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Tips on Using Paintmakers' Watercolor Paint

Dispersion

You may notice our paints do not flow in water as easily as some others. The reasons are that some pigments just do not flow well, that our paints are made without dispersants (such as ox gall), they don't contain dextrin, and the pigments are hand-ground on a slab. Try using ox gall with our paints if you want to see them flow more! Bruce MacEvoy's writes¹

Most common is a **dispersant** or *wetting agent* that accelerates and improves the milling (wetting and mixing) of the pigment in the water-based vehicle, much the same way as dishwashing soap divides and dissolves greasy dirt...they are more common in finely divided or water repelling synthetic pigments such as carbon black, phthalocyanines, alizarin crimson, transparent iron oxides and prussian blue.... **Ox gall** (the yellowish extract of dried bovine gall bladders) was and still is commonly used for this purpose, but synthetic surfactants are sometimes used instead.

The painter notices the presence of wetting agents in the paint because they reduce the time it takes the paint to dissolve, cause the paint to stain papers (especially absorbent papers) more readily, and make the paint **diffuse aggressively** or shoot outward when applied wet in wet.

Other paint makers use mills to grind and mix their paints, and they can achieve very finer particle sizes than hand-grinding can achieve. The trade-off is they also get a more uniform particle size, and some painters appreciate the effects of larger and uneven particle sizes.

Granulation

If you are looking for granulation, not all paints do it. The Daniel Smith website explains²

Granulation of a watercolor paint occurs only with specific pigments. With few exceptions, these paints contain one or more inorganic pigments containing metal. The granulation effect increases with the addition of deionized or distilled water. The pigment(s) drop out of the binder/water solution and settle into the valleys of your watercolor paper. The heavier (denser) pigments usually create granulation, such as Lunar Black and Cobalt Blue.

Only a few organic pigments granulate because their density is not much different than the binder/water solution.

We've noticed beautiful granulation with our carbon black pigments, and we believe the uneven particle sizes from hand-grinding sometimes creates similar textures.

¹ <https://www.handprint.com/HP/WCL/pigmt1.html>

² <https://danielsmith.com/product-updates/primetek-watercolor/what-causes-granulation-in-watercolors>

Ox Gall

Many paint makers use ox gall or a similar dispersant. This is the stuff that makes your colors explode and spread in water. It can be worth trying if you like paints that really move on the page. We might try it someday in our paints, but we would have to get the ox gall from the slaughterhouse and process it ourselves. Yuck.

Cracking Paint in the Pans?

Paints made without a plasticizer, such as glycerine, are prone to cracking in the pan when they dry. While it doesn't look very nice, this is not a problem, and many commercial paints without glycerin also crack, not just ours. Glycerin seems to stop the cracking, but each pigment acts differently.

Questions

We love to talk about paint and pigment, so write to us any time with your questions and comments at paintmakersoflira@gmail.com, or on Instagram @paintmakersoflira.