

Beginning Painting: Vision and Skill

Instructor: Brian Kelley

Washington Studio School

Winter 2022, January 18 – March 28

Begins January 24 (ten weeks, in-person)

Mondays, 7-10 pm

Materials List

Pencils and sketchbook

*At Home Supply: Miscellaneous still life objects and a small table/platform. These objects could be boxes or bottles, for example. Try to avoid objects that are smaller than your hand or larger than your torso. Objects that are single colors or a neutral like white are great to use. The overall form of objects is usually more important than any surface design. Glass and metal objects are also good, but use them more sparingly. Drapery such as old bedsheets is also useful. Consider your trash and recycling bin and upcycle! There is little need to buy new things. Keep in mind that you probably want more objects available than you will actually use and that the objects that have the most sentimental value often are the hardest to make visually interesting in a painting (ex: in beginning painting the empty milk carton usually beats grandma's gold jewelry)

*At Home Supply: A desk light or other spot light that can be used to dramatically light a still life.

*At Home Supply: An easel of some kind. This could be as simple as leaning a canvas against a Masonite panel propped against the back of an old wooden chair to a proper easel. The best of these for beginning painters is probably a collapsible aluminum easel (either standing tripod easel or table easel). A good aluminum tripod easel costs somewhere in the range of \$50-75 and can be used both indoors and outdoors for landscape painting, and can last for years and years.

*At Home Supply: A taboret (or painting table). This needs to hold supplies like the palette, brushes, tubes of paint, rags, etc. An old end table or small card table will work fine. Remember it will get paint on it, unless you cover it up.

Stretched Canvases, in the following sizes (sizes can be approximate [+/- a inch or so] and canvases can be pre- stretched)

3 Canvases 9" x 12"

2 Canvases 12" x 15"

1 Canvases 15" x 24"

Optional: 1 pint of acrylic primer (acrylic gesso) and a 2-3" flat house painting brush (*you will want to paint at least 1-2 additional coats of gesso over pre-stretched canvases as the grounds of most pre-stretched canvases are very unsatisfying surfaces to paint on – you will want to do these coats in

advance so that they are dry and ready to use in class.)

Brushes - Hog bristle brushes (recommended) or synthetic nylon bristles designed for use with oil and acrylic. Make sure these brushes are not intended for watercolor use. Oil/acrylic brushes can most easily be differentiated from watercolor brushes in that oil/acrylic brushes are typically around a foot in length. Below is a list of recommended brushes, though you can get by with a minimum of 3 or 4 of these. Try to get brushes of varying sizes and types rather than brushes that seem too similar.

- Flat size #8
- Round size #8
- Filbert size #8
- Bright size #8
- Round/Filbert size #6
- Flat/Filbert size #10/12

*Additional brushes or brushes in larger sizes can also be used.

Metal palette knife (medium or large size)

Palette – temporary pad, or permanent wood/glass, no smaller than 9"x12" (the larger the better) (make sure to use cardboard/foamcore backing for glass palettes, make sure NOT to get a palette designed for watercolors [ie: lots of tiny "wells" in the palette]) – this should be a flat palette

Optional: Utility razor for cleaning palette (you **do NOT need** this item if you have a temporary palette pad, **may not want** it if you have a wooden palette, and **will definitely want** it if you have a glass palette)

Cold-pressed or alkali refined linseed oil (small bottle)

Paper towels or cotton rags

An apron/smock

Nitrile/Latex/Vinyl gloves (I recommend Nitrile)

Small Jars with lids to seal and store solvents or painting mediums (ex: old baby-food jars)

Soap for clean-up (ex: Ivory/Dove soap) (contact me if you have questions about using solvents instead of soap)

Paint colors (recommended brands [approx. from cheap to expensive]: Utrecht, Plaza, Gamblin, Winsor & Newton, M. Graham, Williamsburg)

- Opaque White: Titanium White (150 ml)
- Earth Yellow: Yellow Ochre (35 ml)
- Cool Yellow: Lemon Yellow/Hansa Yellow Light/Cadmium Yellow Pale Hue* (35 ml)
- Warm Yellow: Indian Yellow/Cadmium Yellow Deep Hue* (35 ml)
- Earth Red: Burnt Sienna (35 ml)
- Cool Red: Alizarin Crimson/Quinacridone Red (35 ml)
- Warm Red: Napthol Red/Cadmium Red Hue* (35 ml)
- Cool Blue: French Ultramarine Blue (35 ml)
- Warm Blue: Cerulean Blue/Cobalt Blue Hue* (35 ml)
- Dark Earth: Burnt Umber/Raw Umber (35 ml)

*Hue colors are imitations of genuine pigments that closely match the original color. They are cheaper in price and are usually less toxic. The trade-off is that the hue color may not be as strong or permanent. For beginning painters, I recommend starting with hue colors.

A Brief Comparison of Oil vs. Acrylic Paint

While the assumed default medium for this class is oil paint, there are often some students that decide they want to work in acrylic instead. I do recommend you work in oil, but will not prohibit the use of acrylic. If you are considering using acrylic, please keep the following in mind.

Pros and Cons of Acrylic

Acrylic paint dries considerably faster than oil

Acrylic paint cannot be worked wet-into-wet unless done within a several-minutes long window of time (*unless an acrylic retarder is added as an artist medium)

By volume, ml for ml, acrylic paint is cheaper than oil paint

There are more “craft” and “student” lines of acrylic paint than oil, so you need to be much more careful that you are buying paint of a good/better/best quality. Poor quality acrylic paint is often sold in bottles and will have such a watery consistency that there will be directions to shake the bottle prior to use. Trying to learn how to actually paint with paint such as this would be like attempting to learn how to play a piano with a toy keyboard designed for small children – theoretically possible but deeply unsatisfying.

Acrylic paint has a lower “pigment load” (this is a physical limitation of the paint, not a commercial manufacturing issue), meaning colors will seem somewhat paler, lighter, and more transparent than oil paint with the same pigment

Acrylic paint has a significant “drying shift” (ex: dark colors appear lighter when dry)

Acrylic paint will not yellow with age, as is typical with oil paint (this process takes months and years, so will not be a major issue in the context of an academic term)

Acrylic paint, when painted thickly when wet, will dry to be very thin (*unless acrylic impasto mediums are added as an artist medium)

As acrylic paint loses volume when drying, is less opaque, and dries quickly on the palette, you will go through tubes of acrylic significantly faster than oil – which can counteract any cost savings

Acrylic paint does not require the use of any noxious solvents – brushes can be cleaned with simple soap and water easily. (Many oil painters use solvents to clean, though soap can be used, as well)

Acrylic paint has a reputation for being less toxic. This is partly because contemporary acrylics use no solvents (it wasn't always so, actually), but also because acrylic lines of paint carry less of the toxic, heavy metal pigments, and often are better about offering non-toxic alternatives. This is more to do with the fact that oil paint lines tend to gravitate toward “traditional” pigments and acrylic paint lines emphasize “modern” pigments, even when they are made by the same company. The only way to know

for certain that the paint is nontoxic, though, is to familiarize yourself with what pigments are actually toxic. The most well-known toxic pigments are heavy metal compounds that contain lead (Lead White), cadmium (Cadmium Yellow, Cadmium Red), and cobalt (Cobalt Blue). In general, the best policy is to treat all paints as if they were toxic and wash one's hands after working. This is an approach not unlike that of a high school chemistry classroom that still treats a vial of water as if it was dangerous.

If dirty brushes are left to dry overnight (or even for an hour or less in some cases), they will likely not be cleanable/repairable unless cleaned in solvents like denatured alcohol or toluene (nail polish remover), which are actually more noxious than the standard solvent of oil paint, odorless mineral spirits (turpenoid). Hog hair bristle brushes will be significantly damaged by solvents like toluene. Nylon hair brushes are significantly more durable when used with these solvents and are generally more recommended for acrylic paint use.

Neither form of paint is inherently better or worse, so much as they are *different*. I typically do demonstrations in oil, however, which means the lessons of the demonstration will not always be like-to-like for acrylic. Also, the higher pigment load and slower drying time mean that it is possible to make more colorful paintings and to experiment more easily with certain painting techniques.

If You Do Use Acrylic Make Sure to Make the Following Adjustments

***Buy exclusively acrylic paint (oil and acrylic do not mix wet-into-wet) ***

These are the brands I recommend from cheap to expensive: Utrecht, Plaza, Liquitex, M. Graham, Golden. Avoid anything that looks like it is marketed for crafts or small children. **Avoid the Liquitex BASIC line.** Compare prices. If it is significantly cheaper than the Utrecht/Plaza/in-house brand, be suspicious of its quality.

Buy either a temporary palette pad or glass, but avoid a wooden palette

Consider buying nylon brushes designed for acrylic paint rather than hog hair brushes

Do not buy Liquin or linseed oil. Instead buy acrylic gel medium

Keep a cup of water with your palette while you work, and keep your dirty brushes in the water or resting on a damp paper towel during class so that they do not dry out

Where To Get Supplies

Plaza Art (also online)

1120 19th St. NW
Washington, DC 20036

Blick Art Materials (also online)

1250 I St. NW
Washington, DC 20005

Jerrysartarama (online)

Utrecht (online)