Painting

Painting, in some form, is believed to be the earliest form of art. Wall paintings discovered in caves in Spain, France, and Africa date as far back as 10,000 B.C. These early works were created by cave dwellers. Their materials included plant oils and animal blood for binding and natural earth pigment for color. Chewed soft branches were used like brushes and hollowed sticks were used to blow paint onto a surface.

In the years since, painting media have come a long way. In this lesson, you will learn about painting media and their many uses.

**How Paint Is Applied**

Painting is the process of covering a surface with color. You may recall finger painting as a young child. The fingers are just one tool used to apply paint to a surface. The most common tool among professional artists is
the brush. Brushes come in many different sizes, or brush heads. The finer the bristles and smaller the head, the finer the detail the brush is able to capture.

Other tools for applying paint include a palette knife and roller. Sometimes paint is made into a mist. It is then blown onto a surface by means of an airbrush. Some of these tools are shown in Figure 4–10. As you take on new and more challenging art projects, you will become familiar with many of these.

**Painting Media**

Before a painter begins a work, he or she chooses a type of paint and an appropriate surface on which to work. Paints are selected for different qualities they exhibit. These include drying time, appearance in finished works, and how well colors blend.

The surface is the material to which the paint is to be applied. Canvas, paper, or silk are three examples. The look of a finished painting has much to do with the combination of materials. A painting made by applying oil paint on canvas with a knife has a look very different from a painting made by dabbing watercolor on paper with a soft brush. To appreciate this, compare the paintings in Figures 4–11 and 4–12. The one in Figure 4–11 is a watercolor. The work has a slightly bright, transparent look to it. The white portions of the work are the paper’s color showing through. The painting in Figure 4–12 appears more opaque. Compare and contrast the use of color in Figures 4–11 and 4–12.
All paints used in art are made up of three basic ingredients:

- **Pigment** is a finely ground, colored powder that gives paint its color.
- **Binder** is a liquid to which the dry pigment is added. The binder makes it possible for the pigment to stick to a surface. Linseed oil is the binder for oil paints. Gum arabic (air-uh-bik) is the binder for watercolors.
- **Solvent** is a liquid that controls the thickness of the paint. Turpentine is the solvent in oil paints. Water is the solvent in watercolors. Solvents are also used to clean brushes.

**Painting Styles**

When painters finish works of art, they usually sign their names to them. In a way the signature of the artist is already there, in his or her individual style. *Style* is an artist’s personal way of expressing ideas in a work. Style is like a fingerprint. No two are exactly alike. Two artists may start off with exactly the same media. They will end up, however, with works that look totally different. Compare and contrast Figures 4–12 and 4–13. Both are oil paintings; one is done on canvas, the other on wood. Both were created in the late
1800s. The vibrant street scene in Figure 4–12 shows lively dabs of paint and bright colors. Figure 4–13, on the other hand, has a soft dreamy quality to it. What other differences between painting techniques of the two works can you detect?

**Check Your Understanding**

1. What are the three types of ingredients found in every type of paint?
2. What is pigment?
3. What is an artist’s style?

◆ **Figure 4–13** Ryder’s works are always full of mystery. The way he applies paint creates this foggy, fantasy effect.


**Interpreting Subjects**

**Experimenting with Pigments.** Pigments were originally made from natural sources such as earth, minerals, and vegetation. Make your own earth pigments by collecting different colors of dirt, clay, and sand. You can use them as you find them, or grind them for a finer texture. Create a binder by mixing one part white school glue with one part water. Using a paper plate, experiment mixing a little of the glue mixture with some of your pigment. Test the various colors. Once you have finished experimenting, paint a small picture interpreting a subject, such as a portrait or a still life, using the various colors you have made.