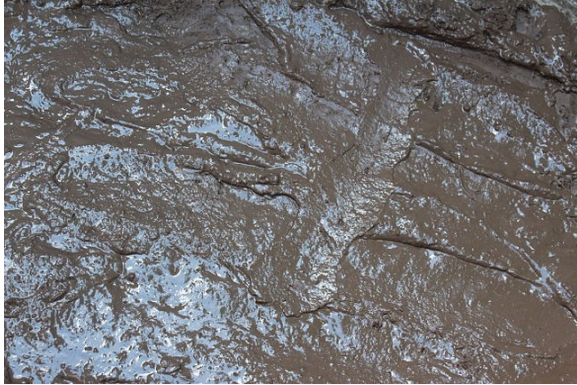




Utrecht Art Supplies In Defense of Mud



Every painter probably remembers being told, "Don't make mud". And, yet there's something irresistible about mixing every color on the palette together, just to see the result.

The real irony of warning painters not to make mud is that's where the history of paint begins. The earliest pigments- ochres and clays dug from the ground- were in the literal sense mud.

Why is mud so important in painting? We live on Planet Earth, surrounded by earth colors. Any artist wanting to evoke the natural world in painting needs to deal with the dull, the brown, the gray and the muddy. This is true for both representational and abstract art: bright colors look more brilliant when they're surrounded with neutrals.

Most traditional palettes are dominated by earth colors, but an Impressionist or Modernist palette includes mostly bright, chromatic hues. The way to fine-tune brightness and create neutrals is to mix complementary colors.

Mixing across the color wheel- in painting terms, the very definition of making mud- opens up a huge variety of earth colors. Mixing complements until the result is mud is a terrific way to reveal the full identity of each color, by

taking each one through the full range of intensity from bright to dull.



"The Lover's Boat" Albert Pinkham Ryder ca. 1881

After all, "mud" is just another word for any nondescript neutral. It could be a muted orange, green, violet, or any hue, really, depending on composition. Each muddy mixture is a color that can be identified in the spectrum. Discerning the primary or secondary identity of neutrals isn't easy at first- it's a skill that must be developed over time- but as sensitivity is honed, naming every neutral as a color of the spectrum becomes second nature. Of course, once you can name a color, you can mix it on the palette and paint with it.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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