

Introduction

Welcome to the London Art College's course in oil painting. We aim to provide you with an enjoyable course which will furnish you with the necessary knowledge and skills to work creatively and artistically with oil paints. We advise you to purchase the minimum of materials listed herein, to work through the course from beginning to end – methodically, and to keep up a regular pace of interaction with your tutor by sending in completed course units as you do them. Doing this enables you to get the maximum benefit from your investment in distance learning.

To acquire the skills needed for oil painting and for artistic development means you will have to put in the work yourself at a practical level. The difference between pure book study and what we are offering here is that you are able to get valuable feedback from an assigned course artist. If you are currently too shy or not confident enough to take what you do out into the world and accept praise, criticism and rejection alike, then this is the place for you to begin.

Prior to commencing you will need to organise your home, your time and materials. Oil paints can be messy and it is advisable to make a place where you can work uninterrupted and where you can tolerate an 'accident' or two, i.e., not on the best Axminster carpet in the living room or on a new divan in the bedroom!

Additionally, please provide your tutor with the information asked of you so he/she can tailor responses to suit your individual requirements.

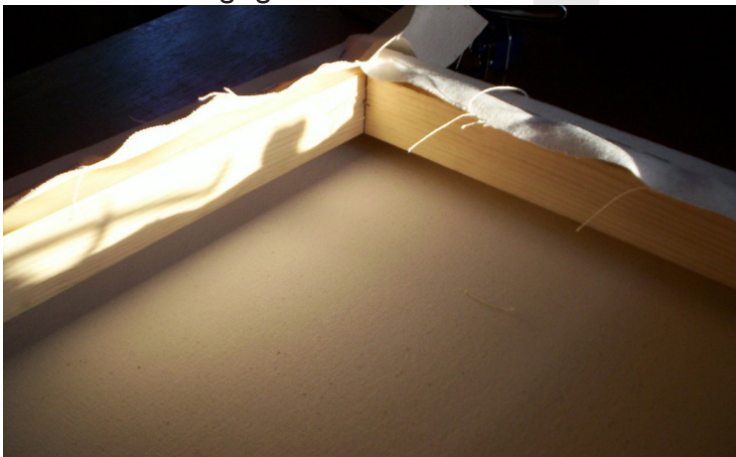
Oil painting is a particularly Western cultural phenomenon. It is alleged to have begun in Europe, in the low countries (Holland and Belgium) around the 14th Century, its discovery being attributed to the Van Eyck family – though there are accounts (literally) of its having been used as early as the 13th Century in England, and in his 'Lives of the Artists', Vasari indicates that oil painting came about gradually through trial and error by numerous different artists across Europe. As a painting medium it really got going during the 16th and 17th Centuries.

It was preceded by tempera (in which egg yolk is used as the binding medium). The winning properties of oil paint being a heightened realism, almost photographic in quality; this being due to the optical clarity made possible through the use of refined linseed oil. Tempera is fast drying and consequently the method of working it allowed for little alteration or 'fudging', the result is a more wooden feel to the form in a picture. Oil painting superseded tempera in part, because of the novelties of the medium at the time. Oil paintings can be done on canvas, which makes an eminently portable form of property. Tempera paintings tended to be done on wooden panels which are heavier and more cumbersome and a canvas can be taken off its stretcher and rolled up. But essentially, oil painting is suited to the artistic temperament. With oil paints there is opportunity for protracted manipulation of the paint; when painting to achieve natural, illusionistic effects it offers great plasticity and has a lengthy drying period.

This is a photo of the reverse of a stretched canvas to show the effect of beading on the canvas structure



In this case we assume you want to make a rectangular picture. Mark up the wood so you can cut it to the required length with a 45° angled surface at the two ends of each piece, so the pieces will abut each other snugly. Cut the wood, taking care to clamp it so it doesn't wobble, using G cramps or a vice. Ensure the cut faces are square and smooth. Rub them down with sandpaper if necessary. Lay them out on the floor in the intended position for final assembly (flat) and using an old paint brush, apply the adhesive as per instructions on the pack. You can use 'Evo-Stick' contact adhesive or woodworkers pva. Apply the corner cramps and/or sash cramps and fix up the frame so it dries square and flat. Use corrugated corner reinforcers at this stage if you think they will be necessary, knocking them in with a carpenter's hammer, ensuring the faces at each joint remain pressed against each other. Adjust the cramps. Whilst the glue dries, cut the quadrant beading with 45° angled end surfaces to attach to the edges of the frame. When the glue is properly dried, release the cramps; check the frame is square. If it is badly out of true, break it apart and do it all again, cleaning the glue from the ends of the wood. This seems drastic, but if you try to stretch canvas over a wonky frame, it will eventually collapse – and your work of art with it. On having assembled a satisfactory frame, attach the beading to its outer edges with panel pins and a small hammer so the curved bit faces inwards and the edge is outwards and uppermost. We do this so the canvas when stretched, is suspended above the frame so the wood of the frame doesn't affect the brushwork at the picture edges because of the brush rubbing against it.



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An example of the straight body colour technique in oils - for a painting about motherhood

SPECIFIC ATTRIBUTES OF OIL PAINTS IN RELATION TO COLOUR EFFECTS

Paint consists of: ground pigment (the colour), a vehicle or binding medium (the oil) and possibly a percentage of inert pigment such as Alumina hydrate to either extend, balance or increase the handling properties of the paint. Much of a colour's apparent properties are down to the nature of the pigment itself. We have already noted that certain pigments are more opaque than others and some are more transparent. The use of these properties depends on the method of painting you choose to employ. Essentially, oil painting technique can be divided into two types: 1) the straightforward technique or body colour in which light effects are achieved by the admixture of white and careful placement of colours for maximum complementary and tonal contrast, which is what we have dealt with so far and 2) use of transparent colours as glazes (similar to watercolour) whereby the light areas are created by allowing the brilliance of the primed canvas and other colours to show through the layers of glazing.

'Paj' by Alan Dedman

An example of minimal glazing over body colour



As a general rule: glazes will reduce the tonal value of the picture surface. The picture will gradually darken the more you glaze it. Therefore the underpainting should be a bit brighter and less tonally integrated than it is to remain unglazed. You cannot fully anticipate the effects of glazing until you have worked extensively with the technique. There is always some degree of experiment in the process and of course, this is all part of the fun and can produce some great results in a creative sense. Another practical issue to remember is to allow the glazes to dry before working over them with another layer. You must consider the colour mixing effects you are about to create: if for example, you put a layer of green glaze over an area of red or tint of red in the painting the immediate effect will be to generate a greying of the colours. Why? Because if you mixed red and green on the palette the result would be a dirty grey colour. Red and green are complementary and opposite each other on the colour wheel. Therefore, in terms of their hues and brilliance, they cancel each other out. This is so for all complementary colours. However, if you laid a glaze of Alizarin Crimson over a tint of Cobalt Blue you would get a Mauve/Violet result, as you would if you mixed them on the palette. In this instance, the colours work well together. You have in essence, two primaries: Red (Alizarin) and Blue (Cobalt) so they will mix to make a secondary Mauve/Violet of darker value than the original Cobalt tint. Use this obvious, simple and concrete knowledge to start your understanding of working with glazes.