

## Oil Painting for Beginners

Once you have selected your canvas or panel and set your palette, you have only to pick up some color on your brush or knife and begin to paint. It's as simple as that. Of course, how you hold your brush or knife and the manner in which you apply paint to canvas can make a very great difference in the kind of picture you will paint. But there is no one approved way and artists tend to be even more individual in their painting habits than in their handwriting. You will, of course, eventually find the way of working that suits you best. In the meantime, it is well to beware of one especially bad habit that painters sometimes fall into at the beginning and later find very hard to break: staying too close to your painting as you execute it. When you work too close, your eye tends to focus on a few square inches at a time, with the result that you may be tempted to overdevelop this limited area, and then the next such area, thus losing the bigness of conception and boldness of execution without which a painting is usually doomed to failure. As a preliminary to painting a picture, it may be helpful to experiment with your brushes and knives to find out what kinds of lines, tones and textures you can produce with each one. Squeeze out four or five colors on your palette. Use the paint just as it comes from the tube for these exercises unless you find it unworkable, in which case you can add a minimum of medium. You might choose White, Burnt Umber, Ultramarine, Cadmium Yellow and Alizarin Crimson for these experiments; such an assortment will give you a wide range of hue and value, but any colors will do. The important thing here is not the way the colors combine, but the way you can use your tools to achieve particular tones and textures. Exercise 1: Lines - With each of your brushes, in turn, carry some single strokes across your canvas. Use paint generously. Don't be disturbed by the ridges of paint which may squeeze out along the edges of a stroke, or by the way the line breaks and lets some canvas show through as the brushful of paint becomes exhausted, giving the result known as "dry brush." These effects are characteristic of oil painting and often are created intentionally. Do some lines with the flat sides of your brushes, others with the thinner edges. Try light paint, medium paint, dark paint. Tip the bristles at different angles to the canvas. Vary your pressure. Make wavy lines, broken lines, zigzag lines. Invent lines of your own. Ultimately, you will need them all. As you work with your brush, you may find that you will want to turn it over, or up on edge, every little while in order to use the paint which accumulates. That's all right, too. Exercise 2: Broken Color - Now dip your brush into two or more colors at a time and draw a number of lines again. As you paint, these colors will automatically blend somewhat, yet each will remain visible in places. Accidental effects obtained this way can be telling at times. After you have experimented with elementary exercises like these, you will be well on your way to starting a real painting. Good luck!

## About the Author

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