

## **Basic Painting Techniques - Gouache**

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Supplies –

Gouache paint

Paint brush (es)

Palette

Water and containers

Something to paint

Eyedropper or medicine syringe

**GOUACHE** is a heavy, opaque watercolor paint, sometimes referred to as body color.

When applied correctly its finish can be almost velvety in appearance. It is commonly found in tube form today, however dried or tablet forms are still available.

Gouache is easily reconstituted once it dries out, and truly a little goes a long way.

There are many different makers or brands of gouache paint and you will have to try them out yourself to see what you prefer. Every artist's personal taste is unique and what may be the perfect brand for one may not be for another. In today's class we will be using Reeves student quality gouache. Not necessarily because I like it, but rather it is very inexpensive. My personal preference when it comes to gouache is Windsor and Newton Designer gouache.

There is a big difference between student quality and artists quality gouache. The main difference is how much pigment is actually in the paint itself. Obviously the more pigment that is ground in the more opaque and even the final appearance will be. It is easier with artist's quality to lay a "flat" background, and uses much less medium as there is more pigment. It can be done with the student gouache, and if you can master the technique with inferior paint, imagine how great you'll be with the good stuff.☺

Period painting was not done in a "flat" manner, and had beautiful shadings and highlights. Some of this was done with watering down the paint to almost translucent and some was done with the layering of paint colors. We will be learning and practicing the latter today.

### **BEFORE YOU PAINT**

Before you start painting make sure you have your anticipated supplies handy. That includes your paints, brushes, palette, paper, a knife for mixing paints, eyedropper or syringe, clean water and a cloth. Keep your work surface clean and clear of any and all potential hazards! No coffee, drinks or snacks. Put them on a separate table nearby if you need them. You wouldn't want to put hours of effort into a beautiful charter or scroll and spill coffee and make the paint run. Try and paint away from distractions such as running kids, pets etc. Ideally your work surface would be at chest level to avoid straining your neck muscles. A slant board is great for this. If you are working on a flat

surface (as I often end up) make sure that you do a few stretches before you start. And at least every half an hour or so. Get up and move around at least once an hour even if it is only to refill the coffee pot. Do try and avoid painting marathons if possible.

### **Laying the Base Color**

Now that you are ready to start painting get your palette ready and your project.

You will need to have a small container of clean water for cleaning your brushes and another small container with clean water for adding to your paint. Choose your color, shake the tube gently, give it a light massage/ knead and add a SMALL amount to your palette, no larger than pea sized. You will note that it is pretty thick at this point and may even have what looks like an oily residue. The “oil” is gum Arabic or what ever binding medium the company has used to make the paint adhere to the paper. If there is a lot of it you can soak up some of it with a q-tip or just mix it in, and all will be well. The more gum Arabic to paint ratio results in a shinier finish.

Next take your eyedropper or syringe and fill it with a bit of water and add one or two drops to your pea-sized paint. Take your knife and mix it well. It should be neither runny nor very thick; I like the consistency of egg yolk best.

We will be trying out a couple different techniques with laying flat color and you can choose what works best for you.

#### Technique 1:

We will call this the Capillary Action technique...if there is a technical term for it, I do not know it at this time. In a second part of your palette you will add one or two drops of water and a very small amount of your already mixed paint, and add one more drop of water to the EDGE of your mixed paint. Do not mix this in. So now you will have one thicker paint and one very, very thin paint. Get some of the thin paint on your brush and begin to fill in an area on your paper. Do NOT soak the paper, just a very light, thin coat. Before that paint dries load your brush with the thicker paint from the EDGE where you have added the water. Apply this to the damp area on your paper with dabbing movements, not brush strokes. The capillary action of the paper should help distribute the paint in an even manner. You can continue with this until your area is completely filled in. The key to this technique is to work in small areas at time, and not letting the first layer to dry before adding the second. Balance is key here, too much water in the first layer and your paper will buckle, and not enough and it will dry too fast. I find this technique works best with the artist’s quality gouaches.

#### Technique 2:

This one we will call the puddle pull method. This is my favorite for large areas. Add one or two more drops of water to your paint, it still shouldn’t be too runny or thin. About the consistency of a thin pancake mix. Now load your brush and put a “puddle” on the area to be painted. Using the tip of your brush “pull” the paint to the edges of your area using small strokes. The trick here is to not put too much paint down at a time or your paper will buckle, keep your strokes even and pull to the edge. I find this gives a beautiful “velvety” effect on a large flat area. I have even used it for smaller areas as well.

## **Shading and Highlighting**

As I mentioned earlier, painting in manuscripts was not done “flat”, but rather was beautifully highlighted and shaded. Again some times translucent washes were used to create this effect (much like watercolor today) and more often it was done using layers of paint to build up areas. I prefer to start with the shading and then add the highlights.

In another area of your palette take some of your already mixed paint and a small amount of a lighter shade, usually white. By a small amount, I mean miniscule. Mix this in well. Determine where on your project the light falls and carefully stroke on your shading. Keep the inner folds of robes darker for a more dimensional effect. Once this new layer is completely dry we will add more white (or lighter shade) and repeat this time making the area slightly smaller where applied. Again let it dry. Now on your palette put a small amount of white and mix it with a bit of water. This needs to be slightly viscous, but not runny. If it is too thin then the color will bleed through, too thick and you will have trouble laying it down. With the very tip of your brush pick up some white and proceed to put the finishing highlights on your project. Long smooth strokes will look better than short choppy ones. Try using your pinky finger for balance if you need. I have also seen rulers used for long lines.

## **Mixing colors**

You can mix your existing gouache to make different colors and shades of colors. Just mix using a little color at a time until you reach the desired intensity. The only color you won't be able to mix is purple. Due to the light refraction within gouache and in particular red and blue, when these two colors are mixed together they make a lovely mud.

## **Metallic colors**

Not everything in period was gilded. In fact a large number of manuscripts used shell gold and shell silver and silver composites for paint. Essentially gold “findings” were milled into a fine powder and then mixed with gum ammoniac and or gum Arabic. They were then used to lay in gold or silver on the project. If the shell gold was a good one, they could even be burnished to a shine. To simulate shell gold and or silver I recommend “Pebeo” metallic gouache. This is the one I personally have had the most success with. There are others out there that may be just as good; I may not have had a chance to try them yet. Please note that metals are generally laid down before any other color.

## **Supply Sources**

Curry's art store online - [www.currys.com](http://www.currys.com)

This has a wide variety of art supplies and is very reasonably priced.

Opus Art supplies – found usually in major cities

Your local office supply store, just be wary of their prices if they need to special order something.

Most local craft stores have brushes and papers etc.

## **Bibliography**

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