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When it comes to painting with acrylics, the first thing to know is that all acrylic paints are not created equal. Student grade paints and inexpensive brands are not going to offer the same results as good-quality paints because they have weaker pigments. Buy the best paints you can afford. I use mostly M. Graham & Co. paints because they have a high pigment load at a good price.

Acrylic paints dry permanently. They are not like watercolors that may be reconstituted, nor are they like oil paints that stay moist and workable for days. Acrylics dry within minutes, but need extra time



to set so that they do not run when you paint over them. I generally allow a painted area to cure for about 20 minutes after it is dry before painting over it. A hair dryer or heat gun can speed up this process and cure the paint in minutes.

If you buy good-quality acrylic paints, you can mix a wide range of colors from just a few basic ones. Paint colors come in opaque, semi-transparent (or translucent), and transparent. Opaque paints have white mixed into them to make them solid. Transparent and semi-transparent paints can be layered so that one color can be seen through another. This makes transparent

paints more mixable than opaque ones because they don't have added white.

Here is a list of basic colors by M. Graham & Co. that I recommend starting with:

- Titanium White, opaque
- Ivory Black, opaque
- Phthalocyanine Blue, transparent
- Quinacridone Rose, transparent
- Azo Yellow, semi-transparent

Other manufacturers offer similar colors, but the names may be different.

Mixing Colors

Most of us were taught that primary colors—red, blue and yellow—could be mixed together to create other colors. But realistically, if you do not use the right red, blue, or yellow, the resulting colors can be disappointing. Transparent, cool colors tend to be better mixers than opaque, warm ones. Warm colors generally have some red mixed into them. Cool colors are more pure and you get the most variety when combining them.

Quinacridone Rose is a cool, rosy version of red, which is generally considered a warm color. Adding a little Azo Yellow

to it makes it more of a true red, and adding more yellow creates a range of orange colors. Mixing a little Phthalocyanine Blue with Quinacridone Rose makes a range of violet and purple colors.

Phthalocyanine Blue is a cool blue and an extremely potent color. It takes very little to make a big color impact and it can easily overpower other colors if you use too much, so mix it sparingly and carefully. To turn this cool blue into a warmer, more ultramarine blue, add a bit of Quinacridone Rose. Mixing the smallest amount of Phthalocyanine Blue with Azo Yellow results in a vibrant greenish-blue. More Azo yields a range of green shades from forest to lime.

Azo Yellow is a semi-transparent color because there is a small amount of white mixed in. It is a cool yellow, but mixing in a bit of Quinacridone Rose makes it a warmer yellow. Or, mix a little Phthalocyanine Blue with it to make a greenish yellow.

To make a subdued version of a two-color mix, add a bit of a third color. For example, if you've made a green color from blue and yellow, add some red to make it less bright. This technique creates a more neutral version of the original color. The more you add, the more neutral it becomes, until you have a brown or a gray color.

To darken a color, add a bit of black. However, adding black can also cause a color shift. For example, adding black to yellow can result in moss green. Add a bit of white to colors to lighten them, but remember that it takes very little to turn bright colors into pastels. Titanium White is an opaque color that changes transparent paints into opaque ones.

This is a very simplified discussion of painting with acrylic paints. It is important to always test your colors by mixing them to see what kind of colors they will make.

