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## Archival Basic Users Guide

### *Using Archival Odourless Mediums for fast or slow drying techniques*

Most people today, whether professional, amateur or students, want to be able to move on as quickly as possible, and want an oil paint which is designed to dry quickly without technical problems showing up later.

This may sound easy but it isn't. Oil paints need oxygen to dry, and when paint is applied thickly or in multiple layers without allowing the under layers to dry thoroughly first, it can take a long time for oxygen to penetrate the painting and dry thicker applications of paint.

While this settling down process is taking place, there is considerable movement, and tensions build up within the painting, which can lead to cracking years later.

#### **The two most important classical rules for using traditional oil paint aim to prevent this cracking:**

1. Leave all underpainting to cure for **six months** before overpainting.
2. **Use the Fat over Lean rule:** Add more oil to each layer through the use of mediums in the hope that the top layer will have some elasticity if the under layers do move.

These two important rules, which evolved over a long tradition of oil painting are largely ignored today, creating the need for a modern paint which will perform in today's world.

## ARCHIVAL HAS TWO PROPERTIES WHICH OVERCOME THE PROBLEMS OF SLOW DRYING AND CRACKING

### 1. FLEXIBILITY

**Flexibility**, is built into the paint itself and all the Archival Oils mediums. When Archival Oils and mediums are combined you have a system for painting freely **without problems later on**.

#### **Give A Little, Take A Little. The Critical Factor Is Flexibility.**

In a traditional oil painting with multiple or thick layers, **tension** builds up as the painting cures, and each layer becomes stiff and brittle. These tensions are alleviated in an Archival Oils painting because the layers are flexible and can stretch and move with each other.

Archival Oils were first released in 1990. Visit the gallery site at [www.chromaonline.com/chroma/gallery](http://www.chromaonline.com/chroma/gallery) and look at Elizabeth Cummings, Euan McLeod and John Walker, who pioneered the use of Archival Oils.

If 15 year's experience of oil painting success (technically) is not enough proof for you, consider artists' acrylics, which first appeared in the mid 1960's. Flexibility, layer upon layer, is what has made acrylic painting "*rule free*" and allows artists to indulge in almost any combination of techniques. Acrylics are predicted to remain elastic for centuries and Archival Oils are designed to do likewise.

Brittleness develops quite rapidly when a traditional oil painting dries. It is actually more important for oils to remain flexible than for acrylics because of the movement that takes place as the oil paint absorbs oxygen and dries. Acrylics only have to tolerate movements in the substrate, which can also be considerable when canvas is used to paint on.

### A Technical Note

“Pure” acrylic (Perspex or Plexiglas) is quite stiff and brittle and artists’ acrylics are modified with soft chemicals called **plasticisers** to make them pliable.

- Linseed oil is flexible when newly dry, but becomes stiff and brittle as it cures and ages.
- Archival Oils use plasticiser modification to achieve ongoing pliability. There are more than 500 plasticisers available – the trick is to find one which is compatible in oil paints.

## 2. SMOOTH GEL

Although Archival is flexible, thick impasto must be stabilised quickly, and needs to set firmly as it gradually absorbs oxygen to dry through. When Archival Oils Smooth Gel or Texture Gel are added (1:1 to your paint), a sharp, thick, easily manipulated impasto is formed which sets up firmly and can be overpainted without problems after a skin has formed. Smooth Gel, while it is absolutely essential for “excessive” impasto, is also useful for more normal brush application, where it retains brush texture but dries as quickly as one day later.

Proportions can be about 1 part medium : 2 parts paint.

Note: On the palette, Smooth Gel can be premixed with paint for a 3 hour session, but when a palette is set out to be used over several days – keep the medium **separate** and mix as you apply paint, so that the painting dries quickly, and the palette set up remains useable.

## FAST MEDIUMS

- **Smooth Gel and Texture Gel** have already been mentioned because they are needed to stabilise thick impasto, but there are several other fast drying mediums, all of which are flexible, which together with the flexibility of the paint itself, allows trouble free paint application.
- **Flow Gel** is a new medium. It is not as thick as the paint itself, or Smooth Gel. Half way between Smooth Gel and Lean Medium in viscosity, it is used for mid viscosity painting either smooth or brushy and gestural, it moves very easily under the brush, but sits in place when it is not being brushed, and will not dribble or run, so it can be placed on the palette.
- **Lean Medium** is the standard fast drying liquid medium, used to reduce paint viscosity. It remains workable all day, but is usually dry the following day.
- **Fat Medium** is a higher solids alkyd medium which delivers more gloss, and a more enamel like surface finish. It can be added to Lean Medium to give intermediate levels of gloss because Lean Medium has a low sheen finish.

**Important Practical Note:** All the alkyd based liquid mediums are designed to dry quickly and the caps on their containers should be kept on. Decant what you need and replace the cap immediately. If you buy larger containers for economy reasons the contents should be decanted into small ones. If there is a large air gap in a container the contents will start to thicken and eventually become unusable.

Alkyd based mediums, ie all Archival Oils mediums except Classic Medium which is based on stand oil, are more resistant to yellowing than oil based ones, but nevertheless they should not be used as varnishes.

**NOTE:**

1. All of these fast mediums can be mixed with each other or the paint in any desired proportions.
2. Fast Drying White can also be used to speed the drying process. Standard Titanium dries in about 5 days. Fast White dries in about 2 days, as Flake White used to do.

**SLOW DRYING TECHNIQUES**

Choose standard Titanium White and use Classic Medium to reduce paint viscosity. There are still some artists who prefer to work wet-in-wet from one day to the next and Classic Medium takes about 5 days to dry.

Muddiness is obviously the danger with this approach, and is avoided by scraping off wet paint before alterations are made as the painting develops.

**HEALTH AND SAFETY**

All Archival Oils mediums are made with odourless Isopar solvents and have been since 1990, well before most people became aware of the serious health problems associated with oil painting. These health problems are not caused by using oil paint itself, but by the solvents used in traditional mediums and to clean up.

**Through the use of odourless mediums only very small numbers of people, with serious immune system problems are prevented from using oil paints.**

For more information on health and safety please read [Health & Safety - Info Sheet 301](#)

**SUMMARY**

- If you are using traditional oil paints in the “slow” manner, with slow drying mediums, and scraping off what you don’t like as you go, or if you are painting “alla prima”, and completing your painting in one sitting, with only one layer of paint in both cases, you are not breaking the rules and should not have problems later on.
- If you want to work freely and overpaint as you go along, and even use glazes on top of impasto if you feel like it, you should seriously consider that you are flouting the Classical Rules for oil painting, and that the only oil paint designed to let you do it is Archival.

We hope that you will like using it when you do try it.

**FURTHER READING**

Archival Oils website: [www.archivaloils.com](http://www.archivaloils.com)

[Archival Oils Colour Chart](#)

[Archival Guide to Oils Medium Guide Leaflet](#)

Chroma Artist’s Pocket Guide Book