

Acrylic Painting Techniques

Acrylic painting is characterized by bright colors, sharp brushstrokes, and quality lines. One of the most desirable qualities of the medium is its ability to be used on a variety of surfaces and mixed with other media.

Dry brush is relatively simple to execute. Using a brush that has not been dipped in water, you can create a scratchy, textured, uneven movement of lines on your canvas. Make sure your brush is as dry as possible and loaded with paint for the optimal effect. Though American realist painter Andrew Wyeth primarily painted in watercolor, his work presents a fine example of the dry brush technique which he used to create structure and layers.

Washing is one of the most impressive qualities of acrylic paint is its ability to modify its consistency; it can be applied in thick layers, or be applied lightly to create a thin, translucent hue. Using a washing technique, you can elicit a softness that resembles watercolor. Dilute your paint with a sufficient amount of water to create a translucent wash. Be sure to note that acrylic paints dry fast and set permanently.

Stippling is the creation of a collection of tiny dots, often used in landscape painting. Though acrylic is a relatively new medium, this technique originated in the 1500s as a method of engraving. Today, artists construct varying degrees of shading based on the closeness and boldness of the assemblage of dots as well as utilize different colors to establish real dimension

Splattering is a lively, unpredictable technique that relies on applied energy to achieve its aesthetic. It was popularized by Jackson Pollock, who is widely regarded today as the leading force behind the Abstract Expressionist movement. Coined the “splatter artist,” Pollock worked mostly with gloss enamel rather than acrylic, applying the pigment to his canvases with a stick and creating his famous “drip paintings,” and ultimately revolutionizing the way art is defined.

Dabbing is a technique used to “dab” accents of color onto the surface of a canvas. Using a stiff bristle brush or paper towel, simply apply the paint with quick, light pressure. For more depth, add multiple layers. Dabbing adds movement to your painting and is often used to illustrate bushes or greenery.

Sponging requires a cellulose sponge to apply paint in a springing motion, creating an irregular, textured pattern. Sponging is a great painting technique for beginners, as it’s visually pleasing, great for foliage, and hard to mess up.

Tips for beginners

Choose the Proper Brushes- Selecting the right tools can greatly affect the quality of your painting. For acrylic painting, you’ll want access to a variety of brushes from small to large to use with varying techniques.

Master Your Mixing- Get creative with mixing techniques that can greatly improve your work. First, make sure you know and understand the color wheel so you can mix with precision and confidence.

Learn to Layer- Layering can refer to many different techniques beyond painting, but for the purpose of acrylic painting, layering is a widely used practice that can greatly enhance the perception of three-dimensionality.

Have a Mister Close By- Given that acrylic paints dry quickly, you can keep them moist by using a mister. By simply watering them down a bit with a mister, you’ll create a watercolor-esque type of paint to use when emulating the washing technique

Protect with a Varnish- When finished with a painting, use a varnish to create a protective film that safeguards against dust and other harmful determinants like ultraviolet rays. You can use a non-acrylic material if you wish to remove the layer in the future.