MIXED ON THE PAPER ITSELF. EVEN IF YOU HAVE AN EXTENSIVE RANGE OF PASTEL COLORS, SOME SURFACE MIXING IS ALMOST ALWAYS NECESSARY.

Surface mixing simply involves laying one color on top of another, and different effects can be achieved according to whether you blend the colors or leave them unblended. Blending will achieve a thorough, homogeneous mix, whereas an unblended mix will give a more broken impression of the resulting color. Bear in mind, however, that too much blending can muddy the colors.

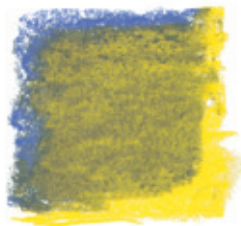
Watercolor can also be mixed on the paper, either by working wet-in-wet or overlaying colors wet-on-dry. Since you can seldom achieve great depth of color in a first wash it is customary to build up the deeper tones and colors by laying successive washes. But don't overdo this, because too many layers will muddy the colors and lose the freshness that gives the medium its appeal.

Although it is well-known that watercolors must be worked from light to dark, you can amend colors by overpainting with a lighter color, especially if you use one of the more opaque pigments. In oils and acrylic, one of the most commonly used methods of mixing or amending color on the working surface is by glazing.



Dark paper

In Rosalie Nadeau's dramatic painting, the pastel has been built up thickly, with successive overlays of color. To set the tonal key for the painting, the artist chose to work on black paper, working up from the darks to the lights.



BLENDED MIX

Here the side strokes of yellow over blue have been blended to produce a smooth application of a lively green, which is more visually exciting than a ready-made green.



UNBLENDED MIX

Line strokes of yellow over blue have been left unblended. The colors do not mix thoroughly but give the impression of green when viewed from a distance.



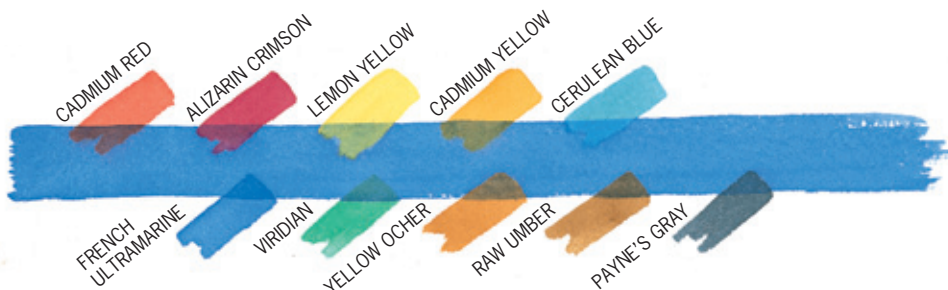
SUBTLE MIXES

To achieve soft gradations of color and subtle mixes, lay down two colors, one over the other, and rub them together with a finger or torchon.



GRADATING COLOR

To depict colors that merge gradually into one another, lay bands of color using side strokes and blend together the edges where the colors meet. This series shows the very subtle effects that can be created by blending one color into another.



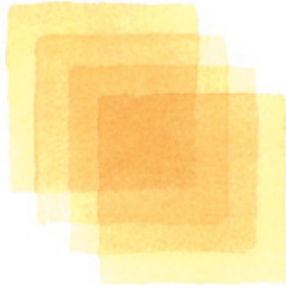
RELATIVE TRANSPARENCY

Some colors are less transparent than others. The more opaque colors in the starter palette are cerulean, lemon yellow, and yellow ocher. Any of these, used in fairly strong solution, will lighten the value of a darker color beneath.

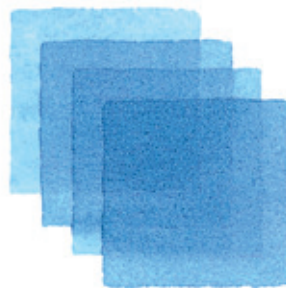
CADMIUM RED



RAW UMBER



FRENCH ULTRAMARINE



VIRIDIAN



OVERLAYING TO DARKEN COLOR

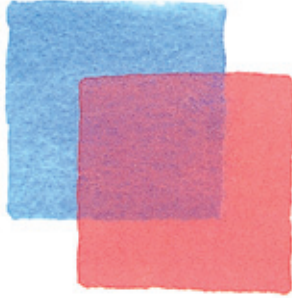
In watercolor painting, colors must always be overlaid to some extent, and the crisp edges formed are among the many charms of the medium. Make sure that the first color is completely dry and work quickly so that each new layer of color does not stir up the one below.

CERULEAN BLUE



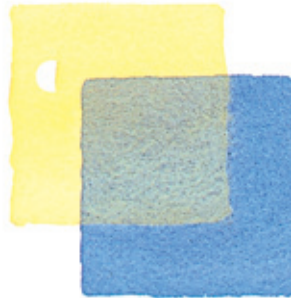
VIRIDIAN

FRENCH ULTRAMARINE



ALIZARIN CRIMSON

CADMIUM YELLOW



FRENCH ULTRAMARINE

LAYING ONE COLOR OVER ANOTHER

Although you can alter a color by laying another on top, you can't obliterate the first one; the new color will be a mixture of the two.

FRENCH ULTRAMARINE



CADMIUM YELLOW

RAW UMBER



LEMON YELLOW

PAYNE'S GRAY



YELLOW OCHRE

LIGHT OVER DARK

A light color applied over a dark one does not disappear. Although you can change the nature of an underlying color in this way, you can't significantly change its value, the lightness or darkness of the color, unless you paint over it with one of the more opaque colors.

Corrections

NOTHING IS MORE FRUSTRATING THAN DISCOVERING HALFWAY THROUGH A PAINTING THAT SOMETHING HAS GONE AWRY; MAYBE THE COLORS DON'T HARMONIZE, OR AN OBJECT IS IN THE WRONG POSITION. THANKFULLY IT IS OFTEN POSSIBLE TO PUT THINGS RIGHT. YOU SHOULD VIEW MISTAKES AS PART OF THE LEARNING CURVE.

Oil paintings are easy to correct while still wet. All you need do is scrape off paint with a palette knife and, if needed, rub down the offending area with a rag dipped into turpentine or mineral spirits. Acrylic can simply be overpainted as long as the paint has not been applied too thickly. Pastel can be corrected by brushing off as much of the top layer as possible, applying fixative, and then reworking. Take care with brushing off; if you are doing this in a selected area only, protect the rest of the painting by rough masking or you will get pastel dust where you don't want it.

Watercolor is more problematic, though corrections can be made. At an early stage you can simply wash your first washes off under cold water (the paper must be stretched for this). Small corrections can be made by lifting out, which is a technique as well as a correction method, and by overpainting with opaque white.



SCRAPING OFF WHEN WET

1. If you are disappointed with the appearance of a particular passage, it can be remedied quite easily while the paint is still fresh. Here the artist is using a palette knife to scrape away excess paint from an area that has been built up too heavily.

2. The scraped area is then wiped with a rag soaked in turpentine and is ready to be painted over. If desired, medium can be applied to the area surrounding the correction so that the new paint "takes" more easily and blends naturally with the rest of the painting. This process is known as "oiling out."

**SANDPAPERING
OIL AND ACRYLIC**

Thickly applied oil and acrylic can be smoothed down and partially removed by sanding. This may seem a bit drastic but is worth trying if you feel your painting is worth saving.



**BRUSHING OUT
WATERCOLOR**

If you think that the edge of a brushstroke is too hard or soft, and you want to achieve smooth edges, “tickle” them out with the tip of a slightly damp brush.



REMOVING PAINT

Trying to move watercolor once it has dried can be difficult, but it is possible. Once your watercolor has dried, the paint can still be re-wet and moved around or partially removed from the paper. A sponge may work better than a brush for this purpose. Bear in mind, however, that some colors cannot be completely removed because the pigment in the paint will have stained fibers in the paper.

OVERPAINTING WITH WHITE

Ragged edges can be tidied up by painting around them with white gouache paint. This is also a good way of reclaiming lost highlights.



SCRAPING OFF WHEN DRY

Small blots and blemishes are easily removed by scraping with a knife or razor blade. This must be done with care, however, or the blade might tear holes in the paper.



BLOTTING OFF

If one color floods into another to create an unwanted effect, the excess can be mopped up with a small sponge or piece of blotting paper.

Tonking

In oil painting, an area which has become clogged with too thick a paint application can be rescued by the method of tonking. This consists of laying absorbent paper over the area, smoothing it down with the palm of your hand and then gently peeling it away, lifting with it the excess pigment and producing a workable surface. You can then repaint over the area using the “ghosted” image remaining on the canvas as a guideline.

Brushwork

THE MARKS OF THE BRUSH HAVE PLAYED AN IMPORTANT PART IN OIL PAINTING SINCE FIRST TITIAN, THEN REMBRANDT, BEGAN TO EXPLOIT THEM IN CONTRAST TO THE SMOOTH SURFACES AND SUBTLE BLENDS PREFERRED BY EARLIER ARTISTS.

Brushwork can be very helpful for describing objects. For example, long, upward-sweeping marks can be used for a tree trunk, and short dabs for foliage. Brushstrokes can also simply be a means of adding interest to an area such as a sky.

The extent to which brushwork is used as an integral part of an acrylic painting depends on the artist's approach. Acrylic excels in areas of flat color. Some artists exploit this while others work in much the same way as they would in oil paints.

In watercolor work, paintings can be built up entirely in a series of flat washes, but brushmarks can also be very important in some cases; it depends on your approach. Aim at making the marks of the brush describe the shapes you are painting; foliage, for example, can usually be described in a series of one-stroke marks, as can the ripples in water. In general, the most versatile brush is the round, which, if good quality, makes a good point and can achieve varied effects from fine lines, dots, and squiggles to large shapes. You might also try flat brushes, which can be used on their sides as well as at their full width.



Varied Brushwork

This lively on-the-spot study by Jeremy Galton shows a use of brushwork that is both descriptive and expressive. In general, the strokes follow the shapes and forms of the objects, with different sizes of brush chosen according to whether thick or thin strokes are needed. But the artist has also introduced brushwork into the sky, applying the paint thickly so that little ridges of paint catch the light. Working on location is a good discipline in the context of brushwork, because you have to work fast and will instinctively find ways of letting the brush "make its mark."



USING DIFFERENT BRUSHES

1. In oil painting, bristle brushes are the most commonly used, but acrylics can also be applied with any brush that suits the purpose. Here the artist uses a soft flat brush to apply well-thinned paint.

2. (BOTTOM LEFT) Working over the first thin, transparent washes, she now applies the paint more thickly.



3. Notice how the brushwork follows the shapes and helps to describe the draperies and forms of the objects.



MARK MAKING

There is always a temptation to reach for a tiny brush when outlining shapes, but the point of a large brush gives many more varied effects.

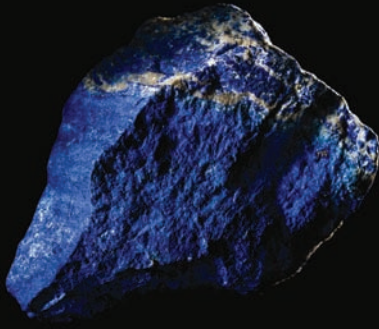
DOTS AND DABS

Here fine lines are drawn out into a series of small dots, becoming paler as the brush is progressively “starved” of paint.

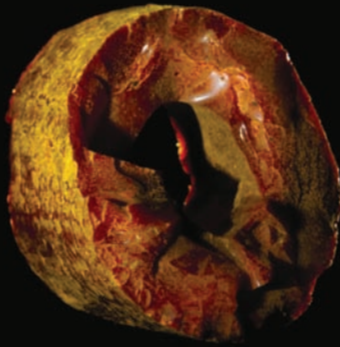


LOOSE MARKS

To avoid tight, fussy brushmarks in this watercolor painting, the brush is held near the top of the handle to encourage a looser, freer approach. Another trick is to work standing up so that you are forced to make wrist movements rather than just moving your hand.



ULTRAMARINE
January



GAMBOGE
February



INDIGO
March

Talking Colors: Pigments brought to life

To commemorate the centennial anniversary of Rembrandt artist colors, in 2012 we are telling the rich, fascinating history of some of the many select pigments we use. Artists from around the world are telling their own stories about these pigments and how they use each one to achieve their vision.

Be inspired by these stories and help inspire others with your own.

Sign up now to receive our monthly newsletter announcing new pigment stories, featured artists and chances to win great prizes and enter fun contests.

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