

Oil Painting Questions and Answers

Why choose oil paints over other types of paint?

Oil paints are one of the great classic media. They have been used for hundreds of years and have stood the test of time with great durability and steadfast color. Oils are beloved by artists for many reasons. They offer great versatility. Oils can be very opaque, or they can be thinned with a solvent to varying levels of transparency. They have a slow-drying time, during which their colors do not change, allowing the artist to rework, correct, and even scrape off areas of paint.

What are oil paints made of?

Oil paints are comprised of pigments suspended in a binder, generally linseed oil. Depending on the manufacturer, other ingredients may be added as well, such as stabilizers or dryers.

What brushes should I use with oil paints?

A wide range of brushes may be used. From natural to synthetic bristles, the brush can be left largely up to the artist. By experimenting with different brushes, each individual artist can find ones that suit their needs. Traditional oil painting brushes have long handles, so that the artist can work at some distance from the canvas. The hair is generally firmer and stiffer than for a watercolor brush. Palette knives can also be a very useful tool for mixing and/or applying oil paints to paintings.

How do I clean oil paint from my brushes?

Cleaning your brushes is a very important step in ensuring a longer life for your brush. In the case of oil paints, the brush should be cleaned off thoroughly starting with solvent and rags or tissue. Once the brush is fairly clean from the solvent, rub the bristles in a glass or plastic jar with either a brush conditioner or a human hair shampoo. Give the brush a good final rinse and squeeze out any water. Dry the brush with its hair end lower than the handle end to prevent water from loosening the handle and the ferrule. Dry brushes can be stored bristle up in a jar, or laid flat. Protective storage containers are available too.

What kind of support should be used with oil paints?

Canvas, linen, panels, boards, and heavy papers are all appropriate. It is important that the support can carry its own weight and that it can support the weight of the paint as well. Preparing the support so that paint will adhere well is very important. Oil paint must be separated from its support with some kind of ground. This ground should provide a combination of tooth and absorbency that suits the individual artist.

What does "Direct Painting" mean?

This means that the paint is applied in one layer. A good way of thinking about this technique is that a painting can be completed in one sitting, and does not require waiting time before adding another layer.

What does "Indirect Painting" mean?

This is a more complex method of painting with oils. It is also thought of as a more traditional approach. Here the artist applies many layers of paint, adjusting the opacity of the layers to create different effects. Indirect painting can result in very luminous tones and colors.

What does "Fat Over Lean" mean?

This is a traditional rule of oil painting. "fat" paint has more oil in it, and "lean" paint has less oil in it. As artists paint layers onto paintings, they make each progressive layer "fatter" than the one before by adding more medium. The more oil the paint has the more flexible it is. When the overpainting is more flexible than the underpainting, the paint is less likely to crack as it dries.

What is "Impasto" painting?

Impasto refers to a thicker application of paint (think Vincent Van Gogh) which has physical dimensionality. Use caution with this technique as thick layers of paint have a tendency to crack as they dry. Integrating smaller areas of this technique into a painting works best.

How can I protect my finished oil painting?

A finished painting should be coated with a protective varnish. However, it takes six months to a year for an oil painting to dry thoroughly enough to apply this finishing layer. In the meantime, store your work in a dust free, but not dark storage area.

Can I save oil paints and use them later?

Once oil paints begin the drying process and have developed an outer skin, they lose some adhesive and drying properties that cannot be recovered.

Here are three tips you can try to preserve leftover paints to use later:

- Try transferring blobs of paint to a strip of glass, then submerge that in water.
- Cover the paint with plastic wrap closely, so as to exclude all air.
- Cover your entire palette with plastic wrap and put it in the freezer.

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