

The Brilliance and Opacity of Gouache

Gouache is a centuries old painting medium often described as opaque watercolor.

Well known to illustrators, animators and designers, it is also popular among other artists who appreciate its unique qualities. Opacity, a matte-finish and a quick drying time are some of the hallmarks of this aqueous paint.

Gouache and transparent watercolor are made with similar ingredients—finely ground pigment and gum arabic are traditionally used in the manufacture of both mediums. Gouache also contains an inert pigment, such as blance fixe or precipitated chalk, which gives the paint its characteristic opacity and increases its brightness. This addition results in a paint that has outstanding covering power and a thicker paint film than transparent watercolor.

Although gouache is water-soluble, its working properties are quite different from transparent watercolor. The slightly heavier body of gouache lends itself to uniform color fields

and precise linework. Transparent watercolor makes use of the white of the paper for tonal variations. The opaque nature of gouache makes it less suitable for washes; instead, create a range of tones by tinting with white.

As it dries, gouache creates a paint film instead of absorbing into the page; for this reason a toothy yet smooth surface such as illustration board is the preferred substrate. Panels primed with acrylic gesso or DANIEL SMITH Watercolor Ground also make an ideal foundation. Use soft natural or synthetic brushes for a smooth, flat finish. To create a paint film that does not lift when re-wet, mix your gouache with GOLDEN Super-Loaded Matte Medium (page 75). This acrylic medium will retain the velvet finish of gouache while creating a paint film that is not water-soluble when dry.

Works painted with gouache should be framed behind glass or coated with a spray varnish to protect the surface of the paint film. Varnishes may change the look of the paint, making the color appear more saturated and giving the surface sheen.



■ Ultramarine Blue Gouache and Ultramarine Blue Watercolor

This comparison shows the even, opaque field of color characteristic of gouache as opposed to a wash of transparent watercolor.



■ Permanent Green Deep Gouache tinted with Permanent White Gouache

Transparent watercolor relies on the white of the paper to create tonal changes. With gouache, make mixtures with white paint to create a range of tonal values.



■ Yellow Ochre Gouache with Varnish

GOLDEN Archival Varnish (Gloss) was sprayed over the right side of this circle resulting in saturated color, a glossy finish and a protective layer over the gouache.



“Secret Bridge”, Ralph Parker, Gouache, 16" x 20"

Ralph Parker, a Texas-based artist, explains why he chooses gouache as his medium:

“I paint exclusively with gouache. The use of this ancient, opaque watercolor medium seems fitting for my landscape subjects, and the brilliance of its color allows me to come ever closer to that special light that all painters strive to portray. Combining just the right consistency of paint with the right brushstroke is a part of the process I love. It allows me to explore a sense of realism at times, and at others, a looser impressionism. Finding those balances are part of what makes painting a lifetime learning experience... an experience I relish each and every day.”

■ See more of Ralph’s work at www.ralphparkerart.wordpress.com