

Why Oil?

When I started out, I did a lot of research on mediums. There seemed to be a big debate about whether Oils or Acrylics were best. Here are the main differences:

Oil Paint (oil based):	Acrylics (water based):
More durable – hardens completely with time (durability adds value to your work)	Needs to be varnished or protected behind glass
Colours could be more intense (but it is debatable)	Colours might seem more toned down
Brushes must be cleaned with Turpentine (a strong smelling toxic substance)	Brushes are cleaned with water (no toxic fumes)
Paint is diluted with oil (usually linseed oil, which could spontaneously combust if handled improperly)	Paint is diluted with water (no risk of fire)
Pretty expensive if you do big paintings	Marginally less expensive, and there is also the option of using paint extenders
Dries slowly (easy to manipulate paint, but you have to wait for layers to dry)	Dries fast (you must also work very fast!)
Care has to be taken that the paint does not get on good clothes, furnishings, walls and floors.	Much less mess. Everything can be washed with soap and water.

I chose oil, and I love it.

Here are my reasons:

Durability

I like the durability of oil paintings – why put in all the effort if it isn't going to last several lifetimes? What if I got famous and my best paintings started to flake?

Protecting the paint

Framing is expensive and tedious, especially if you paint as a hobby and you cannot reclaim costs. Having to protect every single painting with glass was not an option for me. I wanted to paint a stretched canvass and be done with it.

Using varnish seemed a scary thought – I couldn't imagine smearing varnish over any painting, for fear of smudging and ruining it. There is a spray option for those who insist on using varnish, but I figured I'd probably end up with mine running down in ugly streaks or spurting huge drops by accident and ruining the painting anyway!

With oil I can just wait for it to dry.

Turpentine

I do not have a sensitive system so I don't mind a bit of turpentine up my nostrils. You quickly get used to the smell and might even start to rather like it. The fumes are strongest while you work with it (pour it; wash brushes), but then the intensity quickly decreases.

If you are very sensitive to smells, you should rather avoid it. When I started painting I had an unexplained headache for the first two weeks, and I strongly suspect that the Turps was the cause of it! It doesn't bother me anymore though.

Never rub turps on skin, especially broken skin! I once messed black paint on my tight fitting gym pants, at the top of my leg, near the bikini line, and immediately rubbed it off with turps, without taking off my pants. The paint came away from the material, and I thought everything was under control. After a while I felt a burning sensation on the spot where I cleaned my pants, and I realized that the turps was burning my skin (it could have been aggravated by the fact that I shave my legs). When I finally took off my pants, I noticed that I transferred the black paint to the skin on my leg, causing a dark "tattoo" mark that took several weeks to disappear!

Coping with the mess

Everything is of course a bit messier than water based products, but all that mess just makes me feel more inspired – it brings out my inner child!

So what if I have yellow paint under my finger nails (I often use my fingers to paint) or blotches of black, blue and orange paint on my clothes! I just make sure I never paint in my "best" clothes and I always have loads of plastic or cloth protection sheets around my painting area.

Accidents do happen though, but if you act fast you can usually save the day. If you absolutely hate grime and/or dirty hands/clothes you should stay away from oil paint (and gardening too, for that matter). You should probably then just stay away from art in general – a friend of mine used acrylics and I noticed that even acrylics cannot guarantee a 100% mess-free environment.

It's a good idea to have a special shirt or jacket to wear over your clothes, but it can get hot with so many layers of clothes, and remember that oil paint can easily pass right through some material! It's best to wear old clothes, even down to the shoes!

Linseed Oil

I was at first a bit worried when I heard about "spontaneous combustion" of linseed oil, but after extensive research (Google surfing) and weeks of worrying about it, I came to the conclusion that an artist does not use nearly enough oil to warrant such fears. I do however always ensure that the cloth I use never gets "soaked" in the oil. If it seems a bit wet, I hang it over a rail to air. Never leave an oil soaked cloth in a heap!

Read more about *Spontaneous Combustion* on www.tiamari.com