CHAPTER 5: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why are different colors priced differently?
The biggest factor in the cost of the artists’ color is the pigment. Different pigments come from a variety of different sources, and cost from a little to a lot to refine, process, and mill into artists’ paint.

I want that “oil color look.” What can I do?
Use Liquitex® Slow-Dri Blending Fluid or Gel to slow the drying and to help you with blending upon the painting surface. Experiment with Glazing techniques.

My paint dries too fast. What can I do?
Minimize the use of water, and minimize heat and air flow in the painting environment. Make use of acrylic mediums to extend the color, especially Slow-Dri Blending Fluid or Gel, Airbrush Medium, or Slow-Dri Fluid or Gel Retarder. Note: only one additive/retarder should be used within a color mix. Combining additives can compromise the paint film stability.

My colors are too bright. How do I make them look more natural?
Use a Liquitex® color chart to identify the mineral based colors (cadmiums, cobalt, ultramarine). These colors mix to the softer, more gray optical tone that we associate with natural light. Generally, these colors tend to be more opaque.

My colors look dull and chalky. How do I brighten them?
It may be that you’re adding too much water, and spreading (underbinding) the paint film. Try adding Gloss Medium & Varnish instead of water.

How do I make the color flow like water, but stay brilliant?
Choose Liquitex® Soft Body Professional Acrylic Colors. These colors have the same pigment load as the Heavy body colors, but are formulated to a more fluid consistency. Some water may be added for flow, but one of the following may be added as well to increase flow, while maintaining the stability of the paint film: Gloss Medium & Varnish or Matte Medium.

Is water the best additive for thinning acrylic color?
Water is, in fact, the solvent for the acrylic/water emulsion. You’ll find that you get the best performance—not to mention the most fun—out of acrylics if you make use of acrylic mediums to adjust the working properties of the color. Save the water for clean up.
I’m on a really tight budget. What can I do to cut corners?
Artists’ colors aren’t cheap. But, as with any highly refined product, you get what you pay for. That said, there are some strategies that can help stretch the artist’s budget:

- Use mediums to stretch and economize on color
- Use Ultra Matte Medium. It’s formulated to increase the volume of paint without significantly cutting intensity of color
- Complete your underpainting with BASICS Value Series Acrylic Colors, and use the Liquitex® Professional Acrylics Colors for the finishing layers

What is the best surface for acrylic paint?
Acrylic colors are unbelievably versatile, and can be used on an almost infinite variety of surfaces: canvas, paper, leather, and glass (among others). Always conduct an adhesion test when working on more ‘unusual’ surfaces.

What’s the best way to prime a canvas for painting?
Size the canvas with one layer of Matte Medium, and then coat with one or two layers of Acrylic Gesso. With Liquitex® Gessoes, you can choose between traditional white, neutral gray or black colored Gesso, Clear Gesso, or Super Heavy Gesso.

Why is my finished acrylic paint surface powdery, flaking, or cracking?
If your gesso or paint layer is powdery or unstable, you have, most likely, added too much water during painting. Water spreads the acrylic binder, leaving it less able to firmly lock the pigment into place on the painting surface. You’ll find that you get the best performance—not to mention the most fun—out of acrylics if you make use of acrylic mediums to adjust the working properties of the color.

Why are some acrylic mediums milky, some translucent, and some clear when wet?
Some acrylic mediums are milky because of the water content within the emulsion. Others include matting agents that make them appear milky. Other mediums are formulated with a clear resin, giving them greater clarity both wet and dry.

Why do some acrylic colors seem to dry darker?
In general, the acrylic/water emulsion has a distinct milky color when wet. And that milky appearance lightens the color of the paint. As water leaves the emulsion, and the binder clarifies, the color of the paint darkens.

As acrylic chemistry has advanced, newer acrylic resins have become available that offer better and better clarity. As a result, color shift in modern acrylics is of lesser consequence than in early paint products. It still plays a slight role with some colors, but not to the degree that it once did. This phenomenon is most noticeable with transparent dark pigments such as Alizarin and less so with light opaque pigments such as Cadmium Yellow.
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How does the weather affect acrylic paints?
Humid conditions slow down the drying. Hot, dry conditions will speed the drying considerably.

How do I store acrylic paintings?
Protect the surface with glassine paper, or another non-sticky sheet. Cover the glassine with an additional layer, such as raw canvas. Stand upright, and protect from temperatures below 45°F (the temperature at which acrylics become brittle and are more prone to cracking). Never store acrylics face to face, as they can stick to one another. Always crate for shipping.

How long will acrylic paintings last?
Follow sound painting techniques, work on a stable support, use artists’ quality primer, and with proper care and storage, an acrylic painting should remain stable for generations.

What's the advantage of making my own paint?
Until two centuries ago, artists had to mill their own colors. And today, it's not uncommon for artists to experiment with paint making to develop a more intimate understanding of the mechanics of their chosen medium. That said, an experienced manufacturer is able to produce colors, without risk to the painter, with much higher pigment load and more uniformly balanced working properties than is possible for the individual.

Do I need to varnish acrylic paintings?
Yes. Acrylics dry with a slightly tacky and porous surface, exactly the kind of surface to which dirt, dust and, atmospheric grime are prone to sticking. A final varnish will bring a much needed layer of protection to the painting. And a conservation quality varnish, like Liquitex® Soluvar® Gloss or Matte Varnish will remain flexible, and can be removed for purposes of cleaning the painting at a later date.

Can I use acrylic mediums to varnish my acrylic paintings?
Mediums are designed to be mixed with acrylic color unless otherwise labeled that they serve both functions. For example, Liquitex® Gloss Medium & Varnish can be used as both a gloss medium as well as a final varnish. Varnishes are meant to be applied over acrylic color as they are specifically formulated to be thinner, flow on smooth, and self-level. In the case of matte or satin sheen products, varnishes have less or different kinds of matting agents to allow true colors to show through.

Can I paint in oils over my acrylic paint layer?
It is generally not a good idea to apply oil paints over solid layers of acrylic paint. Oil films dry to a less flexible film than acrylics, and their application over the more flexible acrylic paint layer can be problematic. Oil applications over acrylics can be compared to applying Plaster of Paris on a rubber band – if you stretch the rubber band after the Plaster of Paris has dried, the plaster will crack and flake off. Over time, an oil layer that has been painted on top of an acrylic layer may experience the same results, as the under layer of acrylic paint shifts and moves due to atmospheric changes.
I’m interested in creating multi-media work using acrylics. Is there anything I should not combine or layer with my acrylic paint?

Acrylics are restricted primarily by compatibility with other types of paints. Acrylics should not for instance be combined with paints that are made with different resins and binders. For example, acrylics should only be combined with acrylic polymer based paints and not be mixed for example with oil, latex or gum based watercolor paints…or layered with wax.

The flexibility of dry acrylic films along with the paints ability to adjust its working properties when wet, make it a totally unique and powerful artist material. In some ways, it can be thought of as the “go anywhere, do anything” paint. It is hard to cover all the bases when it comes to combining acrylics with the amazing variety of substances that can be used to create a work of art. The best advice that can be given in relation to multi-media work is that you should always conduct testing with the materials you plan to use, prior to beginning your piece, and you should be aware that guarantees concerning permanency or longevity of the art work may not exist. A good place to start would be to make sure you have a working understanding of the acrylic paint film and how it dries.