

# PAINTING TERMS & VOCABULARY

## Materials

### Oil Paints

Oil paint is a mix of a powdered pigment bounded with a medium of drying oil.

Linseed oil is commonly used as a carrier in oil paint. Oil paints can be mixed with linseed oil as a medium to make paints more fluid; this medium also increases glossiness and makes paint more transparent. Linseed oil comes as cold pressed, alkali refined, sun bleached, sun thickened, and polymerised (stand oil).

Traditionally, the old masters used to prepare oil paints themselves. Today, ready-made oil paints available in tubes from any art supply shop. It is possible to paint with oils without diluting them with solvents, by using brush pressure to spread the paint out thinly. In this case, oil can be used as a medium and to rinse your brushes.

There's no need to buy every oil paint available. In fact, a limited palette of few chosen paints would serve you nicely.

**Oil Painting Mediums** Oil paint can be used straight from the tube. When required to change the consistency of the paint, various mediums can be added. Mediums can dilute the paint, increase its flow, thicken the paint for impasto technique, influence the drying time, and alter the paint layer appearance, making it more transparent or opaque, gloss or matt.

**Oils** Various drying oils can be used as mediums.

**Linseed Oil** is the great all-purpose oil painting medium. It increases

transparency and adds gloss to the paint layer. Linseed oil comes in several forms: refined, cold-pressed, stand, sun-thickened, and sun-bleached oils. The cold-pressed oil is the best choice. Refined linseed oil has a drying time from 3 to 5 days. Stand oil has thicker consistency and a slower drying time. It is a good glazing medium when mixed with turpentine. Sun-thickened oil is created by exposing oil to the sun, and sun-bleached by exposing oil to the sun in air-tight container. Stand, sun-thickened, and sun-bleached linseed oils have less tendency to yellow.

**Poppyseed Oil** has a longer drying time of 5 to 7 days and gives less yellowing than linseed oil. Poppyseed oil shall be avoided in lower paint layers to prevent cracking of the top layers.

**Sunflower Oil** has similar characteristics to poppyseed oil.

## Solvents

Solvents or diluents can be mixed with paint to change the oil paint consistency. All solvents evaporate completely while the paint is drying. Solvents are also good for cleaning brushes and palettes. Solvents are also used for dissolving resins. All solvents are harmful and some are flammable, and should be only used in well-ventilated studios.

**Turpentine** The Artist Quality Turpentine is one of the widely used diluents. It is a natural product, completely colorless and evaporates fast. It's super stinky!

**Mineral Spirits** Mineral spirits are produced from petroleum, have a bit slower evaporation rate, and are less expensive than turpentine. Mineral spirits, odourless spirits, and white spirits are all harmful regardless of the smell. A good non-toxic, non-flammable substitute is the Zest-it thinner.

**Liquins** Liquin is an alkyd-based medium and is included in our kit. Several kinds of liquins are available: Liquin Original, Liquin Fine Detail,

Liquin Light Gel, Liquin Impasto, and Liquin Oleopasto. Liquins are self-sufficient mediums and do not need to be mixed with oils or mineral spirits.

**Liquin Original** is the all-purpose medium that speeds up drying time, improves the paint flow and reduces brush strokes. **Liquin Fine Detail** gives gloss finish, speeds up drying, and produces a smooth surface and is ideal for fine details and glazing. **Liquin Impasto** gives semi-gloss and **Liquin Oleopasto** gives semi-matt finishes, speeds up drying, extends tube color, and retains brush marks and textures.

All Liquins resist yellowing and increase film durability; however they are not suitable for oiling out, neither as a varnish or final coat.

**Resins** Resins are solid, insoluble in water substances that are used for making painting mediums and varnishes. Resins are derived from trees and other plants, and manufactured synthetically. Resins increase the gloss of oil paint, reduce the color and drying time of a medium, and add body to drying oils.

**Dammar** is one of the best natural resins for painting mediums, varnishes and sealants for absorbent grounds. It should be dissolved in Turpentine, not in mineral or white spirits.

**Mastic** and **Sandal** resins are inferior to dammar, as they will turn yellow or brown with age. **Shellac** thinned with alcohol can be used for sizing porous surfaces. It turns dark with time and is not suitable for varnishing. It is also not suitable for mixing with drying oils.

**Alkyd resins** are produced by reaction of some types of alcohols and acids. Alkyd resins increase flexibility, fluidity, and drying time.

**Acrylic** resins can be used for varnishing. Acrylic resins are modern materials and considered stable and flexible.

The following medium mixes are very popular with fine artists: Lean (thin) painting medium: - Linseed oil - 1 Part - Turpentine - 5 Parts

Dammar varnish can be added to such lean mix: – Stand Oil - 1 Part – Dammar varnish - 1 Part – Turpentine - 5 Parts

Fat (oily) painting medium with less turpentine: – Stand oil - 1 Part – Dammar varnish - 1 Part – Turpentine - 3 Parts

Different colors are pre-mixed on a palette using a palette knife. Palettes come in different shapes and sizes and are made of different materials. A wooden mid-size oval-shaped palette with a hole for a thumb would be suitable for most uses.

Other oil painting materials include brushes, palette knives, medium containers, mahlstick, and easel.

## **Supports for oil painting**

Traditionally, stretched canvases or wooden panels are used as oil painting supports.

Wooden panels provide a great smooth surface for fine-detailed artworks. However, this support is expensive, heavy, and can warp or split in poor storing conditions.

Canvases are most widely used as oil painting supports. Linen is a preferred choice for a good artist's canvas. It is more expensive though than a cotton one. Canvases should be stretched on a wooden frame called "stretcher", and coated with protective layers of glue and gesso, separating canvas from oil paint.

Pre-fabricated stretchers are available as wooden planks in various sizes that fit together in corners and are adjustable slightly to stretch the canvas even further when required.

The canvas is pulled across the wooden stretchers and tacked or stapled to the back edge of the stretchers. Stapling the canvas to the

side edge of stretchers is not advisable.

The pulled canvas is “sized” with one or two layers of rabbit skin glue and then primed with a gesso. Every new layer should be applied when previous one is completely dry. Traditionally, animal glue was used for sizing and the mix of animal glue with lead white pigment and white chalk powder for priming. Primed surfaces can be sandpapered to smooth out the plane.

Ready-made gesso consists of white titanium dioxide pigment mixed with an acrylic binder. Such gesso is harder to sandpaper, especially on a canvas. Some artists apply gesso directly onto the canvas, although sizing a canvas with a layer of rabbit skin glue would give a better protection of the canvas from oil paint.

Usually, gesso comes in white, but it can be toned to a particular color by adding another pigment. One or two layers of gesso would be sufficient enough. Too thick layer of gesso would draw the oil paint into the surface resulting in dull effect.

Art shops provide ready stretched and primed canvases in various sizes. Generally, such canvases are good enough for a job; however, some artists might have a specific requirement for the support and prefer to stretch canvases themselves.

Other oil painting supports include canvas glued on a board, primed paper or cardboard, pressed wood, etc.

## **Oil Brushes**

Oil brushes are essential tools for applying the paint onto a support. Brushes are made of many various kinds of fibers. Different fibers produce different effects. For example, hog's bristle is good for bold strokes and impasto textures; red sable brushes are excellent tool for fine details and smooth texture. Fitch hair and mongoose are fine and smooth, great for portraits and finishing touches. Kolinsky sable, taken from the tail of the Siberian mink, is the finest quality of brushes. They

come with a well-pointed tip and serve a long life when looked after well. Kolinsky sable brush remembers its shape, has a “snap” when lifted from the canvas, and is highly regarded by professional fine artists. It is the most expensive kind of brush on the market though.

There are also many synthetic brushes available on the market. Synthetic art brushes are very durable and could be a good replacement for a natural hair brushes, especially because they are cheaper.

Brushes come in various shapes and sizes. Rounded brushes are good for detailed works. Flat brushes are handy for backgrounds, broad strokes, as well as for general application. Flat short-hair brush is called “bright”. “Filbert” is a flat brush with shorter hairs that has rounded corners. A very long “Filbert” brush is called "Egbert".

Other tools are also used to apply oil paint onto support. Some artists use palette knives to paint. Palette knives generally used for mixing paints on a palette and scraping layers of paint from palette and painting.

### **‘Fat over Lean’ rule**

## **Oil Painting Techniques**

Oil paint is a slow drying artists’ material that gives more time to change the color, texture or shape of the artwork. It dries by oxidation, not evaporation, and therefore holds its texture and volume after drying.

There is one basic rule fine artists should observe in oil painting. It is called 'fat over lean'. **This means that each new layer of paint should contain more oil than the layer below.** If each additional layer contains less oil, the final painting might crack and peel. The paint with the higher oil content remains more flexible.

## Working in Layers

Working in layers is used when painting requires more than one session. The first layer may be a ground, usually applied all over the surface. Then an under-drawing in outline may follow. Then comes under-painting, over-painting, and finally semi-transparent glazes. When the painting is completely dry it is covered with protective varnish. All of these layers will affect the appearance of the final look.

## Underdrawing

The artist might sketch or transfer an outline of his/her subject on the support before applying oil paint. Such drawing on the ground is called "Underdrawing."

The Old Masters, like Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden, "underdrew" with a brush, making hatching strokes for shading, using water-based black or brown paint.

When artists wanted to keep the ground fresh and clean, the preliminary drawing, called cartoon, was created in full-size, and transferred onto support by pouncing the outlines and dusting charcoal powder through perforations. There are many other ways of the drawing transfer, including optical projections, drawing by squares, etc.

## Imprimatura

"Imprimatura" is a very transparent layer of oil paint well diluted in turpentine or other solvent. It is used to "tone" the canvas by covering the white gesso with required color, providing an overall tonal optical unity. The artist chooses the color depending on the desired general tone of the artwork. Very often earth colors like raw sienna were used for this task.

The term Imprimatura comes from the Italian and literally means "first paint layer." It has origins in workshops during the Middle Ages, and

was used by Italian painters during the Renaissance.

Following layers should be applied with care so the imprimatura sometimes can be seen through in the middle to dark shadow areas of the work.

## Underpainting

Some artists skip the imprimatura coat and start with the "underpainting" layer. Underpainting is laid down as a thin lean layer. It serves as a base that is intended to be painted over.

Most often, brown paints used for this task like Vandyke Brown, Raw Umbra or "bone color" (1 part raw umber 1 part yellow ochre). Underpainting can also be done in bluish, greenish or greyish colors and will be described in more detail later.

Underpainting can be monochromatic, often called *grisailles*, but it can also be a multi-color. The Old Masters like Giotto, Jan van Eyck and Roger van der Weyden sometimes used multi-color underpainting. In this way they ensured the colors in various layers do not physically blend with each other becoming muddy, but compliment each other by showing through transparent and semi-transparent layers.

Here is the good tip for professionally done underpainting. If it is painted properly, it greatly helps the overpainting. However, if fine artists have to overpaint the underpainting concealing it completely, then the purpose of the underpainting is lost, as it no longer contributes to the overall painting appearance.

Sometimes artists leave painting as completed artworks at the stage of underpainting. If such painting is executed in shades of brown, then it can be called "*brunaille*", or painted "*En brunaille*."

## Dead Colors

"Dead Colors" layer is the part of an underpainting. The name "Dead

Layer” comes from the choice of colors, usually bluish, greyish, or greenish mixes.

It is mostly required for figurative paintings where cold colors will compliment the skin tones in the finished artwork. "Dead Layer" is applied over the traditional brown underpainting. It has the purpose of altering the warm tones of the underpainting and imprimatura. It does not affect the tonality of the final painting though.

Dead layer is quite thin, so previous underpainting layers are visible through it. The dead layer must be left to dry before continuing the painting.

Some paintings can be done as a finished artworks using dead layer technique. Depending on the color such artworks are called “verdaccio”, “verdaille”, or “grisaille”.

**Verdaccio** is an Italian name for the mixture of black, white, and yellow pigments. Depending on proportions it has a grayish, yellowish, or soft greenish-brown appearance.

**Verdaille** is an artwork painted exclusively in shades of green. It originates in 12th century when use of color was prohibited in Cistercian monasteries in 1134. Such paintings are quite rare these days.

**Grisaille** is an artwork painted in monochrome, usually in shades of grey. Grisaille may also include some other grey-out colors in addition to black and white. The grisaille technique is great for depiction of sculpture and architectural details.

## Overpainting in Full Color

The subsequent layers come in full color. Flesh colors are applied for figurate artworks. Light areas are usually painted thicker and more opaque than shades. In dark areas, the underpainting can still show through. Colors of deeper layers are optically mixing with top ones.

The overpainting in full color can be worked on in several layers. Usually every layer is left dry before continuing.

The final touches are applied on top of the full-color layer when it is dry. These could be highlights, some final minor corrections, deepening shades, and so on. All these final touches should be dry before completing the painting with the final layer – glazing.

## Glazing Painting Technique

The glazing technique can also be applied in numerous layers.

Leonardo da Vinci developed glazing technique, called “sfumato”, to the perfection.

The glazing layers deepen the tone as they absorb the light, so less light is reflected from the painting. Fine artist should consider this and paint previous layers in lighter tones than intended in a finished artwork.

Every glaze should be applied when the previous one is dry. It is a slow process but results worth it. Each successive glaze should have an increased amount of oil, conforming to the ‘fat over lean’ rule.

Transparent and semi-transparent oil paints are most suited for glazing. Opaque paints can be mixed with a lot of medium and some resins may be added to increase their translucency.

## Scumbling

Scumbling is a technique when opaque paint is applied in a very thin layer, so the previous layer is visible through. Scumbling gives an optical mixing of colors, producing a softer or duller effect. This technique is great for lighter colors, for example when painting fog or clouds. Another term for scumbling is broken color.

## Some Other Oil Painting Techniques Wet on Wet – Alla Prima

“Alla Prima” technique is when oil paint is applied in wet on wet layers. Alla prima translates from Italian as “at first attempt”. This technique is great for painting live models or working ‘plein-air’ (painting outdoors). The artwork can be worked on in one or several sessions, but has to be finished before the first layer is dry.

This painting technique was developed in the mid-19th century, after commercially produced oil paints in tubes become available. Alla prima was used by impressionists like Claude Monet and Vincent van Gogh, realists like John Singer Sargent and Robert Henri, and many other fine artists.

Alla prima can be combined with the layered indirect method. When the first wet-on-wet coat is dry, finishing touches can be done in glazing.

## Drybrush

Drybrush is a painting technique in which a relatively dry paintbrush holds a small amount of oil paint without any medium. Drybrush strokes have a characteristic scratchy appearance that lacks blended smoothness of a usual oil painting. Brushing over or blending drybrush strokes, while the previous layer is wet should be avoided to preserve the distinctive look of the drybrush technique.

## Impasto

Impasto is a painting technique when paint is applied very thickly. It usually has texture with visible brushstrokes or paint knife marks. Using this technique, some artists mix paint directly on the canvas.

Impasto surface reflects the light in a certain way, providing the artist more means to express the artwork appearance.

The old masters like Rembrandt and Titian often used impasto to depict heavy clothes or jewels. Modern artists like Vincent van Gogh used it for artistic expression.

# Varnishing an Oil Painting

Oil paintings can be varnished to protect them from environmental pollution. A painting that is to be framed under glass may remain unvarnished.

A layer of varnish evens out the appearance of painting, it makes it equally gloss, matt, or satin. Matt varnish looks clearer if the first layer was the same make of gloss varnish.

There are a wide range of varnishes available from various manufacturers from any well-stocked art supply shop.

The varnish should be applied on a completely dry painting. It takes about six months to a year until an oil painting is dry, or even longer for impasto paintings.

Varnish should be removable so it can be replaced in case of discoloration or becoming dirty. If an artist would like to re-paint or correct a painting after it has been varnished, the varnish layer should be removed first; it is not advisable to paint over the varnish layer.

Before varnishing the painting has to be cleaned. Varnish should be applied with a quality varnishing flat bristle brush, with the painting is flat, from one edge of to another in parallel strokes in the same direction. When the first layer is dry, second layer of varnish should be applied at the right angle to the first. The whole painting must be covered in one go. After about 10 minutes of completing the second layer, the painting can be lean against the wall facing inward to dry.