

INTRODUCTION TO OIL PAINTING

5-WEEK ONLINE COURSE



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For help and support during this course, please email info@classicalartatelier.com or call +353 (0)87 660 9644

Materials List

OIL PAINTS

Our course begins by using just white and black oil paint, or a monochrome palette known as grisaille painting. As the course progresses, we will gradually add other colours and palettes. **Make sure that all of your oil colours use oil only, and are not water-soluble.**

The best cheapest brand are Winsor & Newton Artists Oil Colours (and not their Winton student grade paint) or Gamblin Oil Colours. Other and better brands include Rembrandt, Old Holland, Williamsburg and Michael Harding.

Basic Palette

A good basic palette includes:

- Titanium White
- Ivory Black
- Burnt Umber
- Raw Umber
- Yellow Ochre
- Cadmium Yellow
- Alizarin Crimson
- Cadmium Red
- French Ultramarine Blue

Recommended Extras

If possible, you should also have:

- Lemon Yellow
- Cadmium Orange
- Sap Green
- Viridian
- Cobalt Blue

BRUSHES

The brushes you will need fall into three categories: bristle, sable, and synthetic.

- Bristle brushes consist of stiff hair making them ideal for big and heavier brushwork in the early and middle stages of a painting
- Sable brushes like Kolinsky are used for finer work – they're softer and tend to be used as your painting becomes more detailed and nuanced
- Synthetic brushes, like sable, will be used in the late stages of your painting when subtle blending is required

Just like the painting process works from the largest forms to the smallest forms, or general to specific, so too, your choice of brushes will progress from large to small. For most of the painting you will work with a medium-sized brush (size 6 – 8), a larger brush (size 12) for large areas like the background, and much smaller brushes (sizes 0 – 1) for very fine detail.

There are many different shaped brushes but here are the main ones that you will need:

- Filbert – rounded end
- Round – round brush with pointed end
- Flat – flat square end
- Rigger – long pointed end (optional)
- Fan – fan-shaped brush

There are many brands on the market, and rather than rate each of them, here's what I use – a mixture of different brands and types:

- Da Vinci Maestro bristle
- Princeton Catalyst Polytip bristle
- Winsor & Newton round and large filbert
- Rosemary & Co.
- Galeria synthetic fan and filbert brushes
- Kolinsky round sable brushes
- Monarch (W&N) rounds and flats

Basically, for the very large bristle brushes and for some synthetic blending brushes, I'm not very fussy. For me, the most important are the most used brushes: the medium-sized bristle filberts and fine detail smaller sable brushes. So I opt for very good brands for these.

MEDIUMS & SOLVENTS

Solvent, as the name suggests, dissolves a solute (or the oil paint).

Medium, again, as the name suggests, carries or acts as a vehicle for the paint. In oil painting, the medium is oil. The paint itself, straight from the tube, contains a certain amount of oil, hence "oil paint." By adding medium (in the form of linseed oil, for example), we're just increasing the amount of oil in the paint mixture.

The oil component also slows down the drying time, so the more oil being used – whether its pure oil paint or oil paint plus added (linseed) oil – the slower the paint layer will dry. Solvent, in contrast, soaks in and evaporates quickly. Just pour some solvent and medium side by side on a piece of paper, and see which one dries first.

Uses

As solvent dissolves the paint, it makes sense that we use it to clean our brushes. As it dilutes the paint, it then also works very well to create a very thin fast-drying layer of paint in the early stages of our painting.

Medium (or linseed oil, for example) is akin to the oil already present in a tube of oil paint, thus adding to the paint reinforces its purpose – to carry the pigment. But it also dries much more slowly, so medium is also used to slow down the drying process.

The ability to control the drying time of each layer, using either solvent or medium (or sometimes a ratio of both), is necessary so as to ensure that the initial layers of paint (or underpainting layers) dry faster than the overpainted layers. If a lower layer of paint dries slower than an upper layer of paint, it begins to undo that upper layer as it dries, resulting in cracking and other problems.

In the lists of solvents and mediums below, basically all of the items in each list are doing the same job just in a slightly different way and with their set of advantages and disadvantages.

Types of Solvent

- **Turpentine:** is technically a solvent, made from natural tree resin, and one of the more traditional ones that painters use.
- **Mineral Spirits** (or White Spirits): petroleum-based, cheaper and less toxic than turpentine, and with moderate evaporation rate.
- **Odourless Mineral Spirits:** made from distilled petroleum with chemicals added to remove the strong odour.
- **Gamblin Gamsol:** low odour solvent
- **Sansodor:** low odour solvent, but evaporates or dries quite slowly.

Types of Medium

- **Linseed Oil:** reduces the consistency of the paint and slows the speed of drying. All linseed oil variants tend to dry with a slightly yellowish tinge but on its own, it dries to a high gloss.
- **Stand Oil:** thicker variant of the purified version. It dries quicker and to a tough, smooth and elastic finish, leaving no brush marks.
- **(Fast) Drying Linseed Oil:** slightly darker than the others, and as its name suggests, dries even more quickly.
- **Poppy Oil & Safflower Oil:** paler oils and are particularly useful when mixing with white or lighter colours, to avoid the 'yellowing' associated with linseed oil. They also take rather longer to dry.
- **Liquin & Alkyd Mediums:** half the drying time.
- **Walnut Oil:** this oil medium was more highly regarded by some of the Old Masters, as they considered it less likely to 'yellow' than linseed oil. It dries quicker than safflower and poppy oils.
- **Neo Megilp:** is a soft gel medium used to maintain the body of oil colors, increase transparency and flow, and impart a smooth, silky feel. Dries at a moderate rate and remains workable for hours. Gives colours a satin gloss.

SUPPORTS

Canvas

You will need a range of A3 (42 x 29.7 cm) and A4 (29.7 x 21 cm) size canvases, or approximate corresponding sizes.

I recommend that if you're doing a lot of painting (which I hope you are and will be), that you buy a roll of primed canvas, as it's much more economical and gives you much more freedom in terms of sizing your canvas. You then have the option of stretching the canvas – and framing it – if you wish. If using canvas cut from a roll, just simply attach it to a wooden board using masking tape and/or drawing clips.

Canvas boards and ready-made can also be used but these are more expensive, limited in terms of sizes and dimensions, and cause storage problems over time.

It makes very little sense to work on stretched canvas just for any of our studies, which you are unlikely to display or exhibit.

Setting Up Easel, Board and Canvas

The ideal set-up is to stand at a studio or portable easel, with a smooth drawing board approximately 45 x 60cm minimum (i.e. large enough to place two A3s side-by-side).

You can use a table easel, which recreates a similar set-up. However, there are disadvantages to being seated:

- You don't have as much physical freedom as you do when standing
- Your arm and elbow movement is more restricted
- And most importantly, you will be less inclined to stand up and move back from your painting, which is essential in order to assess its progress and to judge things properly

If you are using a table easel, make sure that your line of sight to the canvas or board is 90 degrees. In other words, you will have to tilt the the canvas / board towards you. This prevents any distortion in your view of the painting i.e. the bottom of the painting shouldn't be closer to you than the top, nor is any acute tilt creating a foreshortened view.

ACCESSORIES

Below are some of the most essential accessories:

- **Palette**
You can use glass, wood, plastic or disposable. The best standard is the oval-shaped wooden palette with thumb hole. If you are using any other type of palette, just make sure that it isn't white.
- **Palette Knife**
The palette knife should be medium-sized and with a crank in the handle.
- **Palette Cups**
Convenient for holding small amounts of solvent and medium on the palette, rather than constantly reaching to your work table.
- **Paper Towel**
Absolutely essential. This should be in your hand at all times.

- **Mahlstick**
Especially for bigger paintings, you will need a mahlstick, which braces your painting hand and prevents you from touching the wet paint and also stabilises your hand for detailed work. You can make your own mahlstick by taking a long $\frac{3}{4}$ inch dowel, wrapping a ball of newspaper in tape at one end of the stick.
- **Glass Jar(s)**
For mediums and solvents.
- **Tape**
Magic Tape, Scotch 3M, Masking Tape
- **Knitting Needle or Skewer**
For taking measurements – angles and distances
- **Plumbline**
About 50-10cm long, made from black string with a weight at the end of it will be needed as you move into larger studies. As Sargent said, “A plumbline should never leave a student’s hand.” It can be used to check vertical and horizontal alignments, as well as to take measurements of distance. Having said this, the eye is very good at recognising horizontal, vertical and 45 degree angles.
- **Black Hand Mirror**
Using your smartphone or a hand-held mirror, look straight up or down, to the left or to the right, to see the reverse true image of what you’re working on. This is a useful way of tricking the eye when it becomes tired or biased. Any piece of reflective piece of glass, welding glass, or glass painted black will work, and help you assess values.

Art Supply Stores

Below is a list of art supply stores that I use (or have used).

Ireland

Cork Art Supplies Cork	www.corkartsupplies.com
K & M Evans Art Supplies Dublin	www.evansartsupplies.ie
Kennedy Art Supplies Dublin	www.kennedyart.com

U.K.

Jackson’s Art London, U.K.	www.jacksonsart.com
Cass Art London, U.K.	www.cassart.co.uk

Germany

BOESNER GERMANY (Also France, Denmark, Sweden, Etc.)

www.boesner.com

Gerstaecker Germany

www.gerstaecker.de

France

SENNELIER PARIS

www.sennelier.fr

DALBE PARIS

www.dalbe.fr

LE GÉANT BEAUX-ARTS PARIS

www.geant-beaux-arts.fr

U.S.A.

BLICK U.S.A.

www.dickblick.com