

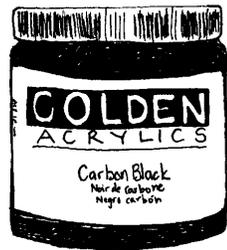
# CHOOSING ACRYLIC PAINTS AT OPUS

*Acrylic paints were developed in the late 1940's as a painting medium that combined the properties of both watermedia and oil painting. Acrylic paints are water-soluble, can be used with wet techniques and can be applied thickly without cracking. They are flexible, and permanent or insoluble in water when dry, and they will not yellow with age. Acrylics are a versatile medium which can be painted on virtually any non-greasy support including paper, primed or unprimed canvas, and masonite board.*

## THE PAINT

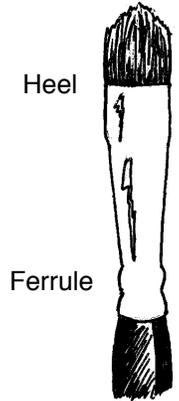
Acrylic Paint consists of pigment suspended in an acrylic polymer emulsion. Acrylic paints are most commonly available in heavy-bodied and fluid form. The viscosity of the paint varies depending upon the manufacturer and the forms they are produced in. For example, tube paints are generally heavy-bodied paints of a thick, buttery consistency, while the viscosity of jar paints varies from heavy-bodied (high viscosity) to fluid (low viscosity).

Heavy-bodied acrylic paint can be thinned with water but if the polymer emulsion is greatly diluted it will weaken the paint's adhesive properties and reduce the intensity of the pigment colour. Acrylic paints should not be thinned down more than 50 percent. Acrylic mediums and glazing liquids can be used instead to ensure that the adhesive properties of the polymer remain intact. Fluid acrylics and medium viscosity jar paints, on the other hand, fill the need for better quality fluid paint. These paints maintain their adhesive properties and a high pigment load, unlike watered-down heavy-body acrylics, and therefore, their colour intensity is not diminished. Fluid acrylics are the consistency of heavy cream and can be poured, brushed, washed on, applied as a stain, or sprayed. Fluid and medium-viscosity acrylics have self-leveling



properties which enable them to dry flat, without brush marks, on most painting surfaces.

Acrylic paints are quick-drying, depending on the thickness of their application. As a result, it is important to keep your brushes wet at all times. Do not let acrylic paint dry on your brushes as it is extremely difficult to remove. In particular, watch out for drying paint at the heel of the brush where the bristles meet the ferrule. Soaking your brushes in alcohol will help to dissolve the dried paint but can reduce the life of the brush.



As with any medium, practice enables you to get a "feel" for acrylic paints, for the peaks they hold, the way they adhere and react to different surfaces, and the length of time they take to dry. Once you begin to understand how acrylics work and feel you can introduce many of the mediums and gels that can be mixed with acrylics to alter their properties.

## ARTIST & STUDENT GRADE ACRYLIC PAINTS

Artist and student grade acrylic paints use the same binder or acrylic emulsion to suspend the pigment. What differs between these grades of paints are the pigment load and use of fillers. Artist acrylic colours contain both synthetic and genuine pigments of the best quality to ensure rich colours and permanency. They also contain a much higher load of pigment than student paints which results in better coverage and density of colour. Some artist grade colours will tolerate a higher pigment load than others due to the size of the pigment molecules. As a result, these colours tend to dry more opaque and with a matte finish. Those artist grade colours which have a slightly lower pigment load dry to a glossy finish and tend to be more transparent.

Student paints on the other hand are produced for the sake of economy for the beginner artist, and, in the

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interest of keeping the price low manufacturers will use a lower pigment load combined with fillers. Calcium carbonate is generally used as a filler in student grade paints.

## DO ACRYLICS BEHAVE THE SAME WAY AS OILS?

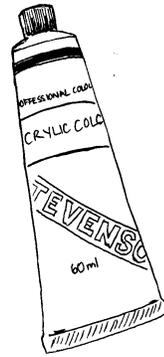
It is misleading to compare acrylics to oils as they are two very different mediums. The most noticeable differences between the two are the drying times and appearance of colour. Oils dry much more slowly than acrylics and although retardants and atomizers can be used to slow down acrylics, acrylics have their own distinct working properties.

In terms of colour, molecules of linseed oil are much smaller than acrylic polymers, enabling oil paints to carry a heavier concentration of pigment. This results in a noticeable difference in the way colour appears when dry. Linseed oil is transparent, both when wet and dry, which means that the appearance of the colour when first applied will be the same when it dries. Acrylic colour, on the other hand, appears lighter when wet because the polymer which carries the pigment is milky and translucent. When the paint dries the emulsion becomes clear and thus the pigment is seen more clearly and appears to be darker.

These differences do not indicate that one medium is better than the other, instead they just illustrate that oil and acrylics behave differently. You can decide which medium is best for you depending on which properties serve your purpose.

## ARE DIFFERENT BRANDS OF ACRYLIC PAINTS COMPATIBLE?

Although acrylic paint formulas are generally the same, they do contain different additives. Since acrylics contain water, they need a preservative such as ammonia or formaldehyde to prevent mould. Thus,



these paints are not considered non-toxic and should still be used in a well-ventilated area. Chromacryl and Liquitex Basics, both student paints, are an exception as they do not contain the same toxic preservatives. These two paints are considered non-toxic.

Paints also include surfactants which enable them to disperse in water, defoaming agents to reduce the foam the surfactants produce, and wetting agents to increase pigment flow. Consequently, some qualities of paints may not work well with others. Acrylic painting is a comparatively new medium and the long term effects of combining different brands is unknown. If you are going to mix different paints be sure to test them first and to use brands of comparable quality.

## INTERFERENCE & IRIDESCENT ACRYLICS

Interference Acrylic Paints are colourless, translucent paints made from titanium coated mica flakes suspended in a polymer emulsion. Interference colours change their colour depending on the angle at which they are viewed, offering a metallic look, colour shift or "flip" effect of a complementary colour. When applied over a white or lighter surface, Interference acrylics are subtle in appearance. The reverse of this is true when applying

Interference colours to dark surfaces, which produces a very noticeable effect. Interference paints are also referred to as "opalescent" or "pearl". A deeper opalescent effect can be achieved with these paints with the addition of a small amount of black acrylic paint. These colours work best if applied in thin layers rather than one thick one. They can be used directly from the jar or mixed with acrylic colours. Try using more transparent colours such as alizarins, quinacridones and phthalos for the best effects.



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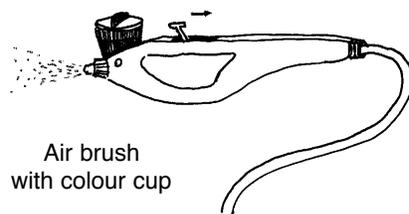
**Iridescent Acrylics** are produced in a variety of metallic colours which mimic bronzing powders, however, be aware that actual bronzing powders cannot be used with acrylic polymer emulsions as they tarnish due to the alkalinity of the binder. Iridescent colours are, like, Interference colours, made from titanium coated mica flakes. Interference acrylics have an outer layer of a transparent light absorbing colourant which determines the colour and complementary colours you see, while Iridescent acrylics are "optically opaque" and rely on reflected light for their effect. Unlike Interference colours, there is no "flip" colour observed with Iridescent colours.

## APPLICATIONS

Acrylic paints are a versatile medium which can be used in many applications other than traditional painting on canvas. They can be used for airbrushing, fabric painting, marbling, stenciling, silk screening, mural painting and much more.

**AIR BRUSHING:** Acrylic jar colours have a smooth consistency and high pigment load which makes them ideal for use with airbrushing. These paints offer a wide colour selection, and they are permanent and flexible. Jar colours are easy to thin with either water or air brush mediums for a sprayable consistency.

When airbrushing onto a porous surface such as absorbent paper or unsized cloth it is best to thin acrylics with water. A porous surface will absorb the thinned acrylic and allow it to permanently surround and thus stain the fibres of the support. Add up to 50% water to the jar acrylic colours and mix thoroughly, to facilitate the flow through the airbrush. Different colours will require more or less water depending upon the pigment load or concentration. When air brushing onto a non-porous surface or primed canvas it is better to thin jar acrylics with an air brush medium to ensure that the paint adheres to the painting surface.



Tube colours, on the other hand, are less suited for airbrush techniques. Thinning these colours is possible, though be prepared for a lower tinting strength due to the greater dilution of pigment.

**FABRIC PAINTING:** Acrylic paints make excellent fabric paints as the wide variety of colours and availability of opaque to translucent paints allows the artist to achieve varied results. Acrylics can be used on virtually any fabric including cotton, cotton/poly blends, woven, felt, terry cloth, silk, velvet, corduroy and flannel. Acrylics dry as a result of the evaporation of moisture, so no heat setting, steaming or chemical fixing is needed for permanency.

The following are a few tips to consider when using acrylics for fabric painting. We strongly recommend testing fabric to ensure the compatibility of the fabric and your technique. It is important to pre-wash new fabrics to remove all sizing which might otherwise interfere with the adhesion of the paint and to take care of any initial shrinkage of the fabric. Also, remember to protect the surface under your fabric by placing cardboard, plastic or wax paper on the surface or against the back of the fabric. This will help to ensure that the fabric does not stick to your working surface or to another piece of the fabric, as in the case of t-shirts.



Jar acrylic colours are great for lightweight or textured fabrics, while tube colours or heavy-bodied paints are excellent for heavier fabrics or for thicker impasto techniques. If jar colours or more fluid acrylics are unavailable, thinning the heavy-bodied paint with a medium will reduce its stiffness and increase flexibility so that it works with the fabric like a fluid paint. If you wish to use acrylic paints for silk screening techniques on fabric be sure to mix your paints with a silk screening medium so that the paint does not dry permanently on the screen.

**MARBLING:** Marbling with acrylic colours is one of our staff and customer favourites. By using a marbling medium, such as isopropyl alcohol, a medium viscosity acrylic paint and a bath of kelgin

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and water, you can marble objects, paper and fabric. See our handout "Marbling on Paper" for further information on this application of acrylic paints.

**MURAL PAINTING (in-door or out-door):** Artist quality acrylics are one of the most durable water-soluble paints available, thus making them an excellent choice for mural painting. Fluid and airbrush acrylics are a particularly good choice. Artist acrylics have been proven to last for many years under a variety of conditions when applied properly. Acrylics are chemically alkaline and are therefore compatible with such common mural grounds as concrete, plaster, cement and concrete block. As well, acrylics contain no toxic solvents, nor require toxic cleaners, and they mix with water. Acrylics dry quickly to a permanent water-insoluble finish and their durability and hardness can be increased with the use of specialized mediums. Student quality acrylics are not recommended for mural painting as their colours are less permanent and the paint film is not as durable. All mural painting surfaces must be prepared and clean of any dirt or grease before painting and it is often a good idea to research the application of a final varnish or coating. We recommend speaking with other mural artists and mural painting businesses for advice and to share information.

**STENCILING:** When using ready-made or personalized stencils, acrylic paint can be applied with a foam dabber, rag or stencil brush. To keep your lines clean use the paint straight from the tube or jar. Do not thin the paint as it may tend to spread and bleed under the stencil.

## NOTES:



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