

Introduction

by Julie Douglas

Welcome to the Beginners Painting Course. I have been teaching drawing, painting and illustration for many years and am pleased to share my knowledge with you and guide you through the beginnings of colour. This course will introduce you to the joys of working in colour through paint. It is important that you understand that this is a journey, and once you begin, you will be traveling on this journey for all the rest of your creative life. In other words, there is so much to unravel and discover about painting, things you will only learn once you stop reading about it and get going - the gaining of knowledge, appreciation and skills is more wonderful than it seems until you start, and all great painters will tell you that they are still learning until they die. How wonderful that is.

Also, please accept now that your painting skills will always be compromised if you don't improve your drawing abilities at the same time. There is no such thing as drawing OR painting. Painting IS drawing - it's drawing with a brush. Drawing is painting, with a stick. Both are vehicles, and without good drawing, your paintings will not go as far forward as you would like. So this course is designed for those who have some drawing knowledge and are looking for help in getting going with paints.

For the moment, please let go of the notion of Finished Paintings. For now, your aim is to get to grips with what the paint can do, how to handle it, how to experiment with it and how to make it do what you want. Once you can do THOSE things, you will be able to paint a Finished Painting. Rather like learning the piano - until we know how to make our fingers move freely, do some scales and lots of simple tunes, we cannot begin to tackle a concerto, for we wouldn't be ready and we would fail. I am not interested in you failing; I am interested in you succeeding.

Your exercises are split into three paint mediums, water colour, acrylics and oils. I will keep the materials and the palette to a minimum so you are able to try all three, without a huge outlay. The differences between the paints are fascinating, and it is rewarding to try them all at this stage.

Finally, when you send your artwork for crit, in that little time window of waiting to hear back, please keep on painting and drawing - don't stop. Repeat the exercises, alter them a bit or change the subject, but keep painting, as it is the constant practicing, playing, experimenting and trial and error which helps you improve and helps you more quickly begin to really understand what you are doing. Please ask as many questions as you need to and let me know how you got on with each exercise.

So, let's begin!

It is time to start experimenting with colour, which is great fun. There are just three primary colours - red, yellow and blue. From them come all of the other colours that we know.

EXERCISE 1 (to be sent to your tutor for crit as PART of set 1. Submit all of the exercises at the end of Study Unit 1)

In order to begin, you will need the following materials, as well as your 3 pans. You need only a small amount of materials - an HB pencil, a jam jar of water. You also need three brushes, size 3, 6 and 8. These need not be expensive, but you need to test them for quality- when you are in the shop, hold the brush in your hand and pull the bristles right back towards you, firmly. (See photo)



Then let it go and feel how it behaves - you want the brush to SPRING back to its original place. If it is really soft and a bit fuzzy, and has no spring in its step, it's not the brush for you. I never spend a lot of money on brushes, (spend your money on the paint, not the brushes), but my brushes are always springy. Note also, that if you buy a set of paint and it has a free brush in it, it's probably best to throw the brush in the bin. You also need good water colour paper. The way to choose is by looking at the weight of paper - this is always on the front cover of the pad and the minimum weight to buy is 140 lb. or 300 gm. For the exercises, get a pad around 12 inches x 16 inches. A palette (or an old plain white dinner plate) if you are using tubes, in which case, please squeeze a pea-sized amount of paint around the edge of the palette, and use the central area to mix the colours.

To begin, you must always regard the main ingredient as the WATER, not the paint. Think of it that you are staining water, and painting with that. Start by taking a small pool of water to the palette (use your brush to 'carry' water from the jar to the palette), then with a moist brush, as opposed to a water-flooded brush (i.e., wipe it on the edge of the jar) put some blue into the water. Stir it around slowly and watch what happens to the pool as the blue

Basic Hues

If you take a gouache colour and compare it to a similar tub of poster paint you will see they are basically the same, but the gouache colours are usually brighter. They have been ground more completely and give a smoother and more attractive texture than poster paints.

Like all colours the contents of the tube or the pan are very basic hues. If you want to get anywhere near an approximation to the subtleties of nature you have to mix these colours.

You will also find that the gouache will move from a 'dense' body colour to an opaque colour and then to a transparent colour much more easily than the cheaper poster paints. Poster paints tend to become rather granular and bitty when they are laid out as a wash.

You will need a range of round and flat brushes for your gouache or acrylic work, and one or two hog hair brushes if you are working on a large area.

You can work on a variety of surfaces though very thin paper will tend to cockle, it is also unsatisfactory to work on.

Relate the paper you are using to the seriousness of the work you are undertaking. If you have a commission or you are doing something into which you are putting a great deal of effort then use a Bristol board or a substantial non-shiny card. It will repay the cost.

Confine your initial purchases of colour to the primary colours, i.e. red, yellow and blue. These colours as you know cannot be obtained by mixing other colours. Theoretically you should be able to achieve almost any colour in the spectrum via these basic primaries. However you will find that you require two reds - one red that moves towards the orange range and another red which moves towards the blue range so you can obtain a purple.

There is so much fun and profitable knowledge to be gained by mixing your own paints that we warmly recommend you do so.

Green straight out of the tube will never simulate the greens in nature. Try putting down some yellow and a little - a very tiny touch of black with it, discover what a beautiful olive green you get. Add a tiny touch of red to that and you push it towards the russet range.

Do not tell yourself that you have an innate sense of colour or, worse still, that you have no colour sense. The latter tends to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, what you need to do is experiment as widely as you can with the business of mixing and matching colours.

Keep mixing your colours all the time.