

“GLOSSARY OF ACRYLIC ABSTRACT TECHNIQUES”

(some of these are interesting when doing loose representational as well)

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This is not an exhaustive list of techniques, but it is a good place to start. I like to keep it nearby when painting, so that if I get to a point where I'm not sure what I want to do next, I can look through it for ideas. It is broken down into visual and textural effects and each section is alphabetical. The idea is to inspire you lots of options, but not to overwhelm you! If you are relatively new to painting, just experiment with the ideas that spark your curiosity. And as always, feel free to reach out and ask any questions. Alright... here we go!!

VISUAL EFFECTS:

1. Brayer effects. Using a 'brayer' (a tool normally used in printing), you can get a 'distressed' look when applying paint. It is a rubber roller; it doesn't hold paint like a paint roller, so when it is used to apply paint on top of your work, it applies in a visually interesting 'spotty' or random way.
2. Colour Blocking. This is a good way to create a subtle, beautiful background. Choose some harmonious colours, then apply them in blocks or sections (I prefer 3 or 5 colour blocks). Then using a mop brush, blend them together where they meet.
3. Dripping. There is not a technique I use more than this one. You can use a spray bottle and spray water generously in areas where you would like drips. Drips create really interesting lines or 'paths'. This will only work with paint that is still wet. If you wait a few minutes after spraying, then dab the drips with a paper towel, it removes all the paint which creates a nice effect as well.
4. Mark-Making. Incorporating permanent markers, charcoal, pens, pencils, chalk pastels or any other 'mark-making' tool you like. I enjoy this technique as an underpainting, but you can try it whenever you like! There are a few products that will not work with acrylic paint—for example, *oil pastels/water-based markers*—but if you're not sure, just give it a try, or ask me! (Note that if you use charcoal, pencils or chalk pastels, you will have to 'seal' those with a spray 'fixative' before painting on top of it... or if

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it's the final layer of your piece, you can keep it from rubbing off by using a spray varnish.)

5. **Paint Flicking.** This is fun! Overload a larger brush with paint and 'flick' to get interesting splatters on the canvas. You can also do this with your hands. This does require the paint have a thinner viscosity (a little more watery); not too much though, as that would look more like the 'Dripping' technique above.
6. **Painting Tape.** Using a good quality painting tape, you can block off areas or lines on your canvas either before you apply any paint, or between paint layers as long as your under-layer is dry. This helps achieve some dramatic straight edges.
7. **Paper Towel or Plastic Dabbing.** Using a paper towel or plastic wrap (even the plastic your canvases come in when you buy them), dab off some paint. This creates a nice visual texture, and reveals bits of the raw canvas underneath (or the paint underneath) in a visually interesting way.
8. **Plastic Wrap (Saran Wrap).** I like to put paint randomly on my canvas quickly, then while it's still wet, cover it in plastic wrap. Smoosh and manipulate the plastic wrap in fun patterns (without ripping it), wait a few minutes, then gently peel it off. An interesting way to create subtle blends of the colours while at the same time, creating interesting patterns.
9. **Sponge Painting.** Using sea sponges, cellulose sponges, or really any sponge, can create a nice textured look on your painting. They can be used either to apply paint, or to pull paint back off depending on your desire.
10. **Spray Paint.** It is a bit difficult to find spray paint that works well with acrylic but is not toxic to breathe. If you want to use regular run-of-the-mill spray paint, it is best to do that outside. OR you can get water-based, artist grade spray paints that are far less toxic and can be used in studio. I enjoy using these with stencils to quickly add visual interest and dramatic flair to a piece.
11. **Squeeze Bottles.** Putting paint in a squeeze bottle creates some interesting possibilities in a painting. Make sure the paint has a bit runnier viscosity by adding water to it if necessary. You can 'draw', 'write' or even 'scribble'

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with the squeeze bottle for fun visual effects. You will get more precise lines than you would if you just tried to paint a line with a brush, and you can use it even if your paint underneath is still wet and it will just sit on top rather than mixing.

12. Stamps. You can use rubber stamps (the kind used in scrapbooking) to create some visual interest in a piece. If you use ink, it has to be archival (i.e. won't rub off or 'move'). If you use paint, less is more; and make sure to clean the stamp off right away or the paint will ruin it.
13. Stencils. I noted above that I use spray paint with stencils. You can also use a brush that is less loaded with paint (like dry-brushing), and scuffle on top of the stencil for a more subtle look. If you use a loaded paint brush, more paint will go under the stencil, but that is not always a concern as it depends on the look you are going for. I usually don't use stencils to add an element or picture literally; but rather to create visual texture that looks less random than something like dripping or dabbing.
14. Toothbrush Spraying. Using a wetter paint, load an old toothbrush and pull back the bristles to spritz paint on your painting. This is a technique I often use in the final stages of a painting. Or if doing realism, it makes wonderful snow!
15. Wet on Wet. Lay down a layer of colour that is a bit more fluid using a large brush or pour from a cup and spread with a putty knife. (To get wetter paint, you can add pouring medium, or merely water it down just a touch.) Now using more wet paint or even better, some acrylic inks, dribble or drip into the base colour. You can manipulate the flow of paint with any tool... try different ways.
16. Collaging. This can be tricky. If you remember back in school when you cut things out of magazines and glued them, they would always wrinkle! So make sure that you use gel medium instead of glue, and that you use images printed on thicker paper. I have been known to coat the cut-out with gel medium, let it dry, press it, then collage... but that's a lot of work!

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TEXTURE EFFECTS:

1. **Embedding Found Objects.** Pretty much anything you can think of that isn't too heavy can be adhered to your canvas either as part of the texture underpainting (to be painted over later), or as a final touch as is. Gel medium is your best bet for adhering it well; let it thoroughly dry before continuing with or hanging your painting. Some examples: beads, gems, bobbles, jewelry pieces, sand, string, ribbon, drawer handles, photos...
2. **Glue Gun/Squeeze Bottles.** A glue gun is an interesting way to get raised, squiggly lines in your under-painting. After letting it heat up, hold a glue gun over the area on your canvas you want the texture, and just pull the trigger and let the stream of hot glue dribble randomly onto the canvas. It dries quickly, then you can paint over it. A similar effect can be achieved using squeeze bottle filled with thicker paint—the only trick is that sometimes the lid/nozzle is prone to clogging.
3. **Mediums.** Because this is such a huge category, this handout won't go into great detail on all the options that mediums can create for you. The main thing you need to know is that medium is basically paint without pigment... some are opaque (they dry white) and some are transparent (they dry clear). They vary in viscosity (how thick or runny they are) from 'modelling paste' which is very stiff all the way to 'airbrush medium' which is like water. There are some that come with things embedded in them already such as 'glass bead gel', but you can also add things into them yourself. The use of these mediums obviously vary depending on which one you are using. In the course, we will explore this in more detail.
4. **Palette knives.** Palette knives of any kind can create texture in two ways when using heavy body paint from a tube. A) '*positive paletting*'... You can set paint onto the canvas by loading paint on the underside of the knife and using gentle pressure to 'set it on' the canvas. Practice various angles and amounts of paint and pressure for different looks. You get subtle raised texture. B) '*negative paletting*'... The second way to use a palette knife is to scrape paint off your canvas. This requires there to be a heavy application of paint already on the canvas; then, using the knife with heavy pressure,

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you can scrape interesting designs out of the paint. This creates areas of low texture within areas of higher texture.

5. Tissue Paper. A simple and economical but effective way to get interesting texture effect. Just crinkle up the tissue paper, set in onto a canvas covered with either glue, paint or gel medium. Then using a large brush, brush the same glue or paint on top, making sure to get out any air bubbles. An alternate way is to just wet your canvas, put tissue paper on, spray it with more water, remove air bubble with a brush or a roller, then apply liquid paint and watch it move in organic and fun ways!
6. Unconventional Tools. This is somewhat of a special niche of mine... finding strange things to manipulate paints and mediums and create unique textured effects in my paintings. This is limited only by your imagination, but here are some examples of things I have found in the hardware store, grocery store, drug store or dollar store... drywall putty knife, hair colour tools, comb, potato masher, silicone cake icing 'stamps', pastry tools, credit card....