



The Still Life Course

Module 6: Layering with Acrylic Skins

Painting Project 4: Introducing Soft Gel

The last project in this painting course is quite different from the previous ones. Introducing Soft Gel, a medium that will be used to create acrylic skins, adding a different component to use in still life paintings.

Materials Required

- One 40x40cm canvas covered with paint marks from cleaning of brushes during the creation of the first three projects.
- A jar of Soft Gel, semi-gloss
- Two plastic A4 or folio sheet protectors (sleeves for storing documents in a folder)
- Optional: roll of transparent cellophane as used for wrapping flowers, normally sold in greeting card shops.
- The Principal set of Fluid colours including black.
- Paintbrushes and palette knife.

The Basics

Soft Gel is a painting medium, similar to matte medium but with a thicker **consistency**. **The gel's consistency is similar to a regular acrylic paint, a bit like yogurt.** Apart from using this gel like a painting medium allowing for thicker applications and impasto techniques with a palette knife, it is also suitable to be turned into acrylic skins. For Painting Project Four the canvas covered in coloured marks is to be used as backdrop for the still life or floral creation, taking inspiration from stained glass windows.

Have a look at the link for inspiration:

<https://www.pinterest.com/estemacleod/explore-colour-stained-glass-inspiration/>

In the video tutorial the process to make the layers, and apply them to create a semi-translucent layer is demonstrated. Working in this way is time **consuming, but an alternative way to use layering with 'sheets' of acrylic** to add dimension, variety and richness.

Process: Surface

The coloured canvas is to be used as backdrop for the painting. It will be different for everyone as a result of the process it was created. The entire surface of the canvas should have different colours of paint on it.

Creating Skins

In a process that is different from regular painting methods, acrylic skins with painted floral and leaf shapes imbedded in them are used to build up a still life artwork inspired by the look of stained glass. The coloured canvas will be important in this.

Draw flower shapes, inspired by the imaginary flowers, on a sheet of paper - close together around the size of your palm. Put this paper in the plastic protective sheet. Trace the flower drawings by painting on the plastic sheets, or cellophane with a dark colour such as black, or a mixture of blue and brown, just outlines and flower details. In case of the paint not wanting to stick to the plastic sheet, cover the entire area with a VERY thin layer of matte medium, you can paint directly on top of this whilst still wet.



Figure 1 Tracing basic drawings on plastic sheet



Figure 2 Black fluid lines undiluted

Flowers, you can paint them really basic as well (see the example) it need not be complicated. Keep the shapes simple and quite round. Paint without adding matte medium to the dark colour and keep the painted outline layer thin, similar to painting on the first three projects. Paint about five larger

flowers, some smaller flower shapes, and leaf patterns (see example). You can also draw a vase and other components such as stems and fill in the areas around the flowers with lines and marks to be cut up and added to the composition.



Figure 3 Cover entire plastic sheet with outlines



Figure 4 Allow to dry

When the flower shapes have dried, use a fan brush to cover the entire sheet with a thick layer of soft gel. *Thick layer* meaning a single layer applied to cover the area, thicker than when you are painting normally but not a heap of paint - this will take too long to dry. Leave to dry for five hours or more. Once dry add another layer and leave to dry overnight. Do not dry with a hairdryer.



Figure 5 Cover entire sheet with Soft Gel



Figure 6 Once dried apply second coat

Once completely dry lift the gel layer, which is now an acrylic skin, off of the plastic or cellophane sheet. If it is a large area, just peel off a small section and then cut out the drawn shape including the plastic sheet that it was painted on.

If you peel off the skin, make sure it does not fold in on itself or another layer since they will become stuck and impossible to use.

Surface for applying the acrylic skins

For Project Four, the canvas is covered with layers of colour.

Refer to your still life composition drawings and create a simple still life layout on you coloured canvas.

To plan your composition, move the flower shapes around as if you were doing a collage, without sticking anything down. When you have figured out what goes where, paint the areas white where the flower shapes will go, let it dry.

Sticking the skins to the canvas

Use matte medium to paint a thin layer over the white areas. If you know the colour you would like the flower to be, add a bit of colour to the matte medium but keep it translucent.



Figure 7 Two coat covering in Soft Gel



Figure 8 Leave overnight before use

Position the flower shapes. Your composition will start to take shape with the coloured areas now becoming background to the flowers. Make more selective marks to give structure to the composition: add a vase, stems, leaves and more detail either with the skins or in combination with painting on the canvas. Engage with the coloured background to incorporate shapes and colours that had been created when the canvas became covered in colours and painterly marks.



Figure 9 Shapes added between flowers



Figure 10 Soft Gel applied with fanbrush

To integrate the coloured canvas more, paint black outlines similar to what you will find in a stained glass window using the different marks and textures of the background to create a rich composition.



Figure 11 Canvas Four, coloured background



Figure 12 Canvas Four, completed still life

If you want to block out coloured areas, paint it in white, and once dry, paint this area with a colour and soft gel mixture.

White detail areas and additional coloured layers can be added to complete to artwork.

When everything is dry, add more layers of soft gel to make the skin sections blend in better with the painting,



Figure 13 Translucent Soft Gel skin



Figure 14 Collaging with skin closeup

Another option

As an alternative to a still life composition on the coloured background, use the simpler option to treat the canvas like a stained glass window with florals and simple shapes instead.

Divide the canvas into nine blocks. Paint the outlines of flowers and leaves on the plastic protective sheet, or cellophane sheet. It is optional to draw the flowers first on paper and trace them, or alternatively place the cellophane on top of the coloured canvas and paint flowers and shapes in dark outlines onto the cellophane. You could add some finer lines in between the bigger forms to **be used as cut up smaller sections when you create the 'skin collage'**

As an option you could also do printing with the silicon sponges to either create the floral shapes, or for areas in-between.

Once dried, cover the area with a painted layer of soft gel, allow to dry completely for about five hours, add another layer and leave to dry overnight.



Figure 15 Whole composition painted on cellophane



Figure 16 Alternative process, floral stained glass.

Follow the same steps as for the still life composition, using the shapes for a simpler composition. Remember to paint out the areas, or part of the areas where the flowers will be, allow drying before painting on top.

This process takes time! Engage with the background shapes, and remember about patterns and rhythm. Use the accidental marks, smears and colours to inform and enhance your artwork.

This process is challenging, but a fun way to play with colour and shapes instead of just painting or drawing. Have fun with the different elements. It is not easy, so keep it simple: do it for the process.

Happy painting!

PS Please remember not to share the course projects online. All material is © and is intended for professional artistic development. It is not to be shared with any third parties without my written consent.