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# Oil Paints for Beginners

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## Overview

Oil painting is the culmination of the classical realism process. All we have learned about envelopes, block-ins, gradients and approach to visual art has led you here. Oil Paints are not like acrylic paints, which I also really enjoy as they are fun and quick drying. Oil paints are organic material and handle very differently from any other medium and dry slowly allowing for fine details and finesse. Many painters consider oil paints like sculpture because of the ability to work into the medium day after day. The closest medium to oil paints is Charcoal and Chalk on toned paper as you can layer, push and pull values and create very detailed realistic artwork with dedication. Because of the many things to consider when oil painting in practice and approach, this document looks at what you need to get started and some of the very basic concepts to ensure you start using oil paints correctly and safely.



**Parents Please Read** this entire document and write consent to [BayAreaArtSchool@gmail.com](mailto:BayAreaArtSchool@gmail.com) before we start teaching your child oil painting.

- Oil painting is not as simple to manage as acrylic paints. All mineral spirits are toxic as they exude fumes that are very bad for your health. A well ventilated room is required for oil painting, that is not a bedroom. If you are uncertain you want your child using oil paints then you can use water based oil paints which do not require mineral spirits.
- **Gamsol is the preferred solvent** for thinning oil paints and for general painting. It evaporates 100% and leaves no residue in paint layers. Gamsol is less toxic than other brands of OMS (Odorless Mineral Spirits), mineral spirits, or turpentine because the harmful aromatic solvent component has been removed. It's also useful for studio and brush cleanup. Nonetheless, Gamsol is a mineral spirit that does exude fumes that are very bad for your health.
- **Flammable:** All mineral spirits can release vapors that readily form flammable mixtures. Vapor accumulation could flash and/or explode if ignited. Therefore it is suggested that

paper towels and gloves be disposed of in an air-tight container to reduce this possibility. Taken from: <https://artandsuccess.freshdesk.com/> - To dispose of oily rags not yet dry, place them in an airtight plastic bag, soak them with water, seal the bag securely and dispose of in an outdoor trash can or dumpster. Oil and Gamsol soaked rags will not spontaneously combust after being soaked in water and sealed in a bag or other airtight container.

- **Protect your things:** Oil paints are not easy to clean, and sometimes impossible to remove. Artist aprons will reduce the possibility of paint getting onto your child's clothing. The real issue is that if paint ends up on an elbow, it can end up on the couch and other places you don't want to have oil paints. Another consideration is if oil covered clothing ends up in the washing machine. Oil paints, in general, stay wet to the touch for 3-5 days so you need to ensure that oil paints stay away from anything else you don't want ruined. In the case of removing oil paints you can use Dawn dish soap and a silicone sponge and salt. Blot the oil paint if it is in a clump or blob, apply salt to absorb some of the oils, then apply dish soap and gently rub in circles with silicone sponge and cold water. I have reduced red paint from white fabric down to just an almost invisible spot, but it took well over an hour of coaxing this to happen.

## What my studio / painting days look like

As I walk into my studio, which is actually my garage, I put on my paint clothes which never leave the garage: An apron, shirt and jacket I often sit and plan my painting time out: what am I painting? What do I need to use today? Is my drinking water far away from my solvents? I put my nitrile gloves on. I get out my silicone jar that is empty along with my 24 oz storage jar of Gamsol. The dirty gamsol has settled over night and I slowly pour my Gamsol into my silicone jar. For a new painting, I transfer my drawing using charcoal and then trace my charcoal lines with burnt sienna diluted gamsol. Burnt sienna dries faster than other paints but I wait another day or two to start that painting's next layer, nonetheless. For existing paintings, I store them in a wet panel box or in a cupboard. I clamp my ongoing painting to my easel so it doesn't tip over on me. Then I place my colors on my palette with a palette knife. I get out the brushes I'll use for the day along with my silicone jar, gamsol and paper towels. The first part of the day is spent mixing my colors as accurate as I can and then I start to paint. I make sure I get up every 30-45 minutes and walk around for a few minutes - this helps my eyes not get too focused on one close dimension and it's good for my legs. I have a tall drinking container and make sure I only touch the bottom portion with my hands. When I'm done for the day, I wipe down my palette and clean its surface and my brushes. Used paper towels go into a bag or an airtight container and I often pour a little water in them as Gamblin the manufacturer of Gamsol recommends. I put my painting away in a safe place. I pour my dirty Gamsol out of my silicone jar and into my 24 oz storage glass jar. I close both jars and place them where they will not be disturbed or knocked over. I take off my gloves one hand at a time and turn them inside out and discard them. I remove my apron and jacket and head to the sink to wash my hands very well with the silicone sponge - I place soap on the sponge and run a small stream of water and scrub down my hands until the sponge is no longer slippery. This way I know my hands are safe to use for eating and placing near my face. The process of cleaning up can take 15-30 minutes so plan accordingly.

# Materials

## Basic List:

- Pre-primed canvas or panels. You can also purchase canvas pads.
- Vellum is required for beginning assignments - Paper will not work! Oils will destroy paper by leaching into it and rotting it away.
- Blue painters tape.
- Paper towels - blue shop paper towels are a good choice.
- Brushes - see list below for details and choices.
- Paint - see list below for details and choices.
- Pallet knife - for mixing paint, this is an essential tool. There are many types and styles so pick one that suits your style.
- Gamblin Gamsol Odorless Mineral Spirits. For all beginning students I do not recommend turpenoid and never use turpentine!
- Silicoil brush cleaner - fill it about half an inch above the coils with Gamsol
- 24 oz glass jar - Gamsol storage jar. Dirty Gamsol settles in this jar keeping your solvent reusable for months.
- Nitrile gloves.
- Goggles are recommended for beginners.
- A well ventilated room where you can paint that is NOT your bedroom.
- Easel with a drop cloth under it.
- Paint palette acrylic plastic, encased glass or wood.
- Charcoal pencil, 2B soft, for transferring drawings to canvas or panel
- Wet Panel & Canvas Carrier
- 1 piece of 160-200 grit sandpaper to remove dried beads of paint before the next layer.
- Silicone sponge - Use this with dish soap to remove from hands and clothing.
- Small clamps to hold paintings to easel.

## Advanced Tips

- Canvas or wood panel, primed (or sealed) for oil paints. Ideally 2 layers of a sealer. Acrylic based gesso will work for beginners and intermediate painters but ideally all materials must be sealed so that the oil paint doesn't leach into your canvas or wood panel and rot it over the years. I use 2 layers GAC 100 as my sealer.
- Paint mediums such as alkyds, walnut oil, stand oil, impasto putty and many others can be used to increase or decrease drying time. I do not cover this for beginners but they do exist and for those using water based oil paints you will want a medium to decrease drying time as water based oils take much longer to dry than regular oil paints.

# Brushes

There are many different types of brushes. When looking for brushes keep in mind that natural bristles will be better to learn the basics with. For the beginner we will primarily use 3 different brushes.

- Rounds - sizes 0 or 2
- Filberts - sizes 4 and 6
- Flat Brushes - sizes 8 or 10

I prefer Trekell brushes, but Robert Simmons 785 series white sable are excellent value.

<https://www.dickblick.com/products/robert-simmons-white-sable-brushes/>

# Paints Required

There are a lot of colors out there and many of them look pretty but keep in mind that since paints are made with pigments most of the colors you may want to get are just mixtures of the basic pigments. That being said we need a basic color palette:

Ultramarine Blue, Cadmium Red Medium Hue, Yellow Ochre, Cadmium Yellow Medium Hue, Titanium White, Quinacridone Magenta (make sure it contains: PV19 or PR122), Burnt Umber, and Burnt Sienna.

- We use more white than any other paint so purchase a bigger tube of Titanium White.
- I recommend using this brand for beginners:  
<https://www.dickblick.com/products/blick-studio-oil-colors/>
- The difference in prices is the amount of pigment to linseed ratio. Student grade oil paints have less pigments and cost less. Studio quality is perfect for students of all levels. Artist and Professional paints are expensive because they are heavier in pigment.
- In the very beginning it may feel like we are wasting colors as we learn to mix - so cheaper paints in the beginning are helpful.

## Important Notes

- We recommend that beginners use Hues for safety. Some paints (like Cadmium Red) contain toxic elements such as cadmiums, cobalts, magnesiums, and ceruleans. Some hues eliminate this toxic element, making them safer.
- Pigment and Mixture has been universally cataloged and organized by pigment numbers. The reason is that pigments are not consistently named across all the different brand manufacturers while some are. Magenta is not. For example PV19 (<http://www.artiscreation.com/violet.html#PV19>) and PR122 (<http://www.artiscreation.com/red.html#PR122>) are sometimes labeled Violet, Quinacridone, Alizarin, or Alizarin Crimson, to name a few. The problem for artists is that color naming conventions are not consistent. A true Magenta is an essential color for artists to use and learn to mix to create brilliant purples and violets so using PR122 or PV19 is recommended.

# Terminology

- **Indirect painting** involves procedures in which the final effects in a picture are built up gradually by placing several layers of paint, one over the other, the upper layers modifying, but not altogether concealing, the lower layers.
- **Alla Prima**, direct painting and usually in one day's effort, is a painting technique in which layers of wet paint are applied to previously administered layers of wet paint.
- **Tiling** is a technique of placing one small swatch of paint next to each other and is a focus on keeping the underlying drawing intact as correct color and value are placed onto a painting surface.
- **Soft edges** are achieved by very carefully blurring or feathering edges of the tiled paint swatches.
- **Primer vs Sealer** Oil paint takes a really long time to dry and during that time period, which can be up to over a year, the linseed oil will want to soak into the lower levels of your painting. For a canvas or piece of wood that has no sealer the oil will leach into the canvas fibers or wood fibers eventually rotting out the material and ruining your artwork. Therefore a sealer is required as your first layer over the raw material. Some primers that are made of acrylic act as a sealer too, but not all primers are sealers. Mostly a primer is used to bring a more uniform white or gray (or tinted value) to start your painting.
- **Open grisaille** - Once your drawing has been transferred to your painting surface, this technique is the very first layer that places a single value of paint (burnt sienna or burnt umber) onto your surface. Gamsol is used to thin your paint where the painting is lighter in value, leaving more of the canvas white. The purpose of this is to start building values and depth into your painting.
- **Closed grisaille** - In classical realism, the closed grisaille is a two paint value layer using burnt sienna or burnt umber and white. The purpose is to complete the values of the entire painting before adding color in the later layers.
- **Fat over Lean** - Oil paint is made of pigment and linseed oil. Stand oil which is raw linseed oil is mixed into a fat mixture and increases flow to your painting by adding more medium, but it takes longer to dry. Lean is oil paint that has been diluted with Gamsol which also increases paint flow but will dry faster as it is thinner the more Gamsol added. Therefore, if a painting takes 6 -12 months to dry the layers closest to the painting surface need to be thinner otherwise they would dry on a layer that is not and the paint will crack as it slowly slides down due to gravity.
- **Varnish** is used after your oil painting is dry and brings back the original sheen and luster of your original oil painting. Varnishes are applied a minimum of 6 months after the last layer of your painting to allow the oil enough time to dry. For paintings with thick layers more time is suggested before your varnishing.