

GLOSSARY OF ART TERMS



The following terms are defined as they are used for acrylic and mixed media painting, and not necessarily the official definition. Some may have more than one meaning.

Accent - Emphasis placed on a certain area of a painting to draw attention to it. Usually a complementary color is used for paint.

Acid Free - Neutral or basic pH of 7.0. Usually referring to paper. Prevents papers from yellowing or cracking while aging.

Acrylic Mediums - There are a number of acrylic mediums other than acrylic paints and acrylic inks. Each manufacturer may have a different name for basically the same medium. These mediums include pastes, gels, liquid polymer emulsions, and glazing mediums. Adding a medium to paint allows for better control over viscosity, luster, and color saturation and increases the open time of the paint. Mediums change the structure of the paint, and allows for special effects and surface texture. See the "Techniques" page for more information and techniques using various acrylic mediums.

Acrylic Paint - A synthetic paint consisting of a pigment and polymer emulsion as a binder. It is a water-based medium that once dried, becomes an insoluble paint film. Has a low odor, dries fast, and is easy to clean up when still in a wet state. A thick layer of acrylic can be applied with a brush or palette knife. Thin layers are applied with a brush to create thin washes and glazes. Other media and water base mediums can be added to acrylic for special effects and texture. Techniques using various types of tools or objects can be easily achieved with acrylic paints and mediums. The right acrylic paint applied correctly can be used for projects exposed to interior as well as exterior environments.

Acrylic Polymer Emulsion - The binder for acrylic paint and acrylic mediums, excluding retarder or flow agent. It offers many creative purposes.

Airbrush - A painting tool that closely resembles a large fountain pen. There are various types available. It may be one that uses a can of pressurized air or one that requires an

air compressor. A controlled amount of thin paint or ink is applied when the lever is pressed.

Air Dry Clay - Air dry clays do not need an oven or kiln as other types of clay require. Made from earth or pulp. It is very easy to manipulate. It dries solid. Once dried, you can paint, sand, and even carve it. Additional pieces can also be attached while in a dry or wet state.

Antiquing - A faux finish technique used to give an aged appearance to a surface. Acrylic and oil paints work best by applying thin paint as a stain. Some of the paint is then wipe off to achieve the desired effect. This technique can also be used to stain within textured surfaces or carved areas. A thicker layer of paint can also achieve an aged effect by using the same staining technique, or by scraping and sanding which creates texture and exposes the under-layer(s). See also Crackling and Distressing.

Archival Paper - Archival paper is made slightly alkaline or with a neutral pH to prevent it from yellowing and becoming brittle with age. Today's fine art papers are made to last at least 100 years.

Atmospheric Perspective - Objects in the distance takes on the colors of the atmosphere with loss of focus, sharpness, and contrast. The colors recede and become paler than those in the middle and foreground. For example, trees in the distance appear smaller, softer, and lighter than those placed in front of them.

Backglass Painting - Painting on the back of glass. The final painting is viewed on the glass side. This method requires the first stroke as what would be considered the foreground and working in reverse towards the background. Foil can be applied to the back of the painting.

Background - The area of a painting that is farthest from the viewer. For example, a back wall in a still life, the sky behind the clouds, or the horizon.

Barbs - The rough edges of paper.

Basecoat - The first layer of paint as an undercoat. Often in monochromatic, but may include more than one color. Layers of color are then painted over it to create the final painting.

Bas relief - A sculpture in which figures or elements are slightly more prominent than

the background surface. This technique involves carving away or adding material to the lower background surface. *See also* high relief.

Binder - The bonding ingredient that holds the pigment needed to form paint.

Bleeding - When one or more wet colors run into another wet color either by accident or purposely controlled as a technique when dropping color into another wet color.

Blending - Softening of hard edges between colors to create a gradual transition so no sharp divisions are visible.

Blocking in - The initial painting stage where broad areas of flat color is applied in simple form and arranged according to the desired composition; usually consisting of opaque color. *See also* Color Blocking, Basecoat, and Underpainting.

Blotting - To remove or lighten a still wet or damp painted area. Painting tools as brushes, paper towels, sponges, and cotton swabs are used to absorb desired amounts.

Bloom - The whitish film or hazy appearance formed on a painting after it has cured due to unwanted moisture being present during the varnishing process. Usually caused by using a damp brush or the moisture present in the environment during its application.

Cast Shadow - A dark area present due to the source of light being blocked by an object.

Color palette - A preferred selection of colors chosen for a specific painting project.

Cold Pressed - Referring to is heavy weight rough watercolor paper. It holds more water than hot pressed and warps less. The hills on its surface provide enough tooth or texture for layers of a medium to be applied and still adhere to it. Cold pressed paper is not the best choice for fine detail work; as a smoother surfaced hot press paper would work best. Because cold pressed is very absorbent, it is best used for wet techniques, loose painting, and dry mediums as pastel and charcoal. *See also* Hot Pressed.

Collage - A composition in which a variety of media of various sizes are glue to a substrate. Additional techniques may be incorporated. Photographs, papers, textiles, metal foil, natural materials, and other found objects work well with collage. Acrylic mediums are often used as glue and to achieve specific effects. Also referred to as mixed media art when incorporated with one or more color mediums. Acrylic paint, ink, and pencil are the most used color mediums for mixed media painting.

Color Blocking - Applying a color over another to cover it so that the new color is dominant. This application can be applied to push an area in a composition back in the distance with a darker value (low key), or it can be applied to bring forth an area with a lighter value (high key). You can color block to form shapes and objects. See also Blocking In.

Composition - Consist of an arrangement of principles and design elements based on the desired outcome. The goal is to create harmony throughout the completed work.

Contrast - A marked difference between things placed next to each other as in shapes, color, and light. For example, black and white, dark and light, straight next to curvy line, or a smooth surface next to a textured surface.

Cotton Duck - Must used and available canvas type.

Crackling - An antiquing effect applied to achieve deliberate crack formation on a surface by using either a crackle medium or quick drying the outer skin of acrylic with very high heat. The speed of the drying time determines the size of the cracks for either method used.

Cross Hatching - A technique where fine overlapping lines are applied by crisscrossing to represent light and shading. Used mainly for pencil, pen & ink, and with etching and engraving. See Hatching.

Curing Time - The time it takes for a medium to reach complete stability.

Decoupage - Objects are decorated with cutouts, usually from magazines, photos, and prints. White glue or acrylic mediums are used for adhering cutouts flat onto the surface, or for applying a transfer technique. A painted basecoat can be applied to bring life and harmony to the piece. The finished surface is protected with a sealer, varnish or lacquer finish.

Distressing: Removing parts of the top layer of paint to create an aged or worn appearance. Usually achieved by sanding, rubbing, or scraping back one or more layers to reveal the under layer.

Double-loading - The brush is loaded with two colors of paint, one color on each side of the brush bristles. Once applied, a stroking back and forth will blend a dark color on one side with a soft middle mix created from a light color on the other side. Used mainly for decorative painting.

Drag - The surface tension of a paint applied along the surface; usually with a brush.

Drier - A liquid form medium that is added to oil paints to decrease their drying times, with the goal being to allow the colors in the painting to dry at an even pace.

Dry Brush - A painting technique that requires a very small amount of paint on a dry brush. The dry brush is first dipped into paint then the majority of the paint is wiped off onto a cloth. The brush is then lightly dragged across the surface of the painting. This technique can have a dramatic effect when applied for contrast. Can be used for highlighting and shading as well.

Eggshell Surface - A canvas with a very smooth surface. Excellent for airbrush work or when texture is least desired.

Embed - An object or material that is implanted into another material or surface.

Enamel Paint - Used for painting on nonporous surfaces such as glass, china, tile, and metal. There are many water base types now available.

Encaustic - Comes in blocks of encaustic color or pigment added to hot beeswax. The wax is applied to the substrate while it's warm and manipulated by heat using special tools.

Faux Finish - Meaning fake. To imitate by painting the likeness of another surface; usually a natural surface so that it appears real. For example, various types of marble, rock, and wood. *See also* trompe l'oeil.

Fixative - In spray form. Used to seal and prevent smudging of dry art mediums as pastel, charcoal, and pencil. A fixative can slightly alter the appearance of the drawing. Workable fixative allows you to continue to work on a drawing at intervals, thus helping to prevent hazy wax bloom.

Flat Wash - A wash of single color is painted using multiple overlapping strokes. See also Wash.

Foil - Imitation metal leaf or aluminum foil.

Foreground - That in a painting or drawing closest to the viewer.

Frottage - Placing a piece of paper over a rough surface and rubbing or skimming over the back of it with pencil or another writing tool to obtain an impression of the textured surface onto the paper.

Flow Medium - Increases the flow and workability of acrylic paint.

Gesso (acrylic) - A primer used as the ground for paint and other mediums to adhere to. A polymer emulsion (sizing) with titanium dioxide and calcium carbonate (ground). Has a matte appearance.

Giclee - (Pronounced gee clay). A print of the artist's work is produced using archival ink on an artist substrate; most popular being a print on a canvas.

Gilding - Applying gold or silver leaf to a surface.

Glaze - A glaze is a mixture of paint with water or medium. The color glaze is then applied over a dry color undercoat. The transparent layer and the undercoat together produce another color. For example, a blue glaze over a yellow undercoat will produce a green color. Glazing techniques are also used to produce wonderful layers of depth.

Glazing Medium (acrylic type) - Glazes are transparent. A clear glazing medium can be mixed with water based paint, dry pigments, tiny lightweight inclusions, or applied directly over a dry surface.

Gloss - The shiniest reflective surface sheen possible.

Gouache - Opaque matte paint. Its binder is gum Arabic as used in watercolor paint. Therefore, it can be reconstituted with water once it has dried. This paint is not used for transparent glazes. It is mainly used by illustrators.

Graded Wash - A wash in which the colors flow down a tilted surface from light to dark or from dark to light. Used often in landscape horizon.

Grisaille - A monochrome painting executed in different values of gray.

Ground - The coating of a painting's surface on which the art medium will adhere.

Hatching - Closely spaced parallel lines are applied to represent tone or shading. Used mainly for pencil, pen & ink, and with etching and engraving.

Highlighting - Applying light color to an object's brightest point where light is received, usually through mixing white with a hint of the color surrounding the object being highlighted.

High Relief - More than half the mass of the overall sculpture projects from the background resulting in a physical projection of a three-dimensional form. *See also* bas relief.

Hot Pressed - A smooth surface paper with little tooth due to the hot rollers used during the manufacturing process. This type of paper is not very absorbent. Best choice for pencil and pen and ink when fine detail work is desired. Pastels work best on cold pressed due to the paper's texture which is needed for layering and adhesion. *See also* Cold Pressed.

Hue - The name given to a color. Color is determined by the wavelength of light.

When the word "Hue" follows the name of the paint, the color is similar to the pure pigment, but is cheaper or less toxic.

Impasto - Thickly applied paint with a stiff bristle brush or knife leaving behind texture marks. Can also be used to create bas relief.

Inlay - Inserting or setting a material into a surface for decoration. The material is then sanded back so that it is smooth and level with the surface in which it was set.

Inorganic Pigments - Chemically stable and without carbon.

Isolation Coat - The final protective coat applied to a painting before an archival varnish is applied. The varnish can later be removed from a painting for cleaning purposes while still being protected by the isolation coat.

Juxtaposition - The placement of two or more contrasting elements side by side. For example, color, texture, shape, or size. *See also* contrast.

Laying-in - The initial painting stage where broad areas of flat color is applied in simple form and arranged according to the desired composition. As the basecoat, it consists of one or more solid colors. *Also see* Basecoat, Underpainting.

Layering - Applying layers of paint while allowing each layer to dry before applying the next. This technique creates additional depth and movement.

Lightfast - A pigment's resistance to fading when exposed to sunlight. Has a rating for resisting fading with long exposure to sunlight. 1 being excellent, 2 being very good, and 3 as the least protection.

Liquid Frisket - *See* Masking Fluid.

Load - The bristles of the brush are loaded with paint needed to complete a stroke.

Mahl stick - A long wooden stick with one padded tip. It is used by the painter to steady the hand. It is held in one hand while the padded end is rested on the canvas. The hand holding the brush can then rest on the stick.

Masking Fluid (Liquid Frisket) - Used to mask over an area to protect it from paint. The masking fluid applied over the area to be protected. Once dry, it can be painted over with a light viscosity wet medium or a dry medium. It is rubbed or pulled off when no longer needed.

Masking Out - Using low tack tape or masking fluid to protect an area from paint. It is later removed when no longer needed.

Matte - No sheen, as in having a dull surface. Usually due to a whiting agent added to the medium.

Medium - The main ingredient added to the pigment that identifies its type by changing its characteristics. For example, polymer emulsion used for acrylic paint, gum Arabic for watercolor, and linseed oil for oil paint. Can also represent the main ingredient used without pigment added, for example, polymer emulsion used in acrylic gel and paste.

Mixed Media - More than one media or medium used to create a composition.

Mold & Deckle - Tools used together with wet pulp to make a sheet of paper. The mold is the meshed sieve that picks up and holds the pulp and allows the water to drain from it. The deckle is removable and sets on top of the mold. It holds the pulp in place and determines the size and shape of the paper being produced.

Multi-Loaded - A brush loaded with more than one color to achieve various color combinations in a single stroke.

Mural - A painting that is executed directly onto a wall.

Oil Paint - A pigment mixed with linseed oil as a binder. It can be applied thick as texture or thin as glaze. It is soluble in solvents as turpentine and mineral spirits.

Opaque - Not transparent. Cannot see through. Also known as the hiding power.

Organic Pigments - Extracted from plant.

Oxgall - Added to watercolor paint as a wetting agent to allow paint to flow more freely.

Open Time - The time it takes for paint to dry to the touch without being tacky. Either a light mist of water over acrylic paint can help to increase the open time, or by adding a retarder additive to the paint.

Palette - The colors chosen by the artist for a painting. Also refers to the physical object that holds paint portions being used for the painting.

Pigment - A natural color compound usually in powder form. When mixed with a binder, paint is made.

Polymer - Natural and synthetic materials made of many small molecules that build up larger molecules. Polymer is a major ingredient used for the formation of acrylic paints and acrylic mediums, as well as polymer clay and white glue.

Primer - A sizing and ground mixture used to prepare the surface with tooth so that a medium can adhere to it. *See also* Gesso.

Pulp - The raw material consisting of fibers that is used for making paper.

Receding Colors - Colors that are applied paler (usually cool) than those in the middle and foreground, and are used to represent distance in the background.

Resist - Non absorbent oil or wax base material that repels paint and other mediums applied over it. *See also* Masking Fluid and Liquid Frisket

Retarder - An additive used to increase opening time of acrylic; especially helpful since acrylic dries rather quick. Retarder slows down the drying time.

Scumbling - Applying a thin layer of opaque or semi-opaque color over a dry layer, usually being a lighter color over a darker to produce a soft hazy effect without completely concealing the dry layer. The thin layer of paint is applied lightly with a barely damp brush.

Sealer – A sealer may have two purposes. The first being used to seal the final top layer when a varnish is not desired.

And second as a “sizing” when used as a protective coating applied to the substrate to prevent a chemical reaction between a transparent paint and the surface in which it is applied. It makes the surface nonporous. Gesso is then applied over the sealer. *See also* Sizing, Support Induced Discoloration (SID).

Semi-gloss – The sheen between a gloss and a matte surface.

Sheen - The amount of reflection on a dried surface.

Sizing - Protects the canvas against SID (Support Induced Discoloration) and is the receptor for a primer to adhere.

Sgraffito - Scratching lines through a top layer of wet paint to expose the underlying layer of dry paint. Contrast in colors work best with this technique; usually with the darker being the under-layer.

Sketch - Like a study, but not as detailed or refined; usually created with pencil. See also study.

Spattering - Using a stiff brush or tooth brush loaded with thinned paint. The bristles are pulled backwards and when released, the bristles move forward as the paint is spattered onto the surface in front of the brush. May also tap the brush handle with another brush to force the paint forward onto the surface.

Solvent - Used to dilute paint.

Stippling Effect - Applying the dry brush technique and pouncing a stiff stippling or stenciling brush to create small dots. This technique can also be done on metal by punching holes into it to represent dots, or on paper by using a pencil or pen to draw dots.

Stroke Work - A single stroke of a brush loaded with paint or medium.

Also associated with decorative or one stroke painting techniques where blending, shading, and highlighting are accomplished in a single stroke.

Study - A quick painting for practice to see how the composition works and to make adjustments before starting the actual painting.

Stylus - A tool usually wooden with a smooth rounded metal tip on one or both ends. Used for embossing technique on foil or as with copper tooling.

In decorative painting, artists use it to dip the tip into paint to create small dots, and to trace over transfer paper to copy an image onto a surface to be painted.

Also refers to a type of drawing pen.

Sumato - Produces a soft smoky or hazy effect. *See also* Scumbling.

Support Induced Discoloration (SID) - When impurities causing a yellowish stain are washed from the support upward to the acrylic paint layer. This discoloration is noticeable through transparent layers of color. For example, a blue transparent layer of paint will appear green or a muddy color. *See also* Sealer, Sizing.

Support or Substrate - Is the material in which a painting or drawing is applied, for example, a canvas or paper.

Surface Preparation - Properly preparing a substrate's surface by sealing, or by applying a ground for added tooth that mediums can permanently adhere to.

Tempera - A specialized medium in which pigment is mixed with egg yolk. Dries to a matte finish. Not to be mistaken for poster paint.

Tenebrism - A special focus on light in a certain area of a painting that draws the viewer's attention to it.

Tipping - Loading the brush with a color then dipping the tip of the brush into more colors for variation in the stroke.

Tooth - The roughness of a surface so that paint will adhere to it. Also known as "having a bite".

Transfer Paper - There are several types of this paper. The older carbon type has a coating of ink. The other type has a coating of graphite or water soluble color pencil on one side.

The coated side of the transfer paper is placed over the surface to be painted. The image to be copied is then placed over the back of the transfer paper and traced over. Both sheets are then removed and the transfer is then present on the surface to be painted.

Tracing Paper - Semi-transparent paper. Also known as onion paper. The original drawing is placed under the tracing paper and a copy is hand traced on top of the tracing paper.

Translucent - Semi-transparent with a glowing appearance. Can see the under-layer, but not clearly. Not transparent and not opaque.

Transparent - Not opaque or translucent. Is clear, making it easy to see through to the under layer. Has very little hiding power.

Triple Load - A brush, usually flat, is loaded with three colors of paint. First all bristles are loaded with a single color then each side is dipped into a different color. The brush is stroked back and forth to produce a soft blend of three colors.

Trompe l'oeil (trômp 'loi)- To fool the eye. A painted surface so realistic as to fool the viewer into thinking that it is an actual three dimensional object.

Underpainting - Preliminary painting onto which layers of color will build upon to create the final painting. *See also* Basecoat, Undercoat

Variegated Wash - A loose wash of colors next to each other and allowed to interact and blend.

Varnish - Protective top coat for a finished painting. It must be archival (solvent-based) if it is to be removable for later cleaning.

Vat - Used to hold water and pulp for paper making.

Vehicle - The liquid binder that carries the pigment in paint. Polymer emulsion is the vehicle in acrylic, linseed in oil paint, and gum of Arabic in watercolor paint.

Velatura - Velatura is light "semi-opaque" glaze that obscures some of the darker undercoat to create a hazy appearance usually desired for atmospheric effect.

Vinegar Paint - Dry pigment, vinegar, and binder (usually liquid soap).

Viscosity - The thickness of paint.

Wash - A mix of mostly water with a small amount of paint applied to an absorbent ground using multiple overlapping strokes. Use a flat wash brush or a large mop brush. Start at the top and continue downward with horizontal strokes. The surface can be tilted for a graded wash. Additional techniques can be applied while the paint is still wet, such as blotting and lifting color or dropping in additional color as with wet-in-wet.

Watercolor Paint - Known for its beautiful translucent color appearance once dried. It is a water base soluble paint, and is very easy to clean up after. Gum Arabic is the binder used to bond its pigment to a ground; usually being acid free paper. Available in tube or block form.

Wetting Agent - A liquid Ovgall is added to watercolor whereas a flow agent is added to acrylic to reduce the surface tension and increase the flow.

Wet-on-Dry - Applying wet paint over dry paint or ground.

Wet-in-Wet – Often referred to with watercolor when applying wet paint onto wet paint thus allowing the colors to freely flow and interact with one another to create effects.

Wet-on-Wet - Often referred to with oil or acrylic painting. Painting wet paint over wet paint. Also referred to as “alla prima” (Italian, meaning at first attempt) direct painting as a fast way of painting before the first application has dried.

*Also read the “Glossary of Color Terms” and “Principle & Elements of Design”.