

Paints

When I began painting I used Windsor and Newton Designer Gouache. But became increasingly disenchanted with the pasty effect I got when the paint was dry. So I switched to Schmincke. I liked the clarity of pigment, but never found a good violet red their Carmine while a violet red carried a strong bias toward yellow. Their Ultramarine Blue was extremely granulating making painting delicate, translucent, violet flower petals very challenging.

I tested 15 different manufacturers of violet red, all using the same pigment PV 19. None were the same and none were quite the color I was looking for, a true pure violet red with no visible bias toward yellow. The closest was a watercolor.

Then I searched for a pure violet blue that dried with little or no granulation, but stopped after trying 10, this obsession was getting expensive! Some Ultramarine Blues were a little biased toward green, but there was only a very slight difference, and almost no difference in granulation. Granulation being the nature of this particular pigment one specifically desired by many artists.

And of course there was the most opinionated of all colors Helio Blue, a wonderful blue with a green bias, but it will test anyone with a heavy hand! It will overpower any other pigment in your palette. I did not do any research on this pigment; I just learned to treat it with great respect, inevitably I lose control of the balance of water to pigment once in a while but the resulting colors I get when using it make the effort worth while.

But things have changed. I know, I can just hear all those of you who have purchased the paints on my materials list groaning – ‘not more paints’. But this is worth a change, or at least a try.

The makers of M. GRAHAM & CO. paints recently contacted me. I admit to being fairly ambivalent about a new paint, I am used to the selection I had been using and how much better can another manufacturer be.....?

But they said they would send me some samples – of course I am a sucker for free stuff. I sent my list of Schmincke colors and these were matched to perfection by M. Graham & Co. When they arrived, 6 tubes of gouache and 6 tubes of watercolor, they got as far as the studio, but then just sat unused – until this week.

Working with these paints is like painting with smooth, clear, pure and consistently reliable silk.

AND the violet red is quite true, the Ultramarine blue's granulation is controllable in thin glazes, and the Phthalo blue seems almost controllable, how much better does it get? Is it because I am used to working with the opinionated Helio blue? Or know how to control the granulation of Ultramarine? No it is the quality of pigments and binders M. Graham & Co use.

I will be testing these pigments in a class shortly with students who have not painted before and I will see if my thoughts hold up.

I was going to write a description of these pigments but it has already been done so eloquently by the M. Graham company themselves.

Watercolor: ‘Formulations taken from a time when artists’ relied on natural materials; we created a watercolor with exceptional amounts of pigment in an old-fashioned binding

medium of pure gum Arabic and natural blackberry honey. The result is watercolor of extraordinary strength that is easily diluted for smooth, controlled washes and deeper 'darks'. Alive with strength and intensity, watercolor made with honey absorbs moisture from the air preventing hardening on the palette or in the tube.'

Gouache: 'Crafted with the same lightfastness pigments found in all of our colors and pure blackberry honey, this fine art gouache was created for the artist seeking both permanence and ease of use. Free from chalk and opacifying adulterants (leaving that choice to the artist), each color is entirely dependent upon the nature of the pigment for its color opacity. A reflective matte finish provides a vehicle to be used alone or mixed media combination with watercolor to create permanent works of art.'

Acrylic: 'At the heart of our acrylic color lies a unique high-solids pure acrylic emulsion. Containing 60% solids (instead of the usual 45% found in artists color), this emulsion has enabled us to eliminate dependency upon the artificial thickeners used in artists color. The result, increased pigment loadings for stronger, more intense color and enhanced working properties with the flow and delicacy normally found only in gouache. Our color may be thinned with gloss Medium and Varnish or Matte Medium to the exact fluidity and sheen preferred.'

As I write this I have not tested the Acrylics, they should arrive in a day or two I am thrilled to be able to use the exact same palette in all three mediums. When buying from multiple manufacturers that is not possible. There are times, when creating a very deep complex color – the complex color of a dark purple grape for instance – I use under glazes of acrylics with gouache on top. The glazes of acrylics dry faster, do not lift once dry, each glaze maintaining it's individual personality to perfection. If these glazes are thin, watercolor or gouache can be used very successfully on top for more defined detail. I will keep you posted as to the results of my testing.

The following are the M. Graham & Co pigments I am using (gouache, watercolor and acrylic)

Cadmium Yellow – yellow with a red bias.

Azo Yellow – yellow with a blue bias.

Cadmium Red – red with a yellow bias.

Quinacridone Rose – red with a blue bias.

Phthalocyanine Blue – blue with a yellow bias.

Ultramarine Blue – blue with a red bias.

I have checked these pigments in Michael Wilcox's Guide to the best Watercolor Paints, they all had excellent ratings.

For more information about how these paints are made or to contact M. Graham & CO: www.mgraham.com

I order M. Graham & Co watercolor and gouache paints from: The Italian Art Store, they were very pleasant and helpful on the phone 800643 6440.

I order the acrylic paints from: Merri Artist: www.merriartist.com