

Art for Beginners: How to pick a creative medium.

Welcome back to the Joyous Misfit blog!

Today, something a little more technical and practical. We'll be going through some of the most common art mediums, breaking them down, taking a look at who they suit and why, and what kind of resources you'll need to get started.

How do I pick a medium?

It seems like a bit of a scary question - like you have to pick one and stick to it - but that's not the case at all. Like writers often drift between genres, artists can be as fluid as they like. Oftentimes, artists use a couple of different mediums or materials (this is called mixed media) to create textured pieces, or because different mediums do different jobs.

In this blog post, we'll be talking about acrylic, watercolour, oil and graphite pencils - but there are thousands of different mediums and techniques out there, and if there's one you're particularly interested in, comment it below and I'll either get back to you personally, or include it in a future blog post! <3

Acrylic

If the Wild Woman was a medium, it'd be acrylic. Loud and unapologetic, vibrant charms dangling from her ears, her hair, her fingers, she catches your eye effortlessly and holds the whole room's attention.

Acrylic is a medium I love to use. It's easy to paint with, easy to mix and glides across the canvas. Acrylic paint comes in a kaleidoscope of colours, which can be overwhelming if you don't know what you're looking for or what your palette will look like, but gives you such freedom of expression and creation - which, to us artists, is incredibly important. It can also come in different thickness levels, which is great to know if you're going to create a piece that requires a lot of layering or texture.

Acrylic pieces are often completed on a canvas, which you can find for just a few £ in places like [The Works](#) if you're practising, or you can find [high quality canvases](#) when you've built your confidence.

Acrylic is somewhat fast to dry on a base level - faster than oils, slower than watercolours - but, overall, you'll want to leave a canvas piece for a couple of weeks before selling or handling it.

Some artists use Acrylic as an undercoat for a painting they know will contain a lot of detail, and then use oil paints over the top for the detailing, blending and finer areas. Acrylic is also great for mixed media pieces - because it's so versatile, it can be used with different textures or materials, like this stunning piece I created using acrylic, golden spray paint and a satin varnish to give it that beautiful sheen:

[golden autumn image]

Golden Autumn

Who is it for?

Acrylic is forgiving - you can easily fix (or hide!) any 'mistakes' or parts you don't want to see with another layer, or easy manipulation of the paint. It's hugely varied, and can come in the most vibrant rainbow of colours if you're a colourful person like me. Don't be scared to get messy or experimental with acrylic, too - it can be washed out of most clothing, and can be scrubbed from surfaces with enough elbow grease! Get your hands in it, grab old sponges and pieces of cloth to create strokes brushes couldn't, get loud, get emotional, and let it all out onto the canvas.

If you're looking for a fun way to channel your emotions that doesn't cost an arm and a leg for materials, or a way to create brilliantly beautiful pieces that are only limited by your imagination, then acrylic is for you!

Watercolour

If watercolour was a person, she'd be the barefoot goddess that lives in the cottage at the edge of the village - herbs and spices hanging like streamers from her rafters, sage and incense burning, and soft, flowy dresses dancing in the breeze - an independent free-thinker, hard to pin down and control.

It's beautiful, is what I'm trying to say.

Watercolour can, however, be quite finicky. Watercolour art is beautiful and delicate, but that means it requires a steady hand. It's more difficult to control than some other mediums - you have to use specialised watercolour paper, and it dries quickly if you don't keep the paper wet, meaning you don't have much time to make changes. Don't let this discourage you, though - if watercolours are calling you, never be afraid to pick up a paintbrush and try, because it can give you the best feeling of satisfaction when you finish a piece. If you just need encouragement and guidance, I offer tailored-to-you 121 sessions that'll leave you confident and excited to start your first proper piece.

With watercolour, you can control the thickness of the paint - the more watered down it is, the more translucent and almost ethereal it'll be. The less watered down, the stronger and brighter the colours are.

Watercolour can be used for realism very effectively if your palette is harmonious, but can also create some stunning abstract pieces. Use water soluble graphite pencils for outlines or shapes, as they'll dissolve with the water. If you don't have those, use 9H to 5H graphite pencils for your sketched outlines, because they're fine and leave very light marks that watercolour can easily hide. If your pencil is any darker, you risk your outline being visible.

It's especially good for glass or reflection pieces, or aquatic pieces - it can easily replicate the movement and the texture of water and how things move and swim, like this deceptively easy piece I often walk through with my students on my popular aquatic watercolour class:

[jellyfish painting image]

Who is it for?

Known to be incredibly calming and rejuvenating, watercolour is where you should go if you need to make your mind quiet. It's great for relieving anxiety and stress, helps you settle a busy mind and breathe.

You don't have to be some world-famous artist to paint watercolour, (or paint *anything*, for that matter - art is for everyone, so have a go!) so don't let it scare you off. Plus, once mastered, your brain will be positively blossoming with creative ideas.

Oil

You know her - she's the lady always dressed to the nines, all diamond earrings and pearls and satin. Her voice is smooth and velvety like the kind of chocolate that bursts with flavour in your mouth.

That's right - she's oil.

Oil looks glamorous and expensive... and that's because it is. While some oil paints will be less expensive than others, it's generally agreed that oil paints cost quite a bit, which is why oil paintings can often be valued very highly. Some of the most famous artists often painted with oils, including Van Gogh and Da Vinci.

Oils are slow to dry and very delicate - the oils can crack or be marked even when they're completely dry, and often need to be handled with great care. Oils are often used alongside

other materials to help with preservation - these materials are, confusingly, *also* called mediums. However, because they're slow to dry, they allow for finer manipulation of the paint, or time to add colours, materials or layers, making the painting feel 'fuller'.

High quality oil paints often refract the light, or even change as the light changes, adding new dimensions every time you look at it, giving the piece a warm glow.

A hard medium to master, oils do take time, resilience and patience - but once you've got the hang of it, the payout can be astounding. Oils can capture movement and atmosphere and, I find, almost capture sound. I'm often enamored with oils paintings - a carnival, and I can hear children laughing and merry-go-rounds singing. A ship, and I can hear the deck creaking, the lamp swinging in the nighttime breeze, quietly thunking against the wood.

Art is like a gateway to whole worlds and universes. Next time you're looking at an oil painting, listen really closely - and you just might hear it.

(Now - I don't actually have an oil painting up on my store yet - so take a look at this beautiful acrylic piece instead.)

[oil painting image]

Who is it for?

Anyone. Everyone.

If you've got worlds and ideas and spirituality buzzing at your fingertips, pick up the oils and listen to your soul.

Oil is fantastic for both imagined pieces and landscapes, or pieces that have people, architecture and nature in for its impressive ability to capture movement.

Graphite Pencils

The quiet artsy type, bundled up in wool and crocheted scarfs in the corner of the local artisan coffee shop, always observing patterns, movements, behaviour - perfectly capturing the change in emotion from one second to the next - she's graphite.

Graphite pencils are BRILLIANT, and yes, I *will* shout about it! You can do so much with graphite, whether it acts as art on its own or as your foundation for another medium.

While you're only limited to two colours, (unless you use colour pencils, of course) you have the entire shade range between dark and light that can be used and manipulated to draw *anything*.

Graphite pencils are also perhaps one of the cheapest mediums to begin with. They don't break the bank like some paints might - even the expensive, professional sets - because they generally last longer. You can also buy cheaper sets when you start out and you're practising, getting into the flow, learning which medium works for you. It's also a great starting point to get a feel for shapes, contours, contrasts, shadow work, features, intricacies... all things artists need to have a keen eye for. (That sounds scarier and harder than it is - but once you've got it, it's like riding a bike!)

Graphite is also a popular choice for portraits, because it allows you to capture 'exactness' - as in, *exactly* what you're looking at.

What I find trips many people up when they're starting out with graphite is,

"Which pencils should I be using? There's a whole alphabet here!"

So, here they are, briefly explained and easily digestible:

[image of different drawing pencils]

H = Hard. B = Black/Blackness.

H pencils are harder and more brittle. They are great for fine, light lines, or very fine, delicate details. Because of their brittleness, they'll shatter inside the pencil if you drop them and be next to useless, so go careful when handling these.

B pencils are softer and more pliable. They have a higher concentration of graphite, and therefore create softer, darker marks. These pencils are harder to get a fine point on (you'll be sharpening them for approximately a century if you try) because the soft graphite will crumble, so they're not often used for light or very fine detailing. More for darker or thicker lines, shadow, or creating atmosphere.

[image created on canva explaining how pencils run?]

Most pencil sets run from 2H to 6B, however you can buy pencils up to 9B for the darkest, softest marks.

In your set, you might also find an 'F' - Fine, and an 'EE' - 50/50 graphite and filler, which creates soft, dark marks with a less shiny, more matte finish than other pencils.

[eye drawing]

Who is it for?

If you know you want to try your hand at being a bit arty but you're worried about money/lack of space/your own abilities, graphite pencils are a great choice. They don't take up much space at all, you don't need special canvases to draw, and you can practise to your heart's content before your pencils start to look like they're running out.

I will reiterate this point, though - something I'm very vocal about on my [page](#), [creatrix group](#) and the blog:

You do not have to be "good" at something to try it!!

Firstly, because "good" is subjective. Not everyone likes the same things, so there's never any "good" art and "bad" art.

Secondly, because no one starts out at something and instantly masters it. Like anything, art takes patience and practice.

So, what are you waiting for? Give it a go! Click the links throughout the blogs to purchase your supplies from [Bristol Fine Art](#), a company I personally get my supplies from, and can vouch for and trust, and click on the pictures of my art to get some more information.

Which other mediums would you like me to cover? Or, is there something you'd love to read on the Joyous Misfit blog? Just comment down below, and share this with your friends on Facebook and Instagram so more people can break into the incredible world of art and realise their own potential.

I can't wait to hear from you!

Talk soon,

Emma x

P.S: Have you heard of our [1:1 tutoring](#) and [art classes](#), both online and in-workshop? ;)