

## **COMPARISON: Oil Paint vs. Acrylic Paint**

Oil paints have survived for hundreds of years, so their long-lasting quality is well known. They do tend to discolor with age, something that acrylics don't seem to do, although acrylics haven't been around long enough for us to really know.

When it comes to color, oil paints have more pigment in them, allowing richer, more vivid colors. Acrylics may also darken slightly as they dry, while oil paints do not.

The main difference between oils and acrylics is drying time. Acrylic paint will dry within an hour, if not within fifteen minutes. Oil paints will stay wet for days or weeks, depending upon the humidity and temperature.

Oils tend to create smooth gradients with greater ease than acrylics. This is true when creating a monochromatic transition as well as a colour to colour transition in a smooth and subtle way. Blending and re-blending oil paint is easier to do than it is in acrylic, partially due to drying time and partially due to the viscosity of the paint.

The drying time also influences other aspects of painting. Mixing acrylics is more difficult than mixing oils, simply because the acrylics are already beginning to dry. With oils you can mix colors for days on end, producing subtle color variations that you won't have time to make with acrylics.

You'll also need to clean your brushes quickly after finishing painting with acrylics—wait too long and the bristles will be full of dried paint. On the other hand, clean-up with plain old water is a snap compared to oil paints, where you'll need to use Turpentine or Mineral Spirits (both toxic) to clean your brushes and hands. In the classroom this is why we use water based oils!

Acrylic paints are also cheaper than oils, so for students or hobbyists, it's much easier on the pocketbook. They're also a bit more versatile than oils. You can dilute acrylic paint with water and use it in an entirely different way, almost like watercolors.

Oil paints can be used with a palette knife to create thick and heavy works that have a sculptural look to them. The high peaks and spread look to oil paint applied in this way is difficult to achieve in acrylic paint without the addition of a specialized media to your paint. Acrylics painted on very heavily without the addition of a media to the paint will peel whereas oils do not do this. There are many different media you can add to acrylics that you cannot find in oils such as gel media, crackling media, modelling paste, bead media and many, many more.

Often oil paintings will sell for than an acrylic painting but that's not always a sure thing. It often depends on what the painting is done on – canvas, board or paper that effects the cost as well. Works on paper sell for less as a rule. Acrylics can be done on heavy papers and both acrylic and oils work well on panel/board or canvas.