

Acrylic Tutorial

Greetings! This tutorial is going to be a basic step by step on how to paint with acrylic paints. My experience with this medium is fairly limited, so I will provide you with some useful links in case you want to read up on other material. The Elfwood Fantasy Art Resource Project (FARP) page has very useful information as well. You can find the website here:

<http://elfwood.lysator.liu.se/farp/>

There is a very good acrylic introduction by Stephanie Pui-Mun Law just in case you want to read about brushes and tools. This can be found here:

<http://elfwood.lysator.liu.se/farp/acrylics/introduction.html>

It's a good read! But if you are already familiar with various brushes and paints, then allow me to get into the actual tutorial in itself. For this step by step, I will be using my image "The Waterhole".

First off I would like to state that I'm not going to touch on basic elements of art such as lighting, composition, etc. I'm going to assume you have knowledge of these. If you do have questions about certain aspects of this tutorial or would like to brush up on your information, you can either email me or check the FARP page. There is a plethora of information for those just beginning. Now, on to the tutorial!

Colors Used: Luiqatex tube paints

- *Ultramarine Blue
- *Titanium White
- *Yellow Ochre
- *Burnt Sienna
- *Cadmium Yellow
- *Sap Green
- *Dark Green
- *Cadmium Red (?)
- *Chromium Oxidie Green

I'd like to take the time to say that acrylics can be one of the most difficult mediums to work with. The pro to it is that Acrylics dry fast, the con to Acrylics is that they dry fast. Unlike oils, you only have a limited time to blend your colors unless you use a medium to extend drying time. In my experience, I could never mix the ratio to paint to medium well enough and always got a sticky goeey mess. After a while, I ditched the mediums available and began to work with straight pigment and water instead. Throughout my many paintings I've done with acrylics, I've learned that you can best achieve the look you want using layers. Layers take a big part in a lot of mediums you use, whether be watercolor to oils to colored pencils. So if you are familiar with layering with other mediums, you will find this slightly easier to get used to. If you are very new to the painting field, all this will require is lots of practice and patience! The biggest fear that I have always had is maintaining bright vivid colors and not mixing colors to make them

muddy. I'm sure we've all had that problem one time or another. So don't be discouraged if that happens to you! If I still had a copy of my first acrylic painting I'd show it to you so you get an idea what my experience was like. It was awful, simply awful! It was a project where I was supposed to have a bright sunny day with two bikers hoisting a car up in rope (crazy college project), but the final piece looked like a midnight scene in a dangerous alley way. The nice thing about acrylics though is you can go over areas you don't like and cover over mistakes.

As you paint you will learn which colors work well together and which do not. Color theory plays a big part here and if you need help with that FARP also has the basics for you to read up on. So enough rambling on my part! Let's begin!



Like all my work, the first stage I began with is a strong sketch. I began by creating three separate, detailed pencil drawings of all the drakes before I scanned them into PhotoShop and arranged the composition. The background to the piece was a photograph (1a) I took while hiking in a local park. Once I established a decent composition, I transferred that information onto a piece of previously gessoed illustration board.*

*The illustration board was gessoed roughly 5 times. Each layer was allowed to dry first then sanded down to remove any burrs or blobs of paint. The end result was a nice smooth surface that absorbed the paint rather well. Typically, before I gesso a piece of illustration board, I will mask off a 1 - 1 1/2 in boarder around the image. Boarders can make a piece look more cleaner and framed but that is more a personal preference really.



Stage 1: Once the image was transferred, I used Burnt Sienna to block in all the lights and darks in the image. This portion was roughly painted in as it will be painted over later on. Note that the paint also is streaked and transparent. This is due to watering down the paint. With acrylics one must be careful if you choose to use them in a watercolor manner. This is due to the gum inside the paint itself as that is what adheres to the painting surface. If too much water is used, you run the risk of the gum becoming diluted and your pigment will not hold on your surface well. If you paint over a loose pigment area, the underpainting might smear and muddy your colors.



Stage 2 (image): After the undercoat has dried, I started loosely building up a second undercoat for the rocks and shadows in the foreground (Ultramarine Blue). At the same time, I began painting in the leaves and grass in the background. Typically when I paint, I move from background to foreground. This makes it easier later on when I paint the main image(s) in the foreground as I don't have to worry about painting around the image. Note how the background covers up various portions of the drakes head and frills. It's ok to go over the edges of the main images because it will ensure you that the strokes in the background are consistent. If you try and go around an image, you can get a 'halloed' effect with the strokes rather than have it appear more unified.



Stage 3 (image): Here I continue to work on underpainting the rocks. Stone has a variety of colors depending on what type of elements there are in it. This was a large piece of granite and it contained heavy amounts of mica, quartz (both white and pink), along with a form of lichen giving it green areas. To achieve all these colors in side the stonework, layering is the way to go. Since I tend to water down my acrylics in the first stages, you can see where the previous layer will show through. By now I began adding Cadmium Red mixed with Titanium white for that pinkish hue found in the stone. I also added in the base coat where the green lichen is, as well as darkening areas in the stone where crevasses and indents are. Note also in the upper right hand corner of the stone I speckled in some texturing. This was achieved by taking an old, stiff bristled brush and applying water downed Burnt Sienna paint to it, then flecking the paint gently over the area using my finger. Be very careful if you use your hands to fleck the paint and be aware that some paints are very toxic. You want to wear rubber gloves if you do this technique with Cadmium or Cobalt pigment as these are highly toxic and can be absorbed through your skin (I should also point out that you should not eat or drink while painting just as a safety precaution, not to mention avoiding food or soda spillage on your art. Trust me that is quite frustrating).

At this stage I also began to block in yellow in the drake on the left hand side. Here I start using more pure pigment straight from the tube rather than watering it down.

I painted in the drake with Yellow Ochre as my base, adding in Burnt Umber and Burnt Sienna to the shadows.



Stage 4 (image): At stage four I still worked in more color to the rocks and added more texture flecks to the foreground. Here I also laid down the basic red foundation for the middle drake as well. The yellow drake is continued to be blocked in using Yellow Ochre and Burnt Sienna for shadows until the whole body has its base coat. Here is where I punched up the shadows underneath the body as well. Ultramarine blue was added in the water pool as a base coat. In the stone portion, I very put a very light wash of Titanium White over the entire section of rock. This helped mute the stronger colors and give them a more unified look. This step will be repeated for the next few stages.



Stage 5 (image): By this point I pretty much have the yellow drake half done. I worked in the lighting and shadow as well as the muscle structure of the beast. At this time I also began to add red into the middle drake in a thicker manner, as well as painting in the ripples in the water around the muzzle. The rocks were once again washed in faint pink and green washes to help eccentricate the layers underneath, and once again a white wash was covered over the same area once it was dry.



Stage 6: Here I added more highlights into the red drake to define muscle and lighting. Yellow Ochre was also added into the wings and horns to tie the yellow and red drake together and make them more unified. By this time the yellow drake was just about done, but there were certain elements I would change later on. In the water pool, I added red into the water as a reflection of the red drake skin color. I also blocked in the base to the blue dragon.



Stage 7 (image): This was a bit of a change for the piece. The first being that the third drakes color was changed completely. Initially I had wanted the color to be blue, but after painting the image in blue, looking at the overall color scheme reminded me of the primary colors. So I decided to step away from that and change the blue drake to violet instead. Once again I blocked in a base of violet undertones, adding in red and yellow to unify this drake with the other two (unfortunately you can't see these due to the scan). I worked in some shading detail on the neck, eyes, and face at this point. Also, on the yellow drake I had to go over the shadow that was once on the tail just above the wing. I realized the lighting was off and it had to be corrected. It was here I also added in violet under the Yellow Drake's tail to distribute the violet evenly in the piece.



Final Stage (image): In the final stages, I finished up the detailing on the violet drake as well as add more violet around the Yellow and Red Drake. The stone they sit on hadn't been touched since stage five, so I added in more violet here as well. In the end, I covered over the entire stone surface with another very light wash of Titanium White. This helped mute the colors that were strong, yet helped blend and bring them together giving it a more layered effect. Because most of the texture was lost when I did the wash, I went back and created more flecks in the stone work, being careful not to texturize the drakes in the process. I also added more Yellow Ochre to the leaves in the background to help unify them to the piece as well since that portion only contains green. With each Drake, a light Cadmium Yellow wash was layered over them to help brighten the colors.

Thus concludes my tutorial on acrylic painting. I hope this helps you on your journey to painting and if you have any questions, feel free to contact me at:

artist_freak@hotmail.com

Enjoy and have fun! Never be afraid to try new things with acrylics because they are a very diverse medium. Using gels and texturizers can make images more interesting and fun to create!

Melissa Hitchcock