

## AN INTRODUCTION TO OIL PAINTING

Oil painting is the ideal medium for the novice. It is an excellent way to study, because changes and corrections are easily made. Unwanted passages of color can be scraped off the canvas any number of times without injury to the surface. One color can be painted over another, drawing and proportions can be corrected, and all the nuances of light and shadow can be studied experimentally. The painting can be put aside at any time, to be picked up and continued at a later date.

### MATERIAL AND EQUIPMENT FOR OIL PAINTING

#### Colors

If you are just beginning to paint, you will do well to start with a reputable brand of student color. Most color manufacturers make a line of student colors along with their professional grades. These colors are appreciably less expensive and the selection is nearly as wide as in the professional line. As you progress, you can replace the student brand with colors of professional quality, which have far greater covering quality, particularly in the Cadmiums and Blues. There are several good brands of colors available. In this class we will use the Grumbacher line.

Some colors for basic use:

Cadmium Yellow, Light  
Cadmium Red, Deep  
Ceruleun Blue  
Ivory Black  
Titanium White

These nine colors will enable you to mix the various shades of other colors that you will need for most purposes.

However, you may want to supplement these colors with:

Alizarin Crimson	Cerulean Blue	Thalo Blue
Cadmium Yellow, Deep	Burnt Sienna	Thalo Green
Cadmium Orange	Viridian	Raw Umber
Cadmium Red, Light	Cobalt Blue	Yellow Ochre

#### Canvas and Other Painting Surfaces

The best and most receptive surface on which to work is stretched linen canvas. Linen, however, is relatively expensive, and cotton canvas is a good substitute. Cotton canvas panels are the most convenient for painting outdoors and are inexpensive. They are light in weight, too, and have the added advantage of not taking up much space when stored in your studio.

The chief disadvantage of any type of panel is its lack of resiliency. Stretched canvas, whether cotton or linen, has a drum-like quality that seems to add vigor to your brush stroke. It also has the advantage of being available in several types of surfaces, from extra-smooth (double-primed) to very rough. You will find a medium-rough texture best for all-around work; extra-smooth is generally used for portraits.

## **Stretching Your Own Canvas**

You can purchase canvas already stretched if you work in the stock sizes (8 x 10, 9 x 12, 12 x 16, 16 x 20, 20 x 24, and 24 x 30 inches). If you want a special size, or prefer to do your own stretching, the process is fairly simple. You will need canvas pliers, which can be obtained in any art supply shop, stretcher strips of the size desired, and a box of 3/8-inch tacks or staples. We will assume that you want to stretch a 20-x-24-inch canvas. Cut a piece of canvas 24 x 28 inches, which will give you a working edge of 2 inches all around the stretcher strips. The strips are placed in a frame position, as square as possible. Place the canvas so that the even 2-inch margin appears around the stretcher frame. Gripping the 2-inch edge with the pliers, staple on each side of the center (about 2 inches apart). Repeat this procedure until all four sides are stapled. Then keep adding more staples, working from the center toward the corners, alternately on each side. Gradually the canvas will be stapled along the side of the entire frame. The wedges that come with the wooden stretchers can then be hammered into the corners to take up the slack.

## **The Easel and Other Equipment**

There are two main types of easels, studio and outdoor or sketching easels. If you purchase a sketching easel, select one that folds into a small, compact unit. Remember that you will be carrying a paint box and probably a sketching stool along with the easel.

A sketching easel can be used for working indoors, but it will lack the stability of a regular studio easel and will limit the size of your canvas, because the grips on a sketching easel are not designed to hold large canvases. Its stability can be improved by placing rubber tips on its legs when it is used indoors.

Whatever easel you select, make certain that it contains a fixture that allows the canvas to be tilted at an angle to eliminate surface glare.

## **The Palette Knife**

You will need a palette knife for removing paint from your palette as you work. It can also be used to scrape unwanted paint from the surface of the canvas before repainting, and it can supplement a brush in mixing colors.

## **Medium**

A painting medium, or vehicle, is necessary to make the paint workable. A good home made mixture is one-part turpentine and one-part linseed oil. You can vary the effect by using more turpentine in the preliminary stages of a painting, to speed the drying as well as to thin the consistency of the paint. Then, as the painting builds up, cut down on the turpentine and use more linseed oil, painting in a heavier manner.

When you are more experienced, you may want to experiment with other painting mediums. Stand oil, which gives an enamel-like finish to a painting, is a very heavy oil and should be thinned with turpentine to make it workable. Sun-thickened oil will also add a gloss to your painting and it dries faster than stand oil.

All mediums should be purchased at an art supply shop to insure high quality.

## Oil Cups

You should have two cups that can be fastened to your palette. One cup is for the medium you are mixing with your colors, the other holds turpentine for cleaning your brush quickly, particularly when working outdoors. Make sure both cups are big enough to take a large brush.

## Paint Rags

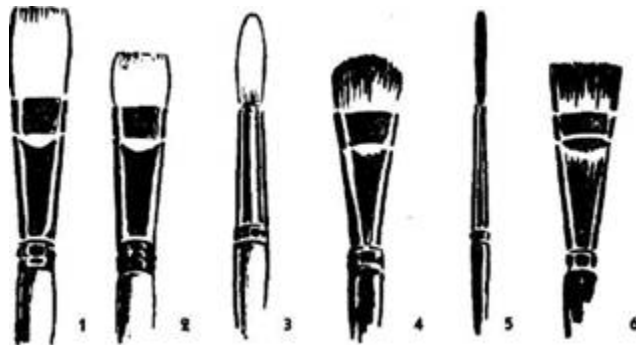
Have enough rags (paper towels) for wiping your brushes and palette, and for general cleaning up.

## Brushes

Bristle brushes are the most popular brushes for oil painting. The most commonly used types are the long haired brush—known as a "flat"—and the short-haired brush—a "bright." There is also a round bristle brush that comes to a blunt point, which you may find useful after you have become familiar with the possibilities of the long- and short-haired varieties. These come in sizes from a scant 1/8 inch to over 1 inch in width and are identified by numbers.

While I suggest inexpensive student colors for beginners, I recommend that you buy the best brushes you can afford. Properly cared for, a good brush will hold its shape and resiliency and will last a long time.

The following sizes would be a good variety to start with:



**No. 1 Flat** - The long-haired bristle brush known as a "flat." It will serve for the bulk of your work.

**No. 2 Bright** - Also a bristle brush but with a shorter hair. Using the edge of the brush produces a thin line, excellent for outlining.

**No. 3 Round** - The round brush is available in both bristle and sable hair. It does not hold much paint but is useful for details.

**No. 4 Filbert** - Combines the characteristics of a flat and a round bristle brush. A very fluent stroke, particularly useful for head and figure painting, can be produced with it.

**No. 5 Rigger** - Made with sable hair, the rigger is used for delineating fine lines and sharp details.

**No. 6 Flat Sable** - The flat sable is the most effective brush for producing a smooth finish. Its soft quality lends itself well to glazing effects.

## CARE OF EQUIPMENT

1. Clean all brushes thoroughly at the end of the day's work.
2. Make certain that you replace the cap of each color tube immediately after using it.
3. Do not allow the oil in the palette cup to accumulate and become gummy.
4. Remove unwanted paint from the working surface of the palette knife, then wipe the palette clean with a rag.
5. Wipe the palette knife frequently, never allowing the paint to become tacky on the blade.
6. Take care not to nick the blade of the palette knife.
7. Never store materials or equipment in a damp place. This applies particularly to paper and canvas.

## BRUSH HANDLING

As you progress you will naturally want to add to your collection. As you paint more you will realize the importance of good brushes, too. A good brush will hold its shape and, with good care, will last several years, but an inferior brush never has the spring and resiliency of a more expensive make. Inferior brushes also have the infuriating habit of depositing loose hairs on the painted canvas. This always seems to happen when you have just executed a particularly fine color passage!

Start to paint by dipping the brush lightly into the color, taking care not to let the color come up to the ferrule. Use the rag frequently, removing surplus color and at the same time pressing the hairs back into shape. If you lay-in your paintings in a dry-brush manner, that is, applying color with a rubbing technique and with little or no medium, use one of your older stiff bristle brushes. Once you start using full color, apply it with a crisp, firm touch.

You can clean your brush fairly well while working by dipping it into the turpentine and wiping it dry with a rag. However, when a deep blue or violet color is followed with a shade of yellow, the darker color may tint the lighter one in spite of the quick turpentine rinse. You will find it convenient, therefore, to use a separate brush for lighter colors, particularly the yellows and ochre. Many painters use several brushes when working outdoors, reserving a brush for yellows, one for blues, another for reds, and so on. That may not always be necessary, but it is advisable to have separate brushes for Thalo colors, whose tinting quality is so powerful that they can easily find their way into all the colors used.

Use as large a brush as possible for the area to be covered. This will insure a broad style. Bristle brushes are preferable to sable brushes for most of your paintings, because they impart a more vital stroke to the canvas. Using a sable brush at too early a stage of the painting can lead to an undesirable slickness.

Oil brushes are made with long handles for a purpose. Much painting is accomplished by holding the end of the brush handle—particularly in the early stages of a canvas. This enables you to paint with more freedom and, since you are holding the brush at arm's length, to see your work more clearly.

Then, as the canvas becomes covered with color, details can be added by grasping the brush by its metal ferrule.

Holding the brush like a pencil is almost instinctive, but you should experiment with the effects that are achieved by handling the brush in various other ways. Notice how the color is deposited on the canvas when you pull the brush firmly downward, in contrast to holding it lightly and patting the color on gently. Try painting a thin line by twirling a pointed brush between your forefinger and thumb; the resulting line will be broken and softer than when the brush is gripped by the ferrule. Keep this in mind for rendering tree branches without leaves, wires, ropes, and similar lines. As you work you will find that long-haired bristle brushes produce a more fluid stroke than short-haired brushes. The flat sable brush with its soft hair will be found useful for smoothing rough passages, blending various colors together, and generally refining the painting.

In addition to turpentine, which is convenient for cleaning brushes quickly while painting, soap and water should be used regularly. Use a mild soap and lukewarm water. Work up a lather with the soap and rub the lather well into the brushes. Pay special attention to cleaning the brush where it meets the ferrule. It is when the paint becomes imbedded into this area that the brush loses its shape. Rinse thoroughly with the lukewarm water, making certain that all the soap is removed. Finish rinsing with cold water. Then, with your thumb and forefinger, squeeze the surplus water out, and at the same time reshape the brush. Put clean brushes in an upright container, brush end up.

Do not discard old brushes; you will find them useful for achieving certain effects that can be obtained only with a worn brush. I have some brushes in my collection that have just a few wisps of hair remaining, but I still find use for them.

If you accidentally allow the color to dry in a brush, try soaking it in turpentine overnight. If the color still adheres, use a commercial paint remover as a last resort. No brush is ever quite the same again after the powerful remover is used, so make every attempt not to allow the color to set in your brushes.

There is an excellent brush- and hand-cleaning fluid on the market. The cleaning agent is properly balanced and will not harm brushes. Color is removed faster with less rubbing, and the fluid acts to preserve the brush.



### *Sketch At All Times*

## **ARRANGING THE COLORS ON THE PALETTE**

The purpose of arranging the colors on your palette in a systematic way is to save time. There should be no fumbling around to find a color, for all your attention should be concentrated on painting the subject before you.

If the colors are always kept in the same order on your palette, your brush will instinctively go to the desired color.

There are several ways of setting up a palette. The colors can be arranged from warm to cool or vice-versa. They can be placed just along the far edge of the palette or form an inverted L by also being

placed along the left edge. The oil cups—one for the painting medium, the other for turpentine—can be fastened to the right side by themselves, so that they are quickly accessible.

Do not skimp on the color you squeeze from a tube. Too small an amount of each color on the palette leads to thin painting. If you paint on consecutive days, most of the paint will remain workable. If any color starts drying out, scrape it off with the palette knife and replace it with fresh color.

### THE STUDY OF COLOR

Early attempts to paint from nature often result in a literal, almost crude, interpretation of the color that is seen.

The sky is blue, the earth brown, the trees seem a definite green. It is not until you really start observing the subtleties of color that you begin to avoid the obvious. You discover that the sky can vary from light gray to greenish brown. The brown earth becomes a pinkish violet or even a vivid orange, according to the light from the sky. Subtle blues, violets, and browns can be detected in what first appeared to be a cluster of monotonous green trees. As you progress you learn to become more selective. You emphasize colors that produce a more harmonious effect and subdue discordant notes or eliminate them entirely.

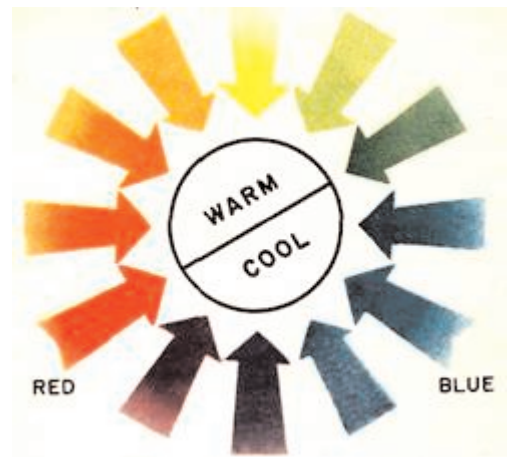
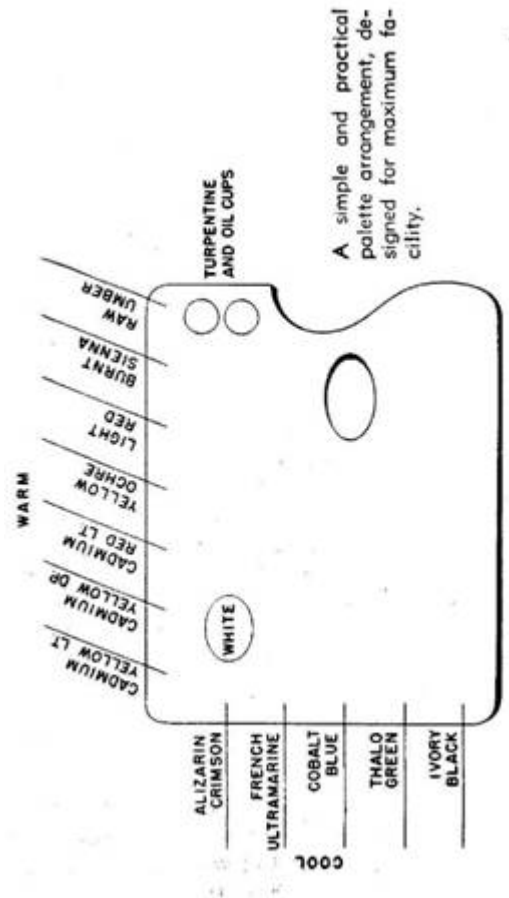
If you were born with a sense of color you are one of the fortunate few. Most people constantly have to return to nature, studying the effect of one color related to another, always working to seek color harmonies and new color schemes. Then, as the eye for color develops, the painter's work becomes more distinctive.

In the actual painting of a subject we learn that a restricted palette insures better color harmony, that the grays enhance the subject, and that restraint is necessary when using the more brilliant colors.

Study the original paintings or good color reproductions of the old and modern masters. Notice how some painters actually used very few colors, yet you are not conscious of any lack of color in their paintings; others seem to have run the gamut of every color, but they also produced beautiful harmonies.

You may want to study the scientific color theories of the authorities on the subject. Many books are available, but before you become too involved with theory remember that you are interested not only in the visual effect of color and its emotional impact, but also in how color creates form and how form is affected by its surrounding color.

Technically, any color can be made by mixing the primary colors, yellow, red, and blue. Each of the secondary colors, orange, violet, and green, is made by mixing the two primary colors on either side of it. Mixing primary and secondary colors produces the intermediate colors, yellow-orange, red-orange, red-



violet, blue-violet, blue-green, and yellow-green.

The complement of each color is directly opposite it. Mixtures of complements make grays.

Colors containing a greater proportion of yellow or red are considered "warm." Conversely, colors containing a greater proportion of blue are "cool."

## Color Mixing

A. The three primary colors, yellow, red, and blue, mixed together neutralize each other to make a gray.

B. The three secondary colors, orange, violet, and green, mixed together neutralize each other to make a gray.

C. Two primary colors, in this case yellow and red, mixed together make a secondary color (orange).

D. Two primary colors, in this case blue and yellow, mixed together make a secondary color (green).

E. A primary color (yellow) mixed with a secondary color (green) makes an intermediate hue (yellow-green).

F. Two primary colors, in this case red and blue, mixed together make a secondary color (violet).

G. Two colors opposite each other on the color wheel (complementary colors) mixed together neutralize each other to make a gray. In this case yellow and violet were mixed to produce a gray.

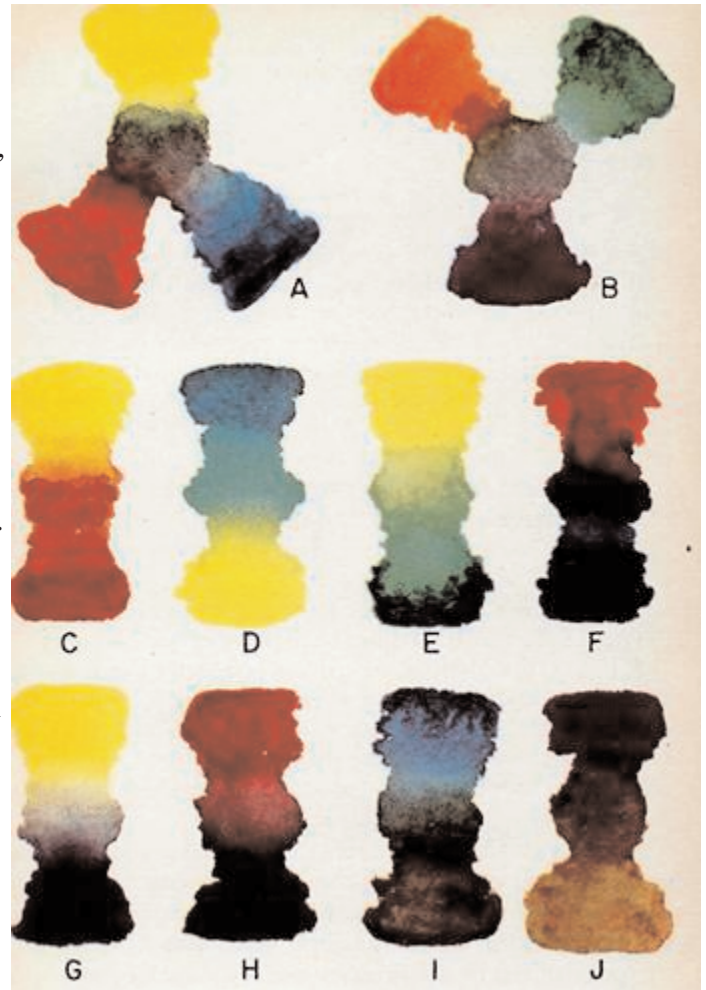
H. When black is mixed with a color, it grays the color to produce a neutralized hue. In this case black was added to red to make a neutralized red.

I. When a neutralized color is mixed with a color, it grays the color to produce a neutralized hue. In this case a deep brown was added to blue to make a neutralized blue.

J. Here is another neutralized color mixed with a color to produce a neutralized hue. In this case a reddish brown was added to violet to make a neutralized violet.

Color mixing is generally the first stumbling block for the novice. Your first attempts result in either a pale, thin, washed-out painting or a heavy, muddy effect. In the first instance, too little color is mixed with too much white paint and these mixtures are applied too timidly.

Keep the use of white paint to a minimum. Rather, exaggerate the color you see in the subject when transferring it to the canvas. It is easier to modify it with white paint later, when the canvas is covered and you compare it with the subject. Chances are the color will not be as strong as you had thought and will require little or no changing. White paint is best used sparingly with each color. For example, to



get a secondary color like a light green we know that the primary colors to be used are blue and yellow. Rather than mixing these two colors together and then adding white, cut each color first with white and then mix them. A far more vibrant secondary color results. This is particularly true when mixing violet. Many students get a muddy-looking violet when mixing red and blue together and then adding white. If the resulting color is too light, they add blue. It then turns out to be too cool so red is put into the mixture. By this time the color has become too dark and more white is needed, and in all probability the mixture then has to be discarded and a fresh start made.

The thinness of the paint layer is frequently caused by the use of too much medium, especially turpentine.

A heavy, muddy-looking canvas is usually the result of mixing too many colors together in striving to capture the desired effect. Learn to know all the possibilities of the colors you are using on your palette. Work first with fewer colors—you will be astounded at the many shades that can be produced with only a few colors.

You will also find it valuable to experiment with making a color darker or grayer by combining it with its opposite instead of the obvious black. Black has a place in the mixing of color, but use it sparingly until you have learned the possibilities of the primary and secondary colors.

It is fumbling in mixing colors and applying them to canvas, then repainting the same area in an attempt to correct the color, that contributes to a heavy, over-painted picture.

Do not become discouraged when your early attempts to mix colors correctly produce any of these unhappy results. The technique of color mixing is always acquired gradually. Later on you will obtain the desired color by using much less paint than you do now. You will mix two colors, possibly modify them with a touch of a third color, or even deepen the hue with a dab of a fourth color. Avoid stirring paint mixtures too much on the palette. Mixing colors on the canvas will create a more lively and sparkling effect.

### **Color-Mixing Hints**

1. Restrict your mixtures to as few colors as possible.
2. Yellow is the most sensitive color on the palette. Use a knife to scoop it up when mixing it with other colors. Daubing a brush that you have been using into the yellow may stain it.
3. Take care when using white paint. Keep in mind that it neutralizes the color with which it is mixed. Too much white will impart a washed-out or chalky look to the color mixture.
4. Mix colors with the tip of the brush hairs. Never allow the paint to seep up to the metal ferrule.
5. Keep two jars of water handy when mixing water color. If you use one to rinse color from your brush the other will remain clear for a longer time, thus assuring clean water for mixing.
6. Dipping a brush into two colors and not stirring the mixture on the palette but applying it directly to the canvas often produces an interesting broken-color effect. This can be done with water color as well, but a minimum amount of water must be used. Warm and cool contrasting colors are most effective.
7. If you paint flowers or portraits you may have to add extra colors to your palette, because certain shades needed in such work are almost impossible to mix with a standard color palette.