

Keeping your Options Open



Former SAA President Michael Sanders compares his new Interactive Acrylic paints with his traditional acrylics

When using a new product, it's always tempting to make comparisons or try to define it in terms of what we've used before. This is quite natural, but doing this we risk limiting the potential of any new material because we will still be using it in the same old way. We need to use new and innovative materials in new ways, and then see how they compare when we work in our 'usual' manner. This is the second complete painting I've done using Interactive Acrylics; the last one used a lot of re-wetting and blending, which was very nice to do, but I've decided to paint this one by starting off using my 'normal' opaque acrylic method. Interactive paints have been developed to be re-workable when dry, which enables a whole range of different techniques to be used during the painting process. But for this one I want to use the paint with the minimum of re-working, just to see how it goes. I always like to start a painting on a tinted surface, known as a coloured ground, because this makes judging tones easier, and gives me a feeling of having 'made a start',

which helps in the early stages. I'm using a piece of grey board to paint on, primed with white acrylic primer called gesso. To get a coloured primer I mix a bit of acrylic paint into this. For this image, I've added a touch of black to the gesso to produce a light grey. I like to work my acrylic paintings up from simple shapes and colours, modifying as I go. Because it's very easy to get fiddly I start sketching the basic composition with big bold brushstrokes, using a no.10 or no.12 flat bristle brush. It's impossible to get bogged down in detail with such a big brush, and it has the advantage of getting plenty of paint on quickly.

MATERIALS:

- Grey board (16" x 24")
- Brushes: flat bristle no's 10 or 12, SAA All Rounder and no. 2 synthetic sable
- Gesso - white acrylic primer
- Painting Knife (medium)
- Interactive Acrylic paints: Black, White, Cobalt Blue, Cadmium Yellow, Cadmium Red Medium, Raw Sienna, Burnt Sienna, Dioxazine Purple, Green Black

1 I've sketched a simple composition here with dilute grey paint, with a no.12 bristle brush, making plenty of alterations. This is a little lane that runs up beside a pond in Cheddar village, where I was tutoring a painting holiday, and comes out onto the main road up near the



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famous caves. It may well have once been a pack horse road; it's too narrow for traffic. The rocks of the gorge aren't actually as prominent at this point; I've enlarged them to make more of an impact. I've blocked in the sky using White and a touch of Cobalt Blue, and some greens, adding some Cadmium Yellow and Raw Sienna to Cobalt. I'm still using my no. 12 bristle brush.

2 Now I'm getting some strong colour into the image! It's easy to hold back and make everything grey when we paint (especially after the summer we've had!), but I love colour too much to do that. I've used Dioxazine Purple, mixed with a little Burnt Sienna, Cobalt and White, to block in the rocks, making them darker at the bottom to help define the distant cottage. While still wet I've used a knife here to add texture. A mix of a little Cadmium Red Medium, Burnt Sienna and White was applied on the left hand cottage; the grey of the background has modified it slightly. At this point I'm using paint that is only slightly diluted with water. The same colour with a touch more Red was used for the tiled roofs. A dilute blue wash was applied over the path area and some brush strokes in dilute violet / grey made the stone wall on the left.

3 Now some shadows are added to the path with Cobalt Blue and White and the sunny areas warmed by putting on some Raw Sienna and White. Darker greens are added on the right; there is a fascinating colour in the range called Green Black, and I've found it very useful for dark foliage. While this dark area was still wet, I've scraped a few lines out with my painting knife to imply branches. At this point I've used the re-wet technique, spraying a mist of water, and softened and blended the greens on the top left to make that area recede. That's something you can't do with other acrylics!

4 Here is the image with a bit of detail coming in. I've finally put down my no. 12 bristle brush and used the SAA All Rounder for the windows and other bits and pieces. I've given the white cottage another coat and introduced some touches of red, both in the foreground and near the far cottage. Green Black has been put on to give the impression of leaves on the right, and some blue touches have been added in the shadows to give vibrancy. At this point I realised





that some splashes and spatter would be nice, and so that comes next.

5 Here is the finished painting with some modifications. I've used dilute Green Black to spatter over the hedge on the left to impart a textured leafy look, and the same on the bottom right. I've used a no.2 synthetic sable brush for the white on the windows and to add some dark branches on the hedge. The path was sprayed with a mist of water and the shadows were softened, and lightened. I've made the distant shadows on the path blue-ish, as well as the wall, with some purple being added near the foreground shadows to warm up this blue. Some additional scraping was done on the rocks to modify the texture. I'm quite pleased with the result. If you know Cheddar you'll realise that I've taken considerable liberties with this scene, but, to paraphrase the comment about journalism, 'never let the truth get in the way of a good painting'!



Michael will be tutoring a painting holiday in Cheddar again next September, organised by Matthew Clark of Cheddar Gallery; for details see www.cheddargallery.co.uk or phone 01934 744188

Michael is available to demonstrate Interactive Acrylics to art societies in the South West, or further afield if there are several societies in one area on subsequent days. If you would like to try the acrylics, why not have a workshop? Contact Michael on 01822 834799 or email him on artistmjsanders@tiscali.co.uk

Michael's new book and tie-in DVD 'Quick & Clever Acrylics' are available through SAA Home Shop.