

Oil painting medium Part 1

An introduction to oil paints
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I appreciate that you may find the first part of this tutorial boring, unnecessary and you would rather go to a tea party with Lurtz, however, if you have not painted figures with oils before **please read on** as I am sure you will find something of interest which may encourage you to give this medium a try. In addition a lot of the contents applies to other paint mediums and most probably the one you are currently using. But if you want to skip the underlying theory and get down to the techniques go to part 3. 'Methods Techniques and Procedures'

This small vignette will give you an idea of what can be achieved when using artist's oils. I don't want to say that 'oils are the best medium' by any means and I hope not to deliver another 'must do' style tutorial. However, if you find something useful however small that expands your skills then this tutorial, for you, will be successful learning experience.

Palando and Alatar
Of the Istari



These two Wizards are early Mithril figures painted by the author using artist oils. The vibrant colours and subtle blending properties of oil paints are well illustrated here.

Introduction:

Painting figures of any scale is an art and as artists we are on a constant learning curve. I have watched the development of figure painting for ?? Years and I am amazed by the constant development of techniques and the steady rise in quality. There are some very talented figure painters out there and I would encourage you to

study their work and learn as much as you can. There are mountains of books, articles, web sites and magazines all stuffed with good advice with some giving the so called 'correct method of painting figures'. Well in my book the only correct method is **Your Own** regardless of the end result. Before we look into the techniques to use when painting with oil colours you should familiarize your self with this package. It furnishes you some basic knowledge of this medium and is an interesting read in its own right.

Many newcomers to the hobby of figure painting often have some previous experience of some other type paint medium This usually means experience with either Enamels or Acrylics or both. But as I have been researching material for this series it seems apparent that a considerable proportion of small scale figure painters have limited or no knowledge of oil painting techniques. Therefore, those who wish to paint their figures in oils are often faced with learning a completely different technique, and there is no doubt at all that it is quite different. Of course, not everyone wants to paint in oils, perhaps because they don't like the finished product or it is a bit daunting, but there is little doubt that when used properly oils can give some excellent results. I have worked with other types of paints all of which have their advantages and disadvantages but I like the control, slow drying and the vibrant colours of oil paints.

Traditional Oil Paints:

There are a number of companies who manufacture oil paints and artist supplies, the most notable being: Winsor & Newton and Daler Rowny. The paints from each manufacturer are completely intermixable and there is very little difference in quality and colour.

The first thing you will notice is the range of colours available to the artist/modeler. The names of colours do not fully follow the names given to acrylic and enamel colours, for example you cannot get 'Olive Green' or 'Medium Red' oil paints.

The reason is that oil paints are made for professional artist and picture painters and the names of colours have been carefully selected by the manufacturers to represent the actual pigments and other factors. Water Colour, Artist Acrylic, Gouache, Alkyd and Artisan paints all follow the same naming system with slight differences and additions by manufacturers.

Artist oil paints consist of pigment colours suspended in an oil binder usually linseed or poppy seed oil and a sold in tubes. Whites are generally made with slower drying, poppy seed oil instead of linseed oil because poppy oil tends yellows less over time than other oils. In a comparison of oil and acrylic properties, molecules of linseed oil are much smaller than acrylic polymers, which enable oil paints to carry a heavier concentration of pigment. This results in a noticeable difference in appearance when the two paints dry. Linseed oil is transparent, both when wet and when dry which means that the appearance of the colour when first applied will be the same as 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 darker.

Griffin Alkyd Fast Drying Oil Paints:

Manufactured from pigments suspended in oil modified alkyd resin and solvent. The most outstanding advantage of the Griffin Alkyd range is their speed of drying which allows a painting to be completed in a single session. (see part 4)

Artisan Water Mixable Oil Colour

Oil and water don't mix my preciousss !!! Yep' your quite right, but these do.

This is an oil paint that behaves like acrylic but with the added characteristic of a slower drying time. The essential difference between 'Artisan Water Mixable Oil Colour' and conventional oils is their ability to mix with water. (See part 4)

Artist and student grades of oil paint.

Oil paints are generally divided into "artist" and "student" grades depending upon their content and pigment load. Most artist grade oil paints consist of only pigment and linseed oil to ensure the purest colour possible. each pigment reacts differently with the oil and can dry to a more matte or glossy finish depending upon the amount of thinner or mediums used, and the type of painting ground they are applied to. Student grade paints on the other hand, contain both pigment and linseed oil and can contain various amounts of stabilizers, fillers or adulterants. Both artist and student grade oils use genuine and synthetic pigments. The primary difference is that the proportion of pigment is much smaller in student grade paints in the interest of economy for the student or beginner painter. In addition, some student paints will use synthetic hues of a particular pigment instead of the genuine pigment colour. With less pigment overall in student colours the bulk of the paint is made up by additives. I have to advise that you should stick to artist grade paints. They are more expensive but are far better to work with and a superior finish.

Grading oil colour

Overall, paints receive grading on several points, which are: hue, tonal value, chroma, temperature and transparency

Hue: This is what we loosely call "colour"; it may vary quite widely yet still be the same "hue". For example, crimson and scarlet are both "reds".

Tonal value: This is how dark or light a colour appears, again compare two reds and note that scarlet appears lighter than crimson

Chroma: This describes the "brilliance" of a colour. This is shown quite strikingly by comparing two yellows, Cadmium Yellow and Yellow Ochre, for example. The former is much more brilliant than the latter,

Temperature	Some colours appear "warmer" or "colder" than others. Red is obviously a warmer colour than blue,
Transparence	This is a very important quality of an oil paint, as will be discovered as soon as you try to paint in certain colours. Oddly it is the darker colours, such as the blues, greens and browns that are the most transparent.

Colour Properties

There are many different colours in the ranges offered by manufacturers each with its own unique properties, which determines how the paint can be used. The following list is a random selection of oil colours and what can be expected when used.

Full-intensity colours

These colours are the full-intensity colours, sometimes just called the colour wheel colours. They are listed more or less in colour wheel order:

Cadmium Yellow:	Light or lemon opaque cool yellow. All cadmiums are expensive.
Cadmium Yellow:	Medium or deep - opaque warm yellow.
Cadmium Orange:	Opaque deep orange.
Cadmium Red:	Light or medium - opaque warm red
Alizarin Crimson:	Transparent cool red,
Ultramarine Blue:	Transparent blue.
Prussian Blue:	Transparent blue, very strong.
Cobalt blue:	Transparent neutral blue, very expensive.
Phthalo Blue:	Transparent blue on the green side, extremely powerful.
Prussian Blue:	Transparent greenish, coppery blue very powerful.
Viridian:	Deep, transparent cool green, expensive.
Phthalo Green:	transparent cool green, also very powerful.
Sap Green:	warm green, often a mixture of pigments.

Earth tones these are the colours that are generally less intense:

Naples Yellow:	Very light and somewhat dull yellow sometimes used as a substitute for white.
Yellow Ochre:	Dull mustard yellow.
Burnt Sienna:	A rich reddish brown.
Burnt Umber:	Dull dark brown.
Payne's Grey:	Grey from a mixture of pigments.

Black and White.

There are several blacks and whites available each type has its own unique properties:

Lamp Black:	Opaque with good covering power.
Blue Black:	Semi transparent with a slight blue hue
Ivory Black:	Semi Transparent.
Titanium White:	Strong opaque with good covering power.
Flake White:	Semi transparent white.
Zinc White:	The least opaque of the whites good for glazes

Drying time:

Unlike acrylic paints, oil paints dry by oxidation instead of the evaporation of water. This means that oxidation chemically changes the paint's composition by absorbing oxygen from the atmosphere.

No advice here except patience but if you're already a model builder and painter patience will be an attribute you already have. Placing your figures in a warm dry place helps and some will dry overnight. Reds and white are the slowest. The up side of this is that you can work on a figure for many hours even days.

Consistency:

Most oil paints have the consistency of warm butter with an oily texture. Some colours along with the Alkyd range are a little firmer. All can be thinned down to an almost ink like consistency whilst still retaining much of its strong colour.

Thinners:

Liquin medium is a gel like substance, which can be useful. Turpentine is the best option for thinning oil paint but it smells like Shelob after tea, but you can buy

odourless turpentine if you wish. Whit spirit will also thin paint and its inexpensive. Also a matt medium is available which can be used to ensure a matt finish.

Buying Oil Paints:

One of the advantages of Oils is the limited number of colours that you need to start, however, your selection of colours will no doubt increase over time but you need to be careful what you buy. Some colours are very expensive costing several pounds for a 38 ml tube and you don't really need them. Oil paints are usually graded, A – B – C and so on with each grade priced accordingly so shop wisely. On the other hand oils will practically last for ever so you will only buy colours once. Believe it or not I have tubes of paint that are more than 20 years old and are still perfectly useable. Ah poor old soul he must be older than Elrond.

As far as starting pallet is concerned I would suggest the following selection. It is usually possible to buy this or a close approximation of this range in an Oil Paint Beginners Set which often have smaller tubes and are really good value. But make sure the paints in the set are **artist grade**.

A Basic Pallet of Colours:

- Flake White
- Ivory Black
- Burnt Umber
- Yellow Ocher
- Scarlet lake
- Ultramarine Blue
- Alizarin Crimson
- Chrome Yellow
- Chrome Green

Conclusion:

I am sure you will have noticed by now that I have a slight bias towards using oils for my figures. There is not particular reason for this other than when I started to paint figures it was the medium of choice at the time. It is the blending characteristic when using oils and their slow drying nature wins hands down for me. The paint remains workable long enough to allow one colour or shade to be blended smoothly with another. Thus, when shadows and highlights are added to a figure, they can be made to flow in a continuous change of tone across the surface. I am sure that what ever medium you use the question remains 'why change when I get good results already' and there is nothing wrong with this, however, as I have stated a number of times, practicing our hobby means we are on a constant learning curve and some basic exploration of another paint medium is not wasted time it's a new learning experience.

Introduction to part 2 Colour Mixing:

Mixing is a way of life with oil paints. Modellers who use enamels and acrylics tend

to rely heavily upon the makers to produce the correct colour for the job. Actually they needn't do so at all. It is quite possible to mix any colour, to a very good approximation, from scratch. There is no such thing as 'Olive Green' in oil paints, but it can be mixed from a combination of a blues and a yellows. It is necessary to experiment and to keep notes of the results. It is fun and very instructive to buy a small "oil-sketching pad" and just try various colour mixes in an attempt to match the result to a desired hue. In part two I will endeavor to explain how colours work and introduce you to the subtle art of colour mixing.

Links:

If you are looking for an online art supplies shop then try this one. Most of what you need to paint figures can be found here, and the site is very user friendly.

Ken Bromley Art Supplies

Artists Materials on Line Shop: www.artsupplies.co.uk

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