

Acrylics

I have decided to experiment painting with acrylics on gessoed board for a period of time.

I have used acrylics on paper with very good results. But I feel a need to get out from behind glass. It appears that many galleries prefer to handle works not under glass and these works seem to generate higher prices.

Some time ago I saw an exhibit in New York of some Japanese botanical artists who worked with acrylics on paper. The colors were very pure and clear. I knew that the medium would dry faster and layer well with no bleed contamination between one underlying layer and the next. I found this very compelling especially when I wanted to create very complex, deep colors.

So I spent some time experimenting, and found I could paint in the exact same manner with the acrylics as I did with gouache or water color. In fact when painted side by side the three mediums could not be told apart – as long as I was using a pure pigment gouache such as M. Graham's gouache which has no white added. If I used Windsor and Newton's Designer Gouache, which does have white added, after very few glazes the colors became pasty looking.

I then experimented with adding gouache or watercolor detail on top of multiple thin acrylic glazes, this worked fine on paper and as long as the layers were thin. As did the reverse application of thin acrylic glaze on top of watercolor or gouache.

But I was still on paper, which would have to be framed under glass.

I tested Daniel Smith acrylics – which I liked very much, but settled on using M. Graham acrylics which are bright, strong and very pleasing to work with, working with these pigments have the added advantage of being the same pigments I use for either watercolor or gouache. So the colors and tonal dilutions are familiar.

Now the question was what surface? I am still testing but I have come to the conclusion that I like board with gesso added rather than canvas, I like a smooth surface, rather than the texture of the woven canvas.

I applied layer after layer of gesso sanding carefully between layers – just not worth the time involved. There are a number of ready-made boards on the market, some completely smooth some with a slight texture – I prefer the smooth. They come in a variety of sizes; if none quite fit your subject matter they can easily be cut with a table saw. I have settled on using boards made by ArtBoards, they will cut to size and their boards really do have a minimum of seven layers of gesso.

I paint in layers from the back to the front. First creating the background color, detail or texture. Next the mid-ground subjects finally painting the foreground detail. Each painted on top of the layer behind. I have been able to paint a very light, or bright iridescent color on top of a black dark background very easily. If I need to block out any background information I use gesso. The gesso made by ArtBoard is by far and away the best quality leaving the surface smooth but also slightly receptive, rather than plastic and slippery as the gesso made by Liquitex or Goldens.

Painting: I am still a novice here, but it is not that much different than working on paper. Of course the board surface is not as absorbent, so any applied wet paint sits on the surface until dry and will tend to pool if it is too liquid. For this reason I use a dryer brush. I am thrilled at how easy it is to create very fine detail and smooth washes – in fact any effect I am used to creating on paper.

At this point I have decided not to use a new brush, so am still using my workhorse Raphael Kolinsky sable brush. I will do more testing with other brushes in time.

One new thing at a time!!

I use the same limited palette of 6 primary colors.

I use the same glazes to create my local color, creating the local color by adding additional glazes rather than mixing pigments in a palette. I use a dryish brush to create small hatches for detail. I always let a glazed layer dry before adding another. I never use thick layers of paint.

I keep the squeezed out paint from drying by using the Masterson Stay-Wet system. It works exceptionally well; I can keep a small amount of paint ready for use for up to a week or so.

I have tested using a hairdryer to speed up the drying time but it really is not necessary. At this point I have not tried any of the special 'mediums' available on the market for acrylics. Tempting as they are I want to become comfortable one step at a time.

So jumping right in, after completing just 5 small paintings, I have drawn up a large image of 5 turkeys in a landscape. If that comes out OK my learning curve will be HUGE. I will keep in touch with how it goes.