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Gouache, an opaque water-soluble paint with gum arabic or acrylic as its binder, is one of the best-kept secrets in painting. Want flat, opaque areas of color? You'll need only one coat with gouache. Want strong tones? Gouache has a high pigment load, ensuring saturated color. Gouache is perfect for illustration and design work because it dries quite quickly and great for digital scanning because it is nonreflective. It's excellent for plein air painting too, since it's both portable and easy to clean up. Traditional gouache paints may be reactivated with water after they dry, but note that those made with acrylic binders cannot. All gouache paints work best on premium watercolor papers; because they are opaque, they work well on colored papers. Browse our roundup of the best gouache paints to find the one that fits you best.

Related Articles

ARTNEWS RECOMMENDS

M. Graham Artists' Gouache

Developed for artists who are keen on customizing their own palettes and mixing their own colors, M. Graham's gouache comes out on top. This line offers mostly pure, single-pigment colors (versus hues) made with a small amount of gum arabic as the binder, so they showcase an intense and impressive pigment load. The prime ingredient, however, is honey, which makes the paint moist and free-flowing. The sweet stuff also prevents cracking during the drying process and enables artists to rewet paints more easily than gouache without honey. This paint lays down smoothly, blends with ease, and can be thinned out to achieve light, translucent washes.

WE ALSO LIKE

Winsor & Newton Designers Gouache

This gouache, as its name indicates, caters less to fine artists and more to illustrators and commercial artists who seek solid swatches of vibrant color, but that's not to say fine artists won't enjoy using them. The difference between these paints and artist-focused lines is in the pigments: The majority of the 80-plus colors are produced—to excellent color accuracy—using premixed pigments; there's less of an emphasis on the individual characteristics of raw ingredients. Used out of the tube, these colors are super-opaque and creamy, and they dry to a flat matte finish, making it easy to achieve consistent, bold coverage.

EDUCATORS' CHOICE

Utrecht Designers Gouache and Sets

This line is geared toward students or hobbyists in terms of both working characteristics and price. There are just 24 colors to choose from, and many are blended hues, but in their formulation Utrecht has attempted to bring out the characteristics of single-pigment colors. In addition to gum arabic, pigments are mixed with wetting agents, plasticizers, and antimicrobials, which help achieve lower cost while

maintaining performance. These water-soluble paints showcase more variation in opacity, which makes them a particularly good paint for those learning color mixing.

ALSO A GOOD CHOICE

Holbein Artists' Gouache

From Japan comes this fantastic line of gouaches to satisfy professionals. Made without talc, calcium carbonate, titanium dioxide, and other common additives to gouache, these paints are very vivid, move without streaking, and don't dry to a chalky finish. The formula does include a lubricant to increase flow, so it's smooth to use right out of the tube, and little dollops go a long way. This paint is also easily thinned with water and will not lose its opacity when less viscous. Our only gripe is that it doesn't reconstitute as easily as M. Graham's gouache.

TOP OF THE LINE

Schmincke Horadam Artist Gouache

The absolute best in our books, the Horadam line from this enduring German company outshines all others in terms of coverage, color, and performance. These are pricey paints, but you're paying for carefully sourced and finely ground pigments with outstanding lightfastness. All but 8 of the 48 colors are single-pigment, and when mixed, they yield clean and crisp blends. The stunning opacity of these concentrated paints is totally natural and retains powerful shades when spread.

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