

Five of the best: Artists' Acrylic

Established over the last 50 years as oil paint's brighter and faster younger brother, acrylic paint has many benefits. Here are five recommended brands explained in full

Q&A

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How have acrylics developed?

Acrylic paint is regarded as a new medium and therefore its performance over a long time should be treated with some suspicion. If acrylics have a bad name it's because of the large number of very cheap products out there. The best acrylic paint will outperform, in terms of longevity and permanence, any oil paint.

What are the benefits of choosing acrylic?

Any number of reasons. It used to be the quality of quick drying, but I think this is all nonsense. Benefits include the colour quality and the ability to control the film of colour that is applied and the repeatability of the medium. On top of that, there's the fact that you can make layers very quickly without waiting weeks for them to dry.

Is there scope for experimentation?

There is endless opportunity for experimentation. It can be used in combination with other mediums like oil paint or as a priming and preparation material for under-painting. It exactly duplicates egg tempera under-painting as used to happen in Renaissance days.

How useful are acrylics that boast a longer drying time?

I am suspicious that there's much value to be gained. If other things are compromised – like the vibrancy of the colour – then I can't see the argument for it. There are ways to slow acrylic down by using slow gels but I am not convinced.

What brushes are best used with acrylic paint?

You can use absolutely any at all. The brush should be the personal choice of the artist. I strongly believe all the materials you use are a personal choice.

Are there special papers for using with acrylics?

There are ways of getting paper to behave to take any medium you want. There should be no restriction whatsoever. In certain special materials we need a preparation, but acrylics will work on tissue paper, concrete and anything in between.

Lascaux Artist, from £5.60 for 45ml



1 For almost 50 years, Lascaux has forged partnerships with artists, museums and restorers in order to develop acrylics that are of the very best quality. They have a matt finish and should not turn yellow or crack over time.

The Swiss company, distributed in the UK by AP Fitzpatrick, is eco-conscious and dedicated to the development of non-toxic water-based products. It has even designed its own water treatment plant at its factory in order to prevent contaminated water from being discharged untreated into the mains.
www.apfitzpatrick.co.uk

Winsor & Newton Artists' Acrylic, from £6.12 for 60ml



2 Winsor & Newton has successfully obliterated the bugbear of many a painter – the dreaded colour shift. Perhaps more than any other brand, there is no change between the wet and dry colour, meaning that there is no agonising speculation about how a painting might turn out. This is thanks to the presence of a specially developed binder that starts translucent and goes clear – this is the element that usually changes from white to transparent when it dries, darkening the overall colour.

www.winsornewton.com

Atelier Interactive Artists' Acrylic, from £5.80 for 80ml



3 This is for those of you who are at your wits end with paints that dry too quickly and would like to work at a more leisurely pace. All 75 colours in this Atelier range can be reworked even when at a 'touch dry' stage. However, they still have a buttery consistency and remain lightfast with a minimal colour shift. The longer working time really does broaden artists working options, also making it an excellent medium for lino block, mono print and silkscreen printing processes.

www.chromaonline.com

Golden Heavy Body, from £6.25 for 60ml



4 Developed in 1930s New York by Sam Golden, what makes these namesake acrylics unique is the way in which the colours and the mediums can be used in combination. The pigments are pure and offer a permanency and lightfastness to the paint, which contains no fillers whatsoever. Each colour is formulated individually, according to the properties of the pigment. The finish on each is slightly different, but this is testament to the respect given to the pigment.

www.goldenpaints.com

Ara Artists' Acrylics, from £6.39 for 250ml



5 Made with 100% acrylic emulsion combined with lightfast pigments, Ara Acrylics contain a strong adhesive binder, making them suitable for most applications and surfaces.

Despite being available in large quantities, the colour intensity and quality is the same throughout each bottle. Ara acrylics are produced by the same company that makes Old Holland oils, and as a result they use similar pigments and offer options not usually found in acrylic ranges, including the useful Flesh Tint.

www.aracolours.com