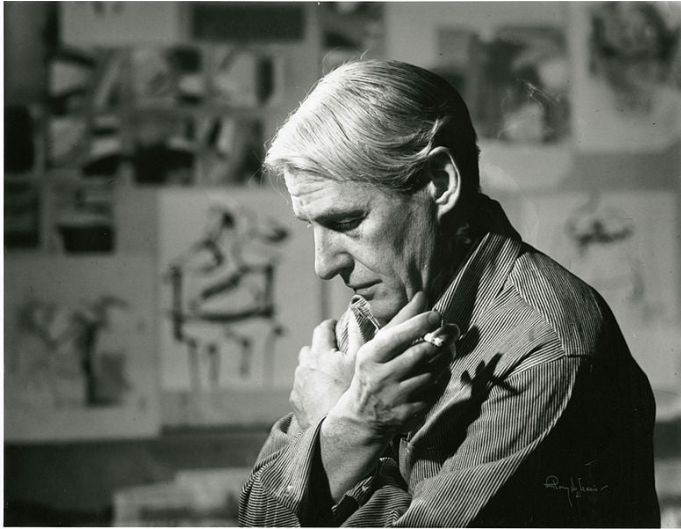


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ASK THE EXPERTS

Studio Craft Oils and Acrylics: Mixed Techniques



absorbency for thin to moderate-thickness oil colors. Oil paint, on the other hand, does not provide a good surface for subsequent acrylic paint. Acrylics painted on top of oils will usually peel off.

Regarding De Kooning's experimental techniques for increasing fluidity in oil paints, it is known that he used, at least on some works, a mixture of water and cooking oil as a medium. Most cooking oils are not good driers, so paint mixed with this type of medium would stay wet for a very long time. The presence of water in a traditional oil paint film is generally undesirable, but water is used liberally with water-miscible oil paints as well as egg-oil emulsion, so we think it's likely that small amounts of water would probably not persist in the final paint film very long. Moisture could, however, adversely affect the support or ground depending on composition, for instance hardboard or hide glue.

(Image: Willem de Kooning in his studio, Smithsonian Institution Archives)

Ask the Experts: "I'm a new painter working in acrylics. Was watching a YouTube video where an instructor was explaining how DeKooning painted with a mixture of oil and some water. Now I'm wondering about other "mixed" techniques, like using acrylics with oils, or mixing a small amount of safflower oil into acrylic paint. What are the advantages or shortcomings of this approach?"

A: We need to be clear on one thing first: acrylic paint will not dry correctly to a strong film if oil is intermixed. Acrylic paint is made up of tiny particles of polymer which stick together when they come in direct contact. In wet paint, water, glycols and other components keep particles separate, but when paint dries, water evaporates followed by other coalescents (ingredients which moderate how fast the solid film develops) and the particles begin to stick together. If oil were intermixed, it would remain permanently in the film, isolating the acrylic particles. The paint would dry and form a film, but it would be weak, lacking in adhesive power and prone to cracking, peeling and flaking.

Oil paint can be used with acrylics in a layered approach, with oils applied on top of dry acrylic paint. While acrylics aren't expressly designed to accept oil paint like acrylic gesso, they do normally provide enough texture and