

Painting 1

Practice of Painting



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Cover image by OCA student Rebecca Moore

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Before you start

Welcome to *Painting 1: The Practice of Painting*. Your OCA Student Handbook should be able to answer most questions about the basics of this course and all other OCA courses so keep this to hand.

Course aims

People paint for many different reasons, but common to most artists or amateur painters is a goal of self-expression. This idea is a relatively new one, as painters were formerly regarded as artisans who perfected their practical skills in applying paint much as other highly skilled craftsmen did. Innovators often emerged as assistants to lesser artists, breaking new ground in the possibilities of style, content and new forms of technical application. Artists had to learn the rules of technical mastery before they could break them.

In the twenty-first century, 'painting' encompasses a much wider range of activities and the notion of painting as a craft is not central to the aims of many fine artists today. Today's painters have the benefit – and the burden – of the history of western art that allows us to find out a great deal about painting media, application, style, content and countless ways of making images. It can be hard to strike a balance between learning what we can from the great artists of the past and succumbing to the modern compulsion to always seek uniqueness and innovation.

Painting is, in essence, a practical activity that involves materials, tools and the acquisition of skills and techniques. At the same time, though, the motivation to paint and draw is based on individual and personal impulses. Only you know why you want to paint and only you look at your world in the way that you do. This course aims to help you analyse and select from the visual world the things that seem to be important and discover ways of translating this visual experience into painting.

On successful completion of the course, you'll be able to:

- explore and employ key processes for drawing and painting
- explore a range of media to create visual work
- begin to understand how historical and contemporary painters and artistic movements can and have informed your own practice
- reflect on your own learning experience.

Your tutor

Your tutor is your main point of contact with OCA. Before you start work make sure that you're clear about your tuition arrangements. The OCA tuition system is explained in some detail in your Student Handbook.

If you haven't already done so, please write a paragraph or two about your experience to date (your profile). Add background information about anything that you think may be relevant for your tutor to know about you – for example, your own practice, your experience of painting so far, your reasons for exploring this subject and what you expect to achieve from taking the course. Email or post your profile to your tutor as soon as possible. This will help your tutor understand how best to support you during the course.

Arrange with your tutor how you'll deal with any queries that arise between assignments. This could be by email, telephone, post or by Google hangout. You may agree, for instance, that you'll scan or photograph sketchbook images and upload them to Google Drive or a free website such as Flickr or Picassa in between tutorials, if you need your tutor to comment on something in particular, or if you have a problem that you need help with. Please note that tutors can only deal with the occasional email between assignments.

Send or show your tutor a cross-section of the work that you've done for each assignment in addition to the finished pieces. This should include preliminary work for the final assignment piece as well as a sample of the work you've done for the various exercises. For example, you could scan or photograph the relevant pages of your learning log and email them to your tutor and then post the final assignment pieces. Or you could post your learning log as an online blog so that your tutor can see how your work is developing between assignments. It's particularly important that your tutor sees regular evidence of your development if you're planning to have your work on this course formally assessed.

Make sure that you label any work that you send to your tutor with your name, student number and the assignment number. Your tutor will get back to you as soon as possible after receiving it but this may take a little time. Continue with the course while you're waiting.

Course Support

Course support are able to assist with things that you may find unclear in the exercises, projects and assignments and technical issues such as locating course resources etc. They can act as a point of contact in between tutor communications. Please email coursesupport@oca.ac.uk.

Studying with OCA

If you haven't already done so, now is a good time to work through the free introductory course 'An Introduction to Studying in HE'. This is available on the OCA student website.

Don't be tempted to skip this introductory course as it contains valuable advice on study skills (e.g. reading, note-taking), research methods and academic conventions which will stand you in good stead throughout your studies.

The OCA website will be a key resource for you during your studies with OCA, so take some time to familiarise yourself with it. Log onto the OCA student website and take the tour of the website.

Remember too, that there are other students following this course, so you are not on your own. Use the online forums to reflect on your findings and discuss issues with other students.

Formal assessment

Read the section on assessment in your Student Handbook at an early stage in the course. Your Assessment and how to get qualified study guide gives more detailed information about assessment and accreditation. For assessment you'll need to submit a cross-section of the work you've done on the course. Please refer to the assessment guidelines available on the OCA student site for what to submit and for the current version.

www.oca-student.com/resource-type/assessment-guidelines-painting

Only work done during the course should be submitted to your tutor or for formal assessment.

Your learning log

Keeping a learning log is an integral part of this and every other OCA course. If you're new to OCA courses, read your Keeping sketchbooks and learning logs study guide for further information, available on the OCA student site.

Your learning log is the place where you develop your ideas and your self-assessment. It is also the place to write up the theoretical elements of the course. There is no rigid prescription for how to present your learning log, but it should contain:

- evidence of your research into the work of other painters and your responses to work that you've seen, in real life or in reproduction, and reading you've done
- cuttings, internet images, photographs or postcards
- reflections on your museum and gallery visits
- your thoughts on the work you produce for each exercise
- your ideas and observations as you work through the course
- your tutor reports on assignments and your reactions to these.

Planning ahead

This Level 1 course represents 400 hours of learning time. It will take around a year to complete the course if you spend eight hours or so each week on it. You should allow around 20% of this time for reflection and learning log development.

As with all OCA courses, these course materials are intended to be used flexibly, but keep your tutor fully informed about your progress. You'll need to allow extra time if you decide to have your work formally assessed.

Painting 1: The Practice of Painting is divided into five parts, corresponding to the five course assignments. Each part addresses a different issue or topic and is separated into projects designed to tackle the topic in bite-sized chunks. Within each project there are several exercises, research points and reflection questions to prompt you to use your learning log.

The first assignment is a diagnostic assignment that will allow your tutor to get a feel for your work and help him or her decide how best to support you. This assignment is not submitted for formal assessment.

Each part of the course should take about 80 hours to complete. You'll need to decide how to divide this time in a way that works effectively for you. Aim to spend around two-thirds of your study time on practical work and the rest on your theoretical studies.

The exact time you spend on each part of the course will depend on how quickly you work, the time available to you, how easy or hard you find each exercise and how quickly you want to complete the course. Don't worry if you take more or less time than suggested provided that you're not getting too bogged down in a particular part of the course and that your tutor is happy with the work that you're producing. If it helps, draft a rough study plan and revisit this at the end of each part.

Your theoretical studies

Take every opportunity to visit galleries and exhibitions. While colour reproductions have improved massively in books and on the internet (usually low resolution), there's no substitute for seeing the real works up close.

As your experience of painting develops, you'll gain insight into the working methods and technical innovations of other painters. Find out what you can about the ideas and techniques of painters you feel drawn to or note down the particular characteristics of paintings that you've seen.

There's a tremendous amount of reading material about artists and art movements in books and online that contextualises the work of individual artists in relation to their peers and the societies within which they worked. Look for commentaries on more recent artists and find out what artists themselves have to say about their work as well as what academics, critics and journalists have written.

Don't confine your theoretical studies to painters alone. Think of art in the broadest sense, and look at the work of sculptors, photographers, architects and engineers. Visit museums to look at objects that might stimulate your ideas. For example, there may be scientists whose ideas and innovations tie in with interests of yours. Keep press cuttings, snapshots, articles – anything that will stimulate your imagination and ideas.

Search for images on the internet. (All students have access to the Bridgeman Education Art Library available through the OCA student site. The password is provided on a separate sheet with your course materials.) This is your collection so don't feel you have to restrict yourself to images mentioned in this course guide.

Reading

Here is a short reading list of the essential texts and you'll find a regularly updated version on the OCA website. You're encouraged to find your own reading and viewing material as you progress through the course.

You'll probably find it helpful to have a dictionary of art and artists so that you can look up any artistic terms that you're not familiar with. A number of these are available in paperback, for example Chilvers, I. (2003) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists* (3rd edition). Oxford: OUP.

Look out for the reading icon though out the course.



Essential reading

Collings, M. (2000) *This is Modern Art* (new edition). Phoenix

Mayer, R. (1991) *The Artists Handbook of Materials and Techniques*. Faber & Faber

Phaidon Editors (2011) *Vitamin P2 : New Perspectives in Painting*, Phaidon Press

Ward, O. (2014) *Ways of Looking: How to experience contemporary art*. Laurence King

Referencing your reading and other research

Whenever you read something that you might want to refer to in your projects and assignments, get into the habit of taking down the full reference to the book, article or website straight away. The same applies to textile pieces, paintings and other images that you may see in museums, galleries or exhibitions. You must fully reference any other work that you draw on if you plan to go for formal assessment. To do this you should use the Harvard system of referencing – there is a guide to the Harvard referencing system on the OCA website. Getting down the full reference at the time will save you the frustration of having to hunt for the details of a half-remembered reference long after the event – and ensure that you don't inadvertently plagiarise someone else's work.

Introduction to painting

Painting can be defined as any activity that involves adhering pigment to a surface or 'support'. The impulse to represent, to tell stories, to symbolise and to decorate by making images goes back to the very earliest period of human history – the late Stone Age period between 10,000 and 40,000 years ago.

The sophisticated and stylised cave paintings of animals and human figures discovered in France were made by rubbing earth pigments onto the cave walls. The modern painter no longer has to make their own pigments. However, it's worth developing a basic understanding of the properties of the many paints that are now available so that you can choose those that best suit your aims and developing methods. And while there are many tried and tested techniques for applying paint, it is only by experiment that you can really discover the exciting potential of different painting media.

Which paint to use

Most paints, whether they are for artistic, domestic or industrial use, fall roughly within two categories based upon the medium that binds the pigment. Broadly speaking paints are either water- or oil-based. In addition to oil and acrylic paint, there is watercolour, gouache and tempera, all of which have been used by artists in the past and are still in use today.

It's good to experience a wide range of materials but buying in a basic range of colours, supports, mixing medium, diluents and varnishes can be an expensive business. For the painting projects on this course, you'll choose between oil and acrylic paint.

Apart from the effects that you wish to produce, you'll have to think about how and where you're going to paint. If you have a spare room, or even a garden shed or garage that can be lit and heated, then you could consider using oil paints. However, if you have limited space that you share with others, the fumes given off by oil paint and solvents may be unacceptable. Wherever you work, the volatile nature of oil and white spirits means that you must avoid naked flame around your materials.

Acrylic paints, on the other hand, are water-based with no volatile solvents associated with them. They can be used and cleared away quickly owing to their fast drying time so may be more practical to use in a busy household.

Oil paint

Oil paints are made of pigments that are finely ground into drying oils. The oils oxidise in the air and form solid skins in which the colour is evenly distributed. The oil most often used is fast-drying or semi-drying linseed oil made from the seeds of flax.

Drying oil was used as a painting medium as far back as the Middle Ages. However, the Flemish van Eyck brothers, especially Jan van Eyck, working in the early fifteenth century, are widely regarded as the founding fathers of oil painting as we know it today. Initially, the medium was more popular in northern Europe but in the 15th century it gained ascendancy amongst Venetian painters. The flexibility and dazzling effects of oil painting were at the heart of the creative explosion of the Renaissance. By the early sixteenth century, oil was the most popular medium for easel painting throughout Europe and has remained so until very recent times.

The depth and range of oil colour is unparalleled, and the great benefit to the artist is that the appearance of the colour, once applied, remains the same and will not fade or alter after drying (with exceptions that will be explored later). What you see when you paint with oils is what you will get, unlike the alterations that can occur with water-based paints. In general, acrylic colours darken once dry, while watercolour paints tend to dry lighter.

Oil paint handles easily and is extremely versatile, lending itself to a multiplicity of effects. It can be used with different techniques to produce a wide range of textures and finishes. Oil paint can be applied to form a smooth and glassy surface – an illusionist's window into other worlds. It can also be used to make a rough and rugged – almost sculpted – surface. It can be laid down in transparent layers, or worked straight from the tube or made thicker with additives for heavy impasto effects.



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Peter Doig, *Road House*, 1991 (oil on canvas) © Bridgeman Images

Using oil paints can be daunting as the properties of the paints are complex. The possible uses of mediums, diluents and varnishes are seemingly endless, but while you can modify, adapt and change you can also just use paint from the tube and dilute it with turpentine or white spirit. You can work on a painting while the paint is still wet, or alter it once it has dried.

A great advantage of oil paint – but also sometimes an inconvenience – is its slow drying time. You can work on a painting over several days while the paint is still wet, blending and merging colours or reworking certain areas altogether. Drying time will vary according to season, weather and temperature. It will also vary according to how thick the layers of paint are. Most manufactured oil colours take between 2 and 14 days to dry. The pigments themselves vary in drying times:

Fast drying (2 days)	Medium drying (5 days)	Slow drying (more than 5 days)
Manganese Violet Cobalt Violet Indigo Cobalt Blue Prussian Blue Manganese Blue Cobalt Turquoise Cobalt Green Raw Sienna Raw Umber Burnt Umber Cobalt Yellow Chrome Yellow Naples Yellow Flake White Manganese Black	Phthalocyanines Burnt Sienna (medium to fast) Cobalt Violet Ultramarine Synthetic iron oxides Yellow Ochre	Azos Quinacridones Cadmiums Lamp Black Ivory Black (medium to slow) Titanium White Zinc White

The drying time of different colours varies because each pigment requires a different volume of oil to give it a workable consistency. Colours that have high oil absorption shouldn't generally be used under colours with low absorption as the top layer of paint will dry before the flexible oily layers underneath. This is what artists are referring to when they talk about 'fat over lean'. If the top (lean) layer dries over the lower (fat) layers then cracking may occur as the surface paint shrinks. If turpentine is added to lower layers of paint, this will allow them to dry faster.

Many oil colours have drying agents in them (especially cheaper student quality paints), so there can be no hard and fast rules about which colours will cause a problem, but if you use paint straight from the tube, you'll need to make sure that the upper layers of paint won't dry before the lower layers.

Mediums and diluents

While it is possible and very exciting to grind and mix your own pigments, most people work with manufactured oil paints. The vehicle or binding medium of most manufactured paints is linseed oil. This holds the pigment in a suspension so that it is workable. It is quite usual to work with paint directly from the tube, but for particular effects you may wish to extend the paint by diluting it or alter its texture by adding other materials.

Oils

Stand oil (usually linseed) is heat-treated oil that is very thick and viscous. It is often used in conjunction with turpentine to impart excellent flowing properties to oil paint and create a very smooth and polished-looking finish. Linseed oil is the most common and popular of the drying oils, but it can have yellowing effects. There are various qualities of linseed oil available. Do some research before you buy as oils are not cheap.

Other vegetable oils have been used over the centuries. Nut oils (in particular walnut oil) have been used in the past for mixing white pigments to retain the purity of the white. Some artists continue to use it for its refined qualities but it can go rancid easily. Poppy seed oil and safflower oil are also used for mixing white and pale colours as they do not yellow. In general, it's best not to mix oils as they all have different drying rates.

How matte or glossy the surface of an oil painting is depends on the properties or types of oil and thinners used by the painter. Paint that has too much oil may wrinkle and turn yellow. If there is too little oil content, it may flake off the support.

Diluents

Several essential oils are used by artists to dilute oil paint, but the most commonly used are turpentine (or 'turps') and spike lavender oil. Turpentine is an essential oil distilled from pine trees. It is a volatile oil so needs to be used with care. It is used to thin oil colour or as a solvent to make varnishes. Spike lavender oil is less volatile than turpentine, and can provide an alternative for artists who cannot tolerate the smell of turpentine.

White spirit can be used to dilute oil paint, but it is cruder in effect and should be used with caution. There are white spirits produced specifically for artists which are purer in content. White spirit is mainly used for diluting varnishes and for cleaning brushes and pallets. Some people prefer to clean brushes with vegetable oils so that the bristles retain their pliability. Used alone to dilute paint (i.e. without oil), turpentine or white spirit can create a flattening effect and loss of colour intensity. This is sometimes described as 'sinking'. If this happens, consider using varnish to restore the richness and intensity of colour once the painting has dried.

Varnish

Gloss or matte varnish, applied to a painting once dry, will bring back colour that may have sunk through the use of turpentine. Apply varnish in a dust-free environment using a special soft brush. Apply thinly and evenly using broad horizontal brush strokes, taking care to ensure that ridges of fluid don't develop then run down. Also check to ensure that bubbles don't form by re-brushing while wet.

Most manufacturers suggest that you wait six months for a painting to dry out and settle completely before varnishing. This isn't necessary for paintings that have quite thin layers of paint, but for heavier impasto layers it is wise to wait longer. As paint dries, dull areas that may need varnish start to become evident, but it's worth waiting for some time before deciding what further work is necessary.

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Chris Ofili, *Untitled Diptych*, 1999 (acrylic, oil, phosphorescent paint, printed paper, paper collage, glitter, polyester resin, map pins and elephant dung on canvas) © Bridgeman Images

Supports

Surfaces for oil painting should be sealed so that the oil doesn't sink through, leaving the pigment to powder on the surface and flake off.

A wide range of supports can be used for oil painting: flexible surfaces such as canvas or paper or rigid surfaces such as wood panels or board. Hardboard makes a useful and cheap support for oil paint and you can use both sides (smooth and rough), depending on the effects you want to create.

Pads of oil painting paper come in various sizes. These are relatively cheap to buy and provide an excellent support if you're a beginner. You can also buy prepared boards in many different sizes.

If you wish to save money or make cheaper supports for experiments and exercises, you can use any board or heavy paper as long as you seal the surface with a primer (see below). Off-cuts of plywood, bits of board or cardboard can also be used.

Until recently, most artists prepared their own canvases by stretching and securing a variety of canvas fabrics across a stretcher (or wooden frame). Stretchers have pegs or wedges in the corners that, when driven in, tighten the stretch of the canvas. The stretched canvas is then coated with glue size which dries tight (and also coats the fibres of the fabric). The next step is to apply primer to all unprepared surfaces.

There are various kinds of canvas materials: these include flax, hessian, artist's linen, calico and variously graded cotton duck. Canvas is favoured as a support for both oil and acrylic paint, as the surface of the fabric catches pigment and allows colours to be caught on the outer surfaces of the weave, allowing the colour beneath to show through. The give of the surface works with the action of the brush and allows for a delicacy of effect that rigid supports cannot accommodate. The movement of the canvas under pressure from the brush can create subtle variations in the application of paint.

If you wish to make and prepare your own canvas, or prepare any other support to work on, apply two thin coats of oil primer and leave these to dry for 24 hours. Some students and artists on a budget will use household undercoat, but this is not formulated for artists and may not be satisfactory.

Gesso is a traditional ground for oil paint and can be used to create textures underneath the paint, allowing for interesting relief effects. Gesso is absorbent so should have a coat of primer applied over it if it's to be used with oils.

Colours

Any manual for artists, art courses or art teachers will recommend a colour list and these vary greatly. Starter boxes are useful to buy and often come cheaper than buying paint separately. You can supplement the colours that you have when you have a clearer idea of the range of colours that you want to work with. It's cheaper to buy larger tubes than small tubes and you'll certainly need a large tube of white as this will be in continuous use.

The major paint brands come in two ranges: artist quality and student quality. Brands vary in their recipes; as you become more experienced, you'll develop your own preferences in brand and colour. Artist quality paints are far more expensive but may go further than student quality paints which have less pigment and more fillers and other agents. Artist quality paints very often have pure pigments, which will make the colours brighter, stronger and more saturated. As your paint collection grows, keep a record of the colours and the manufacturers that suit you best.

Here is a short list of paints that you could start out with: Cadmium Yellow, Lemon Yellow, Cadmium Red, Alizarin Crimson, Violet or Purple, Ultramarine, Cerulean Blue, Prussian Blue, Yellow Ochre, Indian Red, Raw Umber, Burnt Umber, Sap Green, Viridian, black and white.



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Patrick Heron, *Pale Blue, Ultramarine & Indigo*, 1963, © Bridgeman Images

Palettes

The traditional palette for all oil paints is kidney-shaped with a hole cut in it for the thumb. These are often made from mahogany or mahogany plywood but buy one in a paler wood if you can. Unless you're used to it, it's harder to read colours on a dark surface so you'll find a white palette easier to use. Off-cuts of white or pale formica make excellent palettes – or try glass with white paper underneath. There are also tear-off paper palettes, which saves cleaning up after use. These are light and ideal for outdoor use and can also be used for acrylic paints.

Brushes

The brushes most commonly used for oil paints are made of hog bristle, which holds and spreads the paint and is able to withstand the heavy weight of the paint. Bristle brushes come in a multitude of sizes and shapes; these are generally categorised as round, filbert and flat. Start with a range of small, medium and large brushes. You may find that you have quite a lot of brushes in use all at once as the task of cleaning each brush with every change of colour is rather arduous. Oil colours become polluted very easily, so you need to build up a collection to use.

For fine work with diluted oil colour, you'll need a fine brush. This could be sable or a cheaper hair brush. Special care should be taken in cleaning hair brushes.

It's a false economy to buy cheap brushes. Bargain packs are often inferior in quality and it can be disheartening – and time wasting – to have to pick up stray bristles that have shed onto your painting. Many brushes suitable for oil paint can also be used with acrylic paints.

Palette knives

Painting knives are a valuable tool, particularly for oil paint. They can be used as a cleaning tool to scrape paint from the palette but there's also a wide range of sizes and shapes that can be used for the application of paint straight from the tube for heavy textured effects. It is worth buying at least one modestly sized palette knife to experiment with working in impasto techniques. You can build your collection as you become more experienced.

Other useful items

You can buy metal dippers for oil or turpentine that you can attach to a palette. Sometimes these are doubles and can be used one for oil and one for turpentine; alternatively, both dippers can have turpentine, one for cleaning and one for diluting. Small glass jars with lids are perfectly adequate for this purpose, though. You'll also need a larger jar with a lid for white spirit. Spare rough paper, rags, saucers and newspaper are all vital for oil painters.

Cleaning brushes

White spirit is cheap and can be used for cleaning brushes. First, try to squeeze all the paint onto the palette or some absorbent paper or rag. Work as much paint as you can from out of the brush and then, if you're going to work again the next day, put the dirty brush into a jar of white spirit until you can clean up properly. Use rags dampened with white spirit to wipe your brush carefully. Avoid getting too much white spirit onto your hands; some people use rubber gloves or a barrier cream to protect the skin.

Cheap household detergent washing-up liquid is very useful if you rub the brushes into this undiluted. A clump of painting material will come away which is then soluble in water. Vegetable oils can help to clean brushes and may help to restore dried-out brushes.

Take great care when disposing of white spirit, which is dangerous to the marine environment. One way to dispose of it is to allow a sediment to form in your jar of cleaning white spirit. Tip off the clear top layer into a new jar and dispose of the jar with dried sediment separately. This way, you can recycle the white spirit that you've used to clean your brushes and avoid tipping this dangerous substance down the drain.

Using oils safely

Some artist quality pigments are poisonous. The most commonly used are the Cadmiums (Yellow, Red and Orange) and Cobalt and Cerulean Blues. Certain lead-based whites (such as Flake White) have largely been replaced by Titanium and Zinc White, which contain less lead and are less toxic. Many of the more toxic colours (containing substances such as arsenic, mercury and copper) are no longer in use.

Check the labels on your paints and keep them well away from young children and pets. Common sense and careful cleaning (especially under fingernails) should make using oil paints themselves quite safe. Be particularly careful if you use spray-painting techniques, though, because it's possible to inhale fine droplets of toxic pigment and solvent.

The main health and safety consideration for oil paint users is the danger associated with solvents. Turpentine and white spirit are both highly flammable. These volatile fluids give off fumes that should not be inhaled and they require careful disposal. Ensure good ventilation when using thinners and be aware of fumes generated by clean-up rags. If you use white spirit to clean your skin, remove this as fast as possible; it's advisable to use rubber gloves or barrier cream when cleaning up. ARTISAN make water soluble oil paints which avoids the use of turpentine or white spirit.

Acrylic paint

Acrylic paints were developed in the 1950s, and in the 1980s gained ascendancy over oil paint as a popular medium for artists. Acrylic is a versatile medium: it can be used in pale washes similarly to watercolour paint or it can be used alone or in conjunction with other materials to create highly textured effects, much like oil painting. It is, in many ways, far simpler to use than oil paint and is preferable if space is limited, because you don't have to worry about fumes and volatile substances.

Acrylic paints are made up of pigments suspended in acrylic polymer emulsion. They are water-soluble but when dry form into a plasticised skin. New synthetic pigments have been developed and colours have improved steadily over the last 60 years. However, the massive range of pigments available to artists in both watercolour and oils is not yet available in acrylic.

The formula for acrylic paint has improved as technology has moved on. The paints don't yellow with age and they form a permanent and strong surface layer. Because acrylic dries quickly, colours can be overlaid faster, and it combines readily with other materials. However, the rapid drying means that you don't have the luxury of being able to adapt and change your painting in the way that you can with oil paints. It is also harder to blend colours with the subtlety that is possible with oil paints.

You'll need to wash your brushes quickly so that the rapidly drying paint doesn't clog the ferrule of the brush. Synthetic hair brushes are better than expensive sable brushes as they're much easier to clean and less prone to damage from dried paint. If paint does start to harden on the brush, soak it in warm water and washing-up liquid and ease out the softening paint. While mainly considered safe, acrylic paints are still chemical cocktails, releasing agents that are not entirely harmless. If you have safety concerns, consult the manufacturer's label.

Acrylic mediums

Water is the diluent for acrylic paint but a variety of mediums can be used to alter the flow and texture of the paint. Gloss or matte medium can be used to extend the paint into transparent glazes. Flow improver can be used so that acrylic paints can be thinned more easily.

If you're working with acrylic washes, you'll need to work at breaking up the gel structure with a stiff brush before you can make a solution.

Gesso can be used to create textured surfaces or you can buy modelling or texture paste from artists' suppliers. These are formulated specially for use with acrylic paints.

Supports

Most surfaces are suitable for painting with a range of techniques. Acrylic paint can be applied directly onto bare canvas as it forms a bonded skin upon which other layers of paint can then be built. If you wish, you can prime bare canvas by applying acrylic primer with a decorator's brush or by coating it using a plastic squeegee. An absorbent surface can be sealed with a diluted acrylic gloss medium before you apply paint.

Colours

The extreme versatility of acrylic paints allows for many uses and techniques. Bottles can be used for dribbling effects or you can make your own vessels from cut up detergent bottles or yoghurt pots. On the whole, as with other artists' materials, artist quality paints come in a wider range of colours and have a better consistency than student quality paints. Acrylic paints come in tubes and bottles in a wide range of sizes and prices. Be careful, though – some of the cheaper paints are PVA-based and don't have the strength of colour, flexibility or permanence of proper acrylic pigments. Large tubes are better value so definitely go for large tubes or bottles of white paint. If you get paint caught in the thread of your tube lid, use pliers to grip the lid as you turn and open.

The following list of colours should give you a good start:

Cadmium Red, Cadmium Yellow, Crimson, Ultramarine, Purple, Viridian or Emerald Green, Sap Green, Lemon Yellow, Cerulean Blue, Prussian Blue, black and white.



Student Anna Bernard

Palettes

You can use almost anything as a palette for acrylics. As the paints dry fast and set hard, paper palettes can be a good idea – or the disposable plastic trays that come with foodstuffs like chocolate and cakes. If you have a special plastic palette, make sure that you keep it clean so that paint doesn't set hard on it, forming a plastic layer. Be careful how much paint you put out each time, as it will dry hard and rapidly become unusable. A damp rag placed over your paints can keep it moist for another day, but this doesn't always work. You'll need to wash your brushes continuously so have an ample supply of water to hand in several containers.

Brushes

There are many good synthetic brushes available on the market specifically for use with acrylic paint. For some work, a set of decorator's brushes will be useful. Almost any tool can be used to create a wide variety of effects, so keep an open mind.



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Paul Klee, *Creeper-Plants*, 1932 (guache and watercolour on Japan paper), © Bridgeman Images

Other types of paint

Watercolour

Many paints are water-based but watercolour is a particular paint medium developed for highly specialised uses and techniques. Watercolour paints are most often used in thin transparent washes through which the white ground can be seen. Some of the techniques of colour blending with superimposed washes or wet-in-wet blending have been adopted for use with oil and acrylic paints.

In watercolour paints, the finely-ground pigments are suspended in a water-based medium, usually gum arabic. It may also include glycerine and thickening agents.

Watercolours have a special place in the development of British (especially landscape) painting as exemplified in the work of eighteenth/early nineteenth century artists: John Sell Cotman, John Robert Cozens, Thomas Girtin and JMW Turner.

Gouache

Gouache is an opaque water-based paint, sometimes used for solid areas of colour in mixed media paintings or if body colour is needed in watercolour painting. It is a useful medium for designers and illustrators who can use it to block in small areas of solid colour in finely detailed work.

As the paint has to be applied more thickly than watercolour, it needs to be more soluble and have greater flexibility. More glycerine is added to the mix to make this possible and chalk is added to extend the opacity of the pigments. Like watercolour, gouache can be diluted to make transparent washes but these will tend to be less brilliant in effect than watercolour washes.



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Luc Tuymans, *Pigeons*, 2001 (watercolour on canvas),
© Bridgeman Images



Student Susan Bennetta

Tempera

Tempera was widely in use as a painting medium in Egypt, India and throughout Europe from the first century AD through the Middle Ages into the Renaissance. It was used for all European panel paintings until the development of oil paints in the fifteenth century. Tempera painting has undergone periodic revivals, most notably at the hands of William Blake, the Pre-Raphaelites and the Surrealist painter Giorgio De Chirico.

Tempera is a fast-drying and permanent painting medium. It consists of an emulsion derived from mixing ground pigments into a water-soluble glutinous substance. Traditionally, egg yolk was used for this purpose but glue, honey and plant gums are also used.

Tempera has to be applied in thin layers and its effects are built gradually with transparent or semi-transparent layers. Once applied, the colours are permanent and the paint surface is smooth, flat and very strong.

Artists' equipment

You'll need some other items of equipment in addition to your range of paints, brushes, palettes and supports.

Easels

Easels come in many shapes and sizes, and your choice in buying one will depend on the weight and size of the supports that you wish to use. If you're happy to work on smaller paintings a table easel could be suitable but you wouldn't be able to use this outside. Sketching easels can be of some use but, while they are easy to carry, they can be blown easily and won't hold a large or heavy painting support.

Think carefully about what you'll need for painting outside and how you're going to transport it. Your list may include an easel, a way to carry canvases, a table, support and a chair. If you don't have an easel, you can rest your board or canvas on your knee and lean it up against the back of the chair.

Drawing materials

Whichever paint media you choose, you'll need the following drawing materials:

- a range of pencils from HB through to 6B
- charcoal and fixative
- an eraser
- coloured pencils
- oil pastels or chalk pastels
- conté crayon or other coloured painting media such as watercolour, poster colour, gouache or inks, felt pens and ball point pens
- bulldog clips, masking tape and glued paper tape
- a metal hard edge, scissors, knives
- adhesives.

You'll also need a notebook and a range of sketchbooks from A3 down to A5 or A6.

A place to work

It is ideal if you can set aside a place to work so that you can leave your work out and return to it whenever you have some spare time – preferably with wall space to display work or visual resources.

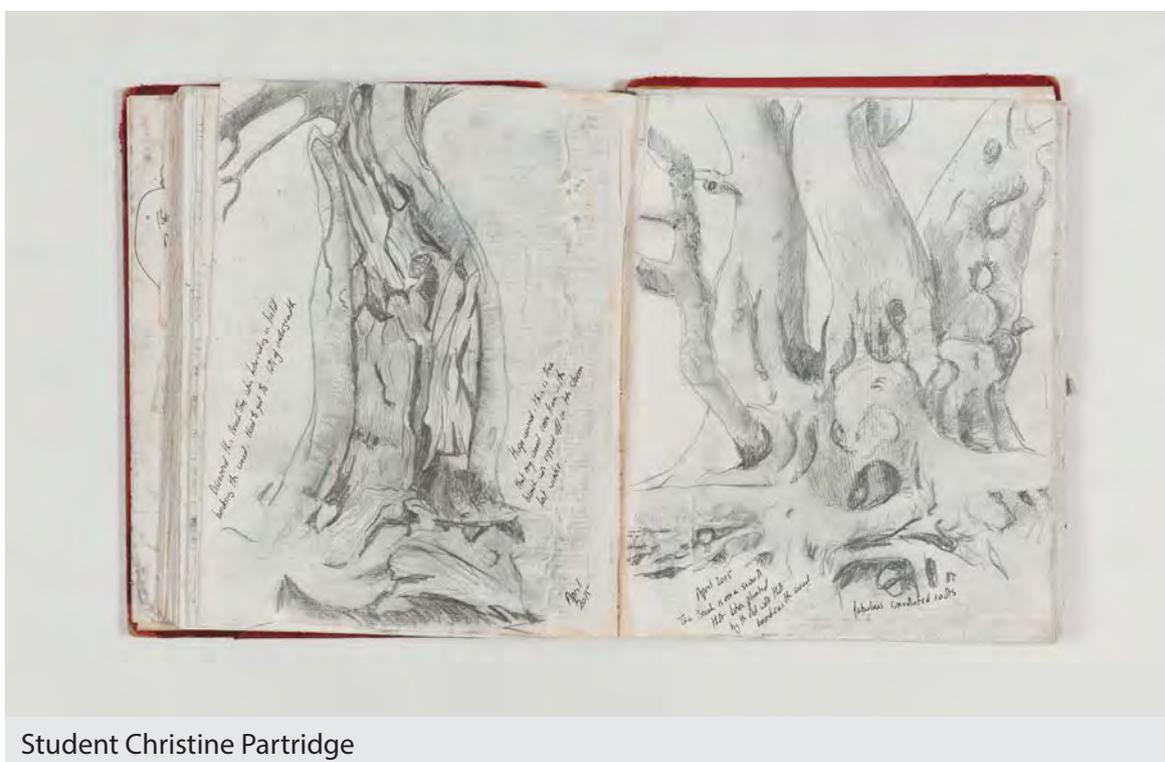
A garden shed or spare room can make a great studio. It also means that any fumes from solvents can be kept out of the general living space, especially if you have young children. However, even in a crowded household, a bit of a room that you can call your own just for a few sessions every week will give you the space that you need. Ensure that you have adequate light, and plenty of newspaper to cover the floor and furniture. Proximity to running water is also useful.

Sketchbooks

A sketchbook is a vital piece of kit for any painter. It can be used for observations, quick studies made on the move and noting down and developing your ideas. It is a record of a work in progress – your development as a painter.

Keep a small sketchbook (A5 or A6) and pencil with you at all times. Drawing from observation is a key skill that can only improve with practice. If you're prepared to draw anything and everything you see, you'll soon develop your observational skills and your ideas as a painter. You'll also develop your repertoire of mark-making. Keeping a sketchbook also demonstrates your commitment to exploring the world through visual language – one of the principal aims of this course.

Larger sketch pads will allow you to develop your ideas in more detail and to try out different compositions and tonal effects. You can simply divide a page into four or make four small boxes. You can then make comparisons between different formulations based on one idea or different compositional arrangements.



Student Christine Partridge

By keeping a record of your ideas – in effect, a visual diary – you'll find out what really interests and intrigues you and re-awaken the visual responsiveness that most of us enjoy as children but tend to lose in adulthood.

How you use your sketchbook is up to you. You could include quite highly worked studies alongside very simple sketches. You could try out new colour combinations, drawing techniques or make written notes about what you see and which colours you may use later. You may just wish to jot down ideas. You could be developing ideas for a current project or noting down something you may develop in the future. This is a place for ideas and experiments, for trying out different materials and colours and noting down their effects.

When you have no ideas at all, just draw what's in front of you. Return to the same subjects – things that are familiar, such as a corner of your room, a tree outside your window, the cat or people that you live with – and make several studies, noting down your changing perceptions. If you keep with the same subject matter you'll have a sense of how you're progressing both in drawing and painting.

Visit a gallery or museum and do what art students have done down the ages – make studies of paintings, sculptures or other exhibits. This is an immensely valuable exercise that will help you to gain insight into the ideas and techniques of great artists and craftspeople, both past and present.



Student Ayla Morten

Painting 1

Part one

What paint can do

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Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Lauerzersee with Schwyz and the Mythen*,
© Bridgeman Images

Use the table below to keep track of your progress throughout Part One.

Exercise	Page	Complete
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Introduction

Whether you choose to work in oil or acrylic paint, it's important to gain some practice in handling your chosen medium and to learn some basic techniques. The projects and exercises in this course can be undertaken using either medium. If you have both kinds of paint available, read through the exercises in each project and decide which kind of paint you'll use for each of them.

The possibilities of what can be done with any kind of paint are almost endless and you'll need to find out for yourself which techniques best meet your particular creative needs. In this first part of the course, you'll be exploring a variety of ways of applying paint and developing your confidence in handling paint. You'll gain a sense of the possibilities that you can explore later, when you undertake the subject-based projects in later parts of the course. You'll return to the topic of technique in Part Five when you'll experiment with some more innovative ways of applying paint and using artists' materials.

As you work through the various exercises, make notes in your learning log about how your chosen paint and colours behave. From the outset, you should be developing ideas for further projects of your own.



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Howard Hodgkin, *In the Bay of Naples*, 1980-82 (oil on panel), © Bridgeman Images

Project Basic paint application

Before the Impressionists changed the face of painting, oil paint had traditionally been applied fairly evenly and built up slowly in layers. Brushwork was sometimes discernible, but was descriptive rather than expressive, and did not play a major role in the composition. But for the Impressionists, especially Monet, the painting surface was as important as the subject, sometimes almost more so, and his brushwork, which varied from painting to painting through his long career, was highly inventive. Start your work on this course by exploring what your brushes can do.

Exercise Getting to know your brushes

Start by exploring the range of marks and shapes that can be made with your brushes. Make marks with brushes of different sizes, using flats, rounds and filberts.

Then, from memory, paint a small and simple landscape (about A4). Use large brushes so you won't be distracted by the urge to include detail; instead, concentrate on the possibilities and patterns made by the brush marks.

Experiment with using the side of the brush as well as the flat and the tip. You'll find that you can make surprisingly fine lines with the side of a brush. You can also use colour shapers, which are an excellent alternative to brushes.

Once you've experimented, paint a piece of fruit using these techniques, taking care to set the fruit in direct light to help define the form.

Exercise Applying paint without brushes

Painting knives have been used for many centuries, usually in conjunction with brushes, but you can also complete whole paintings with just knives, which are sold in many sizes and shapes. If you don't have one, use an ordinary palette knife well loaded with paint for your initial experiments.

Also try applying paint using old plastic credit cards, set squares or protractors, pieces of cardboard windscreen scrapers and plastic plastering tools. You can apply paint quite thinly with these and lay one colour over another so that the first layer remains visible. Don't worry about creating a painting – just enjoy experimenting.

Now try applying paint with sponges, rags, toothbrushes and your fingers. Sponges and toothbrushes are good for texture effects, and can be built up in layers or laid over flat colour. Rags or fingers are useful for blending one colour into another or wiping paint across the surface. This exercise is best done with oils as they dry slowly, giving you plenty of time to manipulate the paint.

Exercise Painting with pastels

If you've got some pastels amongst your art materials, try this exercise.

Pastels are both a drawing and a painting medium, and nowadays are used more in the latter category. The application of oil pastel and soft pastel is very different, particularly in relation to painting:

- Oil pastel is usually used with turps and can be used to layer and blend.
- Soft pastel picks up the tooth of the support and can be blended with paint using a damp cloth or brush and water scumbling techniques.

You can cover large areas with the side of a stick, lay one colour over another, and blend colours and tones. Use the points of the sticks for linear details. Practise making marks and blending with pastels; if you have time, use the techniques you've discovered to make a simple picture.

Project Transparent and opaque

Both oil and acrylic paint can be diluted to make a transparent or semi-transparent layer or glaze. A thin glaze of diluted colour over a reflective white ground can give a painting a luminous quality that's not matched by mixing that same colour with white. The following exercises will help you to explore ways of both applying and mixing paint. Controlling gradual fading or blending of colours is a very important skill in painting and it can be done in a variety of ways.

For oil paint, you'll need a large brush and a pad of treated oil painting paper. You'll also need turps in a small container, a jar of white spirit and a palette or an old saucer.

For acrylics, work on special papers, watercolour paper or stretched cartridge paper. (Stretch a sheet of cartridge paper dampened with a sponge over a board and allow it to dry slowly; this gives a smooth surface to work on.) You'll also find it useful to have some scraps of paper to try out your colour mixes.



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John Constable, *Rain Clouds, Weymouth Bay, Dorset*, (1776-1837) © Bridgeman Images

Exercise Tonally graded wash

Set your paper up lengthways. (This is called portrait format, as opposed to landscape.). Look through your colours and choose either a strong red (such as Cadmium Red) or Ultramarine. Put a small amount of pigment on your palette or saucer and work in water or turps until you have a strong but fluid mix of the colour. Load a medium-wide brush and work from the top to the bottom of the sheet with increasingly dilute mixes of the colour until, at the bottom of your sheet, you have a very pale wash, almost faded out to white.

Practise this several times until you have a satisfactory progression from deep tones through to the very palest tones. Try to avoid the paint running by controlling the load on the brush and the flow of paint across the paper. Choose one or two sheets that have the most steadily graded wash and put aside one of these to dry. (You'll be using this in the next exercise.)

Now find another colour that is close to the original in the spectrum. If you chose Cadmium Red you could make this either orange or crimson. If you chose Ultramarine either a violet, turquoise or Viridian will be suitable. Make a dilute mix of the second colour and paint graded washes on at least two more sheets. Again, keep a sheet aside to dry in readiness for the next exercise.

Next, working wet-in-wet, paint a graded wash onto one of the sheets that has the first colour. Keep the intense tone of the new colour at the pale end of the first colour and allow the colours to merge in the centre. Try this out so that you have several sheets of merged washes. It may help you to think of the gradual merging of colours in a sunrise or sunset where the horizon may be a scarlet or crimson red that fades up through purples to blues.

Exercise Overlaying washes

Once your papers are dry, make up the same colour mixes only this time paint the second colour over the dried wash that you set aside. Notice any differences in the way the paint and colour behaves and make notes in your learning log. For example:

- Does this method give you greater control?
- Have the colours merged in the same way?
- How could you employ these techniques of building coloured glazes?

Now that you've worked on single colour washes, wet-in-wet blended washes and overlaid glazes, practise these different ways of mixing transparent colour using a range of your pigments and note down the mixes that work well. Are there colours that are hard to blend?

You'll have noticed how a bright blue cloudless sky will appear a deep ultramarine or cobalt blue above your head but fade away in the distance, appearing almost white on the horizon. The mixing and merging of a limited colour range has been explored by many artists and the effect of building layers of transparent and opaque paints can create a sense of different picture planes. Look at the paintings of Mark Rothko, in particular the huge Seagram Building paintings, now in Tate Modern, which form a solemn kind of tone poem all in shades of crimson. Visit www.tate.org.uk for an interactive tour of the Seagram murals.

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Mark Rothko, *Green, Blue, Green on Blue*, 1968 (acrylic on paper mounted on canvas), © Bridgeman Images

Exercise Opaque colour mixing

Some pigments have greater opacity than others without the addition of white and some can be laid on thickly to cover layers underneath, but white is essential for building body colour and is the vital ingredient for most opaque painting techniques. In this exercise, you'll paint graded tones by mixing in white.

Look carefully at your tonal mixes and put some white on your palette or saucer.

Choose at least three of the washes you've painted (including the single colour ones) and attempt to recreate exactly the same colour, shade and tone of each of these in turn. This time, though, you'll be mixing colours by adding in white, making the paints opaque.

Over-painting with acrylic works well because it dries so quickly. However, subtle, smooth colour blending is harder to achieve and that is the aim of this exercise. You'll have to work fast at blending the graded tones of each colour by adding more white progressively or you could go from light to dark. Acrylic paints tend to dry darker than when they are applied so this exercise will help you to see how they behave.

If you're working with oil paints, you should be able to blend the colours with ease. One way to blend colours is to lay out broad bands of colours to be mixed and gradually feather the tones across each other so that they blend smoothly and evenly.

When you've completed this exercise, compare the effects of the transparent colour mixes (from previous exercises) and the opaque ones. Think about ways in which both methods could work together. Make notes in your learning log.

Exercise Monochrome studies

In this exercise you'll explore two approaches to the same subject, one in which the transparent qualities of the paint provide the dominant effect and the other which exploits the opacity of the paint.

You could choose a range of subjects for this exercise, but the subject suggested is the outline of a winter tree seen against the sky, as this can be made as simple or complex as you wish and it has positive and negative shapes. If possible, work from an observational drawing but an imaginary tree will do or one loosely copied from a photograph. Draw the main outline of a tree, including the trunk and the main branches, and then roughly sketch in the diminishing outer branches and twigs.

Prepare two sheets of paper (at least A3) or two boards. Prepare one of these with a dark-coloured wash (you could mix this from Prussian Blue or Ultramarine and Payne's Grey, Indigo, a dark earth colour mixed with blue or a dark and dirty green). Prepare another sheet with a light grey ground either mixed opaquely or by using a wash. If you're using oil paints, spread the colour thinly so that it will dry in a day or so.

Now use charcoal to copy the image of your tree on to your two prepared papers or boards. Lightly dust the charcoal off so that a faint image can be seen.

Working on the light ground first, use a fine hair brush to outline the positive shapes of the trunk and branches using the same colour mixture that you used for the dark ground. Fill the trunk and main branches with a dense, solid mix of the dark colour. You could fade this colour out to suggest the finer outer twigs and branches.

Next, start to work on the dark washed ground. This time build up the form and outline of the tree by painting in the negative shapes between the main branches, small branches and twigs. Mix up a light grey and apply this to the shapes formed by branches, trunk and the ground so that you gradually build up the form of the tree. Modulate this grey as you move away from the trunk towards the outer branches. Twigs can appear from the distance in a half tone. (This approach could be useful to you in Part Four when you come to try some landscape painting.)

When you've finished both studies, assess the strengths and limitations of each approach. Note down how you think you could exploit these effects again. Both transparent and opaque methods are often used side by side in the same painting.



Student Averil Wootton

Project Working on different coloured grounds

When we look at a painting there can all too often be a tendency to focus on individual objects rather than looking at the overall arrangement of shapes, tones and colours that are the essence of painting. When you're working on observational studies, for example, it's important to be aware of the design and compositional interest of negative shapes as well as the outline and form of the main subject.

In this project, you'll consider how working on a dark ground can shift your perception of what you're looking at.

We're accustomed to thinking of painting supports as white spaces onto which we make our marks. However the use of white grounds is relatively new. Before the nineteenth century it was customary for painters to work on coloured grounds. A white ground was exploited by the Impressionists who used the reflective white of the canvas to hold the brilliance and dazzle of the pure colours they used. As you've seen, white can illuminate transparent layers of thinly applied paint; it can also increase the impact of individual colours if the ground shows through between them.



Student Roda Fisher

The Neo-Impressionist painters Paul Signac and Georges Seurat developed a system of applying paint in tiny disconnected dots of pure colour onto a white ground in a technique called Pointillism. The idea was that colours would be mixed in the eye of the viewer by a process known as optical mixing.

This project aims to help you become aware of your options as a painter by giving you the opportunity to attempt tonal studies on both white and coloured grounds. Once you're aware of the effects that a different ground can help create, you'll be able to exploit this to create particular effects in your own work. If you want an area of a particular painting to retain a certain brilliance of effect, for example, you could leave that part of the canvas white so that you can apply a transparent or semi-transparent layer of pure colour over it. You may then decide to apply a coloured ground elsewhere in the picture.

Painting a mid-toned ground of a uniform colour is an excellent way of establishing a tonal range, as it forms a midway point between the lightest and the darkest tones in a picture. Colours laid on to it can then be assessed easily for their tonal values.

The second exercise in this project asks you to make a tonal study on a coloured ground. You'll need to prepare this in advance to allow for drying time, particularly if you want to use an oil-based ground. For this reason, you'll find it easier to use an acrylic-based ground, even if you intend to paint in oils.



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Paul Signac, *Les Allees, Cannes*, 1918-1920 © Bridgeman Images

Preparing a coloured ground for oil paints

There are two ways to prepare a coloured ground for oil paints. One is to make an opaque toned ground by mixing an oil colour with white primer. Dilute this with turpentine or white spirit and allow it to dry completely before painting on it.

Alternatively, paint a transparent stain over a ready-prepared support. Choose one of the following methods:

- Dilute oil colour with turpentine to make a transparent glaze which is then rubbed over with a clean rag.
- Make a thin acrylic wash and apply with a clean wide brush or sponge.
- Apply a thin watercolour stain.

This method is called *imprimatura* – which means ‘first paint layer’. The advantage of this method over the opaque ground is that there is a luminous quality to the ground, and a layering effect which is desirable for some paintings. Working from a mid-tone works almost in a sculptural way. It can look as if form is emerging from the canvas rather than being applied to it. Look at some oil sketches by Rubens or Constable, for example. The coloured ground appears to anchor the paintings and holds them together.

The coloured grounds most often chosen by artists are dilute earth colours. These retain a neutrality and provide a degree of warmth in the picture. A greenish or blue wash would have the opposite effect of introducing chill. Most landscapes, interiors and portraits benefit from a warm ground.

Read ahead through the exercises for each part of the course so that you can get your supports prepared in advance. This means that you won't be held up waiting for a support to dry.

You'll need all of your painting equipment, prepared papers, a sketchbook and drawing media for the following exercises.

Exercise Tonal study on white ground

Find a few simple objects that are ready to hand which are plain and un-patterned. A jug, vase and/or some fruit would be ideal. Place them so that they are lit from the side, either by natural light from a window or by lamplight.

Using a tonal drawing medium such as a soft pencil, pastel or charcoal, do some simple studies of your chosen objects in your sketchbook. Make several studies from different angles and then decide which viewpoint and angle you will use for your tonal painting.

Analyse the tonal values of your arrangement by half-closing your eyes. If you do this, you'll be able to see the relative tonal values more easily and be able to assess the lightest, mid-toned and darkest areas. Analysing tone using monochrome media is a useful exercise because it will train you to weigh up tonal variation without the distraction of different colours and hues.

Choose a board or a sheet from a pad of primed paper (usually cream or off-white). Using your drawings to help you, begin work on a simple tonal study. Work directly or lightly sketch in outlines first with charcoal; gently brush this away so that you have a faint image to work on that will not show through the paint.

Now begin painting using a combination of just two quite low-key colours (one that has a dark tone) and white. You could choose earth shades, Payne's Grey or Indigo. Make this a fairly small study (A3 or A4) and work quickly on it. The aim of the exercise is to practise rendering form so detail and precision in drawing are not essential. Assess the tonal values of the background as well as the darkest shadows and highlights falling on the subject.

Working on a dark background creates dramatic effects, which have been exploited by artists working in a range of genres. In narrative paintings, for example, where the focus of the picture is a drama enacted by several people, the light on the subject works much as a spotlight on a stage. It illuminates action, gesture, physical relationship and expression. The same approach has been used extensively in portraiture.

In figure painting, building from dark to light can render the infinitely subtle modulations of tone needed to represent human flesh and the human face. Virtuoso displays of painting musculature or flowing drapes become highly visible against the stark contrast of a gloomy and indistinct background.

The brilliant three-dimensional effects of the Dutch and Flemish masters depended on the convincing portrayal of objects and people occupying space through the precise rendering of tonal values. By working on coloured grounds, building layers of glazes that recede and creating subtle modulations of tone and highlights that conveyed the solidity of form, these artists made the two-dimensional picture plane a magical surface for creating the illusion of reality. Landscape painters such as Constable and Turner also worked on coloured grounds.

Chiaroscuro

The term chiaroscuro originated during the Renaissance when it referred to a technique of drawing on coloured paper by building light tones with gouache and working down to dark tones with ink. It later came to refer to modelling of light in paintings, drawings and prints. The extreme contrast between dark and light areas allowed subtle gradations of tone to create illusions of volume, most notably that of the human form. Chiaroscuro became a common compositional device in religious paintings such as those of Caravaggio.



Research point

Explore the works of some of the artists whose work exemplifies chiaroscuro effects such as Tintoretto, Caravaggio and Rubens. Look also at the candlelit studies of some northern European artists, most especially Rembrandt and Joseph Wright of Derby. (Remember that until relatively recently, life was lived in pools of candlelight or firelight after the sun went down.) Make notes in your learning log.



Don't forget to look at the reading list on the OCA student site:

www.oca-student.com/resource-type/p1-practice-painting-reading-list

Exercise Tonal study on a dark ground

You'll need to prepare a dark ground in advance (see earlier). As this is a stronger mix, an oil-based ground may take a little longer to dry out, so an acrylic stain might be better even if you're painting in oils. You could choose a much darker tone of the same colour that you used for the last ground, or experiment by working on a different ground colour, for example a deep blue.

The technical problem of painting layers of oil colour (i.e. the fat over lean principle) is not an issue in this simple study as the ground colour is dried out by the turps, but as you lay on darker colours try to ensure that they are less oily than your top layers.

You may find that you can create an illusion of solidity very quickly and easily by leaving expanses of the dark ground colour uncovered. You can suggest volume with simple highlights and careful application of mid-tones.

Consider ways in which you could exploit these effects of extreme contrast in future paintings.

Set out all your tonal studies alongside one other and assess how well each of them has succeeded in modelling light and rendering tonal values. Which effects appeal to you most? Make notes in your learning log on any technical difficulties you've encountered and your efforts to resolve them.

Assignment one

This assignment is not submitted for formal assessment.

The purpose of this first assignment is to give your tutor a feel for your work and to help them to decide how best to help you as you move through the course. For this assignment, produce a finished painting at least A3 in size in your chosen medium. Don't be too ambitious at this stage. A still life, landscape or interior will probably be the wisest choice – but it's up to you. Your painting should be representational – showing what you see – rather than abstract.

Make several preliminary drawings looking at line, colour and tone. Look at different possibilities for composition. Observe the subject you've chosen to paint very carefully. Make notes in your sketchbook about the various colours and tones that you can see to help you later when you come to paint. Do pencil or charcoal sketches to explore the arrangement and range of tones. Make a small colour study to help you establish the colours that you may use. Begin by selecting the colours which are as close to those in your subject as possible.

Use the medium of your choice and decide on the format and scale for your painting. Work on treated paper, card or canvas in either portrait or landscape format. Choose the background colour you will use.

Look carefully at your painting as you add each mark. Stand back and look at the painting from a distance. Try to see the whole painting rather than just the area you are working on. It is easy to get absorbed in one detail and forget that it is part of a whole.

Make notes in your learning log as you work.

Due to the drying time of paint – up to six months for an oil painting – you may need to send either an electronic image or a photograph of your final painting to your tutor in the first instance. Your tutor will need to see your original painting at some point, however, and you'll need to submit the original if you decide to have your work formally assessed. Discuss this with your tutor.

You should also send:

- some of your exercises, your preparatory studies and drawings for this assignment
- some representative sketchbook pages from Part One as a whole
- the relevant pages of your learning log or blog url.

Make sure that all work is clearly identified with your name, student number and assignment number. You don't need to wait until you've heard from your tutor before continuing with the course.