

Introduction to Oil Painting

Glenda Blake / <http://glendablake.com>

Your Home Public Library, Johnson City NY

OIL PAINTING MATERIALS

- Substrate (canvas panel, stretched canvas, primed & gessoed hardboard, etc.)
- Palette knife, for mixing and scraping
- Brushes: #4 and #2 filberts, #8 bright. Experiment with others, and with bristle vs. synthetics/sable.
- Wiping rags: cut up old T-shirts into appx. 4x4" squares.
- Paper towels, for wiping brushes, knife, and hands, while painting

Paints

Basic palette colors:

- Titanium white
- Cadmium yellow light or medium
- Cadmium red light or medium
- Cobalt blue
- Veridian green
- Burnt umber

Optional additional paint colors (which I use on my palette):

- Cadmium yellow deep
- Alizarin crimson
- Cobalt violet
- Ultramarine blue
- Sap green
- Raw sienna
- Burnt sienna

Mediums:

- Odorless mineral spirits (for underpainting ONLY)
- Either a purchased medium OR my formula:
- 2 parts walnut oil: 2 parts stand oil: 1 part Liquin
- (for faster drying, I sometimes use 1:1:1 of the above)
- DO NOT use any non-drying oil, such as mineral oil

Clean-up:

- Prior to painting, massage protective high-glycerin hand cream into hands and wrists. If you wash your hands before stopping painting, apply again.
- To clean brushes, first wipe thoroughly with paper towels, then use Murphy Oil Soap -- gentler on the brushes than detergents.

THE OIL PAINTING PROCESS

Session 1:

Thumbnail/composition sketches

- Use the "Rule of Three" for composition: draw a rectangular box to approximately the proportions of the canvas; divide rectangle into equal thirds through both dimensions. Points where the dividing lines intersect are your visual "hot spots;" use one to site your primary visual interest.
- Use remaining three "hot" points for optional secondary visual interest. Make at least 3 sketches of varying views of your subject, then choose the best composition.

Underpainting

- Sketch the "Rule of Three" grid onto your canvas/substrate, to guide you in recreating your composition sketch on the surface.
- Do not use pencil or charcoal to draw on the canvas (except for the grid): using ONLY *burnt sienna* (or *raw umber*, according to preference), thinned with mineral spirits or turpentine, make a complete monotone painting of your subject.
- Use a wiping rag to wipe out lights and to scrub out mistakes. If mistakes persist, use a separate brush to apply thinning solvent, then wipe.
- Use only thinned paint -- darken darks with multiple thinned layers, not full-strength paint. There should be no texture in the paint on your canvas.
- Cover the entire surface, leaving no untouched white canvas. (Photograph it -- it will be beautiful!)

Session 2: First colors

- Regarding each color area in your painting as a "shape" rather than part of a named object, block in approximate hues (colors) and values (darkness/lightness).
- Mix paints on your palette using your palette knife rather than a brush. Stay loose, don't be too exacting.
- For corrections, don't try to paint over wet paint -- use your wiping rag to remove the first attempt.
- Make all edges meet, even if that means wiping and repainting the edge. No mark is sacred.
- Where your underpainting can be used as part of the final painting, use glazes of color: mix your

paint color as other colors, then, using a SMALL puddle of medium (NOT mineral spirits or turpentine), thin some of it to transparency. Use this to block in color without hiding the underpainting.

- For black, mix equal parts of burnt umber and ultramarine (or cobalt) blue. Mix a SMALL amount with some white, for grey.
- When finished with your painting session, scrape any unmixed paints into a small air-tight container and mix all together. Use this “mother grey” on your palette, next time, to mix harmonious greys. Add white and color as need for hue and value, or use straight to “grey down” some colors or for shadows.

Session 3: Intermediary colors

- Begin to blend color areas into one another as appropriate, using both opaque mixed paints and glazes.
- Stand back from your painting frequently, checking for hues and values. Feel free to modify hues -- making blues bluer, browns pinker or yellower, etc. -- but be careful to match values to your subject.
- Begin darkening darks and lightening lights.
- Clarify edges

Session 4: Highlights, shadows

- Apply darkest darks and lightest lights, using moderation.

Session 5: Finishing the painting

- One of the most difficult parts of painting is knowing when a piece is finished. You don't want to overwork, removing any spontaneity, but want to be satisfied with how everything works together. Whether in the end the painting looks exactly like your subject is not really important. It is a painting, and stands on its own.
- Give yourself leeway to declare it finished, then decide after looking at it for a day or two that it's not quite there, and work on it a bit more. (For my own experience with this phenomenon, see my blog at <http://glendablake.com/2013/10/02/down-to-the-wire-with-unlikely-dance/>)

Varnishing...

- We won't use varnish in class -- it's used to equalize the reflective values of a painting, and to protect it -- but here's a source of varnishing information: <http://liamrainsford.com/varnishing-oil-paintings/> (I don't endorse his painting method, but his information on varnishing is very good.)

BOOKS I'VE FOUND HELPFUL

*[*available from or through Your Home Public Library]*

***Problem Solving for Oil Painters**

Kreutz, Gregg

Shelf #: Q751.45 KREUTZ

Tips, tricks, and down-to-earth practical advice.

***Fill your Oil Paintings with Light and Color**

Macpherson, Kevin D.

Shelf #: Q751.45 MACP

Introduced me to the limited palette.

***Mastering color: the essentials of color illustrated with oils**

McMurry, Vicki

Shelf #: 751.45 MCMU

Not crazy about the author's work, but some great advice on composition and color usage.

Carlson's Guide to Landscape Painting

John E. Carlson

A classic, and not just for landscape painters. Compositional and technical/technique advice from a master. All kinds of revelations.

Paint: Illustrated Techniques for Every Medium

Ed. Amy Jeynes

Just what it says. Great stuff.

The Complete Oil Painter

Brian Gorst

Somewhat intimidating, but great to dive into from time to time.

***The Artist's complete health and safety guide**

Rossol, Monona

Shelf #: 700.289 ROSSOL

Not gripping reading, for sure, but valuable information.

***Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain**

Betty Edwards

741.2 EDWA

Learn about rendering what you see rather than what you think you know. I prefer the first edition.

MORE RESOURCES:

Dick Blick / Blick Studio

- <http://www.dickblick.com>

My favorite art supply distributor

North Light Shop

- <http://www.northlightshop.com>

Purchase books, DVDs, downloadable videos

The Artist's Magazine / artistsnetwork

- <http://www.artistsnetwork.com/the-artists-magazine>

I read this magazine cover to cover every month.

Inspiring and informative.

Dover Books

- <http://doverpublications.com>

Great source of inexpensive art book reprints.

Fine Arts Society of the Southern Tier (FASST)

- <http://www.fasstny.org/>

Friendly group of artists from amateur to professional levels. Workshops, exhibits, and comradery.

Broome County Arts Council

- <http://www.broomearts.org/>

A clearinghouse of information on arts happening about town, along with workshops, opportunities.

My own website/blog

- <http://glendablake.com>

Blog ramblings about all sorts of things artistic -- work in progress, painting techniques, exhibits, arts events -- as well as information about me, links to sales and teaching venues, and portfolios.