



Traditional Oil Painting: Without Solvents

A safer method for traditional oil painting

Experience the rich feel of traditional oil color.

Historically, artists created their own color in the texture and viscosity of their preference.

In 1550 Vassari wrote, "When the artist wishes to begin, that is, after he has laid the gesso on the panels or framed canvases and smoothed it, he spreads over this with a sponge four or five coats of the smoothest size, and proceeds to grind the colors with walnut or linseed oil through walnut oil, though walnut oil is better because it yellows less with time. When they are ground with these oils, which is their tempera (medium), nothing else is needed so far as the colors are concerned but to lay them on with a brush."

Walnut versus linseed oil

All drying oils depend on the amount of unsaturated fatty acids in them to dry and form films. The composition of these fatty acids determine how stable the oil is, how much yellowing will take place, how brittle the film will become over time, and how rapidly the film will dry. The composition tells us how well an oil will perform as an artist's vehicle.

A comparison of walnut oil and linseed oil fatty acid compositions indicates that walnut oil is more stable, turns rancid less readily, yellows minimally, and remains more flexible over time.

The primary fatty acids that make up walnut oil and linseed oil are the same; the difference is the amount occurring in each. Below is a listing of the primary fatty acids, typical percentages, and the effect of each.

Acid	Walnut	Linseed	Effect
Oleic	17%	14%	Prevents rancidity or cracking upon drying.
Linoleic	60%	42%	Drying rate of the oil to a tough, flexible film.
Linolenic	12%	38%	Rancidity, yellowing, brittleness, and cracking due to rapid oxidation.

(% values represent typical distribution with slight variations occurring as a result of different crops.)

Due to its high linolenic acid content, linseed oil forms conjugated fatty acids with, combined with oxygen from the air, form polyunsaturated hydroxy compounds, causing both yellowing and brittleness. Linolenic acid is one of the most unstable fatty acids derived from vegetables.

Walnut oil and alkyd medium

WALNUT OIL

Walnut oil effectively removes color from artists' brushes and is a natural vegetable oil that does not evaporate or remove essential oils from the artists' brushes. The addition of walnut oil to color will slow drying, enhance flow, and increase sheen.

WALNUT/ALKYD MEDIUM

Concentrated walnut/alkyd medium thins the color, accelerates drying, enhances adhesion between layers, and increases surface sheen and flexibility while remaining essentially non-yellowing. Ideally suited for alla-prima and glaze applications, walnut/alkyd medium is certified nontoxic.

Walnut oil and walnut/alkyd medium are designed to augment the special nature of our oil color but are also completely compatible with other artist's oil colors and mediums.

The pigments used in our oil color are identical to those in our watercolor, gouache, and acrylic color formulations for ease of color matching in underpainting or mixed media techniques.

Every artist deserves the finest color that can be created.

Oil color made with walnut

Preferred by artists for more than five centuries, colors ground in walnut oil provide the artist with richer, more vibrant color and greater freedom of control over all types of painting application. The result: paintings that are richer, more vivid, and easier to create.

Because of walnut oil's unique refractive index and non-yellowing nature, colors dispersed in this fine oil are naturally more alive and brilliant. They retain their clarity and are free from the discoloration associated with other drying oils.

Free flowing and slow drying, walnut oil enables delicate passages of finely blended color, jewel-like glazes, or full brush applications without the addition of solvents.

The free flowing nature and lower viscosity of this traditional oil enables the color maker to increase the amount of pigment in each batch, resulting in an extraordinary richness, color saturation, brilliance, and tinting strength.

SOLVENT-FREE PAINTING TECHNIQUE

Solvents have been used in artists' materials since the 19th century. Appropriate use of solvents with oils and resins produced mediums that often overcame the technical constraints of painting in oil. However, solvents are highly toxic and when used extensively very detrimental to the appearance and permanence of the work.

The simplest approach to solvent-free painting is to create the painting directly in one application, thinning the color only with a small quantity of walnut oil or alkyd. Use only the smallest amount needed and apply the color directly to the surface of the canvas. For the greatest permanence, the colors should be applied thinly.

When multiple layers of color are required, the technique is quite simple if a few rules are remembered.

1. *Paint thinly.* Heavy applications of color are too massive (ultimately brittle) to age well. Such applications are generally liable to wrinkle or cause cracking. Apply color to preserve the canvas texture.
2. *Fat over lean.* This is similar to flexible over inflexible. The first coat of color should have little or no medium. Each successive layer should have slightly more oil or medium added to it than the underlying coat. This has little to do with the oil content of the color - simply add more medium to each layer of color.
3. *Thick over thin.* Thicker layers of color need to be applied over thinner layers. Often when thin layers of color are applied over thicker layers, cracking can occur - this is especially true for whites composed with zinc oxide.
4. *Slow over fast.* Slow drying colors such as titanium white, cadmium red, etc. should be applied over faster drying colors such as burnt umber to avoid cracking. Allow the lower layer to dry thoroughly.
5. *Use a sufficiently porous ground with tooth.* Oil colors adhere by mechanical adhesion. This requires a ground coat that the oil can sink into and some surface irregularity to grab onto. Linen or cotton canvas prepared with a first quality acrylic gesso work nicely. Remember that gesso, like your color, needs to be applied thinly. The more one preserves the texture of the canvas weave, the better the adhesion of the color.
6. *Use the same medium throughout the painting.* This will help to avoid difficulties in the painting structure that can lead to cracking due to uneven drying rates.

CLEANING

To avoid solvents while cleaning, use walnut oil in place of turpentine or odorless mineral spirit. Walnut oil removes color from the artist's tools as effectively as odorless paint thinners. Walnut oil is a natural vegetable oil that does not evaporate, nor does it remove essential oils from the artist's brushes.

To clean brushes while painting, keep two small jars filled with walnut oil - a small piece of screening can be kept in the jar bottoms to facilitate removal of color from the brushes. As it becomes necessary to clean your brush, dip into the first jar of oil, rubbing vigorously to dislodge any color, wipe the oil from the brush on the jar edge, and dip the brush into the second jar to remove any remaining color. A final wipe on the jar edge to remove any leftover oil completes the process.

The same method can be used at the end of the day. If the brushes are to be put aside for a week or more, a final washing in mild soap and water is recommended.