



Oil Paints, the Basics

Painting in oils is smelly and messy, but if that doesn't bother you it can also be very rewarding. It has the advantage of allowing reworking over a longer time than other mediums.

The smell can be lessened by using low odour thinners instead of white spirit or turpentine substitute for mixing paint. Keep the white thinners for cleaning the brushes or it will get very expensive.

How messy oil painting is largely down to the way you work. I use disposable aprons and gloves for working on a large scale and always have a mahl stick to hand to avoid leaning your hand or arm on wet work. Small scale works requires little in the way of protection, just use old clothes.

The painting surface (ground) can be primed paper, board or canvas. Ready primed surfaces are readily available.

Oil paint is most often worked "**fat over lean,**" which means the first layers of paint are applied with thinners only then subsequent layers have oil added at an increased rate. Lean should never be applied over fat as the lean dries first resulting in cracking when the fat layer starts to dry. A traditionally worked oil painting (fat over lean) can take up to six months to dry, before varnishing can be done and could be two years before dry enough for glazing if that is required. Fast drying alkyd oils can be used, but have a different texture and handle slightly differently.

Excess paint can be removed with a rag or dry brush. Scumbling can be done over dryer areas of paint.

Alla prima is the term used to describe a painting completed in one session. The paint is often used neat and wet into wet. This method was much used by the Impressionists.