

# Paint

## VISCOSITY

The viscosity of paint refers to its consistency, how thick or how fluid it is. In general, heavy body paints are viscous, about the consistency of joint compound or peanut butter. They generally hold the texture of a brush stroke to some extent. Heavy body paints generally come in tubes or jars. Fluid acrylics are usually about the consistency of heavy cream; they pour easily, and they don't hold the texture of a brush stroke. I generally use fluids for smaller works, and heavy body paints for larger work, but there is a lot of crossover too. Golden Paints makes a line called High Flow Acrylics, which are the consistency of ink or liquid watercolor. These are more fluid than the fluid acrylics and are great for spattering or dripping. The viscosity of paints will vary from brand to brand, so you can find many consistencies in between these three basic types: heavy body, fluid, and High Flow.

## TRANSLUCENCY AND OPACITY

The degree of clarity of a particular paint depends on a few things: in a high-quality brand of paint, the translucency or opacity depends on the specific color. The qualities of the pigments themselves are imposed on the paint, as there are no additives to influence its translucency. For example, pyrrole red is opaque, while quinacridone red is translucent; naphthol red is somewhat translucent. This variation in translucency is due to the particular pigments that make those different reds. Some paints (usually of a lower quality, but not always) have additives that give them consistent characteristics in terms of translucency. For example, Blick Matte Acrylics are not only all of a matte finish, but they are also consistently opaque. How do you know if a paint is translucent or opaque? GOLDEN puts a swatch of the actual paint on the label, over three black slashes. The degree to which you can see the black slashes through the paint gives you an idea of translucency. You can make this kind of indicator for any of your paints.

Do not confuse  
opacity with viscosity.

## PIGMENT LOAD

The volume of pigment, relative to acrylic binder (and additives, if any) is the *pigment load*. High-quality paints have a lot of pigment in them, generally, while student grade and craft paints have less. The amount of pigment, to a large extent, determines the price of the paint. It is not the only factor in creating high quality paint, but it is an important factor. High quality paints can be extended (diluted) with acrylic mediums, or tinted with white, and still retain their strength of color. For some applications you don't necessarily want the very high pigment load of a professional quality paint, so you may substitute a student grade paint, which is not only cheaper, but it saves the time of extending paint with medium.

## THESE CHARACTERISTICS ARE SEPARATE

I often hear an artist or student saying something like: "The fluid acrylics seem to be more transparent," or "craft paints are more opaque," or in some way conflating two characteristics of acrylic paints as if they always go together. They don't. Some fluid acrylic paints are opaque, some are translucent, some have high pigment load, others do not. Heavy body paints can be opaque or translucent, highly pigmented or not.

## Acrylic Mediums

There is a host of different mediums you can add to your acrylic paints to affect the viscosity, the drying time, the texture, or simply to extend the paint. The mediums I use most are acrylic matte medium (mostly for collage) and acrylic glazing medium or glazing liquid. Glazing liquid dilutes the paint, *and also extends the working time: paint dries more slowly when mixed with glazing medium.*

## MATERIALS

### Substrates

#### PAPER

**For most of my smaller work,** I use a smooth printmaking paper made by Stonehenge. It is 250 gsm (grams per square meter), which is slightly heavier than a 90# watercolor paper. I choose a smooth paper because I want to be the author of any texture that shows up in my work. This paper is suitable for works up to around 12"x12," unless the pieces are to be mounted on wood panel (see below). For larger works, I prefer 300 lb (640 gsm) hot press watercolor paper. Hot press is the smooth surface.

I keep reams of 'cheap drawing paper' available for doing studies, lifting paint, off-loading excess paint, making collage papers, and more. The 80#, or 60# 9"x12" White Sulphite Drawing Paper from Blick Art Materials serves this purpose perfectly, but you could just as easily use 8.5"x11" heavier weight copy paper or something comparable. I also use newsprint. Having loads of cheap drawing paper makes me feel free to try anything at any time.

I use the 18"x24" cheap drawing paper as well, for larger experimental work.

#### WOOD PANEL

Wood panels are great for working on directly. Apply a couple of coats of gesso to the top surface of the panel, and protect the sides with either painter's tape or a coat of matte medium. After finishing a piece on panel, I usually paint the sides with matte black acrylic. You can finish them with varnish, or apply matte medium, or continue your painting around the edges (like a gallery-wrap), but the sides should be finished in some way, so they don't absorb moisture.