

## Mixing Black and Painting Black Backgrounds

I mix the "Black" paint using a wide variety of colors; essentially the base is Prussian Blue, Daniel Smith's Carbazole Violet or Holbein's Mineral Violet and Permanent Alizarin Crimson. Then I mix in all of the earth tones to get the blue to turn to jet black. To that I add small amounts of almost all of the other colors in the painting to be sure there is a harmony with the background. I usually mix this in a small baby food jar, so I can seal it and use it as a "Starter", like sourdough starter, the next time.

I usually start with a tube of Prussian Blue and then add about a third of tube each of Violet and Permanent Alizarin Crimson. To that add dollops of the other earth-tone colors, such as Burnt Sienna, Burnt Umber, English Red Earth, etc. until it goes flat black, then I top it off with a bit of Quinacridone Gold and/or Quinacridone Burnt Orange. I typically use Daniel Smith paints. Other paints may react differently.

A thorough mixing is essential. I mix it very thick, with only a few drops of water. I have found the plastic coffee stirrers from McDonald's great for mixing. Test to see if it is flat black by putting a small drop on a piece of test paper and hitting it with a 6 or 8 brush loaded with water, drawing out the color until it is a thin wash. You can then easily see if it is too blue. When it is being mixed it will look black long before it will really be black.

I add some water when I apply it to the paper, just enough to make it spread. It goes on like it was several layers thick. I do it in one continuous wash. The stops and starts can be worse than in doing any continuous wash. I usually have several sizes of brushes (2-4-6 old Kolinsky rounds) working at the same time, large ones for the big areas and very small ones for when I get near the subject matter.

I tried just about every method of applying the black. Layering is where I got the most Gum Arabic rising to the surface and creating a bright sheen that looks like snails have crawled across your painting. I also found that in the later layer takes off more paint than I was putting down.

The method that has worked the best for me is to do two things. First give the whole area a thin wash to seal the paper. This provides an underpainting that can enhance the mood of the painting. Such as, if I want the painting to be warmer, I use an Alizarin Crimson or Quinacridone Gold as an under-painting. This also seals the surface of the paper and helps prevent "holidays" in the final coating of black.

I use a scrubbing or scumbling motion to apply the paint so that the brush strokes won't show. I find this also helps minimize the effect of the Gum Arabic rising to the surface and creating a bright sheen on the painting