

My dearest watercolourists,

I hope you are all well. I have received your wonderful art and I thank you for your enthusiasm and help with the online exhibition!

This week we are talking about acrylic paint. In the history of art and painting, this medium is relatively young. It was invented in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and what is extraordinary about it is that it is water-soluble coming from the tube, but becomes water resistant when dry.

This new medium was first used in 1940s and it was revolutionary in combining the properties of oils and watercolours!

Using acrylics is a rather fun process. The synthetic paints can be mixed with additives to change the appearance (matte/ glossy), hardness, flexibility, and texture. For example there are additive such as Soft Gel or Hard Gel which change the consistency of paint and its thickness when applied to the painting surface. They can be used to make the paint resemble reliefs- the colours will look like they coming out of the canvas. Moreover, the synthetic colours have another quality which excites artists. They can adhere to many surfaces with little preparation. One can paint on paper, wood, canvas, textiles, board etc.

The image below shows the consistency of acrylic additives such as the hard gel (not my image)



Below you can see an additive added on top of preexistent layers of paint. These additives dry transparent unless mixed with pigment beforehand, in which case they would dry the colour they were given by the pigment. Acrylics and acrylic additives can be used in layers, so this layer we see here can be painted, once it is dry, whatever colour one desires!

Acrylic gel (not my image) <https://smartartmaterials.com/acrylic-gel-medium-uses-and-tips/>



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When painting with acrylics one can mimic different mediums. For example using minimal pigment and plenty of water it is possible to obtain a result very similar to watercolour paint. The benefit of acrylics is the fast drying time and the stronger pigments, but the drawback is that one cannot always explore all the watercolour wet on wet mixing techniques.

When used in thicker layers, acrylics resemble oil painting. One can create a relief-like effect by using very thick strokes of paint or as mentioned previously, using additives (using additives is cheaper).

We have spoken about how acrylics work and how they may be used, but I am sure you are now wondering how they actually look like and what artists used them for.



David Hockney *A bigger splash* Acrylic paint on canvas, 2425 × 2439 × 30 mm, Tate

One great example of artist whose art style is defined by the acrylic medium is David Hockney. The new paints were a preferred medium for modern artists, especially those who are now classified as being part of

the pop art generation. David Hockney expressed that acrylics were much more representative of the clean, modern and fast pace atmosphere he was looking after in his paintings. As you can see the artist uses block of uniform colour, an image resembling Japanese woodcut prints. This uniform block like appearance is one of the qualities of acrylic paints, which are pigmented and rather viscous- especially compared to watercolours. In watercolour obtaining such a perfectly uniform pigment would be impossible.

Below I added a painting by the same artist in the same medium, however, as you can see, the application of acrylics here resembles oil paints more than anything.



David Hockney *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy* Acrylic paint on canvas 213.4 cm × 305.1 cm (84.0 in × 120.1 in) 1971 Tate

The United States of America had an art movement known as Abstract Expressionism. This movement follows Surrealism, but gives up on figurative work. The way art is created in this movement is by spontaneous, large gestures. The most representative figure is Jackson Pollock. However, I am not going to talk about him today, because he uses oil painting.



Jackson Pollock *No. 5*, 1948, oil on board, 2.4 m x 1.2 m , Private collection New York

Instead, I will introduce Robert Motherwell, another important figure of the movement. He used the medium of acrylic for its fast drying properties. His abstract art seeks to render and transmit a feeling and he liked the immediacy of the medium. When asked what his art means, he answered that he wants to capture ‘not the thing, but the effect it produces’, quoting Symbolist poet Mallarme.



Robert Motherwell, *Elegy to the Spanish Republic #132*, 1975–85

Bridget Louise Riley an English painter also favours acrylics for her Op Art Paintings (optical illusion). The medium allows for a very neat, uniform application and it does not require mixing of the pigments.



Bridget Riley, *To a Summer's Day 2*, 1980, acrylic on canvas, Tate

All in all, acrylic paints are a very versatile and modern medium. Their biggest advantage is also their disadvantage. They dry very fast, so there is a skill in applying the paint. With exercise and experimentation, acrylics can be adapted to work very well with various styles of work, from delicate watery images to bold, colour-block styles. Another advantage of using acrylics is the fact that they can be applied with almost anything - knives, oil brushes, watercolour brushes, splashes – to almost any surface: textile, wood, plastic and canvas.

What do you think about this?

Have you tried working with acrylics, and if so, how did you find it?

Please let me know what you think and if you want to share any of your ideas! I am looking forward to your responses.

All the best

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