

Art Techniques Student's Guides

Acrylic Painting



**Curated by
Ms. Mila Vasconcelos**



Introduction:



Acrylic paint has always been one of my “comfort” materials in the art room. It dries fast, it forgives mistakes, and it allows students to work boldly without fear. When I teach acrylic, I feel like I’m giving students a set of tools that let them

explore creativity through layers, color, and experimentation.

For me, acrylics represent freedom — freedom to layer, to change your mind, to try again, and to bring concepts to life with energy and confidence. Whenever I travel, I often sketch and photograph first, but acrylic is where I turn my visual memories into fully developed artworks. It’s also the medium that has helped many of my IB DP students discover their artistic voice.

This guide is here to help you understand acrylic paint not as something intimidating, but as a toolbox of possibilities.

Benefits of Acrylic Paint

- Fast drying: Ideal for layering, experimenting, and school schedules.
- Versatile surfaces: Works on paper, canvas, wood panels, clay, fabric.
- Beginner-friendly: Mixes easily, cleans with water, low toxicity.
- Layering power: You can paint over anything — corrections are easy.
- Mixed-media friendly: Acrylic combines beautifully with ink, pastel, charcoal, collage, and textures.
- Affordable & accessible: Many quality student-grade colors work well.
- Strong color impact: Bright pigments with strong opacity and coverage.



Materials & Tools

Paint Types

- Heavy body: Thick, buttery texture — great for impasto.



- Fluid acrylics: Smooth, thinner — perfect for glazing and details.



- Acrylic inks: Bold linework and washes.



Materials & Tools

Brushes

- Flat brushes — blocking large areas



- Round brushes — details and lines



- Filberts — soft blending edges



- Fan brushes — textures, grass, hair



CHOOSING THE RIGHT BRUSH

Choose just the right style of brush from our wide selection to get exactly the stroke or texture you want. The guide below will help you pick the best tool to achieve the right look.



taklon round
Paint broad lines, round areas, stroke work



taklon fan
Blend colors, create texture, grass, fur, foliage



angular
Paint angled shapes, sharp edges and float colors



comb™
Paint multiple lines in one stroke for fluffy Santa beard



natural mop
Blend delicate colors and soften edges of objects



shader
Blend or float colors, lettering, and basecoat



natural round
Paint broad lines, round areas, stroke work



ox glaze
Blend colors, apply glazes, and basecoat



natural flat
Blend or float colors and basecoat



glaze/wash
Float and blend colors, make broad square strokes and basecoat large objects



filbert
Paint and blend round petals, leaves and strokes



stencil
Stencil coloring or stippling on any surface



bristle flat
Blending heavy colors, dry brushing, and basecoat



bristle round
Blending heavy colors, dry brushing, and basecoat in rounded areas



bristle fan
Blend colors, create texture, grass, fur, and foliage



natural fan
Large area washes, ceramic underglazes and glazes



hake
Large area coverage, washes, ceramic under glazes and glazes



bamboo
Ceramic glazes, underglazes, lettering, strokes and washes



tight spot
Paint in hard-to-reach spots



Mr. Big Sweep™
Fine lines, large area washes, ceramic underglazes and glazes



funky pouncer™
Add texture with glazes, acrylics, oils, watercolor stains and glazes



wisp™ filbert
Paint multiple lines in one stroke, grass, hair, fur and detail flower petals



wisp™ flat
Paint multiple lines in one stroke, cross hatching and squiggles



wisp™ fan
Paint multiple lines with one stroke, blending multiple lines, curves and splattering



wisp™ angular
Paint multiple lines in one stroke, feathers, foliage, petals and hair



dagger
Banding line lines, stems, long leaves and stroke designs



triangular
Triple load with color to create unique blends in stroke work



script
Extra long strokes, lines and scrolling



detail
Paint angled shapes, sharp edges, and float colors in tight areas



liner
Extra thin lines, small strokes, and the finest details

Materials & Tools

- **Surfaces**

- Canvas boards
- Stretched canvas
- Mixed media paper
- Primed wood panels
- Cardboard (for experimental work)



Other Tools

- Palette knives
- Spray bottle
- Gesso (surface primer)
- Matte or gloss medium
- Texture pastes (modeling paste, sand, gels)



Other Tools

Matte Medium

Softens the natural sheen of acrylics for a velvety finish

Helps maintain pigment strength while reducing shine



Can be used as a final varnish to protect your work

Also great for layering and glazing

Gloss Medium

Boosts flow for smoother brushwork and fluid application

Perfect for creating watercolour-style effects with acrylics



Leaves a slight sheen that enhances colour

Great for layering and glazing; makes acrylics more transparent

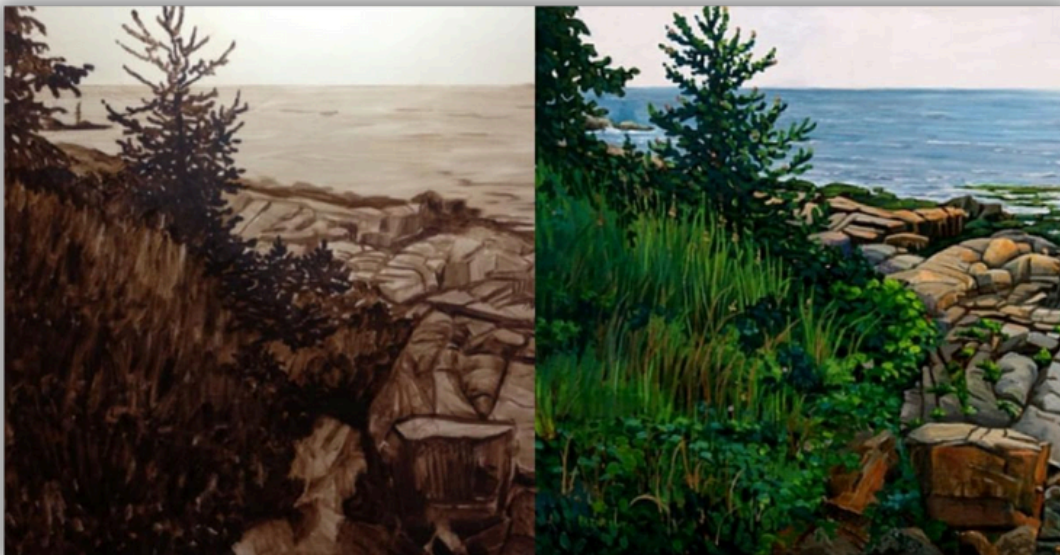
4. Techniques

Layering / Underpainting: *In essence, underpainting is a method of creating an outline on your canvas. Done often in an opposing color, underpainting can help add depth to your work, even if it won't be directly visible once you're done with your work. Below is an example of an underpainting.*

1. Start with a monochromatic base color (burnt sienna, ultramarine, or grey).
2. Block in shapes and values.
3. Build layers of color on top, allowing each layer to dry.



Image Source: Artsmartmanila.com



4. Techniques

2. Dry Brush

1. Use a nearly dry brush with minimal paint.
2. Drag lightly across the surface.
3. Creates rough texture — great for grass, fur, rocks, wood.



Image Source: [Your Decorative Painting Resource](#)

4. Techniques

3. Glazing (Transparent Layers): *An acrylic glaze is made by extending paint with any transparent or translucent Medium. A glaze is a binder-rich mixture typically having a very small amount of paint blended with a much larger amount of medium. Many mediums can be used to create a glaze, including thinner mediums like High Flow Medium or Glazing Liquid all the way up to very thick Gel Mediums.*

1. Mix acrylic paint with glazing medium.
2. Apply thin transparent layers of color.
3. Build luminosity and depth gradually.



Image Source: justpaint.org



4. Techniques

4. Impasto (Thick Texture)

1. Use heavy body paint or add gel medium.
2. Apply with palette knives.
3. Leave visible strokes for dramatic texture.



Image source: vangoghmuseum.com



Image source: [Justin Gaffrey](#).

4. Techniques

5. Scumbling: *A scumble is a dry and broken application of paint. It's really the opposite of a glaze, but the two are often confused as they are both ways of optically modifying an underlying paint film.*

1. Use a dry brush with a light color.
2. Scrub it across darker layers.
3. Creates soft atmospheric effects — perfect for clouds.



Image source: leprince.com



Image source: artistsandillustrators.com

4. Techniques

6. Splattering: *In Abstract-Expressionistic art, the act of creating the work is more important than the final product.*

One famous artist, Jackson Pollock, would place a large white canvas in the middle of the floor and throw paint in different ways onto the canvas.

1. Thin the paint slightly.
2. Tap the brush or flick with your finger.
3. Great for stars, dust, texture, and flowers.



*Image source: Johnson Pollack,
"Splatter Painting."*

4. Techniques

7. Sgraffito: *Sgraffito is a technique where you scratch through something to reveal a layer underneath. In a painting, you can scratch back the paint while it is wet. If you allow the paint to dry you will need to use more abrasive methods such as sand paper or something sharp. Usually when artists use sand paper and scratch through dry paint they will have used a thick canvas or even a wooden board to paint on so that they don't destroy their artwork*

1. Paint a wet layer.
2. Scratch into it with a stick or tool.
3. Reveals the color underneath.



Image source: Kapunda High Art & Design

5. Do's & Don'ts with Acrylic Paint

DO:

- *Use gesso to prepare surfaces.*
- *Work from background → middle → foreground.*
- *Layer thin to thick (fat over lean).*
- *Clean brushes immediately — acrylic dries fast.*
- *Test brush strokes before applying to artwork.*
- *Mix colors on palette AND surface for complexity.*

DON'T:

- *Don't leave brushes in water (ruins bristles).*
- *Don't mix too much water — it weakens the paint.*
- *Don't paint thick over wet layers without drying time.*
- *Don't expect acrylic to blend like oil — work fast.*
- *Don't apply varnish before paint fully cures.*

6. Artists Who Use Acrylic Paint

David Hockney (UK):

Clean color, digital-style acrylics.



6. Artists Who Use Acrylic Paint

Njideka Akunyili Crosby (Nigeria/USA):

Acrylic + collage + family imagery.



6. Artists Who Use Acrylic Paint

Beatriz Milhazes (Brazil):

Color, geometry, layered motifs.



6. Artists Who Use Acrylic Paint

Julie Mehretu (Ethiopia/USA):

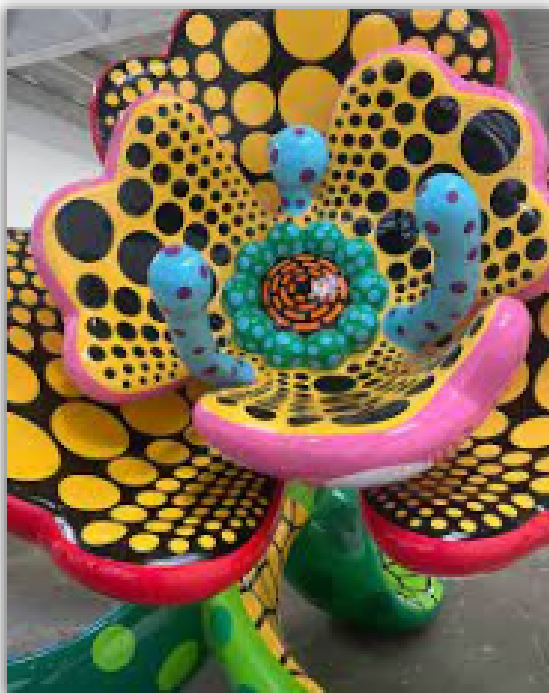
Large abstract works with acrylic and ink.



6. Artists Who Use Acrylic Paint

Yayoi Kusama (Japan):

Bold acrylic patterns and polka-dot worlds.



6. Artists Who Use Acrylic Paint

Alex Katz (USA):

Flat colors and portraits with acrylic.



6. Artists Who Use Acrylic Paint

Hung Liu (China/USA):

Acrylic drips, portraits, and immigrant memories.



6. Artists Who Use Acrylic Paint

- **Tarsila do Amaral (Brazil):**

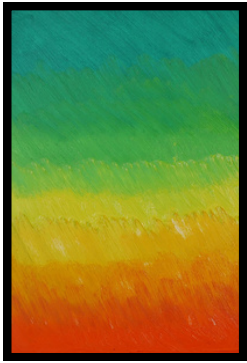
Modernist color studies that translate beautifully into acrylic.



7. Mini Challenges

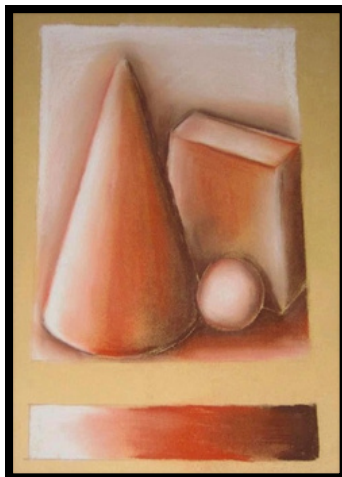
5 Minutes

- Paint a gradient using two colors.
- Create a dry-brush texture test.



10 Minutes

- Paint a small object using three values only.
- Create a color wheel.



7. Mini Challenges

15 Minutes

- *Mini landscape: sky, ground, one object.*
- *Texture study using impasto + dry brush.*



7. Mini Challenges

30 Minutes

- Layered abstract composition using at least 3 techniques.
- Quick portrait block-in (no details).



8. IB-Aligned Tasks

- **Technique Investigation:** Compare two acrylic techniques (e.g., glazing vs. scumbling).



- **Cultural Exploration:** Recreate a place you've visited using acrylic textures to express emotion.

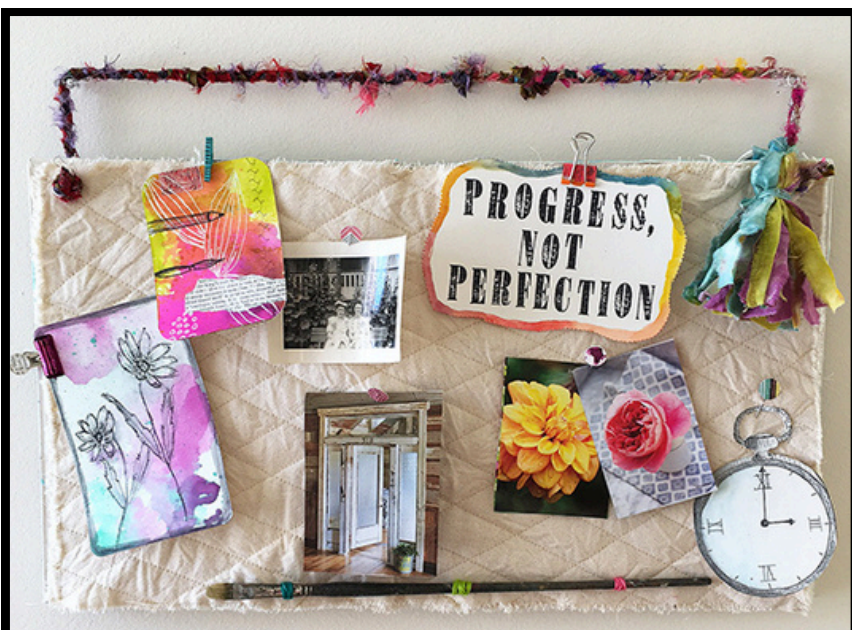


8. IB-Aligned Tasks

- **Artist Connection:** Choose an acrylic artist and respond to one element of their style or concept.



- **Material Experimentation:** Create a mixed-media board combining acrylic with collage, pastel, or charcoal.



Techniques & Approaches

Here are a few experimental approaches you can try:

- **Collage:** Layering paper, photographs, fabric, or text.
- **Assemblage:** Using 3D objects in a painting or sculpture.
- **Photo Transfer:** Transferring images onto paper, canvas, or wood.
- **Texture Additions:** Mixing paint with sand, plaster, wax, or glue.
- **Hybrid Media:** Combining traditional techniques with digital edits or projections.
- **Fabric & Thread:** Embroidery, patchwork, or fabric collage integrated with paint.

9. Conclusion

Acrylic paint is one of the friendliest and most flexible mediums you can learn. It allows beginners to feel confident and gives advanced students the ability to build complex concepts through layers, textures, and bold color decisions. What I love most is that acrylic painting mirrors the creative process itself: you experiment, adjust, cover mistakes, rebuild, and choose the parts that matter. Every stroke is an invitation to think — not just about technique, but about intention.

Use this guide to take risks, explore your ideas, and grow your technical and conceptual voice. Acrylics will meet you wherever you are and help you move forward.

—*Ms. Mila*



