



## Utrecht Art Supplies

### Can acrylic paint be made in-studio?



**Ask the Expert: "I've read a lot about artists making their own oil paint, but what about acrylics? Can I use acrylic mediums and dry pigments to make my own colors?"**

**A:** It's possible to make a basic homemade acrylic paint, but it can be difficult to make high quality acrylic colors in-studio. Acrylic formulas are more complicated than oils or temperas, and without special proprietary ingredients and laboratory formulation, homemade colors may not be as stable as factory-prepared paints. Because homemade acrylic paint can have a relatively short shelf life, we recommend using it up fairly soon after preparation.

Laboratory formulation is especially important with acrylics because performance and permanence can be affected by ingredient proportions, and it's not always apparent to the naked eye when something's wrong. Also, certain pigments like genuine Viridian aren't compatible with the dispersion base, so not every pigment will yield a usable acrylic paint.

Some of the special additives necessary to produce high quality acrylics are glycols, surfactants and antimicrobials. Glycols act as wetting agents for pigments and also remain in the dry film for a short time after water has

evaporated, allowing for gradual curing to a strong film. Without glycols, the drying rate of the paint might not be optimal, and stiff, heavy applications might split or crack.

A simple paint can be made using a glass muller and palette knife to disperse pigment in the medium. (Make sure to wear gloves and a particle filter mask when handling pigments.)



The best Utrecht-brand acrylic product for making acrylics in-studio is Acrylic Sizing. This product may appear to have a thin consistency, but it's a very strong polymer dispersion that will produce a tough, durable film. Gloss Medium can also be used. Artists making their own acrylics can use Retarder Gel as a source of propylene glycol, adding a small amount to the dispersion vehicle before introducing pigment.

When making acrylics, it's necessary to add dry powder gradually to the vehicle and make a paste before mulling to avoid dry clumps. (This is unlike the process of making oil paint, which involves gradually adding vehicle to dry pigment.) The pigment can be pre-moistened with a combination of distilled water and

Retarder Gel (this also cuts down on airborne dust).

Too much solid material added to the acrylic vehicle can lead to a crumbly, weak paint that lacks adhesive power. To be on the safe side, homemade acrylics can be left looser and more fluid than tube colors to avoid adding too much pigment. One simple test for film strength involves applying a sample of color to flexible mylar. Wait for the paint to dry, then flex the sample to reveal any splitting, cracking or peeling.

Manufactured acrylic paints also contain antimicrobials, additives which suppress mold growth and prevent spoilage. The ones used in manufacturing are specifically made for acrylic paints, but there are consumer-grade substitutes that might work. Household Lysol spray can be used to retard mold growth in containers. Spray an even coating on the paint surface before sealing jars. The active ingredient (orthophenyl phenol) is commonly used in latex house paint, so it should be safe to use in homemade acrylics.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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