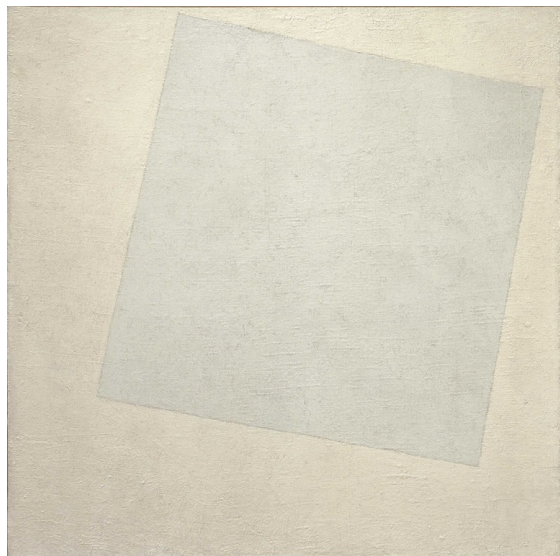


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ASK THE EXPERTS

Studio Craft: Mixing Different Whites



"Suprematist Composition: White on White" Kazimir Malevich, 1918

Ask the Experts: "I have three different versions of white in my kit, each one with a different name. Is there a special purpose to each? What happens if I use all 3 at once?"

A: Each type of white paint has its own characteristics distinct from other versions. Pigment, vehicle and formulation influence the overall properties of a color, and white is no exception.

Titanium White is generally regarded as an "all purpose" white, good for mixing, underpainting, highlights and essentially everything except priming. This white has a bright, neutral color, strong opacity and hiding power with a moderate to fast drying rate in oils, depending on brand.

Zinc White is a cool white pigment, slow drying in oils, that is better suited for use in the upper layers of a painting. Some artists prefer zinc white for scumbling or creating semi-translucent, milky layers.

Flake White is a lead-based color that has a warmer, fleshy temperature, faster rate of drying and a bulky body. This pigment absorbs relatively little oil, but can seem "fat" out of the tube if the paint has shed some of the vehicle through settling. Flake white is ideal for underpaintings and figurative work, but due to the toxicity of lead white pigment, this color should only be used by artists who can manage the risks.

There are a number of **mixed whites** that combine two or more pigments for a neutral color and maximum range of use from underpainting to highlights. In oils, mixed whites usually have a neutral colored vehicle (safflower or poppy oil) or a blend. Each blended white will perform differently according to the manufacturer's formulation.

One important consideration when using more than one type of white on a painting is temperature, the relative warm or cool appearance of a neutral. A warm white applied next to a cool one can emphasize the subtle blue or yellow undertones of the color, and unintentionally distract from the picture. This can be managed by careful placement and adjustment in mixtures.

Drying rate and oil-to-solids proportion are especially important with oil paints, in the sequence of application. Faster drying colors with a higher concentration of solid pigment are good for the initial layers, and can also be used throughout the painting, if mixed with other colors and mediums. Oily, slow-drying colors should be introduced later in the process, to avoid having faster drying colors form a skin over still-wet paint.

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