

OIL PAINTING – 2025 cheat sheet by Adam

BASIC SET OF MATERIALS FOR OILS & ALKYDS

If you don't know these colours, I suggest that you watch the video for each colour which shows you some of the mixes atet each colour can give. <https://www.michaelharding.co.uk/>

Very good info about palettes : <https://gamblincolors.com/exploring-color-palettes/>

COLOURS

Please note that I'm not recommending any brand in particular but maybe go for Daniel Smith is in America & Winsor & Newton or Jackson's if in the UK.

- * Titanium White (A big tube. You'll need more white than any other colour. If oils, whilst traveling, I recommend using an ALKYD white, instead of an oil paint white.)
- * Lamp Black (or Gamblin Chromatic Black)
- * Dioxaine Violet (Winsor Violet or Daniel Smith Carbazole Violet) for darkening.

The 'Split-Primaries' Palette (a warm & a cool of each primary colour) :

- * Permanent Rose (for flowers & portraits) or Alizarin Crimson (for landscape)
- * Cadmium Red Pale (daniel smith Cadmium Red Medium Hue)
- * Cerulean Blue Hue
- * French Ultramarine Blue (Ultramarine red shade)
- * Cadmium Yellow Pale **artists quality for this one.** Put your money on yellows. Cadmium won't harm you... unless you eat it. Daniel Smith Cadmium Yellow Light Hue is OK but a shade too warm, bring a lemon yellow as well for bright spring greens?
- * Yellow Ochre

Now add a few other additional colours for landscape:

- * Sap Green, * Phthalo Green – once called 'viridian' (Winsor Green blue shade, Daniel Smith Phthalo Green Blue Shade)
- * Burnt Sienna, * Light Red (Daniel Smith Indian Red),

BRUSHES

- 2 or 3 Short Flat Brights, hog hair, size 2 to 4 if you paint small, size 3 to 5 if you paint large.
- 2 or 3 Long Flat, hog hair, size 4 to 6.
- 1 Filbert, hog hair, size 5.
- 1 or 2 small pointed brushes, prolene/nylon or sable.
- 1 large round, hog hair.
- 1 wide flat wash/varnish hog or nylon. Use for transparent glazes, blending & varnishing.
- 2 palette knives

CANVAS BOARDS OR CANVAS PAPER

5 canvas boards (not stretched canvases), size 30 x 40 cm (15x11inches) or 24 x 30 cm (10x12 inches).

We have three full sized 'Julian' box easels which can take any size up to 75 cm height.. Two light weight mediums sized pochades which can take up to 12 inches (30,5 cm) width. And one Strada mini. So you must decide beforehand if you wish to work large, medium or small. Then bring Along The appropriate sizes.

A few sheets of Canvas paper , great for doing learning exercises on. Take it off the backing board of pad to save weight.

Help with packing paintings on last day.

We provide these materials:

SOLVENTS

white spirit for outside. Odourless for inside.

Inflammable materials are not allowed on air flights.

Linseed oil & liquin

Drying agents

FURNITURE

Palettes (basic quality)

Easels (wooden tripod field easels)

Camping tables

Sketching stools

Drawing Boards

Aprons

Sun parasols

Jam jars

Rags

Paper towels

Pins

Tape

THE PALETTE – ‘MOTHER OF ALL COLOURS’

The palette has three main uses :

1. To provide a surface for mixing your colours and balancing them one to the other
2. To organize, systemize and lay-out your colours. Your palette is your map.
3. To provide a surface for tempering your paint with mediums.

There are four basic types of lay-out:

1. THE TONAL PALETTE.

Based on the achromatic scale. Traditionally starts with white & runs down to dark/black. An order might be White, Yellow Ochre, (thumb-hole), then runs down the exterior outside in a descending scale from light to dark. An order might be White, Yellow Ochre, Naples Yellow, Cadmium Yellow , Raw Sienna, Raw Umber, Cadmium Red, Dove Grey, Kings Clear Blue (mid-point cobalt blue), Chrome Green Mid, Ultramarine, Alizarin, Violet, Burnt Sienna, Viridian, Black.



Francisco BAYEU. (détail) Autoportrait, vers 1792, huile sur toile, 133 × 98 cm, Académie San Fernando
Note few greens & blues.



NB: note that paints that are in right position on palette are left to dry out in 'ant hills'

The tonal palette is good for portraits. Much confusion as tonal value of red.

Most prevalent from Renaissance to Nineteenth Century.

NB. Post-Industrial Revolution colours are stronger, longer lasting and brighter, especially Cadmiums.

Before the invention of tube colours, the day's paint had to be freshly prepared in advance.

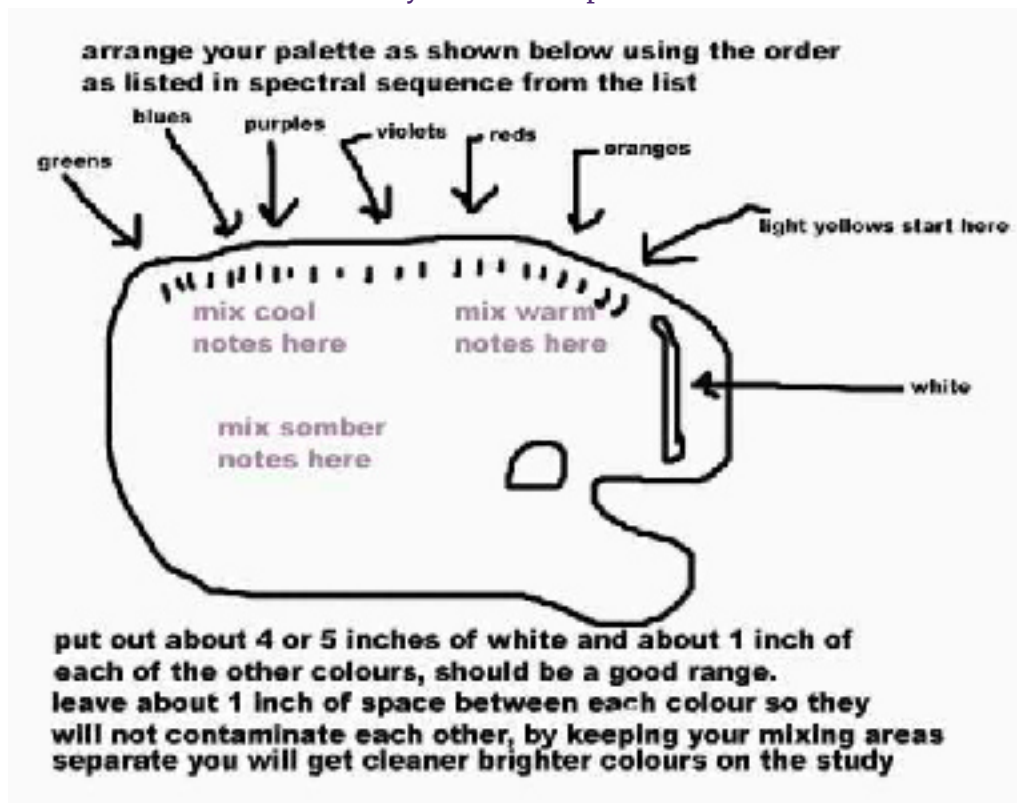
A wonderful tonal palette is **Zorn's restricted palette** : yellow ocre, cadmium red pale, ivory black, white.

- Flake white,
 - Yellow Ocher
 - Vermilion
 - Cool black (Ivory + cobalt blue)
 - Warm black (Ivory + burnt Sienna)

2. THE SPECTRAL PALETTE.

– R O Y G B V – Based on the rainbow. Mixes into a central pool of white. Came increasingly popular 19th Century. Note that Black has been banished. Note that Black has been banished. Greys and neutrals mixed from the breaking of complementaries.

Here's Henry Hensche's Spectral Palette :



Seurat used an interesting, practical and blindly obvious variant of the Spectral Palette where in front of each colour was placed its mid tone and then a pate of white (rather than mixing into one central - and easily pollutable - pool of white). Pre-mixing a few mid tones isn't a bad idea as it will save on brush hygiene.



ADAM'S 'GREEN SPECTRAL PALETTE'

– R O Y G B V –

Yellow in middle, not red. Good for a green landscape. Because I like my greens next to my yellows & my blues. Because I like a large surface area to mix my greens & yellows. Because I like to keep the white opposite my spectrum of colours.

Jump across the yellow 'dividing line' to break or 'dull down' a colour.

Mix into white, with areas for dark, mid & light values.

Two dark points of Dioxazine Violet.

Sometimes I mix a chromatic black from :

Dioxazine Violet (transparent)

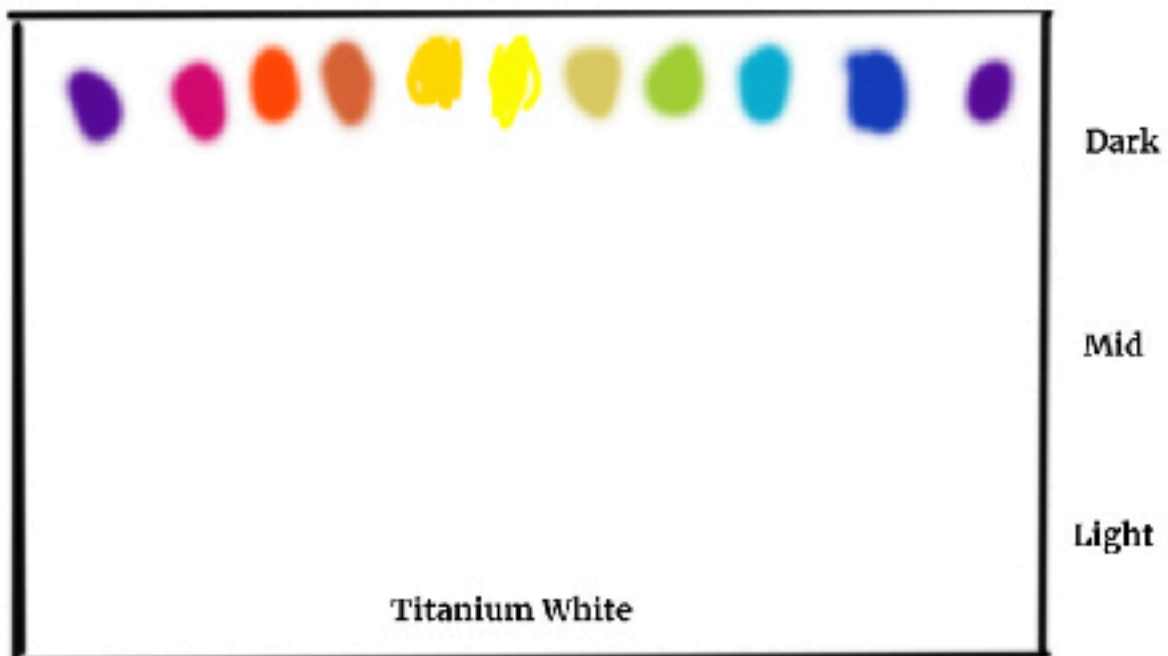
+

Sap Green (transparent) or Viridian (transparent)

+

Permanent Rose (transparent) or Light Red (opaque)

Adam's 'Green Spectral Palette'



From left to right:

1. Dioxazine Violet
2. Permanent Rose (or Alizarin Crimson)
3. Cadmium Red Pale
4. Light Red (or Burnt Sienna)
5. Cadminum Yellow
6. Cadmium Lemon Yellow (or Cadmium Yellow Pale)
7. Yellow Ocre
8. Sap Green (for glazing)
7. Cerulean Blue hue
8. French Ultramarine
9. Dioxazine Violet

3. THE RESTRICTED PALETTE.

Here the number of colours are restricted to only a necessary few. This is a good learning experience , as with only an economy of colours , the painter is forced to master his/her mixing skills.

In theory, most colours are attainable from a combination of the three primaries plus white. In practice, it is better to have both a warm and a cool cast of each hue. This called the 'SPLIT PRIMARIES'

This is the classic Winsor & Newton restricted palette:

SPLIT PRIMARIES

- Cadmium Red Pale/ Permanent Rose
- Cadmium Yellow Pale/ Lemon Yellow
- Ultramarine Blue/ Cerulean.

Every painter should try to do at least one painting using this restricted palette, as it is an invaluable exercise.

Either way, you should have the habit of asking yourself 'Is this colour really necessary?' when you lay-out your palette. Economy of means is one of the marks of mastery. More colours than is really necessary only goes to confuse...

The Impressionists, especially Pissarro, frequently used restricted palettes. Here is the one of Pissarro's - From the thumb hole on the outside, White; Chrome Yellow; Vermillion; Alizarin Crimson (1890's - Madder); Ultramarine (1890's - Cobalt); Emerald (1890's - Veronese Green). Note how not only black is banished but also browns.

Even more mixing on palette going on than in Spectral and Tonal Palettes.

4. THE IDIOSYNCRATIC PALETTE.

Do your own thing... but don't expect to be taught as nobody else will understand what's happening on your palette.

Matisse said to put order into your palette is to put order into your thinking. I started off with an idiosyncratic palette i.e. All over the place... As soon as I started to lay out my palette, my painting improved exponentially & I started to waste much less paint.

Tips for Saving and Reusing Oil Colors

- Instead of letting oil colors dry on your palette between painting sessions, seal your palette with plastic wrap to prevent the oil colors from drying out.
 - Mix all of the colors that remain on your palette, to make your own, personal Grey. This often yields an interesting neutral/grey color that can be stored in empty tubes, boxes or air-tight jars for future use.
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What is Oil Paint made from?

The composition of oil paint may be compared to a white sauce: flour, butter & milk. For *flour*, read the pigment, which is then held together by a binder – the *butter* – linseed or saffoil in oil paints. The white sauce is then diluted or thinned into a flowing viscosity with a ‘vehicle’ by *milk* – or turpentine in oil paints.

Cheap paint has lots of extenders (wax, aluminium stearate, chalk...) & less pigment. It feels slimy, and so is less controllable. It is also more transparent than quality paint. Cheap paint also has lots of driers to make different pigments all dry at the same rate. Different pigments dry at different rates. Thickly applied Dioxazine Violet can take months to dry whilst Burnt Umber dries overnight.

White Spirits

‘lean’ **Vehicle**

Petrol derivative. Hydrocarbon, not benzene. Less toxic & smelly than Turpentine.

Cleaning agent for your brushes, etc.

Good to paint ‘alla prima’ one coat plein-air. Dries looking less rich, oily & succulent thus needs a varnish.
I paint with white spirits outside en plein-air.

Use as a Thinner : Dilute to about single cream consistency for a block in. A film of paint diluted with only white spirits is dry-looking, has good grip and leaves the brush-marks visible. A thin coat normally dries overnight in summer.

Artists Turpentine Substitute is a type of refined white spirits. Use the Odorless inside: Gamsol (USA). Gersteacker Ordourless Artists Turpentine Substitute (UK@ greatart.co.uk). I paint inside my studio with Shellsol T ordourless solvent (UK@ Jacksonsart.com or Kremer-pigmente.de).

True Gum Turpentine

‘less lean’ **Binder/solvent**

True Gum Turpentine is made from the distillation of thick resinous sap of pine trees. Toxic odours!! It is a volatile and toxic material; please exercise due caution when using this product. Store in darkness, as direct sunlight causes turpentine to cloud. Turpentine Substitute from DIY shops, isn’t fatty, is not made from pine trees & has a lot of drying agents in it, making a bad choice for artist’s oil painting. Use white spirits instead if you can’t afford True Gum Turpentine.

It acts as a binder as well as a solvent. Use unadulterated for first layer or coat. Slower drying than white spirits, which can be helpful in hot sunshine in plein-air if you wish to paint ‘wet in wet.’ Beware of turpentine substitute from DIY shops; they are not true artists quality turpentine. Don’t use them because they often have far too many driers added, which can ruin any attempt at ‘wet in wet.’ You are better off using white spirit.

White spirits dilutes or ‘cuts’ the oil paint, whilst true gum Turpentine gives a creamy, smooth, liquid butter dilution. It also dries to a richer finish, less dry in appearance than white spirits. Thus gives brighter glazes.

Linseed Oil

'fat' Binder.

Gives oil paint its juicy succulence. Tends to flatten out brush strokes. Helps with blending & 'wet in wet'. Somewhat elastic.

Oil paint doesn't only dry by the turps evaporating but rather by the linseed oil oxidizing or 'setting' by exposure to air. It dries from its liquid, malleable state into a hard solid skin, forming a substance called 'linoxin', which cannot be reverted back. The drying process is comparable with the cooling of freshly cooked pudding. A skin covers the surface whilst the pudding is still soft underneath. Thick paint with too much linseed oil may cause the skin to crack or wrinkle or may make the paint underneath to slide on vertical surfaces.

Stand oil is much thicker & makes for a stronger paint film. Flexible & elastic. Much slower drying & less yellowing.

Safflow Oil is less yellowing than refined linseed oil but has a slimy feel.

Poppy Oil gives the brightest colours (being virtually transparent) & is slow drying. But dries brittle & risks cracking. So don't varnish over poppy oil & use in only in final layers.

Damar

'fat, sticky, shinny'

Tree resin. Great adhesion or stickiness. The base of a varnish. Brittle. Can cause cracking. Needs the elasticity of linseed & maybe even wax. Slow drying.

How many layers? How many coats?

'Alla Prima' painting refers to paintings made in one sitting & have one coat of paint. This has the considerable advantage of not having to worry about how to build up layers of oil paint without causing cracking or dry patches.

If you wish to paint another layer, then you have to decide:

1. To paint 'wet in wet.' If the first layer isn't touch dry, then there's the risk of the first layer mixing into the next layer, thus effect the colour mixing. This is what is called 'wet in wet' in oil painting; it requires a light touch. Wet in wet gives good adhesion between layers.
2. Or wait for the undercoat to dry. It can take years for an oil painting to dry, which I why I like to varnish my paintings at least six months later so I can see how they are aging. A good oil painting will look succulent & 'fatty', as fresh as when it was painted. Adding fat as you build up the layers will help. When working over dry paint, it is important to follow the 'fat over lean' rule. When painting on top of a dry layer, if there's a lot of paint on underlayer, then consider applying a thin glaze of retouching varnish. This helps prevent dry patches & creates a more stable base coat, less likely to crack with aging. Or 'Oiling out'. When I know there's a need for at least two coats, I try & keep the first coat thin i.e; not too much paint. Block in with thin diluted paint (about 1 part paint, 1 part white spirits) . Then build up paint thickness.
3. I find too much paint early on makes the brushstrokes difficult to control as it is too slippery for me.

FAT OVER LEAN

For rich, lush, brilliant oil paintings that are succulent and age well, that don't crack, craze or dry out, paint FAT OVER LEAN. That is to say oil over spirit.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wt-TX24V0t4&list=PLXneTdw6DSfwCvdfAjNDbwIQgzo990TsR&index=19>

Never, ever put a film of paint diluted by white spirit over either pure 'tube' paint or paint that has been thinned with a fatty medium. (lean over fat).

Build the fat content up slowly.

A good way of building up a painting is to start off with a 'lay-in' made from paint plus white spirits, then start to fatten up by adding a percentage of oil to the second and subsequent paint layers. Increase the amount of fat with each layer. Avoid mixing with only pure linseed oil, as it yellows, is 'slimmy' and too glossy.

Try to paint thick over thin as well (except when glazing). The control is easier.

In practice, 'fat over lean' works best if one keeps to the following procedure of layering:

1. Oil paint over ground layer: dilute with solvent 1:1.
2. Neat oil paint, without dilution.
3. Neat oil paint, plus 10% oil-medium (e.g. dammar/stand oil based medium).

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Recipe for a second 'lean' coat: use paint thinly (double cream)

Linseed oil - 1 Part
white sprits - 5 Parts

Or true gum turpentine - 3 parts

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Recipe for a third 'fat' coat: apply with thicker paint (butter)

Stand Linseed oil - 1 Part
true gum turpentine - 3 Parts

Dammar Varnish – 1 part

The Damar varnish is made from tree sap resin and gives stickiness & grip to the mix. It needs the stand oil to stop it from becoming brittle. Beware of brittle paint layers on flexible supports such as canvas: they crack.

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ALKYD RESIN OR MASTIC MEDIUMS – 'fat-ish'

Been about for forty years. WINDSOR & NEWTON LIQUIN is the most popular.

Thinner: Dilute with white spirits. Made from beans + alcohol and acid. Quick drying. Do not mix with turps or linseed oil, as this can cause cracking & whitening over time (10 years or more). Turps can effect under lying alkyd layers.

The fat over lean rule still applies. Treat liquin like a 'fat.' Can be brittle if too thickly applied. A variation is WINDSOR & NEWTON OLEOPASTO, which is a gel. Allows the artist to work some texture into the painting but also accelerates the drying rate. Don't use too thickly as it will dry on the outside whilst staying wet on the inside, thus causing tensions that could lead to cracking.

Glazing in Oil Painting

Glazing is transparent. The paint is applied in thin, delicate, transparent layers. You work with the under-tone colour (thin paint) and not the mass-tone colour (thick paint), which greatly changes the way colour looks. Glazing in oils is similar to the 'dry on dry' technique in watercolour, where the colour is superimposed on top of another.

The under-lying paint layer has to be dry or else it will combine with the glaze. It is not wet in wet, where you smudge & mix on the canvas. It is thus not an 'alla prima' (done in one session) technique & is rarely used in plein-air alla prima (works great in acrylics though!). It tends to flatten out the brush strokes.



Titain - detail

Observe the fine transparent glazes of warm reds & cool transparent blues. How they sit in coarse texture of the heavy grain of the canvas. See how masterful the top layers of opaque blacks define the ships & waterfront. The opaque white highlights cover over the under layers. They are painted thickly, dry & without any mediums. ('scumbles')



‘Boisse, Cummulus Longinus’

Oil on canvas.

74 x 56 cm

1999

(Private collection, Glasgow).

STEP ONE : PLEIN-AIR, ONE SESSION (IT'S A BIG PAINTING!)

No glazing nor scumbling. I was happy with the dynamic brush strokes & composition. But somehow, the painting lacked the drama of the shadows cast by the long cumulus clouds, as they passed over in alternating bands of blue sky, white rolling waves & ominous grey rain-heavy cumulus. The trees seemed to be calling back.



Step Two : Glazes & Scumbles. Finished stage. painted in studio, when Step One is dry.

A combination of glazes and scumbles can be built up to form a unifying whole: such applications can be re-worked while still wet, scraped off, or worked over with fatter paint mixtures. Always, when applying mediums, scumbles and glazes refer to the Fat over Lean principle. Fatter layers always sit on top.

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* Damar Varnish (1 part damar to 3 parts turpentine) - one part

* Linseed Stand Oil - one part

* Artist's True Gum (balsam) Turpentine (double rectified) – five parts, depending on how many undercoats. And if 'oiled out'

* (dangerous option.. to be used only in emergencies - Cobalt drier– use with extreme caution , not more than 5 drops max. or else it will dry out and fragilize the oils in the paint. The 5 drops are for the ratio above if one part equals five fluid ounces.

Note that the turps evaporates quickly. The Damar varnish is made from tree sap resin and gives stick & grip to the mix. It needs the stand oil to stop it from becoming brittle. I find glazing with this damar medium gives more brilliant colour in the end result than the liquin mastic (which can age to be milky...), though it is more shiny. Glazing requires patience, slow drying & a very well ventilated studio because the turpentine fumes are noxious.

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Some pigments are more transparent than others and have beautiful undertones, such as :

- Winsor & Newton's Transparent Gold Ochre (2) or Old Holland's Transparent Red Iron Oxide (3), for warming up and giving heat.
- The modern bluey-red colours Alizarin Crimson (4), & the quinacridone colours.
- Phthalo turquoise (5) Winsor & Newton's ultramarine (6) for cooling down shadows.
- Phthalo Green blue shade (7), Sap Green (8)
- Dioxazine Violet (9), works well over dark colours
- Gamblin make a beautiful Chromatic black which is transparent & delicate. Great for darkening .
- OPAQUE COLOURS : titanium white (1) & Mortuum Captum (10)

Windsor & Newton paints have a higher proportion of Alumina stereate, making them more transparent than Old Holland, which are pigment heavy and thus more opaque. You can feel the difference in weight between the tubes; the heavier paint tends to have more pigment.



Scumbling in Oil Painting

Some pigments are opaque. When you lay down a thin layer of opaque colour, it acts as a kind of veil, masking over the underpainting. This is called 'scumbling'. It looks like the bloom on a plum. This can give the painting a tired look – or, when properly used, can be handy for knocking back too much detail and levelling down areas to the same importance in the compositional scheme. As they are opaque, they semi-cover over the under painting. I like to use the iron or Mars colours for this, but stop at scumbling with Mars violet as it so opaque – it's ancient name of Mortum Caputum (the burnt iron earth of alchemy) tells you all. Titanium White is opaque; use it to cover over & for high lights. Zinc white less opaque & thus is better for scumbling.

Winsor & Newton Master Class on transparent & opaque oils:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6WTB_KUwOI&feature=emb_title

Scumbling with oils | Winsor & Newton Masterclass

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FepWOa8bIpI&list=PLXneTdw6DSfwCvdfAjNDbwIQgzo990TsR&index=18>



[v=FepWOa8bIpI&list=PLXneTdw6DSfwCvdfAjNDbwIQgzo990TsR&index=18](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FepWOa8bIpI&list=PLXneTdw6DSfwCvdfAjNDbwIQgzo990TsR&index=18)

TIPS FOR GLAZING & SCUMBLING

I find it helpful to work on a white palette, as this allows you to see the degree of transparency.

The under-lying paint layer has to be dry or it will combine with the glaze.

1. Glazing has a horror of impurities. It is very susceptible to pollution. Make sure that all glazing brushes, palettes, solvents and mediums are all sparkling clean. Work in dust free environment. Smooth, uniform glazes need smooth, uniform undercoats, as glazing picks up and exaggerates the texture and brush marks in the undercoat.
2. **Fat over Lean** (dont lay those thin glazes over fat white clouds... They will crack eventually).
3. Generally, it is best to use hog bristle brushes, or else the stick in the medium risks to pull out the hairs of the more delicate types, such as sable. Please don't buy hair of dead badgers. Synthetic nylon works just as well.

3. Brushstrokes – Apply several thin coats rather than heavy one – better for structural reasons. Diagonal strokes reflect & scatter the light better.

But there is a risk of losing the power of decisive mark-making. It levels your brush strokes down. It can annul spontaneity. It makes your painting darker. It has a higher risk of cracking with age. Glazed paintings are difficult to exhibit, since they reflect a lot of light but also need a lot of light to be able to seen them.

4. Glazes can be laid down either in large flat areas like watercolour washes, or can be used for tinting up a specific area in a painting

For smooth, homogeneous, wash-like glazes, use a varnish brush, which is wide and thin, and so doesn't take up too large a charge of paint. Work the flow of the paint to lay a uniform film, just as with gloss household paint. The linseed oil will smooth out most of the irregularities.

Graduated glazes are good in skies. For blending in a smooth graduation, one area of glaze colour into another glazed area of a different colour, such as the rosy blush on a cheek into a glaze of bluish shadow as can be often seen in Ingres portraits, it was traditional to use a linseed oil heavy medium and a 'Fan Tail' brush for gently blending the two areas into each other

For working with glazes in a freer and looser manner, such as Constable's uses of thin glazes of bluey-black on the undersides of storm clouds, use a long flat or a filbert. The brush marks are left apparent.



'Chemin dans le Vignes (Homage au René Char)', Oil on canvas, 81x65cm, 2000. Private collection.

5. A dark colour over a light colour. The colour of the ground will shine through and optically combine with the glaze colour. The great standard of the Venetian school was robes of Popes, where alizarin is

glazed over vermillon red. For example, for a really hot mix glaze transparent red oxide over cadmium yellow, which will really heat up the overlying red.

6. What colour are the shadows in your painting? In natural light, the shadow colour is normally cooler than the high light. Glazing is often best done by playing warm against cool.

TECHNIQUES

1. Underpainting
2. Block-in
3. Side by side
4. How to paint a line
5. Blending
6. Alla Prima
7. Wet on wet
8. Tonalism
9. Grisaille
10. Demi-teinte Générale
11. Under-painting
12. Modelling
13. Chiaroscuro
14. Impasto
15. Palette Knife
16. Glazing & Scumbling
17. Dry on Dry
18. Oiling out & retouching
19. Varnishing