



TECHNICAL NOTES ON PAINTING AND
DRAWING

NOTES ABOUT DRAWING

PENCILS

Pencil drawing can be remarkably varied and sensitive. Pencils range in hardness from about F to 12B. The harder the pencil, the lighter the mark it makes on the paper. F, 2H and H are very hard pencils and therefore the drawing will be very light. B stands for blackness. The softer the lead, the darker the mark it makes. 9B, for instance will give very black marks.

The most useful range to have for the purpose of life drawing is from HB to 8B.

Take care not to drop your pencils as the lead breaks and makes them impossible to sharpen. Sharpen with an art knife and then hone the point with fine sandpaper. Derwent are a good brand.

CHARCOAL

Willow charcoal is light-bodied and easy to erase. It comes in various thicknesses and so can be used for a variety of purposes, ranging from fairly detailed and sensitive work to more bold and expressive gestures. It is excellent for mapping the initial phases of a drawing for its erasable qualities. Using fixative over successive layers of charcoal can result in a fairly wide range of tonal values. Willow charcoal also tolerates the use of smudge sticks and Kneadable erasers as complimentary drawing tools.

The best charcoal available in South Africa is a brand called Coates. Avoid Ashrad as the quality is very uneven.

Compressed charcoal is charcoal that has been subjected to hardening through mechanical compression. The result is a hard and dark charcoal, which is very difficult to erase, but can offer crisp, precise lines and deep, inky black tones. It is best used in the final stages of a work because of its permanence. Compressed charcoal is also excellent standing on its own, but you should be sure of what you want from the material before using it.

Charcoal dust is willow charcoal that has been finely ground to make a dust that is excellent to use. Dusted onto the surface of the drawing to create tonal layering, it lends itself to overwork with willow and compressed charcoal and also to being manipulated with erasers. Successive layers can be fixed with a spray fixative to build up complex tonal surfaces.

White and sepia Conte chalk is pastel type chalk that has been hard baked and compressed to have similar qualities to compressed charcoal. It is very compatible with other dry mediums and can also be used alone.

ERASERS

Plastic erasers, especially the variously shaped, coloured variety available at most art stores, are very useful for precise removal of unwanted marks on the drawing.

Kneadable erasers are exceptionally important for charcoal drawing, not only because they are effective at removing willow charcoal, but they are also used as a drawing tool and can be shaped to form points or blunt, soft shapes. They can also be pressed to the surface of a drawing to lighten the marks without blurring them by rubbing them or risking erasing them entirely.

PAPER

There is a vast array of papers available for drawing. At the studio we only provide the most basic of these. However, it is important to note that different papers provide different results. The cartridge and brown paper available at the studio is not very receptive to materials but is cheap. While other papers are more expensive, it is important that you experiment with a variety of papers to see what results can be achieved. Cotton based papers, such as Fabriano, are dense and resilient. This paper can take a lot of layering and is receptive to the most sensitive of mark making. Very textured, cold pressed paper is more suitable for charcoal than pencil and smoother, hot pressed paper is more suitable for pencil and ink.

Some brands of paper worth investigating are: Fabriano, Saunders, Hahnemuhle, Arches, Canson, Rives, Strathmore Bristol Board. Most of these houses make both hot pressed and cold pressed papers of various weights. The heavier the paper, the more durable. Many of these papers are called watercolour paper but you should not let this put you off. Watercolour paper is sized to make it receptive to water without warping.

It is important, when investing in good paper to check that it is acid free. This prevents the paper from yellowing and crumbling with time.

FIXATIVE

Fixative is used to seal drawings and prevent the final work from smudging if accidentally brushed or touched. It is also used when working with successive layers of materials in order to stabilize the first layer before applying the second, and so on. When working on inexpensive paper and while still taking practice shots at drawing it is fine to use a cheap aerosol hairspray as fixative.

NOTES ABOUT PAINTING

1. BRANDS OF OIL PAINT
2. COLOURS – transparent, opaque.

3. HUE, TONE, ACID AND DEVALUED COLOUR
4. WASHING, GLAZING AND IMPASTO
5. SOLVENTS AND MEDIUMS
6. SUPPORTS
7. BRUSHES
8. PALETTES
9. GENERAL EQUIPMENT
10. OFF THE MAP

1. BRANDS

Most paint brands have a student range and a professional range. The student ranges vary in quality. Winton and Lukas are generally very good and the price is reasonable. Art Spectrum and Daler Rowney also make some reasonable student colours. Dala and Zellen are to be avoided.

In the lists of paints that follow you will find that those listed in italics are generally available as student colours.

When the label on a tube states the colour, followed by the word 'Hue', it means that the pigment used is not original but a chemical copy. This is not a problem and should not discourage you from using student colours.

The main difference between student and artists colours is that the artists' colours have much more pigment ground into the oil. Student colours often have fillers that give the paint body. In the end artists' colours are cost effective, as you tend to use less paint to get the same effect.

The best artists' colours available in South Africa are: Windsor and Newton, Sennelier, Holbein, Rembrandt, Michael Harding and Schminke. These are not available at all outlets but can be ordered online from Ashley and Radmore in Johannesburg or from the Deckle Edge who will order in for you. The Mameri Classico range, Daler Rowney, Lukas and Art Spectrum are reasonably good brands but do not always conform to the expected norm for a standard colour. An example of this is Daler Rowney's Sap Green, which is earthier and less transparent than the other brands.

2. COLOUR

The lists of opaque and transparent colours below are by no means comprehensive and it is not necessary to have all of these colours.

Opaque Colours

Colours listed in italics are available in student colours from various paint houses, such as Winton and Lukas

Titanium White

Naples Yellow
Cadmium Yellow Pale
Cadmium Yellow Deep
Yellow Ochre
Raw Umber
Raw Sienna
Cadmium Red
Cadmium Orange
Indian Red
Venetian Red
Mars Red
Vermillion
Bright Red
Flesh Tint
Cobalt Blue
Cerulean Blue
Manganese Blue
Kings Blue Light
Terra Verte
Cobalt Turquoise
Buff or Unbleached Titanium
Cobalt Violet
Caput Mortuum Violet
Mineral Violet
Mars Violet

Transparent Colours

Colours listed in italics are available in student colours from various paint houses, including Winton and Lukas

Indian Yellow
Sap Green
Viridian
Windsor Green
Hookers Green
Pthalo Green
Prussian Blue
French Ultramarine
Windsor Blue
Indigo
Pthalo Blue
Dioxadine Purple
Purple Lake
Magenta
Alizarin Crimson
Crimson Lake
Rose Madder
Rose Dore
Permanent Rose
Burnt Umber
Burnt Sienna

Van Dyke Brown
Paynes Grey
Daveys Grey
Zinc White

3. HUE, TONE ACID AND DEVALUED COLOUR

Hue

What is meant by hue is whether the colour is warm or cold. All colours that have warmth will have a reddish or yellowish tint. Colours that are cold will be tinted toward blue. Given that (optically speaking) warm colours advance (appear closer) and cool colours recede we can engage this strategically in creating a sense of space or distance in a painting. Temperatures are all relative, it is the relation between adjacent colours or those elsewhere within the painting that any are warm or cold. Based on the individual properties of the pigments used to make colours as well as the processes these pigments have undergone to make an oil paint (are they burn or not, treated with some particular chemical process etc) a colour will be warmer or cooler. There are warm reds and cold reds and warm blues and cold blues, warm greens and cold greens etc. A way to determine which colours in ones palette are warmer or cooler is to put the colours side by side, ensuring that they are applied (thin or thick) or mixed so as to be of equal tone (darkness/lightness). This means that there will be no difference in contrast on the margin between the colours. If you look with eyes half closed at the area in which you've applied the colours (in other words not looking at one or the other) you will feel more than see one of the two drawing towards you. That is the warmer colour. Differences in contrast on the margins between colours and forms will also change the way in which we see them: high contrast is immediately visible and advances and low contrast is less visible and recedes.

Below a list of paints arranged from warmest to coldest by colour:

Black:

Ivory
Perelene
Lamp

Blue:

Cerulean
Prussian
Pthalo
Cobalt
Ultramarine

Purple:

Purple lake
Dioxazine
Cobalt violet
Ultramarine violet

Red:

Indian
Venetian

Geranium Lake
Crimson Lake
Cadmium
Rose Dore
Rose Madder
Magenta
Alizarin Crimson

Yellow:

Indian
Transparent gold ochre
Yellow ochre
Raw sienna
Cadmium deep
Cadmium
Transparent yellow
Naples
Lemon

Green:

Transparent golden green
Cinnabar
Olive
Sap
Permanent
Oxide of Chromium
Terre Verte
Cobalt green
Monestial
Viridian

Brown:

Transparent brown oxide
Burnt Sienna
Burnt umber
Van Dyke brown
Kassel earth
Raw umber

White:

Unbleached Titanium
Flake / Cremnitz (PW 1)
Titanium (pure PW 6)
Titanium (mix PW 4 PW 6)
Zinc (PW 4)

Tone

Tone is the grading of colours from light to dark. To lighten a colour, one will generally add white unless you also want to alter its hue. To darken a colour is more complicated as if you simply add black the

colour is changed and often looks dirty. There are a number of alternative ways of altering the tone of a colour when you wish to darken it. For instance, in order to deepen cobalt blue, which is an opaque colour, you can add French ultramarine. This will darken the colour without dirtying it, but it will also shift the hue to greater of lesser extent. Some paint colours come in light and dark varieties – for instance: Cadmium Yellow Pale, Cadmium Yellow Deep or Kings Blue Light or Kings Blue Deep. It is important to note however, that in the case of the cadmiums, the Light Yellow is cold and the Deep Yellow is warm.

Acid and Devalued Colours

Acid colours are very strong and dominant. Some of these are French Ultramarine, Windsor Green, Windsor Blue, Cadmiums, and so on. Devalued colours are muted and can be mixed into acid colours to reduce their acidity. Some of these are Terra Verte, Naples Yellow, Cobalt Violet and Raw Umber.

4. WASHES, GLAZES AND IMPASTO

Washes:

Washes are often confused with glazes. A wash is paint that is thinned down with a solvent and washed onto the canvas before applying heavier paint. It is a good way to map out compositions and to get some sense of how you want to distribute colour. Washes, because the oil is broken out of the paint, dry fairly quickly.

Transparency and the technique of glazing:

Transparent colours are those that, when you spread them in a thin layer over other dry colours, they form a transparent coloured veil that influences the colours beneath them. To do this means to glaze. This can be useful for enriching colour that has gone chalky or lost its vibrancy. Multiple layers of glaze, each one layered over the other when it is dry, create rich and complex qualities of deep darkness or subtle shadows, depending on how you use them. The general painting medium used for glazes is a mixture of linseed oil, solvent and resins. (See 'mediums' for further information.)

Impasto

Impasto is very thick paint generally applied with palette knives. Dense, waxy mediums are added to the paint to solidify it and speed it's drying time. Impasto is a very specific technique and should be approached with caution as it is difficult to apply and equally difficult to remove should you not like the effect you have created. |

5. MEDIUMS, VARNISHES AND SOLVENTS

A medium is a liquid used to thin oil paints in various ways. Depending on how you want your paint to perform, different mediums can be

used.

Most paint brands offer ready-made painting mediums but it is preferable to mix your own as it gives you more control over what you want the paint to do.

Before embarking on choosing what medium to use, you must bear in mind that oil painting works on the principle of 'fat over lean'. What this means is that, as you work layers of paint over each other they should become increasingly 'fatty' or oily.

Medium can simply be a solvent, such as turpentine or white spirit or Zest It. This serves to break the oil out of the paint and disperse the pigment in a thin wash across the painting surface. As the oil has been dissolved in the solvent the surface will be very 'lean' and therefore ideal as a first layer of paint. (Some painters only use solvent as a medium to give a very matt surface to the painting. The limitation of this is that the paint can lack lustre as well as be prone to cracking.) Linseed oil is a commonly used ingredient in the making of mediums. There are various kinds of linseed oil but the one that has the widest usage is refined. There are numerous other oils, such as poppy seed oil, that have various properties that are useful and can be researched on the web. By adding a small quantity of oil to your solvent when applying the next layer of paint you add 'fat' back into the paint even though you may be thinning it in order to get it to spread adequately. This causes the second layer to cleave to the first layer. One would keep adding small quantities of oil to the medium each successive layer of the painting.

Resin-based mediums, such as Liquin or Zelkin are used for a number of reasons and are very useful. Blended with linseed oil and a solvent, they speed up drying time, adding luminosity to the colours as well as holding brush marks fast when working with detail. An added benefit is that the surface of the painting becomes very resilient when resins have been used and therefore less prone to scratching, cracking and so on. These mediums can also be used by themselves but tend to make the surface of the painting very shiny and reflective.

Retouching varnish is used specifically for brushing over dry areas of painting where the surface is noticeably dull relative to the rest of the painting. Damar varnish can be used blended with oil and solvent as a medium but it can be prone to yellowing and cracking with age. It is also used as a final varnish for completed paintings. It is important to note that varnishing of completed works should only take place 6 months after the finishing date. This gives the paint a chance to cure properly before being sealed from air by the varnish.

Impasto mediums are a mixture of oils, resins and waxes that are used for extending and giving body to paint when it is to be used very thickly and will set the paint in the manner in which it has been applied. It also speeds up the drying time of the paint and ensures that it dries evenly.

A useful multi-purpose medium is:

Solvent, Refined Linseed Oil and Liquin.

Start with solvent for the first layer and then gradually add linseed oil in successive layers until you reach approximately 1/3 oil to 2/3 solvent. For the final layers, make a mixture of 1/3 oil to 1/3 solvent to 1/3 Liquin.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT WE DO NOT USE ANY KIND OF TURPENTINE IN THE STUDIO BECAUSE OF ITS HIGH TOXICITY. ZEST-IT or ODOURLESS TURPENTINE SUBSTITUTE OR ZELLEN ARTISTS' WHITE SPIRIT ARE ACCEPTABLE (LUCAS is the most cost effective and can be ordered in 1litre cans.)

6. SUPPPORTS

By supports we mean the surface to which you apply paint. The two main types of support are canvas and board. Canvases are stretched around a frame and then coated with what is termed a ground. The ground forms a sealant between the canvas and the paint, preventing the canvas from absorbing the paint. It must also provide a surface that binds appropriately to the canvas support as well and allowing the paint to bind properly to it. Acrylic gesso is the best ground for this purpose and some excellent grounds are available ready-made.

Boards are either covered with canvas to create a rigid support for the canvas or they are also coated with gesso. Multiple layers of gesso, each layer being sanded down to smoothness, provide a substantially different painting experience to painting on canvas.

Good quality pre-primed and stretched canvases are available at art supply stores and are good enough for starting up painting. Some artists prefer some brands of canvases rather than others because of the differing quality of surface each brand offers. A GENERAL RULE WITH MOST PAINTING AND DRAWING EQUIPMENT IS THAT CHEAP = POOR QUALITY.

7. BRUSHES

The most essential brushes for oil painting on canvas are made of hog's hair. This is because the hair is springy, resilient and enables the paint to be pushed into the warp and weave of the canvas.

Other good brushes that are somewhat softer and more flexible are made of badger hair.

Synthetic fibers and squirrel or sable hair brushes are not suitable unless you are working on primed board.

Avoid cheap brushes. They tend to shed, wear out very quickly, becoming brittle and inflexible. These brushes are quite easy to identify apart from their low price as they usually have unpainted handles.

The better brands are Raphael, Eve, Winton, Windsor and Newton, Georgia Rowney. (The range of Eve brushes with the dark green handles are the best of that brand.)

Sizes

If you know what size of painting you will be working on, brush sizes become fairly obvious - the bigger the canvas, the bigger the brushes. However, it is useful to have a wide range of brush sizes as some large paintings require detail and some small paintings require fairly generalized areas of paint.

Shapes

Brushes come in a variety of shapes for good reason: different shapes give different effects. Bear in mind that you will find you develop a preference for some brushes over others as your particular manner of approaching painting develops. The shapes and what you can expect from them are as follows:

Filberts: these are the most versatile of the brush shapes as they can be used to create broad, flat brushstrokes as well as turned on their sides to give more linear marks. As the edges are rounded they are useful for creating smooth surfaces but can also be used in such a manner that the brushwork remains evident.

Rounds: the main use of the rounded brush is for scumbling, as it is not a brush that can be used for detail or with any kind of precision. It is useful for diffusing paint and blurring edges.

Flats: these are completely squared off and tend to give a mark akin to a postage stamp.

Brights: these are pointed and can be used for line work and certain aspects of detail.

Fan: used to erase the evidence of brushwork.

Mop: used to soak up large washes and distribute them loosely across a surface.

Cleaning Brushes: It is very important to clean your brushes properly after each working session. To do this you must first rinse of any residual paint in your solvent and wiping it with a clean rag. Then hot soapy water worked through from the ferrule (base of the bristles) to the tip until no pigment stains the water. Store in a manner where the bristles are not bent out of shape, such as upright in a jar.

8. PALETTES

There are various kinds of palettes available but the best to use are as follows:

A good-sized sheet of armored glass is excellent because it is easy to clean and reusable. You can place a sheet of white paper underneath it or paint the one side of it white in order to get a reading of the colour that corresponds to the reading you want on the canvas.

A good-sized sheet of Perspex is also good for the same reason and is less heavy to carry about.

Disposable palettes are useful for transporting as you simply throw away the sheet you have used at the end of a day's work.

AVOID plastic palettes with little recesses to hold paint. Brown wooden palettes are also of little use as the brown of the wood makes it difficult to read the colour you are mixing on the palette.

9. GENERAL EQUIPMENT

A palette knife is essential. This is for mixing paint on the palette, not for painting with. Avoid the plastic ones as they are not good to work with. A steel knife with a wooden handle is best.

Good, clean, cotton rags. It is important to have rags that do not leave fibers all over your painting if you wipe paint away. For this reason, cotton sheeting is the best.

Glass jars. Marmite jars are excellent for storing mediums, as are any old vitamin bottles that are of blue or brown glass. Jars should be quite small as the evaporation rate of solvent is high and large jars therefore increase wastage.

Toolboxes are the best means of packing equipment for transportation.

10. OFF THE MAP

Thus far this handbook has provided you with some of the basic principles and materials for oil painting. However, oil painting is a very flexible medium that allows for a great deal of experimentation with materials. Once you have found your way around painting generally, you may find that you want to experiment in order to achieve something different from what you are already getting. These experiments, like all experiments, can fail or succeed. This should not put you off from trying out things. There are artists who add marble dust to their paint, others who use enamel paints along with oil paints and so on. The variety of what can happen is endless. It is very valuable to do research on painters who have evolved various ways of engaging with painting – it is by doing this that you will get a good idea of what has been done and even how it is done.

TWO EXERCISES – HUE AND TONE

THE OVERALL BRIEF: These two paintings will be about hue and tone.

There should be a formal or conceptual (or both) relationship between the two paintings that makes an interesting link between them.

HUE – LIQUORICE ALLSORTS: Using Liquorice Allsorts as basic components, develop a composition that considers the following principles – scale, perspective, light source(s) and figure-ground relationships. Remember that the core exercise is about understanding HUE with colours ranging from WARM TO COLD. (see Notes on Painting in the Handbook for further info.)

TONE – BONES ON CANVAS: Select a number of bones from our store at the studio and arrange a composition of them on the canvas cloth provided. After developing a composition through thumbnail sketches and doing a few tonally developed pencil sketches, transfer the composition onto your canvas. Working with either black and white or French Ultramarine and Burnt Umber, develop a range of tones from light to dark that fully realize the volumetric depth of the objects in space.

If you have not really painted before the following exercises are useful for developing a number of core issues relevant to starting up a painting.

WORKBOOKS: To begin visualizing and thinking about these projects you should begin by making use of the workbooks that are essential to setting up propositions for paintings. Working in these books must become a habit and a resource.

THUMBNAIL SKETCHES and ATTENDANT NOTES: Once you have read through the brief, begin the projects by thinking about how you may wish to interpret them and make small thumbnail sketches and notes about what sort of emphasis you may wish to place on the work. Remember that the thumbnail sketch you wish to use must conform to the shape of your chosen final format (canvas). If the shape is different, the composition will change its dynamic.

STYLE: Style is a complex matter that an artist develops over time and through a mixture of personal emphasis and the influence of other artists. For the purposes of these exercises, it is important that you focus primarily on perceptual and interpretative development rather than that of a personal style that will evolve over time.

NOTES ABOUT SOURCE MATERIALS AND DEVELOPING IDEAS.

PHOTOGRAPHS: There is no good reason why a painter should not use photographs as source material for painting. However these should not simply be thoughtlessly copied. The reason for using the photographs should be sound and not simply based on their visual appeal. Some idea of how you would like to interpret the photograph should be developed prior to beginning the painting. If you have a special set of objects that you wish to photograph before beginning

painting, as a source material, that is acceptable.

IMAGINATION: While you should always use your imaginative facility when painting, you should not simply rely on your imagination or visual recall to make a painting. Sources other than what is 'in your head' must be used to support your ideas.

IDEAS: If you have an initial idea of what you would like to paint, do a bit of research about it before embarking on the project. Google is ideal for having a look at how other artists have approached the topic (believe me, it will have been done before), and you can glean some good ideas about how to make an initial approach. Think about why you would like to make the painting – ie: is it simply a challenging exercise in realist painting, is it a personal statement about something relevant to you, or is it a means to memorialize someone or something? These are just a few of the many reasons why we paint.

REMEMBER THAT YOUR TEACHERS ARE ON HAND TO DISCUSS THESE IDEAS WITH YOU.