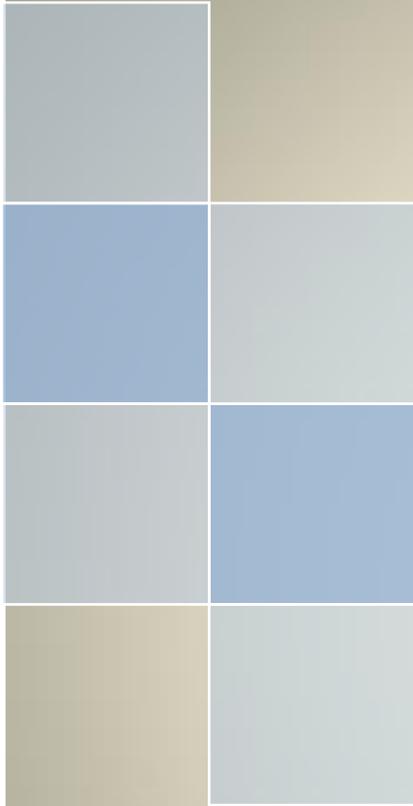


# Taking the mystery out of working with Acrylic

By S. Taylor Hedges



## Working with Acrylic Paint

### Definitions:

**Glaze** – thin transparent layers of color that enable the artist to use each layer to intensify, manipulate or enhance the layers of color below.

**Opaque Color** – light will not bounce through the layer of color

**Transparent or Translucent Color**– layer of colour that allow light to bounce off the white substrate beneath

**Pouring** –Fluid paint poured onto a wet surface which allows the paint to move across the surface of the substrate freely

**Medium** – A product which when added to pigment allows the pigment to change its consistency, transparency and properties that without it would not be possible. Examples of mediums for acrylic paint would be matte or glossy; gel or fluid; heavy body or molding paste and additives to slow drying time.

**Substrate** – The surface on which becomes the foundation for a painting such as paper, wood, canvas, glass or fabric

**Lifting** – Paint is removed from a wet or tacky layer of paint with Rubbing Alcohol by brushing, dripping or spraying the surface of the paint and quickly removed.

**Texturizing** – The use of textured surfaces to apply or remove paint for example sponges, woven coarse fabrics, steel wool, bubble wrap or steel nib pens.

**Brush Quality** – The controlled movement of the brush across the surface of the painting to control the unloading, lifting or directionality of the paint on the brush

## How to Use Acrylic Medium

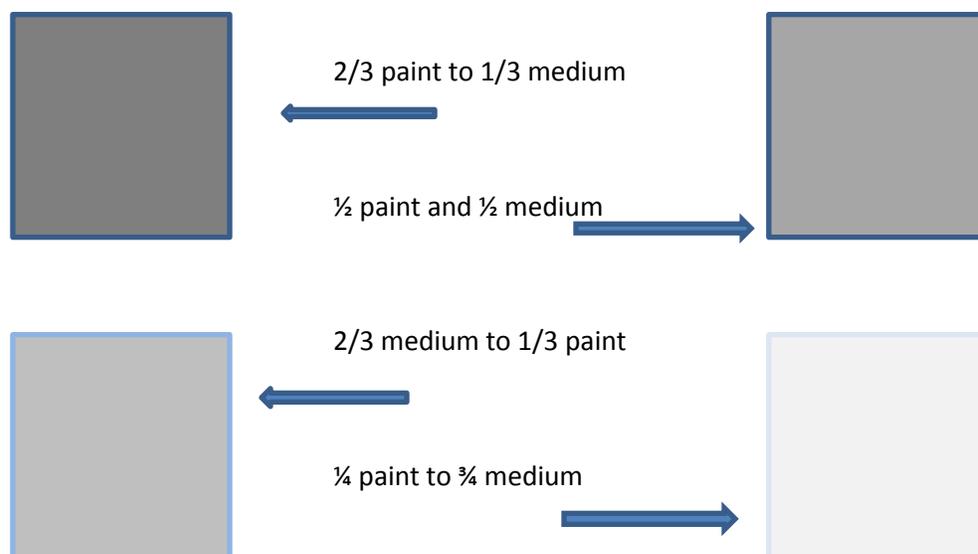
### What is Medium?

Acrylic Medium simply put is paint without pigment. When we purchase paint we are buying pigment only in a suspension fluid which is called Binder and is made up of a product which is compatible with the type of paint; oil paint is generally linseed oil, watercolor is gum Arabic and acrylic is a little more complicated.

Acrylic Binder is made up of several products one to make it fluid, one to keep the pigments suspended and one to keep it all from becoming a slimy mess, how this happens is not that interesting but I'm glad it works. Medium is the binder without colour added and its main purpose is to extend out your paint and slow down the drying time.

### How to use Medium

Simply put the more medium you add to a teaspoon of paint the more transparent (even the opaque colors) it becomes. How much you add depends on the effect you are looking for but the rule of thumb to start out is ...



**Important!! Medium will make the colour look like white has been added however when the paint is dry it will darken down to its true color as the medium dries crystal clear.**

## **Types of Medium**

Fluid Medium – comes in bottles and looks like melted ice cream. This medium will give you a flat level surface and brush strokes ridges will often disappear as it dries particularly if the substrate is lying flat.

Soft Gel – Thick whipped up look that will leave some textures and brush stroke marks in the paint as it dries. This gel will give the paint a creamy feel more like working with oil paint.

Regular Gel – looks like hair gel and it has more body than soft gels and will stand up to texture and ridges formed while painting. Excellent for working with scraping away paint layers to create texture effects.

Heavy Gel – Pasty looking like lard. This is the closest to working with moulding paste without losing the true color of the paint you are working with. All ridges and brush marks will stay true.

Moulding Paste – Similar to heavy gels but will make the paint change colour, best used alone to make texture and then painted over it is very similar to putty in appearance. The moulding paste can also be sanded and is used to attach objects onto the canvas. Once it dries it is a permanent bond to the surface of the substrate.

There are also fancy mediums that have crushed beads in them, crack or will reflect certain colors back these have limited uses.

## **Types of Acrylic Paint**

**Aside from ground pigments, which is difficult for artists to prepare when it comes to Acrylic paint there are three available types of paint for artists to use**

**Regular paint in tubes** – Comes in many sizes and has a binder that is fluid enough to allow you to squeeze the paint out of the tube easily.

**Heavy Body in jars** – The binder is more gel like that is used and often these paints are more pigment dense than the tubes even with the same manufacturer. The paint has a creamy texture and can be used with any of the mediums.

**Fluid paint in bottles** – Several manufacturers are offering fluid paints for several uses such as ease of use on paper or airbrush painting. Generally this paint is the most pigment rich of the three types that are available

## **How to lift the top layer of paint**

Paint the substrate with a layer of paint using a mixture of 1/3 medium to 2/3 paint and allow the area to dry thoroughly to speed this up a hairdryer can help or leave in the sun.

Now choose a second color of paint that will contrast with the layer underneath and mix this to 50/50 paint to medium and brush this over the surface of the first color.

Before the paint has time to dry completely use rubbing alcohol in a spray form or dip your brush into it and wet the surface of the new layer of paint, with practice you can choose where to apply and where not for the best effect. Now using a soft cloth or paper towel blot the wet areas and lift the top layer of paint. Unless the alcohol is left for a long time and then rubbed the only paint that will lift is the fresh layer of paint.

You can also get interesting results from wetting your paint brush with alcohol and wiping along the edges of the applied paint to get the paint flowing and dripping.

I have also used wet Q-tips and lifting lines or dots out, an eye dropper can help to make more controlled spots but make sure you are laying the work flat otherwise the eyedropper will cause the paint to start to run, which could be interesting as well.

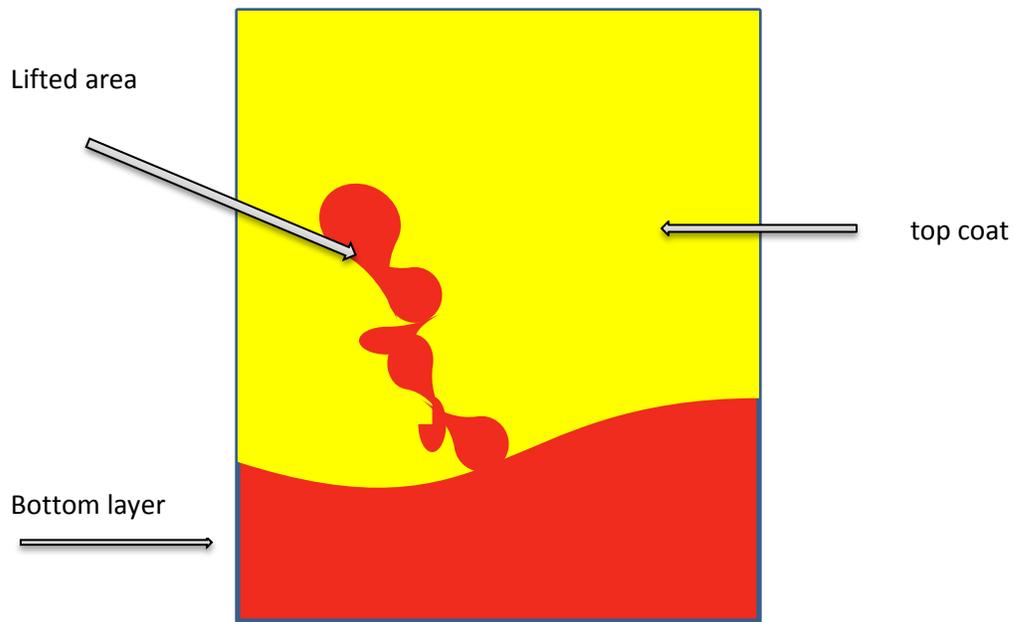
## **How to prepare an Acrylic pour**

With a foam plate or bowl prepare a mixture of paint and medium using liquid medium to liquefy the paint. Add several drops of alcohol to the mixture so that when you move the dish or bowl around the paint moves freely. Test the color on a scrap of paper to make sure the color is strong enough if not add paint or medium until you are satisfied with the transparency level. You want it strong enough to at least alter the color of the bottom layer if not cover it completely. Make enough to cover the area you want to cover over. Now you should wet the substrate one of two ways 1. Dampen with water or 2. Dampen with alcohol either way works. It's important to not have the area dripping wet just dampened.

Now pour the mixture onto the damp area and move the paint around by tipping the substrate in different directions. Small puddles of colors can be made up ahead in order for you to add several colors to the surface and see how they react together when the paint moves around.

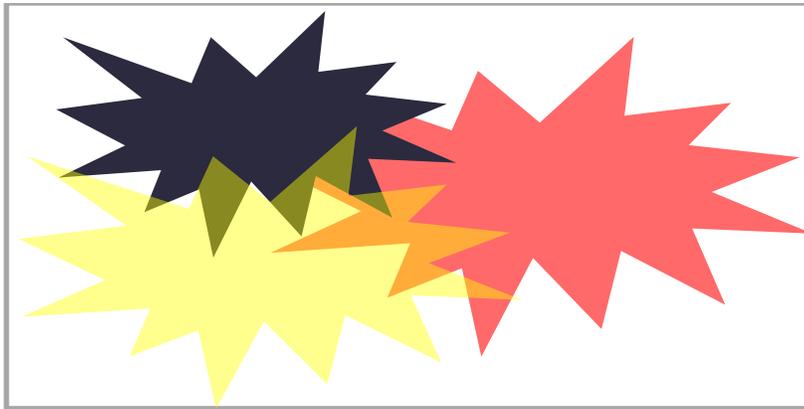
Work quickly as the drying process will start the minute the paint hits the substrate. Another consideration is in how the substrate is prepared ahead of time. A layer of titanium white (or any color really) or fluid acrylic medium on the surface will make the paint move around easier.

This will also help with irregular absorption on paper. Remember time and practice will help you to find the right method for you.



Example of Lifting paint above

Example of Pouring paint with multicolor puddles with levels of transparency below



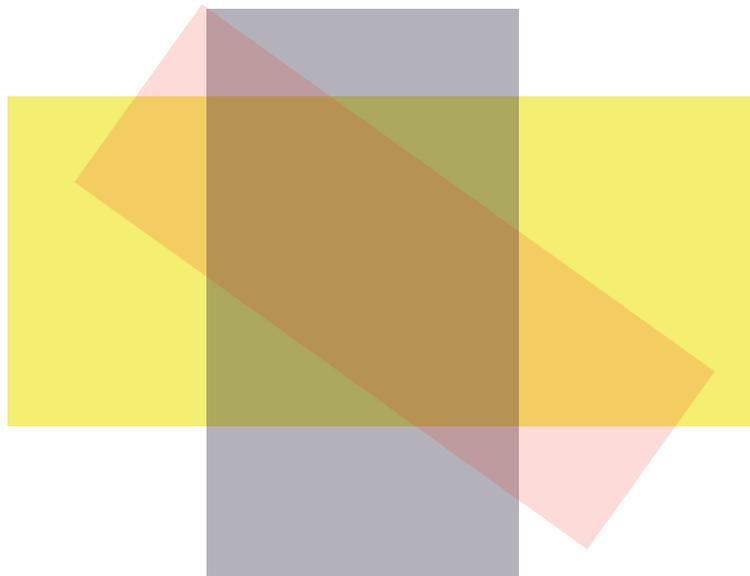
## Glazing with Acrylic layers

Glazing or applying thin paint layers one over the other is a technique developed by the Dutch during the renaissance. Traditionally it has been used by oil painters but is also easily converted to Acrylic paint.

The goal is to apply transparent layers of color allowing each layer to dry before the next layer is applied. The level of transparency is up to the individual artist and the goal. This is the perfect approach for artist who are looking for a higher level of realism particularly in portrait painting or images with buildings where perspective is required. It also can create interesting abstract work making it a very versatile approach to creating your art.

I would suggest you brush up on your color theory before attempting this method just so you will be able to manipulate the color appearing on your canvas by using the optical illusion created by light passing through two different colors.

Start with thin washes of your foundation colors to develop the light and shadowed areas and build the intensity of both as you go along. Washes of diluted titanium white can be used to lighten areas that have gotten over saturated or alcohol lifting or pouring can also be used for interesting areas of paint.



## In Closing

As with any new medium or approach it will take some practice to get the hang of working with any of the above techniques. With a little patience you will learn to love Acrylic paint just as I do