

OIL PAINTING MATERIALS

Oil Colours

I recommend "Langridge Handmade Oil Colour", "Art Spectrum Artists' Oil Colour", "Gamblin Artist's Oil Colour", or "Michael Wilcox School of Colour Permanent Artists' Oil Colour" (available on-line). Oil Colours are best made with linseed oil, which makes the strongest paint film, and has been used by artists for over five hundred years. Titanium white, however, is best made with Sunflower, or Safflower oil, as titanium dioxide pigment in linseed oil tends to make the paint go a bit yellow. Sometimes the blue colours are also made with Sunflower or Safflower oil. Poor quality oil colours have weak tinting strength, and thus more paint will need to be used. This means, that more expensive paints, can actually be "cheaper" because the tubes last a lot longer, as there can be a lot more actual coloured pigment within the tubes. Cheaper colours have filler added as adulterants, being like translucent powder. "Michael Harding Handmade Oil Colours" (from Oxlades, and Jacksons in Subiaco) are probably the best quality oil colours available in Perth.

Mineral turpentine is used for cleaning up. Odourless solvent can also be used.

Odourless solvent still has a smell, but it is just a different type of smell.

If you don't wish to use turpentine, you can actually clean brushes by dipping the brushes in a little linseed oil, and wiping the brushes down. You can also then further clean the brush with soap and water, if you wish. It is important to completely wash out any residue soap, as soap in the oil paint film can cause problems.

Palette knives are used for mixing colours. These come in various shapes and sizes. Chose according to your preference, or experiment with different brands, and shapes. I prefer a more pointy knife, with some flexibility in the blade. Mamieri, RGM, and Art Spectrum are OK.

Paper towels are used for cleaning up.

Cotton rags are also useful. I recommend 100% cotton as it is more absorbent. Cotton rags can also be used to wipe paint off the canvas when doing corrections. Cotton buds are also useful.

Palettes: a white tile, a wooded board, a plate, a piece of perspex, glass, a wooden palette, or a disposable paper palette, can all be used. For oil painting, a completely flat palette is best.

Paint Tube Squeezer: I recommend Gill Mechanical Company Heavy Duty Wringer.

Brushes

Oil painting brushes can be bristle (hog hair), nylon (synthetic), mongoose, and/or sable (softer). You can buy round, flat, filbert, and also fan brushes for blending. It is your choice. Test various types, to see your preference. Art Spectrum Series 900 and 1100 are good hog hair brushes. For synthetic brushes, I recommend NEEF Series 95, and Art Spectrum Imitation Mongoose. For sable, I recommend Raphael series 8404, Art Spectrum series 72, and NEEF series 225. Actually, you can paint in oil paint, with any kind of brush. You can also apply paint with a palette/ painting knife. With the bristle hair brushes, make sure that hairs don't come out when you flick the brush hairs. The brush should be well shaped, and the hairs should not be sticking out inappropriately. The hairs of a bristle brush should retain their flags (pointy tips) and should not have been trimmed. All hairs should point inwards, so when one looks at a round brush, and rotates it around, the (naturally curving) hairs, should all point inwards, so the tip of the brush tapers to a point. Softer brushes leave less brush marks, and are also good for blending. Some brushes are sold with glue in the hairs, so you need to soak the hairs in water, and wash out the glue before using the brush. Unfortunately, the glue can prevent you assessing the shape of the brush, and after the glue is washed out, one can sometimes find that the brush is actually badly made, with hairs sticking out all over the place.

Even for a beginner, it is worth obtaining the best quality brushes available.

Sometimes you may find that insects eat the hairs of natural hair brushes, so you may want to store them in sealable plastic bags, or in Tupperware.

Painting Medium

Painting medium can be mixed with 50% **linseed oil** and 50% **pure gum turpentine** (or odourless solvent). Use that to thin your colours as you paint. I recommend mixing your own medium, as medium sold in the shop usually doesn't mention the ingredients within the bottle, so you don't actually know what you are buying. Also, you can adjust the amount of turpentine and oil.

The basic technical rule in oil painting is "fat" over "lean". A fat medium has more oil in the mixture. So the upper layers of the painting should have more oil in the medium. This is because the lower layers tend to suck some of the oil out of the top layers of paint. This can sometimes result in the top layer of paint cracking, due to insufficient oil in the paint layer. It is the oil that give the paint flexibility, as the painting support (the canvas board or canvas) increase and decrease in size slightly, due to changes in temperature. In practice, I find that half oil, half turpentine is usually satisfactory, however, if you are painting many many layers, then I recommend making sure there is more oil in the medium in the upper layers, and more turpentine in the lower layers. You need to careful to not use too much linseed oil, as that can cause yellowing of the paint film, and other problems. The turpentine in the medium is a way of allowing the paint to be more fluid, without adding too much oil. The turpentine then evaporates. You can use linseed oil as a medium, without the turpentine, but use the oil very sparingly. Do not use the linseed oil sold in the hardware, as it is not sufficiently purified. Water soluble oil paints are also sold. These are a kind of emulsion paint.

Stand linseed oil is a type of oil that gives a painting more gloss, when mixed with the colours. It was used extensively by artists in the past. Sun thickened linseed oil is similar.

Dammar varnish can be used to varnish a picture to give it more gloss, of one wants a glossy look. Oil Paintings do not necessarily need to be varnished. Gloss varnish will cause glare.

Brush Stands are useful, to hold your brushes as you paint, or use large jars.

Jars, with lids, to hold the turpentine, and also the painting medium.

If you leave the dirty turpentine in a jar or bottle for a few days, colour can settle on the bottom. The clean turpentine on the top can then be decanted, and used as a first rinse next time, together with a second rinse with clean turpentine. Eventually the turpentine will become too dirty, and will need to be discarded. I dispose of my turpentine at the Council recycling centres.

Painting Supports

Canvas boards: In the class I Fredrix canvas boards. These boards can be cut, if you want to adjust their shape. I have found that other brands of board can sometimes be made with plastic, so cannot be cut. Also, some of the other brands of canvas board can have a rough surface. Painting boards are sold with a very smooth surface, such as Ampersand boards. It is worth trying such surfaces, as you may find that you prefer such boards, having a different surface texture compared to normal canvas boards. Smoother surfaces allow one to paint with more detail.

Wooden boards: One can paint on wooden boards, however avoid MDF, as the high glue content within the board is acidic and may damage the subsequent paint layers, over time. Masonite is often recommended, if it is made by steam pressing, rather than the use of glues. All boards should be primed before painting, to prevent the oil in the paint causing the wood to rot. Wooden boards can warp, over time, so they need to be framed with a strong bracing picture frame, or they need to be braced from behind by gluing a kind of wooden frame onto the back.

Canvas stretchers: These are best made with 100% cotton. Linen canvas is even better. Make sure the fabric is not too thin, and that it has a close weave. Inspect the back of the canvas. If the fabric is too thin, it will be very easy to damage the canvas, and one can accidentally pierce a hole into it. Double, or Triple Primed Canvas is recommended.

The fabric in a canvas is covered with a priming. This white priming is usually a kind of acrylic paint, although traditionally the priming was made with animal glue (a sizing) covered with white oil paint (called the priming). The idea of the acrylic priming (and the glue sizing) is to prevent the oil in the paint reaching the fabric below. If the oil gets into the fabric, it can rot the fabric, and the canvas will deteriorate over time. I have found that many canvases, when examined after starting a painting, have oil leaking onto the fabric at the back, as the priming is of poor quality. So it may be useful to put another coat, or two, of priming onto a canvas, before starting a painting on a canvas that you have purchased.

Notes

Pure gum turpentine is extracted from a pine tree, and mineral turpentine comes from petroleum. Pure gum turpentine has been traditionally used in the painting medium, as it apparently assists in the drying process, however, mineral turpentine can be used in the medium, instead.

I have been told by a toxicologist at the W.A. Health Department that: "Currently, the peer-reviewed scientific evidence does not support any concern that turpentine may cause cancer or mutations". It is still important, however, to have adequate ventilation when using any solvent.

It's important that one carefully properly wash one's hands after using artist's painting materials. Some artists wear thin latex type gloves when painting. From my reading, any toxic chemicals used in paint pigments, are not absorbed through the skin. Cautious students may want to avoid the cadmium colours, however reliable substitutes need to be used, if one does not want one's reds and yellows colours to fade. These can be hard to find.

Oil colours tend to go slightly transparent over time. For this reason, it is suggested that one try to maintain the white of the canvas, as much as possible, under the lighter colours.

If very dark colours are painted under light colours, then, over time, those light colours will be less luminous, as the dark colours will start to show through (slightly).

In practice, it is difficult to avoid painting light over dark, so the light colours may need more than one coat (or applied more thickly), when painted over darker colours.

If one wants to paint on a non-white painting surface, then I recommend a thin wash of some colour painted over the white surface of the support. The paint diluted with a medium mostly composed of turpentine. After that is dry, then start any drawing on top of that, and then proceed with the painting from there.

The painting support needs a certain amount of absorbency and tooth, otherwise the paint will not adhere, and it may crack and flake off. Quality priming of the support is important.

When a dried painting presents a slick smooth surface, upon which fresh paint does not take well, then one can roughen the paint surface with some fine sandpaper, to give the surface tooth.

Too much oil added to the oil paint, can lead to a glassy non-absorbent surface.

Too much added oil, can also lead to wrinkling of the paint, and also yellowing of the paint film.

Painting over old canvases is not recommended. Old paintings will usually show through the newer painting, eventually, on account of the increasing transparency of the oil paint over time. Ghosts of the original work will show up in a disconcerting manner, including brush marks.

Thick heavy impasto stokes, have good durability, only when broken or scattered across the painting. Continuous thick, pasty, layers are extremely liable to eventually crack.

Several thin coats of paint, are always preferable to one heavy coat of equal thickness.

The fresher the paint, the better the chances of permanent adhesion of the paint to the support.

Avoid the use of old paint that has been exposed to the air on the palette for a long time.

Once the paint starts to become tacky, or if it needs fluids to bring it back to it's normal consistency, then there is more chance the paint will not adhere properly to the support.

Before varnishing an oil painting the painting needs to be completely dry. Linseed oil dries by oxidation, while being exposed to the air. A normal oil painting will take three months to dry completely, even though a painting may be touch dry after one week. A painting, with lots of thick paint, may need six months, or longer, to dry. Varnish the painting while it is flat, and let it dry flat. Simply apply the varnish with something like a fan brush. The varnish dries quickly, by evaporation. Try to prevent dust and insects getting onto the painting as the varnish dries.

More than one coat may be required, depending on how glossy one wants it to look.

Over time, all varnishes turn yellow. When that happens, the varnish is cleaned off and a new

coat of varnish is put on. Old and yellowish paintings in museums, are ones due for re-varnishing.

Technical Matters

Different authors tend to give slightly different advice on oil painting, so, one may need to look at numerous books to compare advice, and then make up one's own mind. I think these five authors cover everything that you need to know.

I would strongly recommend the original "Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques" by Ralph Mayer as the main reference book for technical information. Try to consult/get his original version, the last 4th edition being published in 1981. Ralph Mayer was actually a paint chemist, and his research was extensive. Unfortunately, the later revised edition of this book, published after his death, has some important information removed from the text. The later version of his book, however, is still worth consulting, and has some updated information.

"The Artist's Handbook" by Ray Smith. This book has coloured illustrations and is quite comprehensive. I recommend getting the hardback version, as that version is easier to use as a text and reference book in the studio. This is a good book to start with.

"The Painter's Handbook: Revised and Expanded", the 2011 edition by Mark Gottsegen.

"Glazing" by Michael Wilcox. A very good recent book on oil painting techniques and materials.

"Art Hardware" by Steven Saitzyk (also at www.trueart.info)

"The Materials and Techniques of Painting" by Kurt Wehlte.

I also recommend these web sites: www.wetcanvas.com and justpaint.org/archive/ and www.artcons.edul.edu/mitra/resources and also: michaelwilcoxschoolofcolour.com

SOURCES OF ART MATERIALS

Jacksons Drawing Supplies

Alfred Cove: 595 Canning Highway, Alfred Cove. Ph. 9330 1322

Balcatta: 76 Erindale Road, Balcatta. Ph. 9240 1795

Cannington: 1468 Albany Highway, Cannington. Ph. 94581933

Fremantle: 21 Adelaide Street, Fremantle. Ph. 9335 5062

Mandurah: 58A Pinjarra Rd, Mandurah. Ph 9535 2827

Midland: 13 The Crescent, Midland. Ph. 9274 4964

Perth: 96 Beaufort Street, Perth. Ph. 9328 8880

Subiaco: 103 Rokeby Road, Subiaco. Ph. 9381 2700

Art and Craft World

12 Boag Road, Morley. Ph. 9328 4833

Oxlades

49 Guthrie Street, Osborne Park. Ph 9446 3233

Officeworks

Officeworks stores do sell some art materials, including canvases.

Oil Painting Starters Materials List

Use this list, in conjunction with the attached detailed information about materials:

Oil Colours: As a minimum, one can start with Cadmium Red Light (PR 108), Permanent Rose (PV 19), Cadmium Yellow (PY 37), Ultramarine Blue (PB 29), and Cerulean Blue (PB 35 or 36) or Phthalo Blue (PB 15), Black (PB 9, 6, 7 or 11) and Titanium White (PW 6).

The "Hue" colours (with different pigment numbers), can be bought instead, however, I still recommend only buying genuine Permanent Rose (PV 19), genuine Cadmium Red or Naphthol Scarlet (PR 188), genuine Cadmium Yellow (PY 37 or 35) or Hansa Yellow (PY 3), if you want colours that don't fade. The "Hue" colours are cheaper, although they have some limitations. This is enough to get started, and to mix most colours.

The next most useful colours are Cadmium Lemon Yellow (PY 35), and Phthalo Green (PG 7 or 36), which enable one to mix brighter greens. Hansa Yellow (PY 3) can be substituted for Cadmium Lemon Yellow. It is cheaper, although it is a much weaker colour, in terms of its tinting strength. I would recommend Hansa Yellow (PY 3 only) as the only reasonably reliable replacement for any Cadmium Yellow, if you don't buy the Cadmium Yellows.

Cobalt Blue (PB 28) is recommended, as in practice, this is probably the most commonly used blue when you paint. It is a middle blue. Cobalt Blue "Hue" is satisfactory, although not quite the same colour as true Cobalt Blue. It is made by mixing Ultramarine Blue and Phthalo Blue.

All the browns, can theoretically be mixed with red, yellow and blue, however these browns are very good to start with, and handy: Yellow Ochre (PY 43 or 42), Burnt Umber (PBr 7), Raw Umber (PBr 6), and Burnt Sienna (PBr 7).

Recommended Brands: Langridge, Art Spectrum, Gamblin and Michael Wilcox (available on-line). Michael Harding and Old Holland (available on-line) are top of the line, although expensive.

Students who are not concerned about buying colours that may eventually fade, should obtain the following: An orange-red, a pink-purple red, a purplish blue, a greenish blue, titanium white, black, a middle yellow, a lemon yellow and a phthalo green. The four browns mentioned above are also useful. Cheaper paint brands don't necessarily have pigment numbers on the tubes. One can sometimes obtain a set of cheaper oil colours in a box.

Palette Knife: Art Spectrum, RGM Soft Grip, or Mamieri brands are recommended.

Linseed Oil: 100ml.

Pure Gum Turpentine: 100 ml.

Mineral Turpentine: 1 litre.

Brushes:

Recommended Hog Hair Brushes: Art Spectrum series 900 and series 1100.

Recommended Synthetic Brushes: NEEF series 95 and Art Spectrum Imitation Mongoose.

Recommended Sable Brushes: NEEF series 225, Art Spectrum Series 72 and Raphael 8404 are all good brushes if you want some quality fine brushes for fine detail work.

These sable brush series are also recommended for watercolour painting.

Art Spectrum Long Handled Flat Sable Brush.

Jars, Paper Towels and Cotton Rags.

Palette

Easil: Mabef M/06 (used in the classroom) or Mont Mart 240 cm Large Studio Easil with castor wheels. This is similar in size to the Mabef M/06, but much cheaper.