WELCOME TO ACRYLIC PAINTING FOR BEGINNERS
This workbook will closely follow the course, but I also want to add many other tips and topics that you can try out. Painting is a practical subject, but we also love to read about it. Often we try out ideas much later, but as long as you keep learning. That is my goal for you. Where possible I have included photo references for the painting demonstrations. Try them out to consolidate the lessons. Before we start I must say that acrylics is a vast medium and I cannot cover every possible use in this course. My primary aim is to introduce you to acrylics and show you how to paint well.
MATERIALS

What you will need: A selection of good student quality paints. There is no need for expensive artist paints for this training. I can suggest brands like Maimeri’s Acrylico or Galeria by Winsor & Newton and also Golden acrylics. Colors include: Titanium white, cadmium yellow lemon and yellow deep, a warm red, alizarin crimson, ultramarine blue, cobalt blue, burnt sienna, yellow ochre and orange. If you want a few high key colors then add a bright green, blue and red.

Unlike with oil painting I do use a few extra convenience colors with acrylics, because the medium does offer so many creative options.

Brushes and more: A large square brush for blocking in. A household brush will do. Synthetic brushes in sizes 4-10 cover most approaches. Round and long flat brushes are perfect. Add a painting knife or two. A long and short pear shaped blade is best.

Less is more when it comes to materials. If you know what you are going to paint you will have an idea what materials you need. Size, subject, traditional or modern?
Palette

Palette: Any non porous material can make a temporary palette for acrylics. But it is better to use something comfortable and reliable. For regular painting I like the stay-wet palette. It keeps my paints wet for days or more and is convenient to carry with me.

Make a Stay-Wet Palette: Use a plastic container of about 35cm x 25cm with a sealable lid. Line the bottom of the container with paper towel. Moisten the towel with water. Not too much. Then place two pieces of wax paper over the moist towel. Make sure a waxy layer faces the water. The other waxy layer will face upwards. You can now squeeze out your paints onto the top wax paper layer. When finished simply seal the container with the lid.

Also use a water atomiser to spray the paints lightly when conditions are very dry.

Brushes Care: A warning here. Quick drying acrylics can ruin your brushes so make sure you clean them with water straight after painting. Store your brushes upright over night. Do not leave them standing bristles down in the water jar.

Use the stay-wet palette to keep you paint moist and usable for days at a time. Also have a water atomiser on hand to lightly spray water over your paints in very dry conditions.
PAINT SUPPORTS

Acrylics will stick to just about anything that does not repel water. Beware your clothing can get ruined too so use an apron.

As far as supports go the traditional supports like paper, card, and canvas will work in most cases. I use all of these supports without problems. Make sure you prime these supports with acrylic gesso or similar primer. If you use paper, card or MDF panels I suggest priming both sides of the support. This keeps the support free from moisture contamination.

**Paper:** Use good quality watercolor paper. A 300g paper will be best. I like to tape the paper onto an MDF board and lightly wet the paper with water. Let the paper dry fully for the day to stretch the paper. I then prime it with acrylic gesso and let that dry for an hour.

**Canvas Panels:** You can make these easily as demonstrated. Glue the canvas to a MDF panel and let it dry overnight. The firm support is an excellent surface for painting. Of course regular stretched canvases are excellent especially for large works. Modern or abstract paintings on box canvases are very attractive.
There are many mediums available to mix into your paint. Some help the paint dry slower, make them more watery, add body or gloss and much more. You can quickly run up a big bill on these items. Personally I find impasto medium to be useful at times if I want a thick textured surface. Impasto mediums are white then dry transparent. They bulk up your paint and extend it without losing the color. Within reason.

Impasto mediums can be very thick like texture paste. They can also be thinner and smoother like gel medium. Experiment with these to find your happy medium (sorry about that). Having said that I do suggest that you get comfortable with the basics of painting before using these mediums. As always successful paintings require planning so that you can use the materials effectively.
We all dream of a fabulous studio filled with space, light and cool gear. But for most of us the reality is limited space, clutter and compromise. For many years my studio was the corner of our bedroom!

But do not despair. You can do very nicely with a little bit of space. Acrylics do not have harsh solvents, smells are minimal and with a little planning you will not disturb the household.

**The most important thing** is to leave your painting space ready for painting. Avoid packing everything away then unpacking it all the next day. This is a creativity killer. Also have a place to store paints and other kit to avoid clutter (my biggest issue).

Have an easel that is easy to move about if you have space issues. A mast easel is big yet easy to take down and store. Perhaps a desktop easel works best for you.

Display your paintings for added motivation too.
Composition:
This is an important part of your painting skills to practice. Poor composition will ruin a painting even if your colors and brushwork are excellent. The video lesson gives many of the most important tips.
When approaching a scene I always suggest looking for the horizon line first. Draw that in on your sketch and painting surfaces. All shapes must relate accurately to your horizon line. Observe shapes closely. Where are they in relation to your horizon line?
Next make sure that you are leading the eye towards the focal area. Avoid distractions that take the eye away from the focal area. You may notice these distractions a day or two after you complete the painting. Remove them. Color, values and edges all contribute to eye movement too. More on those to follow.
VALUES

What are they and why do they matter?
What Value?

Every color note is usually lighter or darker than another color note.

We use the term values to describe the light and dark nature of color notes.

Values are measured with the Munsell value scale. (example on left)

By observing the value relationships between color notes you can add drama and interest to your painting. Make it stronger or more impactful.
Values at Work

In this demonstration you will learn about preparing a notan sketch with a felt tip marker. The notan sketch isolates the main mass shapes that give a painting structure. Then move that sketch onto a painting panel. You will see how a strong dark mass creates strength and drama when set off against vibrant light values. If you follow this idea for your paintings you will have an excellent chance of developing strong paintings.

The Lane Demonstration Painting
Shapes

Study master painters and see what shapes they leave in. Usually the shapes are isolated according to value and composition requirements. Leave out what does not add to the simple structure of a painting.

Notice in this picture I have drawn lines around the main shapes. The values are measured on the value scale. I can now mix color according to that value scale. Usually there are 4 values in a landscape, but it varies too. Squint at a scene to isolate big shapes and eliminate minor details. See how this helps to get a big and strong start to your painting.
In this lesson I want to demonstrate what to look out for when you want to start painting a subject. Instead of being intimidated by the job in front of you take this approach. Break the process down into assessing the following:

1. Direct light shapes;
2. Indirect light shapes;
3. Cast shadow shapes

Mark out these shapes like jigsaw puzzle pieces. Draw them on a sketch if you can. Now decide on the colors for each shape. Consider its value and color temperature by comparing the relationship between each shape.

Mix color and compare it to the shape. Lighter or darker? Warmer or cooler? When happy put the color down as a flat plane of paint.

In this way the entire subject is simplified.

Move forward by developing each shape with variation in color temperature. But overall the shape keeps its' initial value.
Perspective

Artists worry about getting perspective mathematically correct. Unless you are an architect I suggest not worrying at all. Instead know where your horizon line is and use a viewfinder. Relate all objects to the horizon line and edges of the picture plane and you are good to go.

As a painter I think more about aerial perspective. This means getting your paint to follow the effects of atmosphere on shapes and color. Light and color change over distance. So does your perception of objects. Adapt your paint accordingly and your painting will look fantastic. This lesson covers the important points. Practice them on your palette too.

AERIAL PERSPECTIVE NOTES:
COLORS COOL WITH DISTANCE (MORE BLUE) - YELLOW GOES FIRST
OBJECTS GET SMALLER OVER DISTANCE
EDGES GET SOFTER - TEXTURES REDUCE OVER DISTANCE
Color

Color is a vast topic and I cover that in much detail in my Course Learn to Paint With Impact. But I also go into some depth in these videos looking at the nature of color in acrylics. Acrylics can be used in a variety of ways. Mix it thin and use almost like watercolor. Keep it thick out the tube and use it thick. Add gel medium and make it even thicker for deep textured effects. Generally I use acrylics straight out the tube without adding mediums. This gives me the most options.

**These lessons focus on:**

1. the idea of color notes in relationship to other color notes.
2. Opaque and transparent color
3. Color temperature

Colors consist of hue, saturation and value.
Color Relationships

1. It is not just the hue (name of the color) or value (light or dark) that is important when mixing color. It is the temperature of the color that is critical.
2. Is the color note warmer or cooler in relation to other colors in your painting? Use your artist’s eye to observe the color relationships.
3. ALWAYS CONSIDER COLORS COMPARED TO OTHER COLORS AND ADJUST.
4. Ask is the color warmer or cooler, lighter or darker?

Colors are warm or cool depending on relationships to other colors.
Color Transparency

1. Acrylics are generally transparent out of the tube. Lighter colors more so than darker ones.
2. Transparency can be used by letting dry colors show through color painted over them. This layering of color can develop rich color effects.
3. Shadows can benefit, for example by being left transparent and layered.
4. Add white paint to make shapes opaque. White paint also cools down a color and changes its value. Sometimes dramatically. Once the white is in the color is permanently changed.
5. Start off with less or no white paint and add later once the painting is established. Too much white can lead to chalky looking color.

Use the transparent and opaque nature of paint.
LIMITED PALETTE

A limited palette does not mean limited results. Have the essential colors instead of all the colors on sale. Too many colors wastes money, time and results in haphazard color mixing. Instead focus on mixing pure color according to temperature and value required. Tint with white paint where necessary.

WHAT COLORS?

We love buying new colors. But I always ask my students to get a few colors to begin with. Cadmium red light, cadmium yellow lemon, alizarin crimson, yellow ochre, burnt sienna, titanium white, ultramarine blue, cerulean blue and perhaps orange or yellow deep. This is a generous palette that has a few convenience colors too. Notice I avoid tube green as I cannot find one that is suitable. I prefer to mix my greens. I also avoid black unless I am paining an illustration or poster.
Nature is made up of color mixes. This means that you will need to mix color to get an approximation of natural color. Most of nature's colors are neutrals of some sort. Often you will says things like: that color is greenish or reddish. To me this means it is a cool or warm neutral leaning towards a certain hue.

We often refer to neutral colors as grays. This does not mean black mixed with white. Rather it is a desaturated color. For example green mixed with a little red. Maybe a touch of white added too. That may result in a perfect match for a distant green in your landscape. Generally a tertiary color is heading to neutral territory. But do not overdo the mix as it can lead to mud, which is a lifeless color. So keep one color dominant. This results in a neutral that is either warm of cool. And also beautiful.
VARIETY

When using color try to think of it more than simply a pigment. Consider the relationships between colors and experiment with them. What will violet look like next to light yellow? Maybe use a blue in the shadows. What does that look like? Experiment and assess.

Then there is the thickness of paint. Thin in the shadows. Thick in the sunlit parts. Textured in the foreground.

Use a bristle brush for more textured brushwork. A fine hair brush will give you smoother surfaces.

Palette knife for thick impasto smears of paint or thin lines.

Some artists use other tools like credit cards to smear lots of paint on.

Teeth of a comb can make amazing uniform lines when dragged through upper layers, exposing lower layers of color.

Or what about dribbling paint over a canvas? It is up to you to try.
This takes time, focus and practice. Above all practice and experimentation will develop your painting quickly. This also means reminding yourself to paint without worrying about what others think. There is no paint police. You only grow by making mistakes. Yes many flops too. This is the learning process so go for it.

**VARIETY OF TECHNIQUE**

Remember that acrylics dry quickly. Use this to your advantage by letting layers dry then going over those layers with variety of brushwork. Build up the layers for richer and interesting paintings. Use the brush with vigour and full arm movements. Not like a pencil. Stand and move your arm to get a big shape on the canvas. Twist your wrist, move your hand and so on to get shape variety. Curves, lines and juicy dabs of color make a painting come to life.

**VARIETY OF BRUSHES**

Acrylics do seem to favour the finer synthetic brush. I like the square shaped brush heads called flats. They are especially versatile for my approach. A good round brush or two and perhaps a filbert shape especially for portraits. A large flat like a house brush is ideal for preparing large canvasses or big projects. Generally bristle is not ideal for water based paint, but I use cheaper ones at times for texture. Know what shapes each brush offers and try them out.

**CONFIDENCE**

BRUSH WORK
PAINTING DEMONSTRATIONS
Value Painting

1. This painting as previously mentioned shows the benefit of using a strong value contrast.
2. Look out for large dark mass shapes in your scene, like the trees on the left.
3. Use thick paint on the sunlit portions to make the most of this bright and colorful part. Layers of acrylic can be built up there.
4. You will also note the process I follow from toning a canvas (in this case I use red) to painting the large dark mass shape, then the lights, then developing those shapes with smaller shapes.
5. Shadows are thin, but not flat. See how the toned board shows through on the road shadows?
1. This painting builds on the value based painting by adding the element of a complementary color scheme.
2. The violet and yellow colors work off each other for added impact.
3. Also note the composition lines curving into and down to the water.
4. Thicker and warmer paint in the foreground. Thinner and cooler in the distance.
5. Shadows are not flat. They are filled with information, but within that dark value range.
6. Details are suggested, but not laboured.
Expressive Landscape

1. This painting is all about bold color and loose shapes.
2. Contrasting warms and cools and complementary colors work off each other.
3. It is still a representational painting using rules of aerial perspective for three dimensions.
4. Work quickly for more spontaneous effects.
5. Impasto paint application with thick scoops of paint placed on the canvas.
6. Palette knife and brush work together.
7. Texture through impasto and scraping with the painting knife.
8. Wet into wet painting creates blended edges here and there if I want.
9. I use the road to lead the eye into the painting. Plus lines in the landscape, diagonals and verticals for balance and interest.
1. This painting is about interpreting a simple flower arrangement.
2. Approach still life paintings similar to landscape.
3. Consider shapes and color relationships.
4. Avoid details early on. Look only for shapes.
5. Compose the painting by considering viewpoint, cropping and dominant light source.
6. Basic palette of colors and build up vibrancy with layers.
Process

From the course demonstrations you will notice that I follow a similar process. I encourage you to do the same. A process makes painting simpler by taking a series of steps that help you to succeed. Painting is complicated enough so you want some steps you can count on. These are:

2. Think about the composition. What stays and what goes?
3. What format canvas? Landscape, portrait or square.
4. Tone the canvas? What color?
5. Draw in the horizon line. Basic shapes too.
6. Block in the dark masses. Then the lights and middle value mass shapes.
7. Develop shapes with smaller shapes.
8. Stand back and assess.
9. Add or subtract shapes.
10. Complete with accents both light and dark. Sign the painting.

Your process will develop and become personal to you. Be patient and do not get down when a painting does not work out. That is also part of the process. Mistakes. Then leaps of growth. Then plateaus before another leap forward in skill. Time and consistent work will result in greater achievement. Accept that so you can also find time to relax and have fun. That is the point of painting after all.
Thank You

I hope that you enjoyed this introduction to painting. If you are interested in more resources and lessons please join me on my website:

malcolmdeweyfineart.com
Also on YouTube/mdfineart
Facebook/MalcolmDeweyFineArt
Instagram/malcolmdeweyfineart