

Herdy Guidance – January 27 2016

Below are some tips from one of our artists who has done many Go Herdwick-style projects before, in response to an artist who had some queries.

I have never used acrylic paints before so have you any basic do's and don'ts and general advice, please?

I see there are 'heavy bodied' and 'fluid' acrylics. How do they differ and is one better than the other?

I'm very happy to share what experience I have of acrylics, which is mainly use on animal sculptures!

In general Acrylic is fairly versatile, it can be used thickly even applied with a palette knife (heavy body formula), or used with the addition of a little water (or flow medium) so similar to gouache, or used diluted with a lot of water (or flow medium) like water colours and for multi layer glazes.

I read somewhere that these paints don't like being mixed and stirred too much. Is that right? I have only worked with gouache previously and I could mix and stir these forever and they would be fine.

It sounds like you would want to use it at a medium consistency if you are used to gouache, and depending what your approach is it's also similar to gouache technique in that you would work from darks to lights, applying a dark or medium ground and working up lighter shading and highlights (and darker shading and shadows) on top of it. Although quick drying in a warm dry atmosphere, acrylic can take a while to dry if it's applied very thickly. Although it can be used very diluted like watercolour when on paper or canvas, this isn't so ideal on the sculptures as there's not much pigment left on the surface when the water has dried so it could rub off and the colours more likely to fade outside..

Student quality acrylics such as Daler Rowney System 3 or W&N Galeria are fine, though do not have quite as much strength of colour or opacity as the artists quality ranges.

Two things it's useful to know before you start with acrylics are its tendency to be on the transparent side and the fact that it dries a little darker.

Colours such as yellow and red are very transparent and will need white adding to make them opaque, and if you want a solid flat area of colour will need several layers. You can check the opacity of colours on the tubes and this might affect what you buy. The darkening that occurs as it dries isn't really a problem except if you haven't mixed enough of a colour and are trying to match it later...in which case it's better to premix a larger quantity and keep it in an airtight pot or well-sealed with cling film.

It's absolutely fine to mix colours, usually a little easier with a drop of water or flow medium, but no problem to keep stirring.

I would suggest you might do some quick tests on paper before you start painting on the sheep to get the feel of the paint and work out your colour mixing.

Depending on what your design is, it might be easier to stick to a limited colour palette and mix what you want from basic primary and secondary colours like cadmium red, cerulean blue, lemon or cadmium yellow etc. There are dozens of lovely colours available, clear bright purples and pinks etc, which are good if you want to use that specific colour neat or just mixed with white, but they don't always give the result you expect when mixing with another colour, and could have limited use. Also 'mixing white' is better than titanium white for mixing with other colours as it's more opaque.

Remember that the sculptures are very tough, you can tip them about to get at underneath and awkward angles . Don't be afraid of 'going wrong' you can paint over or even lightly rub it all down and re-prime and start again if you wanted to (I've done this!).

Just have fun!

Ps you'll probably need bigger brushes than you think for covering the area...or it'll take a long time!

Varnish

Please would you let me know which varnish you use on the animal sculptures and any relevant tips for application? I'm nowhere near needing it but think it would be a good idea to order it.

The recommended varnish now is Easy on. Here's where you can buy it.

<http://www.urbanhygiene.com/paint-coating-anti-graffiti/10-easy-on-coating.html>

You only need the smallest size they do. It's a two-part resin which you mix and then apply with a mini smooth sponge roller, using a brush for the fiddly corners. There's enough for two coats in the can, it only takes a few hours for the first coat to dry before you apply the second. You have to be careful to keep the mixture airtight so it doesn't thicken before you can put the second coat on, but without getting the lid glued on!

You'll have to use two sponges as they set hard, it's not worth paying for the solvent to clean them...also the brush, use cheap small decorating brushes.

As with any varnishing, a dust free, dry atmosphere is best!

I think I probably tipped the sheep on its side to apply the varnish underneath and up the inside of the legs, then stood it up and started systematically from the head. It doesn't dry so quickly that it's a problem on the overlaps.

There are some instructions with the Easy on, but the people at Urban Hygiene are very helpful if you have any questions.

Hope you are enjoying your painting!