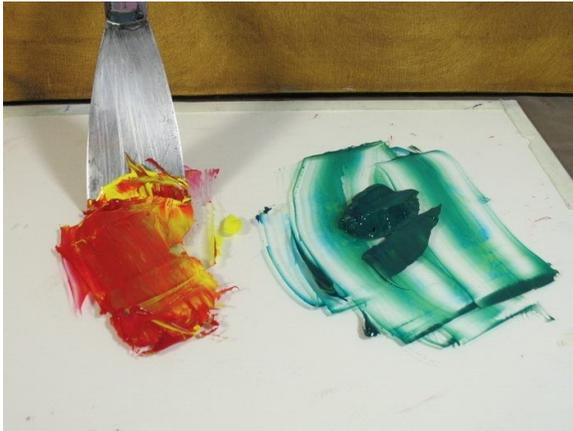




Utrecht Art Supplies

Ask the Experts: Acrylics compared to Oils



Ask the Expert: "Why don't acrylic paints have the same viscosity, body, handling and drying rate as oil paint? I've tried just about every brand there is and none of them are like oils."

A: While it's more possible now than ever to achieve oil-like effects with acrylics (and vice versa), there are some basic properties of the materials that influence the limits of what each medium can do.

Pigment concentration: Professional-grade oil colors contain a significantly higher pigment load than acrylics, because the oil paint vehicle can bear a higher proportion of solids compared to acrylic dispersions. Because of this, pigment used in oil paint has a much more significant influence on physical properties like tack, stiffness and length.

Drying Rate and Stability: How fast paint dries can have a big impact on durability and permanence of the paint film.

The drying rate of acrylic paint is regulated by how fast water and coalescents leave the paint. Water evaporates first, followed by glycols and other ingredients that keep polymer microparticles separate from one another while

paint is wet. When acrylic particles touch, they adhere to one another, forming a solid film.

Artists often use retarders to increase the working time of acrylics. (Take care not to add more than 1 part retarder to 3 parts paint to avoid a weak, porous or permanently sticky paint film.) Moistening the canvas surface before painting and misting water over the palette are additional ways to keep paint wet longer.

The natural drying rate of oils is relatively slow compared to acrylics. Oils "dry" through a complex process of oxidation, and while it's possible to speed up this process to some degree, forcing oils to dry too rapidly through the use of catalytic siccatives can lead to defects like wrinkling, darkening and embrittlement. Alkyd mediums are a more sensible choice for artists who want oils to dry to the touch overnight.

Despite some limitations, there are always methods to make one medium behave more like another. There are perfectly valid reasons why a painter might want to make an acrylic painting look more like oil, tempera or watercolor. Still, it's important to remember that sometimes when you try a new kind of paint, a quality that's at first perceived as a limitation can eventually become a key advantage in your work.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#).

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