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How do you paint with acrylics for beginners

Welcome to Creative Bloq's guide to canvas painting for beginners. If you've mainly worked in your sketchbook or on paper so far, making the move to canvas can be a daunting prospect. This article will fill you in with everything you need to know about canvas painting for beginners, from the kit you need to get hold of, to how to prepare your surface for painting. Canvas is an archetypal artists' support (artists' canvas and paper are referred to as supports), and offers a wealth of advantages over paper - not least that it's much more durable, and can ensure your work lasts through the years - so it's worth taking the time to get to grips with this approach. If you need more advice on painting, see our posts on art techniques or oil painting techniques. There are a number of different kit options and techniques specific to canvas painting, but we're going to guide you through your options and fill you in on what you need to know. Use the drop-down menu opposite to jump to the section you want. For centuries, oil paintings were done on specially prepared wooden panels. These gave a great rigid surface to paint on but environmental factors could cause cracking and warping. They were also heavy to transport. Soon, lightweight stretched canvas soon became the popular choice for painters. Walk into any art shop and the most common canvases available are made from cotton canvas pre-primed with acrylic gesso, with linen canvas primed with oil primer at the more expensive end of the 'pre-made' market. There are a range of different canvas types available, at different prices (Image credit: Artoza) If you're going to really splash out, larger art shops will often offer a bespoke canvas-making service. You'll end up with a quality pre-made canvas that will stand the test of time, but expect to pay a proper price for it. Which canvas should I buy? When choosing a canvas, remember you get what you pay for. Linen offers a fair superior surface to paint on due to its greater strength and finer surface, when compared to cotton. Given the choice, we'd always plump for fine Belgian linen primed with an oil primer to give a lovely smooth and non-porous surface. However, if you're just getting started with canvas painting, it might make sense to pick up a cheaper cotton canvas to experiment on first. You can always improve a cheap pre-made cotton canvas by re-priming with an oil primer. ... a note on wooden corners One element of canvas painting that artists often miss is the little bag of wooden wedges supplied with each canvas. These are really important but often thrown in a drawer. These wedges are designed to be hammered into the holes on internal corners of your canvases to create tension on the canvas surface. This is vital to ensure a taut surface so you can control your brushstrokes. You might want to invest in a good rubber mallet for knocking in your wedges without damaging the stretcher bars! Alternatives to canvas Canvas boards are great for studies, they're thin, lightweight to transport and smaller sizes don't tend to warp. As the name suggests, they're made by glueing primed canvas to a board, usually a cardboard. Because they're made using canvas they tend to have a tooth to the surface which is great for showing off brushstrokes. If you're handy at DIY, a homemade version could save you money overall - take a look at our guide to how to make your own canvas boards. Gesso boards are a strong, lightweight option, but can be expensive (Image credit: Ampersand) Gesso boards by Ampersand are expensive compared to canvas boards but well worth the investment. They're made from a high-density hardwood so they're much stronger and still lightweight. They also come in a variety of thicknesses from standard 1/8" to 3/4", 1 1/2" and 2". They have a non-porous and lightly sanded surface that allows for great brush control, making Gesso boards a top quality alternative to traditional wooden panels and linen canvases. Metal can be a great alternative to wood as its extremely smooth, naturally non-porous, doesn't rot and is lightweight. Copper is the best choice, but aluminium is also a good option. It's important to still treat the surface with decent oil primer to make sure your paint bonds to the metal. Take care though, most boards and canvases will take the odd knock but a metal support will need extra TLC. Primers: Porous or non-porous? Whatever material you choose to use for your support, you'll need to prime it. Primed canvases can be put into two main camps, porous and non-porous. An acrylic gesso primer will make your canvas porous, while an oil primer will make your canvas non-porous. The basic principle is that a porous primed support will enable the paint to dry quicker as the water content of the paint is drawn into the support itself. A non-porous support will allow the paint to dry naturally through evaporation only. Non-porous primers, like this one, keep the paint workable for longer (Image credit: Michael Harding) The two main advantages to using a non-porous primer are the paint will stay wetter and more workable for longer and the oil paint will keep more of its lustre, or life. On porous primers the paint can look dead and chalky, because it has dried too quickly. A non-porous primer like Michael Harding Oil Primer will also give you more control of your brushstrokes, as the paint will glide over the surface, and stay wetter for longer. A non-porous primer will tend to drag the paint from the brush. How to prime a canvas When priming a support use a wide priming brush like a C Roberson to give an even finish. Start from one side of the support and work horizontally across the entire surface in one direction, and then allow to dry. Once dry turn the support 90-degrees and repeat the process, working across the brushstrokes of your first coat and allow to dry. Repeat as necessary. How to prepare your canvas for painting First: kill the white! Or put less dramatically, apply a ground of colour on your canvas. This not only gets rid of the daunting white, but also acts as a harmoniser. As you paint some of the ground will inevitably show through the brush strokes, creating a visually pleasant, harmonious effect. If using oil paints, I would advise applying the ground colour thinly mixed with a little Liquin drying medium the day you want to start painting properly, before to give it enough time to dry. Apply the ground colour roughly with a brush and then scrub it in with a wad of kitchen towel. Don't be too precious, it doesn't need to be perfect. Try experimenting with different coloured grounds. You will need to add more paint over a darker ground compared to a lighter one, but this can also give interesting results. Using a mahlstick You don't need much equipment to get started with canvas painting, but what little you do need it's worth investing in. A mahlstick is a great tool for canvas painting. It's basically a stick with a cork ball on the end covered in chamois leather. It's primarily designed to give something for painters to lean when working on larger canvases, but they come in very handy with smaller canvases too. For more information, take a look at this article on how to use a mahlstick. Canvas painting for beginners: Get started So you've got your kit all ready, and your canvas primed and good to go. Time to start painting! How to approach this depends heavily on what kind of paint you're using. We've gathered our best advice articles together to help you continue on your canvas painting journey. Dive in... Oil painting Working in oils can feel scary - and to master oil painting requires knowledge of certain techniques you might not be used to. Explore these 10 essential oil painting tips for advice on getting started and how to manipulate the paint. For more advice on getting kitted out, take a look at this article detailing five things you need for oil painting. Acrylic painting Acrylic paints dry fast and can either be used straight from a tube or thinned with water and used more like a watercolour. This article runs through the acrylic painting tips you need to know to start working with this versatile, vibrant medium. General painting advice Ready to take your skills to the next level? Explore this painting techniques article for some more advanced tips, including using dry brushing, glazing and sgraffito. There are tips here that can be used for canvas painting with a range of different paint types. Read more: If you've ever wished for an acrylic paint that dried slowly, more like oil paint, you now get it in the form of Open Acrylics from Golden. It looks and handles like normal acrylics, but makes blending colors something that can be done leisurely. Paint stays workable for far longer than normal acrylics without the use of mediums. Makes blending colors slowly feasible. Available in 40 colors. Compatible with other Golden acrylics (thus likely will be with other brands). When paint is tacky, fresh paint, water, or medium makes it workable again. Pay attention to the packaging/label so you don't accidentally buy 'normal' Golden acrylics. Very thick applications of paint will take ages to dry (Golden says don't go over 1/16" thick). Need to leave paint to dry thoroughly before varnishing (Golden says 30 days minimum). Produced by Golden Artist Color, came onto the market mid-2008. Available in 40 colors (color chart) Two mediums (info sheet) and a thinner (info sheet) have been created for this brand. The gloss gel medium is an extender (retains the paint's consistency) while the gloss medium makes it more fluid. Having heard quite a bit about how Golden's Open Acrylics did indeed stay workable for ages, making them more comparable to oil paint than normal acrylics, I decided to do a bit of an unfair test. I tried the samples I'd received on a piece of unprimed paper and then left it overnight near the night-storage heater. So not only was it on a very absorbent surface but also near a dry heat source. The result? Thin paint dried very quickly (not a surprise), but slightly thicker paint was still tacky the next morning, and clumps were totally workable and had not skinned over. It may look like normal acrylic paint, but it's not. I've only played around with some samples so haven't yet used it extensively enough to confidently say how it handles glazing. But given that the paint can be "reopened" if it's not totally dry it will require some timing adjustments compared to normal acrylics at the very least. Working wet-on-wet requires more discipline to prevent overworking because you can keep going for so much longer. Overall I think Golden's Open Acrylics are an exciting development in acrylic paints. I envisage mixing normal acrylics and these depending on what I'm painting, as sometimes I want paint to dry very rapidly and sometimes I want time to consider and blend. how do you paint rocks with acrylics for beginners. how to paint with acrylics for beginners. how to start to paint with acrylics

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